

“In the Voices of People Like Me”: LGBTQ Coping During Trump’s Administration

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Abstract

The present study explored strategies that LGBTQ people used to cope during the U.S. presidential administration of Donald Trump. Coping strategies can buffer the impact of identity-related stigma and decreased psychological well-being, however, little is known about the ongoing coping strategies used by LGBTQ people during Trump’s presidential administration. This research addresses this gap in the literature. Participants included 335 LGBTQ individuals who were negatively impacted by the discriminatory policies of the Trump administration. Participants completed an online survey where they discussed the coping strategies they used during the Trump administration. Thematic analysis revealed five coping-related themes, including: (a) Coping Through Connecting With People, (b) Coping Through Self-Care and Self-Preservation Activities, (c) Coping Through Relational Disengagement, (d) Coping Through Activism, and (e) Coping Through Outness Decisions. Our discussion explores how counseling psychologists

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can work with LGBTQ clients to maximize coping strategies for managing distress during anti-LGBTQ presidential administrations.

Keywords

sexual orientation, gender diversity, coping, counseling, thematic analysis

Significance of the Scholarship to the Public

Research suggests that anti-LGBTQ political administrations and policies negatively impact the psychological well-being of sexual and gender minority populations. LGBTQ people in this study coped through connecting with others, self-care and self-preservation activities, relational disengagement, activism, and outness decisions during the presidential administration of Donald Trump. This scholarship directs an affirmative-care approach to clinical practice with LGBTQ clients.

During the 2016 campaign for the United States presidency, Donald Trump declared himself the first Republican candidate to openly support LGBTQ rights (Lopez, 2017). However, as Trump's time as president of the United States progressed, he engaged in hostile behavior toward members of the LGBTQ community. In the early days of Trump's presidency, all LGBTQ content was removed from government websites (O'Hara, 2017) and from the census (Necati, 2018). Trump's administration also attempted to define the term gender as a purely biological construct (Green et al., 2018), and argued that the law allowed for the discrimination of LGBTQ individuals (Stockler, 2019). The Trump administration also proposed to rescind nondiscrimination protections for transgender individuals under the Affordable Care Act, and implemented a rule stating that medical providers could refuse services to transgender individuals based on religious objections (Mack, 2019). On a national level, hate crimes against LGBTQ individuals rose from 1,263 in 2015 to 1,445 in 2018 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016, 2018).

Minority Stress and Anti-LGBTQ Politics

Meyer's (1995, 2003) minority stress model posits that LGBTQ people may experience more identity-based stress than their cisgender and heterosexual counterparts, and that this stress can lead to increased physical and mental health disorders (Meyer & Frost, 2013). Part of this stress is derived from proximal stressors, which may be subjective to an individual's identity and personal attributes (Riggle, Thomas, & Rostosky, 2005). *Proximal*, or internal stressors, stem from negative societal perceptions and manifest as self-stigma

after stressful identity-based events (Meyer, 2003). Examples of proximal stressors include identity concealment, internalized transphobia or homophobia, and fears of discrimination or rejection, among others (Meyer, 2015). In recent studies, LGBTQ individuals reported experiencing more proximal stressors, including increased hypervigilance, engaging in ruminative thinking about their sexual and gender identity, and feeling less safe and more targeted as a result of their LGBTQ identity after the election of Donald Trump (see Brown & Keller, 2018; Gonzalez et al., 2018a, 2018b; Levitt et al., 2009; Riggle et al., 2018; Russell & Richards, 2003; Veldhuis et al., 2018a, 2018b).

Distal, or external stressors, are ones that happen outside of the individual's sphere of control and include experiences of prejudice, rejection, harassment, or violence based on one's sexual orientation or gender identity (see Szymanski & Sung, 2010). Research suggests that distal stressors include structural stigma (Doyle & Molix, 2015), defined as, "societal-level conditions, cultural norms, and institutional policies that constrain the opportunities, resources, and well-being of the stigmatized" (Hatzenbuehler & Link, 2014, p. 2). Structural stigma has been linked to negative physical and mental health outcomes for marginalized groups, including LGBTQ people (see Hatzenbuehler, 2014).

One of the primary distal stressors that LGBTQ people faced during Trump's presidential administration was systematic discrimination via institutional policy changes (Staples et al., 2018). Although these distal stressors may not impact all LGBTQ individuals' day-to-day functioning (e.g., some LGBTQ people were not personally harassed or discriminated against), the threat of discriminatory policies and practices alone may have increased the adverse mental health outcomes for many LGBTQ people (Breslow et al., 2015; Gonzalez, Ramirez, & Galupo, 2018). The negative impact of Donald Trump's behaviors during and immediately following the election (e.g., appointing anti-LGBTQ judges; Human Rights Campaign, 2020), as well as the implementation of anti-LGBTQ policies on the psychological well-being of LGBTQ people, have been well-documented (see Lannutti & Galupo, 2018 for a review of the literature). Trump supported a culture that stigmatizes LGBTQ identities and enacted policies that deny the rights of LGBTQ people. In summary, during the Trump administration, LGBTQ individuals had to cope with: (a) a president who endorsed anti-LGBTQ platforms, (b) exposure to increased hate crimes and violence against the LGBTQ community (Williams, 2018), and (c) proposed legislation that sought to further discriminate against LGBTQ individuals (e.g., Green et al., 2018; Stockler, 2019).

