

Challenges, Coping, and Benefits of Being an Asian American Lesbian or Bisexual Woman

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Despite the richness of the literature about minority stress and negative psychological outcomes and growing attention to lesbian, gay, bisexual (LGB) people of color, few studies have examined the multiple and intersecting identities of Asian American lesbian and bisexual women (AA LBW), and both the challenges and benefits that can arise in managing these identities. Thus, the purpose of this study was to provide an understanding of the experiences of 50 AA LBW. More specifically, this study explored challenges, coping strategies, and positive aspects of being an AA LBW. Qualitative content analyses revealed 2 overarching domains concerning day-to-day challenges faced by AA LBW: living with multiple minority identities and experiencing sexual orientation-based oppression. In terms of AA LBW's coping strategies used for dealing with these challenges, 2 overarching domains were identified: identity management and empowerment strategies. Lastly, 2 domains of positive aspects about being an AA LBW were identified: sociocultural sources of strength and insight into and empathy for self and others. Corresponding themes (a total of 18 themes), 1 of which included subthemes, are also described, and interpretation is provided in light of the relevant literature.

Keywords: Asian, coping, heterosexism, lesbian, resilience

Over the past three decades, many researchers have been exploring multicultural issues focused on the ways in which social oppression (e.g., racism, classism, heterosexism, sexism) contributes to mental health problems (Szymanski & Moffitt, 2012; Carter, 2007). In doing so, they have been elaborating on theories “that step beyond the traditional ethnocentric, androcentric, and heterocentric perspectives (p. 113)” (Bridges, Selvidge, & Matthews, 2003), as well as focusing on social change to improve the sociopolitical and psychological conditions of marginalized populations. As such, a growing body of research on lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) persons has demonstrated that exposure to heterosexist stigma, prejudice, and discrimination is connected with deleterious consequences for a LGB person's health and well-being (for a review, see Szymanski & Moffitt, 2012). However, this body of research has been limited by focusing largely on the experiences of White LGB persons, failing to adequately attend to multiple minority identities and oppressions, and giving limited attention to coping, resilience, and positive aspects associated with managing multiple minority identities (Moradi, DeBlaere, & Huang, 2010).

Reviews of the sexual orientation research reveal a paucity of research about LGB persons of color and their invisibility in the psychology literature (Moradi et al., 2010; Szymanski, Kashubeck-West, & Meyer, 2008a). In addition, a recent content analysis of articles regarding LGB people of color during the past decade

(1998–2007) showed that when a significant number of racial/ethnic minority LGB people are included in empirical studies, the most represented LGB subgroup was Latino men, followed by African American men, and Asian American/Pacific Islander men (Huang et al., 2010). Furthermore, this content analysis revealed that the most common topics of focus reflected in empirical studies were sexual behaviors and risks, symptomatology, and disease such as high-risk sexual behaviors, condom use, AIDS and HIV, psychological distress, and alcohol and drug use. Huang et al. (2010) pointed out that although these topics may indicate risk factors and health concerns for LGB people of color, the limited range of these topics may also implicate that these are the most relevant areas to examine with these populations.

Although Asian American (AA) lesbian and bisexual women (LBW) may share some similarities with White and other racial/ethnic minority sexual minority persons, their experiences at the intersection of gender and Asian race/ethnicity suggest that AA LBW's experiences are unique and thus not directly comparable with these groups. For example, some scholars have described traditional Asian culture as both patriarchal and heteronormative, which results in AA LBW having devalued identities both as women and sexual minorities (Chan, 1989; Chung & Szymanski, 2006; Greene, 1994, 1996; Kimmel & Yi, 2004; Liu & Chan, 2003). Negative and/or restrictive cultural attitudes toward gender and homosexuality/bisexuality within an Asian context suggest that AA LBW inhabit a unique space worthy of investigation. In addition, attitudes and stereotypes about AA LBW in the larger dominant White culture (e.g., being sexually exotic or asexual, not existing, being inferior, being passive) also underscore their novel experience (Greene, 1994, 1996). Thus, the time is ripe to move toward exploring AA LBW's unique experiences including both negative and positive aspects within a racist, heterosexist, and sexist society. The purpose of this study was to explore challenges,

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coping strategies, and positive aspects of being an AA LBW, a group that has been largely neglected in research.

Conceptual Models for Understanding Multiple Minority Identities and Oppressions

Several theoretical models have been put forth to better understand the complexity of racial/ethnic minority LGB persons' experiences of multiple identities and oppressions (e.g., the additive/intersectionality models and greater risk/resilience perspectives; Moradi et al., 2010; Szymanski, Kashubeck-West, & Meyer, 2008b). In terms of additive/intersectionality models, the additive model posits that sociocultural identities function independently from each other, and these autonomous groups can then be added together to form experience (Warner, 2008). This approach proposes that for each minority status there is a simple accumulation of disadvantage (Shields, 2008). For AA LBW, these identities may bring on multiple, additive, and compounding stressors including racism, heterosexism, and sexism, a phenomenon known as "triple jeopardy" (Greene, 1994, p. 389). In contrast, intersectionality models suggest that social identities interdependently interact and intersect to create each group's unique position within a social matrix (Warner, 2008). This perspective rejects the artificial dichotomization of diverse sources of oppressions and suggests that each group's unique position within a matrix of social organization may be different or greater than the sum of its parts (Shields, 2008; Warner, 2008). For example, the category "Asian American" does not capture important differences between AA men and women, the category "Asian women" cannot capture differences between heterosexual and LBW, and so forth. Therefore, studying identity intersections (AA LBW) will be more informative than studying AA, women, and sexual minority individuals separately (Kertzner, Meyer, Frost, & Stirratt, 2009). In terms of greater risk/resilience perspectives, some researchers assert that disadvantaged social statuses put additional psychosocial burden related to multiple minority identities on LGB people of color (e.g., Meyer, 2003; Szymanski et al., 2008b), whereas others postulate that experiencing multiple oppressions may create protective factors associated with an individual's ability to cope by learning to navigate different marginalized spaces in society (e.g., Meyer, 2010; Wei et al., 2010).