In response to these stressors, LGBTQ people had to take steps to cope or risk burnout due to identity-based political stressors (see Eliason et al., 2018). Active coping (e.g., removing oneself from bad situations, finding support, engaging in activities) may have served as protective factors against the

adverse mental health outcomes that result from minority stress (Levitt et al., 2016). Adapting to a political climate where LGBTQ individuals may experience more stressors may also call for individuals to rely on coping strategies more frequently and consistently. This may be of even greater importance when considering feelings of well-being and resilience (see Kemper et al., 2015).

Finding Strength in the Face of Adversity: LGBTQ Resilience, Coping, and Well-Being

As LGBTQ people experience heightened stress, it is important to explore how they cope, find hope, and build resilience in response to the behaviors, policies, and legislation enacted during anti-LGBTQ political administrations. Understanding coping strategies during times of stress is important, as coping influences the relationship between stress based on identity stigma and psychopathology (Hatzenbuehler, 2009; Kaysen et al., 2014). Scholars distinguish between two types of coping: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Kaysen et al., 2014). *Problem-focused coping* aims to address the problem directly and is seen as protective and adaptive (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985), whereas *emotion-focused coping* can be active and adaptive or avoidant and maladaptive (Holahan & Moos, 1987). For LGBTQ people specifically, understanding the different coping mechanisms during times of stress and identity-based stigmatization is vitally important because maladaptive forms of coping (i.e., avoidant coping) can lead to heightened distress whereas adaptive forms of coping are linked to increased psychological well-being (see Budge et al., 2012; Szymanski & Carr, 2008; Szymanski et al., 2017).

Emerging research has provided an important starting point for considering resilience among LGBTQ people during anti-LGBTQ political administrations. Specifically, research after the 2016 election explored the mechanisms of LGBTQ people's resilience at the start of the anti-LGBTQ political administration of Donald Trump (see Brown & Keller, 2018; Riggle et al., 2018). They found that in the face of anti-LGBTQ policies, LGBTQ coping and resilience manifested through LGBTQ activism, advocacy, and support of broader civil rights efforts (Brown & Keller, 2018; Riggle et al., 2018; Rostosky et al., 2009). Anti-LGBTQ policies and political administrations often result in LGBTQ people educating themselves as to how to become better activists and use their privilege to be allies for other oppressed people (Riggle et al., 2018).

In response to anti-LGBTQ policies, administrations, and presidents, LGBTQ people also cope by confronting their internalized homophobia, an act that facilitates resilience and decreases identity-based shame (McClelland & Frost, 2014). LGBTQ resilience also manifests through instances of self-

affirmation that help to protect against the negative impacts of anti-LGBTQ politics (Brown & Keller, 2018). These internal coping strategies help LGBTQ people to confront and challenge some of the anti-LGBTQ messages that are perpetuated during conservative anti-LGBTQ political administrations by increasing a positive sense of self (Riggle et al., 2008). During these times, LGBTQ people additionally reported that the actions and behaviors of others, including allies and other marginalized people, often function as a source of support and facilitate hope, empowerment, and resilience (Brown & Keller, 2018; Riggle et al., 2018; Russell & Richards, 2003). Previous scholarship (Riggle et al., 2018) further indicated that LGBTQ people who see others engage in activism and advocacy efforts feel an increased sense of hopefulness, and are subsequently inspired to engage in political advocacy and activism.

Similarly, research has indicated that positive personal relationships with others also serve as a source of hope and facilitate resilience for LGBTQ people during anti-LGBTQ political elections (e.g., Riggle et al., 2018, 2020). These informal support networks not only help foster resilience but also help them to feel empowered and hopeful, despite a bleak anti-LGBTQ political outlook (Brown & Keller, 2018).

Finally, access to LGBTQ communities has been found to be crucial for facilitating resilience through exposure to other LGBTQ people and experiences (Russell & Richards, 2003). This community can then function as a source of protection and reduce feelings of vulnerability during oppressive sociopolitical times (Riggle et al., 2018), while also helping other members in the community feel supported (Russell & Richards, 2003).

The current research is an important first step to better understanding LGBTQ resilience during anti-LGBTQ political climates. However, as these studies (i.e., Brown & Keller, 2018; Riggle et al., 2018) were conducted immediately after the election, additional research is needed to better understand the ongoing and persistent coping strategies utilized by LGBTQ people during the Trump administration.

Statement of the Problem

In response to the threats to health, safety, and well-being enacted by the Trump administration, (see Simonoff et al., 2020), some LGBTQ people were forced to revisit and identify new coping strategies. Although the short-term coping mechanisms that occurred in response to and immediately after the 2016 election have already been examined (e.g., Brown & Keller, 2018; Riggle et al., 2018), we believe that it is crucial to examine the long-term coping strategies of the LGBTQ community, especially given the negative and lasting effects of anti-LGBTQ political administrations on the mental health and well-being of LGBTQ people (Eliaison et al., 2018; Hatzenbuehler, 2009; Levitt et al., 2009; Russell et al., 2011). To our

knowledge, no research to date has explored the long-term coping strategies LGBTQ people used as a result of the Trump administration. Our research addresses this gap in the literature. The research question guiding the current study was: How did LGBTQ people cope during the first 14–16 months of Trump’s presidential administration?

This qualitative research employs a critical lens (see Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994) through the use of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Using this critical lens, the authors’ values aimed at “emancipation and transformation” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129) of LGBTQ communities guided the present research. As criticalist scholars, we argue that all research must be contextualized within the current sociopolitical climate and must therefore operate under the assumption that anti-LGBTQ political systems oppress LGBTQ people and prevent the liberation of all oppressed communities (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994; Ponterotto, 2005). We relied on previous research (Gonzalez, Pulice-Farrow, & Galupo, 2018; Gonzalez, Ramirez, & Galupo, 2018) to support these working assumptions that LGBTQ people were and are negatively impacted by Trump’s election and presidential administration. Within this assumption, we recognize that not all LGBTQ people will endorse being negatively impacted by Trump’s administration given other aspects of their lived experience and positionalities. This paper functions to lift the voices of those LGBTQ people who have been negatively impacted by the Trump administration as well as examine the coping strategies they used during the first 14–16 months of Trump’s presidential administration.