Challenges/Stressors

Researchers who consider multiple social identities, such as race/ethnicity and sexual orientation, have recently examined LGB people of color's experiences of oppression related to their minority statuses. Consistent with the additive and greater risk perspectives, research has found that the more multiple minority statuses an individual identifies with the more likely they are to report experiences of harassment and discrimination (Nelson & Probst, 2004). In addition, LGB people of color fairly consistently report greater levels of stress, including discriminatory stress, than White LGB persons (Meyer, Schwartz, & Frost, 2008; Meyer, 2010). The findings about the level of distress/well-being among racial/ethnic minority LGB persons (largely reflecting data with only African American and Latina/o LGB persons) compared with White LGB persons have been inconsistent, with some studies showing greater distress and lower well-being for LGB people of color and others

finding no difference (Kertzner et al., 2009; Meyer, 2010). However, studies consistently find a link between minority stressors and distress with racial minority LGB samples (e.g., DeBlaere & Bertsch, 2013; Szymanski & Gupta, 2009; Szymanski & Sung, 2010). Although researchers have begun to pay attention to minority stressors of LGB people of color, there is almost no empirical research on how the multiple minority identities, including but not limited to race, gender, and/or sexual orientation, compound and intersect to serve as risk factors for AA LBW.

In addition to minority stress, some scholars have noted that culturally specific influences may affect the way in which sexual identities emerge and are expressed among LGB people of color (Biesckhe et al., 2008). Specifically, some traditional Asian values such as a huge emphasis on the family as the primary social unit, familial obligations to continue the family line through marriage and the bearing of children, rigid socialized gender roles, belief that homosexuality is a sin, and traditional patriarchal values and socioeconomic system have negatively portrayed being a LBW as a rejection of the importance of family and Asian cultural values and an identity that can bring shame to one's family (Chan, 1989; Liu & Chan, 2003).

Quantitative findings on AA LGB persons and qualitative findings on AA gay men suggest that the intensity of heterosexism and homophobia is much stronger in Asian cultures than in U.S. culture (Chung & Szymanski, 2006; Kimmel & Yi, 2004). In many Asian cultures, a nonheterosexual lifestyle or relationship is more likely to be unacceptable and almost invisible. In addition, AA LBW are likely to experience not only inner conflicts related to their sexual orientation but also traditional cultural pressure from their families to marry a man, procreate children, and perform heteronormative gender roles and filial responsibilities (Liu & Chan, 2003). Supporting this notion, two qualitative studies, one on 10 Asian American gay men (Chung & Szymanski, 2006) and the other on 10 Hmong gay men revealed conservatism in Asian culture as a predominant theme (Chung & Szymanski, 2006). Thus, culturally specific influences may complicate the integration of racial, sexual, and gender identities for AA LBW. Yet, scant research exists examining AA LBW's experiences of heterosexism and sexism within the Asian cultural context.

Coping and Resistance

Recently, growing attention to resilience factors in LGB populations has expanded the scope of research focusing on the effective ways to relieve psychological distress as well as enhance support resources (Sheets & Mohr, 2009; Szymanski, 2009). In addition, Kwon (2013) suggested a theoretical model based on three sources of resilience such as social support, emotional openness, and hope and optimism to better understand resilience factors in the general LGB population. It is important to broaden knowledge regarding human resilience by examining how LGB individuals maintain their well-being in challenging circumstances of pervasive social stigma. In this context, researchers have begun to pay attention to coping strategies that LGB people of color use to deal with the stressors they face. For example, in a study focused on African American, Latino, and AA gay men, Emano (2007) found that participants used various coping strategies to manage heterosexism such as suppressing and denying homosexuality, confronting, and utilizing social supports. In a qualitative study of

African American sexual minority men, Della, Wilson, and Miller (2002) identified role flexibility, changing sexual behavior and feelings, standing up for oneself, creating gay-only spaces, keeping the faith for emotional comfort, and accepting self and one's sexual orientation as coping strategies. In another qualitative study, Bowleg, Huang, Brooks, Black and Burkholder (2003) found that African American lesbians coped with the multiple minority stressors of racism, sexism, and heterosexism by seeking balance in their families and Black communities, taking active steps to engage in protective and supportive Black lesbian environments, maintaining internal psychological resilience characteristics, engaging in a variety of resiliency processes, and building social support systems. However, research in this area is meager and no study has specifically focused on AA LBW.

Some researchers have speculated that LGB people of color may gain resilience through communities of color's unique values and experiences, which hold potential as resources and coping skills (Huang et al., 2010). For instance, AA LGB individuals face challenges and stressors related to race, and greater perceived stigma toward homosexuality among their racial/ethnic communities. However, at the same time, their multiple minority identities and multiple communities can also be sources of strength and coping to manage stigma-related stress in their daily lives. These individuals may obtain more flexible and adaptable views in responding to life events because they have been exposed to both Asian and Western values and perspectives on their life experiences (Liu & Chan, 2003).

Positive Aspects

In terms of positive aspects of being lesbian or gay, a qualitative study based on predominately White participants revealed numerous positive themes of LGB identity including belonging to a community, having loving families of choice, having strong connections with others, serving as positive role models, living authentically and honestly with oneself, personal insight and sense of self, increased empathy and compassion for others, freedom from gender-specific roles, exploring sexuality and relationships, and creating egalitarian relationships (Riggle, Whitman, Olson, Rostosky, & Strong, 2008). However, the authors point out that further research is needed on racial and ethnic minority LGB persons to examine their potentially different positive aspects.

A 1989 to 1998 content analysis of gay and lesbian issues affecting racial/ethnic minorities suggests that AA gay men and lesbians experience positivity related to family as the primary social unit throughout one's lifetime and traditional religions that do not address homosexuality (e.g., Buddhism; Akerlund & Cheung, 2000). In addition, Chao (2001) found that the majority of AA lesbian participants in her study compared with AA heterosexual women reported that they were not struggling with the traditional Asian feminine role. Furthermore, East Asian culture's maintenance of stringent restrictions on open and public expressions of sexuality may assist AA LBW to develop less dichotomization and more fluidity of heterosexual and homosexual behaviors (Chan, 1997). Therefore, the study of positive aspects among AA LBW can deepen our understanding of unique and culturally contextualized experiences of LGB people of color beyond the deficit view.

Current Study

Despite the richness of the literature about minority stress and negative psychological outcomes, and growing attention on LGB people of color, few studies have examined the experiences of AA LBW. Contemporary research also fails to address the complexity of experience proposed in a number of models put forth to better understand LGB people of color's multiple identities and oppressions (e.g., additive/intersectionality models and greater risk/resilience perspectives; Moradi et al., 2010; Szymanski et al., 2008b). That is, little empirical attention has been given to the multiple and intersecting identities of AA LBW, and both the difficulties and successes that can arise in managing these identities. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore challenges, coping strategies, and positive aspects associated with managing identities related to race, sexual orientation, and gender among AA LBW.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 50 AA sexual minority women. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 52 years, with a mean of 24.72 years ($SD = 7.82$). Of the participants, 38% self-identified as lesbian, 36% as bisexual, 2% as questioning, 4% as not sure, and 20% as other. Participants' ethnicities were 31% Chinese, 8% Filipino, 2% Hmong, 4% Indian, 8% Japanese, 10% Korean, 2% Laotian, 2% South Asian, 10% Taiwanese, 10% Vietnamese, and 12% Other. Generational status of participants included 16% first-generation AA, 74% second-generation AA, 4% third-generation AA, and 6% fourth-generation AA. For first-generation AA, length of time in the United States ranged from 5 to 46 years, with a mean of 24.29 years ($SD = 14.76$).

Sixty-six percent ($n = 33$) of participants were currently enrolled in a college or university, with 12% being 1st-year undergraduates, 18% sophomores, 9% juniors, 24% seniors, 30% graduate students, and 6% other. Of the 34% who were not currently students ($n = 17$), 6% attained a high school diploma, 47% attained a 4-year college degree, and 47% attained a graduate or professional degree. In terms of geographical location, 62% lived in the West, 16% in the Northeast, 16% in the South, and 6% in the Midwest.

Procedures

To be eligible for the study, participants needed to be an Asian/Asian American woman who was at least 18 years old, had experienced same-sex attraction, and currently resided in the United States. Participants were recruited through an e-mail announcement of the study sent to lists that target members of the AA LBW community. These lists included the list owner of a variety of general LGB and AA and/or LBW related listserves, e-groups (e.g., Facebook, YahooGroups), community organizations, university LGB centers, professional groups (e.g., APA Division 35, 44, and 45), and Asian Studies and Women's Studies programs. Our goal was to get as many participants as we could using these contacts. Those who received the research announcement were asked to distribute the e-mail as appropriate. The e-mail announcement and the informed consent stated that "the purpose

of the study is to provide an understanding of the experiences of AA LBW. More specifically, this study will explore the intersection of multiple minority identities including but not limited to race, gender, and/or sexual orientation." Potential participants were given a hypertext link to access the survey website. After reading the informed consent, participants completed the online survey. As an incentive to participate in the study, all participants were given an opportunity to enter a raffle drawing for one of three \$100 gift certificates to Amazon.com.

Participants were asked three open-ended questions to effectively capture and describe the challenges, coping experiences, and benefits of their multiple minority statuses of race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation: (a) *Please tell me about some of the day-to-day challenges that you face as an Asian American lesbian [or woman-loving-woman]/bisexual woman [or woman-loving-both man and woman]*, adapted from Bowleg's (2008) study on African American lesbians; (b) *Please tell me about the ways that you cope with and/or resist the day-to-day challenges that you face as an Asian American lesbian [or woman-loving-woman]/bisexual woman [or woman-loving-both man and woman]*, adapted from Bowleg's (2008) study; and (c) *Please tell me what you think the positive things are about being an Asian American lesbian [or woman-loving-woman]/bisexual woman [or woman-loving-both man and woman]*, adapted from Riggle et al.'s (2008) study on predominately White LGB persons. Additional questions consisted of only demographic information. The study was approved by our university's Institutional Review Board.

Data Analysis

The responses submitted by participants to the three open-ended questions were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. This was a descriptive coding of the content/themes that emerged in participants' responses to the questions provided. The research team consisted of the three authors, two doctoral students and one faculty member in counseling psychology, all with knowledge and experience in qualitative methods and multicultural and sexual orientation issues. All research team members were involved in the entire data analysis process, which consisted of reviewing and discussing the data and their meaning, arriving at major conclusions, and presenting the results. Data analysis began with each research team member independently reading through the survey responses while making brief, specific notations regarding significant phenomenological experiences, emergent themes, and preliminary theoretical explanations. This was a low-level coding phase in which notations and themes remained close to the actual data record in terms of verbiage and content. Following independent analysis, research team members met numerous times as a group to discuss their findings and compare and reconcile their individually derived referents to the data. This process comprised a high-level coding phase in which continued discussion and evaluation of the data and interpretations generated more refined and abstract codes and resulted in the final themes and subthemes presented. The inductive nature of this method allowed for continued verification that emerging themes tied back to the raw data record and that more abstract conceptualizations were both accurate and meaningful in capturing the participants' experiences.