Method

As part of a larger mixed method study on LGBTQ experiences from the time Trump was elected as president of the United States through the first 14–16 months of Trump’s presidential administration, the current study utilized an online survey to explore the coping strategies LGBTQ people used during Trump’s administration. As we were interested in exploring the experiences of LGBTQ people at least a year after Trump took office, we launched the online survey 14 months into Trump’s administration, and participants completed the survey 14–16 months into Trump’s administration. For simplicity, we will refer to our findings as coping during Trump’s presidential administration from here on. Online surveys, which have been proven to be an acceptable medium for collecting qualitative research (Kazmer & Xie, 2008; Meho, 2006), were used to ensure that the identities of the LGBTQ participants in the study were protected (Riggle, Rostosky, & Reedy, 2005).

A qualitative approach was used to illuminate the narratives of LGBTQ people about their use of coping strategies during the sociopolitical climate surrounding Trump’s administration. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke,

2006, 2013) was specifically used because we were interested in reporting patterns and themes by highlighting how participants made meaning of their coping experiences within their social context (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The institutional review board at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, approved this study.

Participants

Participants of this study ($N = 335$) were members of the LGBTQ community. To participate in this study, individuals had to be over the age of 18, identify as LGBTQ, and currently reside in the United States. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 68 yrs ($M_{\text{age}} = 25.14$, $SD = 7.37$), and identified as both cisgender (53.43%) and transgender (46.57%). The present sample represented 42 states and Washington DC, and had limited racial and ethnic diversity, with 80.30% of the sample identifying as White. The sample was also educated, with 38.21% of individuals having completed a Bachelor's degree or other graduate work. Finally, over one-fourth (26.27%) of the sample identified as middle class. Table 1 includes full participant demographics with regard to racial and/or ethnic diversity, education level, and socioeconomic status.

Recruitment announcements were posted to social media sites and online message boards, and included a link to the online survey. Participants heard about the study through online means, such as Tumblr (48.66%), Reddit (20%), and Facebook (16.72%), with 4.48% of the participants referred to the survey by a friend. The survey was disseminated on Tumblr using hashtags such as *Lesbian*, *Gay*, *Bisexual*, and *Transgender* in order to increase visibility and reblogs. Participants were also recruited through postings on LGBTQ-specific Reddit pages (e.g., *r/ainbow*; *r/transgender*; *r/LGBT*), and Facebook pages (e.g., *LGBT Community page*; *LGBT Pride page*). The remaining participants found the survey through psychology listservs (3.88%), having the survey forwarded through another listserv or email (1.19%), on Twitter (1.19%), or through other methods (3.88%).

Procedure

Individuals taking the survey first completed demographic questions, and answered questions about their sexual orientation and gender identity. Following the participants' completion of the survey, the researchers analyzed two open-ended prompts from the larger survey. These prompts were: "As an LGBTQ person, where or how have you found strength during the Trump presidential administration (if at all)?" and "As an LGBTQ person, what are some of the ways you take care of yourself as a result of the Trump presidential administration (if at all)?" Coping was conceptualized in the context of

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Demographic variables	% (n)
Sexual orientation	
Bisexual	24.48 (82)
Queer	22.39 (75)
Lesbian	16.42 (55)
Gay	13.43 (45)
Pansexual	12.54 (42)
Other	7.76 (26)
Heterosexual	2.09 (7)
Fluid	0.89 (3)
Gender identity	
Woman	41.80 (140)
Man	25.67 (86)
Gender nonconforming	19.10 (64)
Other	13.43 (45)
Identify as trans/trans history	
No	53.43 (179)
Yes	46.57 (156)
Race and/or ethnicity	
White	80.30 (269)
Biracial or multiracial	6.57 (22)
Hispanic/Latino	6.27 (21)
Asian/Asian American	3.28 (11)
Black/African American	2.09 (7)
No answer	0.89 (3)
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.60 (2)
Educational background	
Some high school	3.58 (12)
High school/GED	55.82 (187)
College degree (AA/BA/BS/BFA)	26.57 (89)
Graduate degree (master's or doctoral degree)	
No answer/other	11.64 (39)
Socioeconomic status	
Working class	2.39 (8)
Lower-middle class	26.57 (89)
Middle class	20.00 (67)
Upper-middle class	26.27 (88)
Upper class	17.01 (57)
Don't know	0.60 (2)
No answer	7.16 (24)
No answer	2.39 (8)

Note. *N* = 335.

participants' strategies for finding strength and taking care of themselves. Thus, participant narratives were framed within a coping context. Participants' responses ranged in length from one word to 212 words, with an average response of 23.7 words. Overall, 90.1% of the responses acknowledged some form of coping.