To ensure standards of trustworthiness in qualitative research, steps were taken through credibility, transferability, and confirm-

ability. Four techniques were employed to establish credibility, including peer review through all stages of the study, negative case analysis (i.e., scanning the data for instances that support or disconfirm emerging themes), triangulation via the use of different investigators who independently identified their own codes and categories from the data before collaborating and seeking consensus, and researcher reflexivity (i.e., multicultural training including examination of personal social identities and biases; Creswell, 2007). In terms of researcher reflexivity, it is important to note that the first author is an Asian feminist sexual minority international student from South Korea who became interested in this research based on her own personal experiences and after noticing that there was a lack of research and knowledge available regarding the experiences of AA LBW. She was able to find numerous personal connections to many of the themes identified from the data. The second and third authors are White lesbians with research interests in LGB issues and multiple oppressions.

Transferability was established by providing sufficient information about the participants and methodological processes, as well as direct quotations from participants so that the reader is able to contextualize the findings of the study to her or his own context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability was accomplished by an external auditor who was not part of the research team examining whether or not the findings, interpretations, and conclusions were supported by the data (Creswell, 2007). This individual, a Middle Eastern queer identified woman, read all of the raw data and a draft of the manuscript, including the survey questions, resulting themes, and supporting quotations. She concluded that the survey questions were appropriately broad enough to maximize participants' freedom to respond based on their own views of their experiences, that the process by which the researchers developed the themes from the data was logical, and that the themes/subthemes were accurate, thorough, and corresponded with the raw data.

Results

The results are organized around the three research questions. Participant demographics are included in a parenthetical following each direct quotation in the form of (participant number, age, sexual minority identity, ethnic identity, generation status). Abbreviations have been used for the sake of being simultaneously concise and descriptive. Sexual minority identity abbreviations include "L" for lesbian, "B" for bisexual, "Q" for questioning, "O" for other, and "NS" for not sure. Ethnic identity abbreviations include "C" for Chinese, "K" for Korean, "J" for Japanese, "T" for Taiwanese, "V" for Vietnamese, "L" for Laotian, "F" for Filipino, "H" for Hmong, "SA" for South Asian, "I" for Indian, and "O" for other. Generation status abbreviations include "1G" for 1st generation, "2G" for 2nd generation, "3G" for 3rd generation, and "4G" for 4th generation. As an example, the parenthetical (P34, 20, L, C, 2G) identifies Participant 34 as 20 years old, lesbian, Chinese, and 2nd generation.

Challenges/Stressors

Concerning day-to-day challenges faced by AA LBW, two overarching domains were identified: living with multiple minority identities and experiencing sexual orientation-based oppression.

Within the domains, a total of 5 themes, one which included several subthemes, emerged. Table 1 illustrates the overarching domains, as well as the number of cases that exemplified each theme/subtheme. In addition, it is important to note that 3 participants reported that it was hard to identify challenges or that they felt there were no challenges associated with being an AA LBW.

Living with multiple minority identities. Some participants reported difficulties living with multiple and intersecting minority identities related to racism, heterosexism, and sexism. This domain included three themes: living as an AA sexual minority women in the context of Asian culture, invisibility, and sexual stereotypes, fantasies, and fetishization.

Living as an AA sexual minority woman in the context of Asian culture. Consistent with Asian cultural values described above, four subthemes emerged: conformity to traditional gender roles, intolerance of homosexuality and bisexuality in AA cultures, difficulties with disclosure of sexual orientation to others, and conflict with AA parents/families.

Conformity to traditional gender roles. Seven participants reported pressures related to female gender roles, especially in

terms of appearance, negative attention, gender nonconformity, and judgment by others. Participants reported feeling pressure to “be more feminine” (P45, 22, O, V, 2G), feeling like “I must conform to more feminine styles of dress and hairstyles” (P34, 20, L, C, 2G), “Getting looks from older generation of Asian folks when we are together or mostly my gender presentation that fluctuates from femme to androgynous,” (P13, 26, O, C, 2G), and becoming “nervous in certain settings, especially if I’m wearing gender nonconforming clothing.” (P23, 21, O, SA, 2G). A self-described “very masculine” looking lesbian reported that “people draw assumptions all the time about me based on the way I dress” and she does not “fit in” (P25, 26, L, F, 2G) when interacting with groups that adhere to traditional gender roles.

Intolerance of homosexuality and bisexuality in AA cultures. Fourteen participants described AA culture as conservative and generally intolerant of homosexuality and bisexuality. Most participants wrote about their sexual orientation and same-sex relationships being regarded as invisible and unacceptable in their Asian cultural contexts; there is a “perception that Asians can’t be lesbian (what my mom told me when I came out to her)” (P42, 46, L, T, 1G).

Describing Asian culture’s sense of intolerance and lack of acceptance, participants wrote “I feel that Asians tend to be more conservative, and as such they are more hesitant to accept homosexuality” (P19, 21, L, T, 2G), and “There is also a fair amount of gay phobia within the several prominent Asian communities in my town (Chinese and Korean)” (P47, 19, O, J, 2G). Some participants wrote about the intolerance and ignorance of homosexuality not only being a part of broader Asian culture, but also being present in their Asian families and kinship: “the idea of family honor and pride, and the daunting realization that when an Asian comes out, the whole family can shun you” (P49, 28, L, V, 2G).