Researchers' Positionality and Self-Reflection

Due to the researchers' collective experiences across gender identity, gender presentation, sexual orientation, and race and ethnicity, the researchers came to coding discussions with different perspectives. The research team included Kirsten A. Gonzalez, an assistant professor of psychology who self-identifies as a Latinx, heterosexual, cisgender woman; Lex Pulice-Farrow, a counseling psychology doctoral student who identifies as a White queer nonbinary person; and Roberto L. Abreu, an assistant professor of psychology who identifies as a first-generation Latinx gay cisgender man. All authors have expertise in qualitative research and have coauthored multiple peer-reviewed published qualitative research studies. Additionally, Kirsten A. Gonzalez and Lex Pulice-Farrow kept journals to track their reactions, thoughts, and feelings during the coding process (Gilbert, 2001). Roberto L. Abreu served as the auditor and engaged in discussions with Kirsten A. Gonzalez and Lex Pulice-Farrow throughout the coding process to allow for peer examination and to reduce bias in the data analysis process (see LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). As criticalist scholars, it is also important that we disclose our own biases and assumptions inherent in this research study. Given each of the authors' social locations, we identified ourselves as believing in progressive ideals and policies that promote social justice values and equity for all marginalized individuals, including LGBTQ people. For example, when Kirsten A. Gonzalez and Lex Pulice-Farrow came to consensus on the final thematic structure, they engaged in conversation with the auditor Roberto L. Abreu to evaluate how our collective values may have influenced how we captured our participants' views and narratives.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006, 2013) was used to examine how participants described the strategies they used to cope with the oppressive political climate of the Trump administration. Analysis began with Kirsten A. Gonzalez and Lex Pulice-Farrow coding the data independently by reading through participants' responses. All responses were categorized and grouped together based on similar ideas or meaning units (Giorgi, 1985). Participant responses were then broken down such that words or clauses were coded and

grouped together. These groupings formed preliminary themes. Kirsten A. Gonzalez and Lex Pulice-Farrow then met to agree upon the preliminary themes. Roberto L. Abreu, who served as the auditor, reviewed the preliminary themes and provided feedback to Kirsten A. Gonzalez and Lex Pulice-Farrow, who then met to revise the thematic structure and establish themes for the dataset by carefully reviewing the data and coding quotes based on themes. During the coding process, the authors also met to discuss any discrepancies and revise the preliminary themes, identify new themes, and eliminate themes until a final thematic structure was established.

Following recommendations by [Braun and Clark \(2006\)](#), the research team engaged in several discussions about what constituted a theme with respect to participants' narratives. Braun and Clark suggested that there are no "hard and fast answers" regarding the number of participants needed to endorse a theme (2006, p. 82), and that themes should reflect answers to the research questions set forth for the study. Thus, we identified themes that directly pertained to and answered the research question. These themes are presented in the results below.

Results

Participants discussed a variety of coping strategies used in response to the Trump presidential administration. Five themes were identified across participant responses, including: (a) Coping Through Connecting With People, (b) Coping Through Self-Care and Self-Preservation Activities, (c) Coping Through Relational Disengagement, (d) Coping Through Activism, and (e) Coping Through Outness Decisions.

Coping Through Connecting With People

Participants named several people and communities they connected with in order to cope during Trump's presidential administration, including friends, the LGBTQ community, online communities, heterosexual and cisgender allies, family-of-origin and chosen family, and public figures. This theme was endorsed by 76.11% ($n = 255$) of the sample.

Participants specifically named the importance of connecting with LGBTQ community members during Trump's presidential administration. One participant stated, "Other LGBTQ people. It doesn't really seem like most cis het people have our backs, so we help each other" (31-year-old White pansexual nonbinary person). For participants, online platforms were sometimes the best way to connect with people and communities. One participant exemplified this finding when she stated:

Online forums like twitter/instagram/tumblr give me the platform to find comfort in others. Given that being LGBTQA+ isn't written on my forehead, going online gives me the ability to connect with others of my community that I wouldn't have otherwise recognized. The outpouring of love and support online keeps me... somewhat hopeful. (20-year-old White lesbian cisgender woman)

Participants also named connecting with allies as an important source of coping during Trump's administration. In response to the question of finding strength during the Trump administration, one participant stated, "Knowing that there are allies who legitimately care about my and others' well-being and livelihood" (26-year-old White Latinx pansexual gender nonconforming person).

Other participants named connections with family-of-origin and chosen family members as sources of coping during Trump's presidential administration. One participant illustrated this finding when she stated:

Definitely from my mother for one. She supports me unconditionally. She was born and raised a southern Baptist but she's one of the nicest, sweetest people ever who will tolerate no bigoted bullshit the rest of her family tries to preach. She has broken ties with them partly because of me and the opinions they have on trans people, and I can't thank her enough for that. (19-year-old White lesbian transgender woman)

LGBTQ participants referenced connecting with specific public figures including media personalities, politicians, and writers, whose public presence contributed to their coping in response to Trump's administration. One participant exemplified this finding by stating, "through talk show hosts like Stephen Colbert, John Oliver, Seth Meyers - who comment on the administration (and when appropriate, LGBTQ issues) and implore us to realize this is not normal and not ok" (22-year-old White gay cisgender man). Participants' connection with public figures exemplifies the importance of public role models who worked to legitimize the experiences of LGBTQ people during Trump's anti-LGBTQ presidential administration. Overall, participants named specific connections to people in their lives as coping sources to manage their negative feelings during Trump's presidential administration.

Coping Through Self-Care and Self-Preservation Activities

The second major theme identified through participant responses was coping in response to Trump's presidential administration through self-care and self-preservation activities. This theme was exemplified in three main ways, including specific reference to self-care activities such as reading books,

engaging in exercise, pursuing hobbies, and attending therapy; self-protection as a means of self-preservation such as purchasing weapons for protection; and acts of self-love such as radical self-acceptance. This theme was endorsed by 43.58% ($n = 146$) of the sample.