Difficulties with disclosure of sexual orientation to others. Twenty-seven participants reported that they have difficulties with disclosure of their sexual orientation to others including their family, friends, relatives, partner’s family, coworkers, students, and/or community. Many participants mentioned distress regarding coming out issues more broadly, such as feelings of pressure, discomfort, difficulty, hurt, nervousness, stress, worry, fear, hesitancy, separation, and negativity. In trying to deal and cope with such struggles, several participants described deciding not to come out, “I simply do not tell anyone. I act normal most of the day so not a lot of people know about it” (P2, 19, B, C, 2G) and “I am scared to come out” (P35, 19, NS, O, 2G). Sometimes participants’ decisions not to come out also extended to family, “I would have to say the biggest challenge is keeping my identity and relationship a secret from my family” (P14, 21, L, K, 2G) and “I am hiding who I am from my whole Chinese family” (P32, 20, O, O, 2G), possibly because their sexuality raises “conflict with traditional Asian beliefs and culture” (P33, 18, L, C, 2G) and AA LBW have to deal with “the pressure of marriage and expectations found in typical Asian families” (P16, 22, L, L, 2G). Decisions to not disclose to one’s family thus appeared to be related to the tenets and pressures of traditional Asian cultural values, “I can’t tell my family, because if I did, their reaction would be much more drastically negative considering the kind of culture they are from” (P40, 22, B, K, 2G).

Coming out is not a static process, as some participants noted, there is added stress related to a continuous negation of sexual

Table 1
Themes and Number of Cases of the Day-To-Day Challenges, Coping Strategies, and Positive Aspects of Being an AA LBW

Category/theme	n of cases
Challenges	
Living with multiple minority identities	
1. Living as an Asian American sexual minority woman in the context of Asian culture	
a. Conformity to traditional gender roles	7
b. Intolerance of homosexuality and bisexuality in Asian American cultures	14
c. Difficulties with disclosure of sexual orientation to others	27
d. Conflict with Asian American parents/families	24
2. Invisibility	16
3. Sexual stereotypes, fantasies, & fetishization	8
Experiencing sexual orientation-based oppression	
4. External heterosexism/bisexism	21
5. Internalized heterosexism/bisexism	4
Hard to figure out/No challenges	
	3
Coping/resistance strategies	
Identity management strategies	
1. Using cultural camouflage	5
2. Avoiding any subjects/situations related to sexuality	11
3. Hiding/de-emphasizing	9
Empowerment strategies	
4. Building social support systems/creating safe spaces	18
5. Resisting/confronting	12
6. Engaging in social activism	6
7. Engaging in a variety of resilience processes	8
None	
	3
Positive aspects	
Socio-cultural sources of strength	
1. Belonging to a community	11
2. Asian cultures/values as sources of strength	6
3. Freedom from constraints of heterosexuality and oppressive gender norms	7
Insight into and empathy for self and others	
4. Positive sense of self	11
5. Uniqueness	14
6. Increased empathy and compassion for others/world	4
Nothing positive	
	10

orientation disclosure, “It’s also a daily struggle to wonder if I should come out to people or not” (P21, 22, O, K, 2G), “‘Coming out’ is a process that I must go through with everyone I meet, and I have to decide when or if it is ever appropriate to do so. I have to always wonder if my sexuality will threaten my working relationships or friendships” (P34, 20, L, C, 2G), and “I constantly have to worry about if letting certain people know about my queer identity, I would be outed to my extremely homophobic parents who currently have no idea about my sexual orientation and the fact that I currently have a girlfriend” (P27, 19, B, C, 3G).

Conflict with AA parents/families. Twenty-four participants described experiences of conflict with their AA families regarding their sexual orientation, coming out, and/or relationships. The level of participants’ disclosure of their sexual orientation to family and degree of relational conflicts varied according to their parents’ degree of awareness, openness, and acceptance. For participants who were not out to their family it seemed to create “pressure on the home front, being unable to be who I truly am with my parents” (P8, 29, L, T, 2G). Participants described the conflict and stress their sexuality created within their relationships with their parents, which was often felt through a lack of support for their LBW experiences and identities, “My parents are not only Christian but also traditional Koreans, so when I came out it was a disaster. I knew that they would kick me out of the house if they knew I continued this lifestyle” (P14, 21, L, K, 2G) and “I feel like I lose my voice when arguing with my parents about this subject [LGBTQ social issues]. Sometimes I’m so hurt by their insensitivity that I just remain in shocked silence” (P27, 19, B, C, 3G).

Although some participants had family members that were more open and accepting, difficulties remained with other close-minded family members and family members’ struggles to fully accept participants’ identities and relationships, “However, I recently found that my father would be okay if I brought home a girlfriend. My mom would find it gross” (P12, 21, B, V, 2G) and “they [parents] know of my white girlfriend and that she lives with me but they struggle with bridging the gap and creating a relationship with her” (P7, 30, L, V, 2G).

At times, acknowledgment and/or acceptance of a participant’s sexuality was contained to the immediate family unit and hidden from wider AA extended families and communities.

My father accepted my partner as my lesbian girlfriend but would not articulate that this was our relationship. When in public he allowed us to hold hands, hug, and kiss in front of him but requested that we not do it in Chinatown or when we visited Hawaii as a family, as there were many other Asians around. (P15, 21, B, C, 2G)

and

My family won’t accept my sexuality and my mother is hiding my lesbianism from my Chinese grandparents. Because I can’t speak Cantonese, I can’t tell them about it. My mother is withholding that from my grandparents because she thinks they’d be “heartbroken about what I’ve been doing.” (P32, 20, O, O, 2G)