One 25-year-old White lesbian cisgender woman exemplified the importance of hobbies when she stated, “I try to cater more to my hobbies to occupy my mind so that I can have some time to decompress and not focus on the tangerine tyrant and his tantrums.” For this participant, having an outlet to channel her energy and keep herself busy was important in coping with the negative effects of Trump and his administration.

Other participants’ self-care activities included going to therapy and taking prescribed medication for mental health concerns. One 59-year-old White lesbian cisgender woman exemplified this when she stated, “therapy [and] an increase in my medication” help her cope in response to the Trump administration. Another 29-year-old White asexual cisgender woman reported, “I go to therapy. It helps some.” Participants in the current study also reported an increase in avoidance-focused self-care activities to help them cope. One participant cited, “eating my feelings” (21-year-old biracial/multiracial pansexual cisgender man), whereas another stated, “I think my alcohol consumption has gone up a bit” (23-year-old White queer cisgender woman).

Other participants detailed the ways in which they engaged in protective self-care activities as a means of self-preservation. These self-care activities included pursuing physical protection or planning for worst-case scenarios. One participant talked about the importance of weapons for physical protection when he stated:

I have taken action and purchased a firearm. I didn’t like guns until now. I purchased a weapon in case I have to protect my family. I live in area that pre-November 2016 was quiet, and now we worry just letting the dog outside. (24-year-old White gay cisgender man)

Other participants discussed self-care and self-preservation through planning for worst-case scenarios. One participant stated, “I keep all my paperwork and documentation accessible. If I think I’m going to need any of it, I bring all of it” (25-year-old White transsexual man). Participants also talked about preparing in case they needed to leave the United States for safety reasons and to preserve their life. One 31-year-old White bisexual trans-masculine man demonstrated this finding when he stated, “I also renewed my Canadian passport, so knowing I have a way to flee if needed is both a relief and a bit of a worry that I felt there might be a need for it.” Participants spoke about the need to plan when going out for regular outings in public. One participant shared their plans reporting they, “don’t go out at night alone” (36-

year-old White queer gender nonconforming person). Participants in the study engaged in many forms of protective self-care activities to preserve their safety and well-being during Trump's presidential administration.

Finally, participants engaged in protective self-care strategies for self-preservation through loving and accepting themselves. One participant exemplified this self-care strategy as "self love" (21-year-old Hispanic/Latino lesbian cisgender woman). Another participant reported, "I try to remind myself that who I am is not a condition or a disease or a problem to be 'dealt with'" (21-year-old Hispanic/Latino lesbian gender non-conforming person). For participants in the sample, this positive way of thinking was an important counter-narrative to the anti-LGBTQ actions seen during Trump's administration.

Coping Through Relational Disengagement

The third major theme identified in participant narratives was coping through relationally disengaging from sources that were perceived as potentially damaging or life threatening. Participants' relational disengagement manifested in two major ways: through behavioral disengagement from politics and places, and intentional behavioral disconnection from people. This theme was endorsed by 31.34% ($n = 105$) of the sample.

Participants in the current study behaviorally disengaged from news sources that could be harmful or damaging. This finding was exemplified through the following quote, "This is maladaptive, but I don't pay much attention to politics. Instead, I adopt an ostrich with its head in the sand position so I don't get too worried" (21-year-old White and Hispanic lesbian cisgender woman). Participants felt ambivalent about disengaging but ultimately made decisions to behaviorally disengage as a way to manage their own negative emotions stemming from Trump's presidential administration.

Other participants spoke of their tendency to behaviorally disengage from social spaces and places as a mechanism for coping. One 21-year-old White bisexual transgender man stated, "I avoid places that are frequented by his [Trump] supporters, online and in person, and focus on my mental health as much as possible." Narratives suggested that participants viewed places where Trump supporters frequented as threatening, and their behavioral disengagement was seen as a coping response to protect their mental health.

Participants also coped by making intentional choices to behaviorally disconnect from people who were perceived as being harmful. One participant reported:

I have to give myself breaks... from talking about certain things with my family, even from scrolling Facebook. There's a threshold of how much I can handle

when it comes to hate directed at something that helps to make me who I am.
(20-year-old White queer cisgender woman)

Another 26-year-old White asexual cisgender woman exemplified this finding when she reported, "I had to cut someone out of my life because I just couldn't talk to them anymore knowing they agreed with so many of his [Trump's] policies. And not having that really helped my outlook on things." Participant narratives indicated that they made difficult choices to relationally disengage from sources that directly impacted their mental health and overall well-being. Many of the participants in this study were forced to behaviorally disengage or intentionally disconnect from others to survive and cope during Trump's presidential administration.

Coping Through Activism

The fourth major theme that participants specifically identified as a source of coping during Trump's presidency was activism. For participants, activism seen throughout the country helped them to feel supported, less alone, and cultivated hope that a critical mass of people existed who were fighting for the rights of all people oppressed by Trump's administration. Participants discussed activist-focused coping in three main ways including their own activism, observing others' activism efforts, and the resistance movement. This theme was endorsed by 28.36% ($n = 95$) of the sample.