Invisibility. Sixteen participants reported facing challenges related to invisibility. This invisibility and lack of representation of AA LBW occurred within both the LGB community, as well as the larger U.S. culture. Participants described, “Being invisible to the public as well as the queer community at large as a femme Asian American queer woman” (P31, 25, B, C, 2G), “It is also difficult

and tiring to be constantly invisible to other queer women in the [LGB] community” (P27, 19, B, C, 3G), and being negated by “Having other lesbians/bisexuals not even considering that I might be interested in them because I am a Korean American. Koreans are known to be Christians, conservative, and image conscious. Nobody would assume that I, as a Korean, would be a bisexual because of these factors” (P40, 22, B, K, 2G). Invisibility was also discussed in terms of a lack of an AA LGB community and people, “not being able to find other Asian American LGBT people to relate to in the area” (P16, 22, L, L, 2G), causing participants to feel “disconnected” and “isolated,” “since I see so few openly gay Asian Americans, I feel more isolated because there seems to be fewer people like me” (P19, 21, L, T, 2G). This invisibility is further reinforced by mainstream culture and media, as one participant eloquently expressed:

The greatest day to day challenge is simply how invisible I feel whether it is what is shown on mainstream media, the books I read, or the most recent frustrating news about how Asian American stereotypes are still rampant and bisexual women are still underrepresented. For me, media has always been powerful. To put it simply, I always believed media can dictate who we think can be heroes, what our society currently believes about this current group of people, what ideals we perpetuate. I exist, I am a multifaceted, complex individual and yet I am reduced to an exotic stereotype, to a sidekick or most of the time, to nothing. I am an invisible woman and I ache to exist. (P41, 22, B, F, 2G)

Participants also wrote about invisibility stemming from racism that exists within the LGB community and noted the primacy of “whiteness” and “anti-Asian/white supremacist racism” within the LGB community, “I find that most LGBT resources are geared toward white gay men” (P15, 21, B, C, 2G). One participant’s experience involved fighting against this racism-based invisibility, “Writing a thesis (which has become my sole day-to-day activity) that addresses racism in LGBT literature, scholarly work, policy, and communities. Destabilizing whiteness as the accepted norm for the LGBT experience” (P18, 23, L, F, 2G).

Sexual stereotypes, fantasies, and fetishization. Eight participants illustrated how racism, heterosexism, and/or sexism influence AA LBW’s experiences in regards to sexual objectification and stereotyping, particularly being “reduced to an exotic stereotype” (P41, 22, B, F, 2G). In describing this societal landscape participants shared how, “There is a consistent expectation for the Asian woman to be overtly sexual and desirous of white men, and if not white men, white women. Day in and out, I face subtle innuendos, subtly sexually suggestive comments, and so forth” (P28, 28, L, C, 2G) and “There are a lot of sexual stereotypes about Asian women which emphasize exotic behaviors and people associate being a lesbian with those kinds of fantasies that is, do not take Asian lesbians seriously as people with real lives” (P6, 42, L, K, 2G). These stereotypes and acts of sexual objectification also play out in AA LBW’s experiences with dating and choosing partners, as participants described, “I experience people fetishizing my race as well as my sexuality. I don’t like the idea of ‘fulfilling’ the freaky Asian woman stereotype that I often see in films so I am extra wary of choosing partners that won’t expect certain things because of my race, gender or sexuality” (P12, 21, B, V, 2G) and “I come across a lot of fetishization of Asian, usually in the form of telling me I’m exotic or look like Mulan. So every time I date

someone, I have to take into consideration that it might be ‘yellow fever’” (P36, 18, B, O, 3G). For some participants, such fetishization and objectification is so distressing that it causes them to second-guess being open and out as an LBW, “I am sick of the objectifying fetish-izing of lesbian relationships. While I guess it’s better than being hateful, it’s still dehumanizing and it almost makes me want to not be out” (P38, 20, B, J, 4G).

Experiencing sexual orientation-based oppression. Consistent with the theoretical and empirical literature examining heterosexist oppressions as risk factors among LGB individuals (cf., Huang et al., 2010; Szymanski et al., 2008a), two themes emerged within this domain: experiencing external heterosexism/bisexism and internalized heterosexism/bisexism.

External heterosexism/bisexism. Twenty-one participants described experiencing external heterosexism and/or bisexism. Participants reported feeling “constant fear,” “hurt,” and “uncomfortable” in dealing with “homophobia” or “homophobic messages from outer society.”

One participant recalled, “Once after dinner in a restaurant in the Seattle area, a woman sitting nearby us told her children that ‘those people are called lesbians,’ pointed to my female partner, and said ‘that one’s probably transgender.’ Unaware of her mistake she smiled at us like she was doing us a favor” (P15, 21, B, C, 2G). At times participants experienced an intersection of heterosexism and racism, “I can definitively say that the South is barely accepting/inclusive of Asian Americans but hardly accepting at all of LG-BTQ people” (P7, 30, L, V, 2G).

Participants also discussed challenges specific to stereotypes about bisexuality, including bisexuality being a “just a phase” and bisexuality being synonymous with promiscuity, as one participant described, “Even though I have hinted to my family members that I am bisexual, they fail to take me seriously because they think sexuality is a choice. Bisexuality to them is a phase. Also, with male partners, sometimes they would suggest we invite another female to participate in sexual intercourse with” (P26, 19, B, C, 1G).

In addition to more overt forms of heterosexism/bisexism, participants reported dealing with sociocultural assumptions of heterosexuality in their interpersonal exchanges. They expressed the prevalence of heteronormativity in their lives, “I’m not visibly queer, which means everyone just assumes that I am straight. It’s incredibly hurtful and stressful to have an important part of my identity be so meaningless to other people that it doesn’t even enter their radar” (P21, 22, O, K, 2G) and “People sometimes ask me about a boyfriend” (P8, 29, L, T, 2G).

Internalized heterosexism/bisexism. Four participants reported that they experienced some level of internalized negative messages and attitudes about their sexual orientation and identity, including struggles with feelings of shame, wrongness, abnormality, and unacceptability. Participants expressed, “Feeling like I’m hiding and that I need to hide one of my identities, which makes me feel as though being queer is shameful, when I know it shouldn’t be that way” (P22, 20, O, C, 2G), “As a lesbian I just feel wrong. I see women around me with kids. I want kids and a normal family like the one I grew up in” (P50, 22, L, H, 1G), and “While being attracted to various genders is becoming more and more okay, I still hesitate about being open and proud about being bisexual because it still feels unacceptable to some degree” (P31, 25, B, C, 2G).