Participants in the sample discussed instances where their own activism or activist efforts functioned as a coping source during Trump's administration. One participant exemplified this finding when she reported, "Trolling Ted Cruz on Twitter is always good for a laugh. When I'm angry or hurting I pull up Resistbot on Facebook Messenger and yell at my various elected officials" (37-year-old Hispanic/Latino bisexual cisgender woman). For this participant, challenging anti-LGBTQ elected officials helped to ease her anger and facilitated coping and healing through laughter. Another participant stated:

I'm ashamed to say that, in the past, I've walked away from situations that made me uncomfortable. Since the election, I've found my bullshit tolerance and ability to turn the other cheek virtually gone. I've lost some "friends" over it but I've stopped laughing along and started calling people out on their nonsense. (26-year-old Hispanic/Latino pansexual cisgender woman)

Trump's election and presidential administration was a catalyst for igniting the activist behaviors of many participants in the current study. Some participants felt that they could no longer passively observe others making

painful and hurtful comments. Instead, participants found themselves challenging and confronting oppressive behaviors, even if that meant they lost friends in the process. Other participants expressed how observing people engaging in activism, including LGBTQ-specific activism and other activist and resistance efforts, functioned as sources of coping during Trump's presidential administration. One participant stated:

Seeing native activists mobilize to protect our water - the fact that they're still fighting after centuries worse than this administration, and seeing the survivors of the Parkland shooting refuse to be silenced and being supported by survivors of the Pulse shooting, are inspiring. (28-year-old White bisexual cisgender woman)

Finally, participants spoke to the visible resistance movement as a source of coping during Trump's presidential administration. One participant stated, "Seeing so many other people energized for the resistance has been powerful, not just because it's energizing to me, but because it's comforting given the nonstop cycle of new issues that keep coming up" (27-year-old Asian/Asian American bisexual cisgender woman). Resistance movements and activism functioned as sources of hope for participants who felt validated and supported despite the Trump administration's anti-LGBTQ legislation and actions designed to oppress LGBTQ people. Participants were empowered to use their voice and challenge oppressive forces, which allowed them to cope.

Coping Through Outness Decisions

The fifth major theme identified from participant narratives was coping through decision-making about whether to disclose or not disclose their LGBTQ identities, labeled as outness decisions. Participants' outness decisions were seen in two main ways, including deciding to be more open and disclose more about their LGBTQ identity, or deciding to be less open and disclose less about their LGBTQ identity. This theme was endorsed by 17.61% ($n = 59$) of the participants in the sample.

Some participants in the sample discussed the importance of remaining an out and visible LGBTQ person as a coping mechanism during Trump's presidential administration. One participant exemplified this finding when they stated, "I'm not willing to keep my identity a secret" (20-year-old White bisexual transgender person). Another participant stated:

As an LGBTQ person, I take care of myself by being honest, brave, and courageous. The thing about the Trump administration is that they want to incite fear in people. I'm not scared of anything and I don't believe in holding yourself

back when you want to be your true, authentic self. (26-year-old Black/African American queer cisgender man)

Another participant talked about the importance of being open about their identity as a means to support other LGBTQ people:

I openly stand up to bigotry, and try to ensure that I am publicly and visibly trans and queer, just for the possibility of making other trans and queer folk feel safer, because the slightest possibility of that makes me feel better. (21-year-old White lesbian gender nonconforming person)

Other participants shared how Trump's presidency also led to their decision to come out as a member of the LGBTQ community:

I came out during this presidency. I did that because I can't stand what people say around me. "Just joking" has gotten much worse. Now that I'm out to folks I can usually shut them up with just a glare. (35-year-old White queer gender nonconforming person)

Participants felt it important to live honestly and authentically, and that being out as a member of the community was crucial in their coping process while managing Trump's presidential administration.

However, other participants shared how they coped by deciding to be less open and disclose less about their LGBTQ identity. One participant exemplified this finding when they stated, "I'm more careful as to who I out myself to - homophobic and transphobic people are now more confident in their ability to discriminate against us publicly" (18-year-old White pansexual gender nonconforming person). Another participant echoed this finding when she stated:

I always make sure not to say I am a member of the LGBTQA community and have ensured I do not put myself at risk of bashers. When your President openly bashes those he does not like, you cannot expect his followers to do any different. (18-year-old White lesbian cisgender woman)

Not only did participants censor who they disclosed their identity to, but they also stopped correcting people who misgendered them as a way to protect themselves. One participant reported:

I don't correct people in face-to-face interactions on my pronouns or name. I don't try to actively portray myself the way I see myself, I keep quiet on matters that those closest to me know are important to me. I'm small and I know it,

speaking out could mean worse than just someone yelling at me. (20-year-old White queer gender nonconforming person)

Participants found themselves either emboldened to disclose their sexual or gender identity as a form of resisting Trump's presidential administration, or were conversely galvanized to protect and hide their sexual or gender identity as a means of survival.

Discussion

By considering the coping strategies that LGBTQ individuals reported using during Trump's administration, as well as the increase in hate crimes (Williams, 2018) and anti-LGBTQ policies (Simonoff et al., 2020), the present study focused on the resilience of LGBTQ people in the wake of Trump's presidential administration. The narratives from participants add to the available research about the impact of structural stigma (Doyle & Molix, 2015) on the well-being of LGBTQ individuals (Gonzalez, Pulice-Farrow, & Galupo, 2018; Gonzalez, Ramirez, & Galupo, 2018; Riggle et al., 2018).

Consistent with Meyer's (1995, 2003) conceptualization of minority stress, LGBTQ individuals develop different forms of coping in order to address the unique stressors they face (Eliason et al., 2018). When our participants engaged in coping activities, they were likely to do it actively (coping through connecting with people, through self-care and self-preservation activities, through activism, through relationally disengaging, and through outness decisions). These findings both confirm and build on previous findings about how LGBTQ individuals coped with, and how their well-being was impacted by Trump's presidential administration. For example, similar to the findings by Riggle et al. (2018), participants changed their behavior and used themselves as agents of change. Participants in the present study also described receiving support from others as an integral part of their coping. Echoing the findings by Brown and Keller (2018), participants engaged in self-affirmations and found support by connecting with others (e.g., allies) as a way of coping with the Trump administration. However, the present study also extends the available research about LGBTQ coping during oppressive political climates in several ways. In our study, participants' coping strategies included self-care and self-preservation activities focused on seeking protection and learning to defend themselves, as well as through navigating their own decisions to disclose their LGBTQ identities. Although other studies have noted connection to others as a mechanism for coping, our participants specifically identified how other people, including other LGBTQ individuals, allies to the community, and public figures, have helped them cope with Trump's presidential administration. Finally, our participants referenced engaging in activism in specific

ways such as participating in marches, rallies, protests, canvassing, and voting as a means of coping.

Strengths and Limitations

Our findings make important contributions to the literature on LGBTQ coping during anti-LGBTQ political climates. The participants in the present study represent an online convenience sample of LGBTQ individuals. Online platforms may be used by sexual and gender minorities in order to find support and access to surveys when they may otherwise be isolated from the community (Riggle, Rostosky, & Reedy, 2005). This is especially important in the Trump era, given that participants expressed more concerns about being visibly out as a member of the LGBTQ community. Online platforms offer LGBTQ people a place to gain support and access to resources that might no longer be available in an oppressive political climate.

Due to the novel experience of having an anti-LGBTQ president following a pro-LGBTQ president, to our knowledge, this is among the first studies to examine how queer and trans-identified individuals have coped with Trump's presidential administration. Another strength of our methodology was allowing participants to provide the researchers with feedback at the end of the survey—thus, allowing participants to underscore or clarify what they meant by their responses, instead of fully relying on the researcher's interpretation. Further, there was a nearly equal amount of transgender and cisgender participants, meaning that the results of this research are not just viewed with a cisgender lens. Having an almost equal number of transgender and cisgender participants allows our research to speak to the experiences of both of these populations.

This study has limitations that are important to address. Consistent with previous online surveys (Christian et al., 2008), our sample was disproportionately White. In line with our goal of having a critical lens when interpreting the findings of our study, it is important to note and unpack what it means that our sample was predominantly White. When coping with oppressive political climates, LGBTQ People of Color might use strategies that are congruent with the intersection of different cultural values. For example, in a recent study by Abreu et al. (2020), researchers found that immigrant Latina transgender women came together to share knowledge (i.e., *convivencia*) in order to navigate oppressive experiences within the healthcare system. As our sample was predominantly White, it might be possible that this study did not capture intersectional oppressive experiences related to political climates; thus, failing to highlight the coping mechanisms used at the intersection of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity. However, we intentionally selected and included quotes by Participants of Color to center their voices, in an attempt to avoid perpetuating

the underrepresentation of People of Color in LGBTQ research. Future research should critically explore how the intersection of sexual and gender diversity and race and ethnicity create additional layers of minority stress for LGBTQ Individuals of Color during oppressive political environments, like the Trump presidential administration, and intersectional strategies used by these individuals to cope as a result.

Another potential limitation of our study was the recruitment strategy. Because most of our participants were recruited from Tumblr and Reddit, it is plausible that LGBTQ individuals who are active in these forums have a greater need to seek community as a way of coping. Thus, the recruitment strategy may have influenced the coping strategies identified. However, it is important to recognize that many LGBTQ people do utilize online platforms for support, validation, and community. Thus, our findings do suggest that LGBTQ people who are or have been negatively impacted by Trump's presidential administration do utilize online platforms.

Implications for Practice, Research, Advocacy, and Education/Training

Practice

The present findings have implications for clinicians working with LGBTQ clients. Counselors should be aware that although LGBTQ individuals may have access to an array of coping mechanisms, they might need assistance in identifying and enacting such coping mechanisms in a positive manner. For example, research shows LGBTQ individuals commonly abuse substances in order to cope with oppression (e.g., [Drazdowski et al., 2016](#)). Therefore, counselors should explore with LGBTQ clients positive ways of coping during oppressive political climates, such as those coping strategies identified by the participants in our study (e.g., seeking connections with people, and engaging in self-care and self-preservation activities). In addition, counselors should acknowledge how interlocking systems of oppression affect LGBTQ individuals and consider how some LGBTQ clients may need more support than others based on the intersection of their privileged and oppressed identities (e.g., racism, cissexism). For example, while Trump broadly targeted LGBTQ individuals ([Murray, 2017](#)), LGBTQ People of Color and transgender individuals have been disproportionately impacted by Trump's policies ([Coronado & Paredes, 2018](#); [Hermann-Wilmarth et al., 2017](#)). Therefore, it is important that counselors working with LGBTQ People of Color and transgender clients openly acknowledge the different layers of oppression clients navigate and provide supportive and affirming space where they are able to be authentic and validated; thus, providing a corrective emotional experience.

Participants in the current study utilized nontraditional spaces as a way of coping. For example, LGBTQ participants in the present study found community and a sense of belonging on the internet and through online platforms. Consistent with findings from the literature, the internet is often utilized by minority communities in order to find connections with the larger LGBTQ community (Cserni & Talmud, 2015). Within LGBTQ communities, non-normative identities are becoming more widely accepted, and recently, spaces that are more accessible to the LGBTQ community have been established (Skirpan, 2018; Stenros, 2015). Therefore, it is important for clinicians to be aware of new outlets and avenues that are being used by LGBTQ people so that they can make suggestions to clients about alternative and safer avenues where LGBTQ people can find community and support, especially during anti-LGBTQ political administrations. Given that online platforms are more accessible, clinicians should work to identify and develop online psychoeducational or self-care programs that can be widely used and easily accessed by LGBTQ people. For example, psychoeducational or self-care podcasts, webinars, or online LGBTQ support groups might provide new avenues for LGBTQ people to connect and cope during anti-LGBTQ political administrations, such as the Trump administration.