Coping and Resistance

Among the coping strategies AA LBW shared for dealing with their day-to-day challenges, two overarching domains emerged: identity management strategies and empowerment strategies. Within these domains, a total of 7 themes were identified (see Table 1). Additionally, two participants wrote “n/a” and one participant left the answer to the question about their coping strategies blank.

Identity management strategies. Participants described a variety of ways they manage and protect their AA LBW identities, and within this domain, three themes emerged: using cultural camouflage, avoiding any subjects/situations related to sexuality, and hiding/de-emphasizing.

Using cultural camouflage. Five participants reported that they used certain norms and mores of the Asian cultural context to cope with heterosexism and sexual orientation-based prejudice by “camouflaging” their sexual minority identities and same-sex relationships with such cultural elements. At times, participants would use Asian cultural norms, such as affection between female friends, to conceal romantic attraction and affection, as one participant described, “most people would see females hugging as a security reason (psychology) or simply a need for friendship . . . females are more emotional than males therefore while other saw a simple hug as no meaning, the couple may see it as a sexual approach” (P2, 19, B, C, 2G). In Asian culture, individuals are not defined by their sexuality (e.g., sexual attraction, sexual behavior), and lesbianism and same-sex relationships are viewed as “Western concepts” that do not affect Asian culture (Chan, 1989, 1997). This cultural tenet camouflaged some participants’ same-sex relationships by rendering them invisible in Asian culture and ultimately minimizing homophobic reactions and fostering more tolerance from other AA. As one participant shared,

I find that being in an interracial relationship and living in a cosmopolitan city has always shielded me from a majority of discrimination. I feel that other Asians greatly ignore the fact that I am visibly with a same sex partner and excuse it to the fact that my partner is not Asian. In that way I feel like typical homophobic reactions are reduced . . . perhaps it’s the idea that non-Asians have “led me astray,” and not that two Asians engulfed in Asian culture have turned their backs on it. (P15, 21, B, C, 2G)

Although some participants conveyed the difficulties involved in Asian culture’s assumption of heterosexuality and pressure to marry, some participants discussed how they can use the Asian cultural taboo of open discussion of sex and sexuality (Chan, 1997) to conceal their sexual minority identities and maintain attention on other life facets:

Because in the Asian culture it is not encouraged for children to date until past the age of 21 (preferably after the 3rd or 4th year of college), it is easy to cover up my queer identity even if I don’t have a boyfriend. Although I know this advantage is temporary and I will be pestered to get married around the age of 27, I’d like to relish in the fact that my parents care about my academic pursuits so much more than romantic/sexual relationships that I can basically hide in undergrad and later, in grad school (hopefully). It is also a stigma in the Asian American community to not talk about sexual relationships, so the question and topic are never brought up and I never have to deal with the awkwardness of answering it. (P27, 19, B, C, 3G)

Avoiding any subjects/situations related to sexuality. Eleven participants reported that they used avoidant coping strategies to deal with the prevalence of heteronormativity in their lives and relationships. Participants described avoiding certain interactions, situations, and conversation topics that may (or often) catalyze heterosexist reactions, “I try to avoid any confrontations and if the subject comes up, I skirt around the topic and try to change the subject” (P8, 29, L, T, 2G), “In terms of the homophobia, I just try to avoid situations that could cause us trouble” (P36, 18, B, O, 3G), and sometimes such avoidance was for the sake of other people’s comfort, “When it comes to my family though, I keep silent. I avoid topics about LGBTQ issues if only to maintain the harmony within my family or to avoid stressing out my father” (P41, 22, B, F, 2G). At more extreme levels, participants described avoidance and/or termination of relationships and contact with their parents and families, “Ended relationship with family/parents” (P1, 48, B, C, 1G), “I try to distance myself from my parents as much as possible” (P14, 21, L, K, 2G), and “I cope by staying at school and seeing my parents as sparingly as possible” (P27, 19, B, C, 3G).

Hiding/de-emphasizing. Coming out to others is likely to increase the chances of encountering heterosexist prejudice, discrimination, harassment, rejection, and violence, and decisions to come out to others need to be weighed against the possible negative consequences that may follow (Szymanski & Sung, 2010). Nine participants reported protecting themselves from such risks by hiding or de-emphasizing their sexual orientation in their daily lives. For example, participants wrote, “I de-emphasize sexual or personal references to my life of any kind” and (P6, 42, L, K, 2G) “Not much to do except be careful and have privacy settings that don’t allow people to post without my permission. It also means not bringing significant others to family events, which is hard to deal with” (P20, 25, L, C, 2G). Other participants described negotiating risks of being out by controlling the level of disclosure of their sexual orientation to others, “Only talking to folks I trust about my orientation. Sometimes, trying to be invisible when I don’t feel safe” (P23, 21, O, SA, 2G), “I present a very limited version of myself to my family members” (P34, 20, L, C, 2G), and “I separate my home life and my social/school life” (P35, 19, NS, O, 2G).

Empowerment strategies. In addition to managing one’s sexual identity, participants also employed empowerment strategies to cope with oppression. Within this domain, four themes emerged: building social support systems/creating safe spaces, resisting/confronting, engaging in social activism, and engaging in a variety of resilience processes.