Research

Emerging from this dataset are specific positive and constructive coping mechanisms used by LGBTQ individuals. Previous studies with heterosexual and cisgender individuals suggest that individuals cope through effectively managing their own difficult emotions and through engaging in political activism (Ford et al., 2018). Although people of all sexualities (e.g., heterosexual, sexual minorities) may share similar coping strategies, the strategies that emerged in the present study illustrated coping mechanisms that were unique to a group of LGBTQ people who had been exposed to prolonged periods of minority stress under an oppressive anti-LGBTQ political climate, immediately after prolonged exposure to a pro-LGBTQ president. For example, participants identified self-love and self-preservation activities including pursuing physical protection as a mechanism for coping. Therefore, future research should take into consideration the different systems of support and resources available to individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity and how individuals access and engage in different coping strategies to maximize self-care and self-preservation.

How individuals cope during times of stress and turmoil is an action—something that is active, ongoing, and a conscious choice (Harzer & Ruch, 2015). Unlike hope, defined as, “the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals, and motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways” (Snyder, 2002, p. 249), which has been a widely researched topic in

LGBTQ scholarship, coping is an active choice (Gillig et al., 2019) that often serves as a buffer to negative experiences (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2019). Within the LGBTQ community, coping serves as a protective factor against discriminatory experiences and negative mental health outcomes (Craney et al., 2018). In research regarding traumatic encounters, coping mechanisms such as humor act as a buffer to protect against negative mental health outcomes, such as burnout and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms (Sliter et al., 2014). As the political and interpersonal ramifications of Trump's presidential administration have potentially long-reaching consequences for LGBTQ people, future studies should seek to define long-term changes in the ability of LGBTQ individuals to pursue different coping strategies during times of anti-LGBTQ political platforms. For example, we encourage future research to quantitatively test the extent to which these coping strategies and resources function to bolster resilience and protect against the negative impact of LGBTQ stigma and experiences of discrimination across time during the entire four years of Trump's presidential administration.

Advocacy

Systems, including political systems, have a significant impact on the well-being of marginalized groups, including LGBTQ individuals. For example, prior to marriage equality in the United States in 2015, a series of studies established the negative psychological effects of anti-same-sex/gender marriage amendment campaigns designed to exclude same-sex/gender couples from the institution of marriage (e.g., Rostosky et al., 2009). After marriage equality, there was an observed decrease in suicidality among sexual minority youth linked to marriage equality (Raifman et al., 2017). Therefore, counseling psychologists should recognize the systemic impact of advocating for LGBTQ individuals by challenging current oppressive laws and policies (e.g., Hage & Kenny, 2009). Counseling psychologists should use their knowledge and training to advocate for inclusive local, state, and federal laws and policies (e.g., writing position statements, drafting amicus briefs) that help promote the well-being of LGBTQ individuals. Although it is clear that many LGBTQ individuals are finding ways of coping with political oppression, counseling psychologists should try to alleviate the burden placed on these individuals by directly targeting those political structures that create stressful and oppressive environments for LGBTQ people.

Education and Training

Our findings have implications for counseling psychology training and education. First, it is important for counseling psychology training programs to incorporate and engage in discussions about how politics (as a system) have

detrimental effects on the well-being of LGBTQ people. In his presidential address, Heesacker (2018) urged the counseling field to reflect on its role as counseling psychologists in the era of Trump, including the profession's role in addressing social issues, the importance of having a presence in the public sphere, and promoting diversity. Therefore, we urge programs to name and call out the detrimental effects that the Trump administration has had on the LGBTQ community, presently and in the foreseeable future. Second, in line with counseling values of enhancing the welfare of others, the focus on healthy development, and the emphasis on strengths, resilience, and positive coping (Council of Counseling Psychology Training Programs et al., 2009; Packard, 2009), our findings highlight the importance of focusing on the positive ways in which LGBTQ individuals are coping and challenging the current system of political oppression where they navigate daily experiences of heterosexism and cissexism.

Conclusion

During the Trump presidency many LGBTQ individuals were exposed to a number of distal (e.g., attempts to rescind nondiscrimination protections for transgender individuals under the Affordable Care Act) and proximal (e.g., hypervigilance and identity-based rumination) stressors that increased their anxiety and depression. Research conducted immediately after the election of Donald Trump revealed that LGBTQ individuals were engaging in coping behaviors, finding hope, and resilience through activism, advocacy, and civil rights efforts, among others. Our findings shed light on the coping strategies LGBTQ people used during Trump's presidency, including Coping Through Connecting With Others, Coping Through Self-Care and Self-Preservation Activities, Coping Through Relational Disengagement, Coping Through Activism, and Coping Through Outness Decisions. This study has important implications for practice (e.g., identifying and enacting coping mechanisms in a positive manner), research (e.g., quantitatively testing the extent to which coping strategies increase resilience and protect against the negative impact of LGBTQ stigma during oppressive political environments), advocacy (e.g., challenging current oppressive laws and policies), and education (e.g., engaging in discussions about how politics, as a system, have detrimental effects on the well-being of LGBTQ people). In conclusion, findings from this study highlight the long-term resilience of LGBTQ people and the importance of supporting their well-being through more research in this area of scholarship.

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