Building social support systems/creating safe spaces. Consistent with Kwon’s (2013) theoretical model of resilience factors in LGB individuals, a large number of participants in this study ($n = 18$) reported various ways of building social support systems. A large number of participants in this study ($n = 18$) reported various ways of building social support systems. These methods included creating their own safe spaces through their relationships, including “sisters,” “(queer-identified) friends,” “allies,” and “family,” as well as active involvement in “an Asian queer community,” “online support groups,” “a women’s group,” “an Asian American LGBTQ group/club,” and “a few websites and tumblr pages for queer women of color.” Participants reported that they could effectively manage their challenges and oppressive experiences with support, awareness, safety, normalization, accep-

ance, and empowerment, “I have a close group of queer-identified friends who face similar challenges. Talking to them and creating safe spaces together are amazing and empowering for me” (P21, 22, O, K, 2G) and “Having the most amazing girlfriend and supportive friends/sisters helps me cope with any of the challenges I may face. Just knowing that there are people I can fall back on and who would support me no matter what, makes coping easy” (P10, 21, B, F, 2G).

Resisting/confronting. Twelve participants reported using strategies of resistance and/or confrontation to deal with stigma and prejudice. Participants engaged in acts of resistance through externalizing the locus of the heterosexism issue, coming out, being publically affectionate, and expressing oneself as unique and separate from cultural norms. Several participants reported a refusal to let others’ narrow-mindedness become their problem and instead placed the need for change of mind on the oppressor, “it is their problem if they don’t like it, not mine” (P19, 21, L, T, 2G) and “if people have a problem with correctly assuming I’m gay and having a problem with it, then 1) they’re dumb and 2) it’s not my problem. I’ve learned not to bother with other people’s hang-ups because it’s a waste of my time” (P25, 26, L, F, 2G). In sharing acts of resistance, other participants described, “For PDA, I think I’ve just accepted it, people need to see it. The more people see it happening, the more normalizing it is. Being visible is the first act of resistance” (P13, 26, O, C, 2G) and “I do come out to acquaintances who assume that I am straight. I tell men who hit on me in bars that I am there with my partner and am not interested. I am not ashamed of who I am regardless of cultural stigma or not” (P3, 27, L, T, 1G).

Confrontation often came in the form of participants “calling out” others, although this often depended on their relationships or relational closeness, “I will call out my friends and partners on homophobic/transphobic things, but not my parents. I allow myself to feel angry and to demand accountability from those who are closest to me” (P31, 25, B, C, 2G). Similarly, another noted, “I try to speak up when I find other people’s actions oppressive, unless they’re my friends’ parents or someone else that I don’t have business speaking to about it” (P38, 20, B, J, 4G).

Engaging in social activism. Six participants reported that they engaged in a variety of activism activities to cope with and challenge multiple forms of oppression, including speaking out, LGBTQ community leadership, scholarly work, and involvement in university activist organizations. Participants shared, “Creating scholarly work that centers on lesbians of color’s voices and integrates intersectional analysis that doesn’t bolster gender essentialism that privileges the white lesbian experience and silences all others” (P18, 23, L, F, 2G) and being “one of only two Asian American queer people who is outspoken, attends political events, and demands equality” (P7, 30, L, V, 2G). Furthermore, participants wrote about activism aimed at building an inclusive community, enhancing awareness of diversity, and increasing the visibility and representation of AA sexual minorities and communities. For example, “So I have the privilege to be an out-advocate and hopefully indirectly help educate more people to be as accepting as my family and play a small role in increasing the visibility of Asian American bisexual women” (P38, 20, B, J, 4G).

Engaging in a variety of resilience processes. Eight participants reported engaging in different kinds of resilience processes to manage their minority status including therapy, meditation,

reading, writing, sports, hobbies, vacation, and intimate relationships. For example, one participant wrote about drawing strength and comfort from her reading,

I read things like comics and articles from other Asian women living in America or abroad to connect with social challenges and traditions I am familiar with. I also read stories of negative coming out stories for bisexual women because I find it comforting to know that other people go through the same things and survive. (P12, 21, B, V, 2G)

Positive Aspects

Despite the challenges of being an AA LBW, participants also described numerous positive facets of their racial/ethnic and sexual minority identities and experiences, which developed into two domains: sociocultural sources of strength and insight into and empathy for self and others (adapted from Riggle et al., 2008). Within these domains, a total of six themes were identified (see Table 1). In addition, a surprising 20% of sample participants ($n = 10$) reported that there was nothing positive about being an AA LBW or they were “not sure.” For example, participants wrote, “Nothing, in this society, it is much easier to be Caucasian and male. There are so many things against us: race, sexual orientation, sex, appearance/looks” (P40, 22, B, K, 2G) and “I honestly can’t come up with anything positive” (P10, 21, B, F, 2G).

Sociocultural sources of strength. Many participants described sources of strength in the sociocultural context as AA LBW, and three themes emerged in this domain: belonging to a community, Asian cultures/values as sources of strength, and freedom from constraints of heterosexuality and oppressive gender norms.

Belonging to a community. Eleven participants reported that belonging to and having connections within supportive communities, including the AA women, the AA LBW, and the LGBTQ communities, were positive aspects of being an AA LBW. Participants expressed that their sense of community made them feel supported, lucky, grateful, comforted, strengthened, understood, accepted, motivated, and empowered and that “There’s a certain kinship I have with other Asian LGBTQ people, because only we can understand the specific things we go through. It’s like I have my own little community” (P37, 18, B, J, 2G).

Asian cultures/values as sources of strength. Six participants reported that they drew strength and meaning from their Asian cultures/values, including teachings, anecdotes, traditions, philosophy, and history. Participants wrote, “I find comfort in my father’s teachings and anecdotes of Vietnam, its mythologies and what it’s like to live there” (P12, 21, B, V, 2G), “As a Chinese person I am very proud that China didn’t really have a history of homophobia (at least not as serious as the West). And our language has always been non-gender binary till Westernization” (P26, 19, B, C, 1G), and

For myself I love the fact that my cultures are ancient and have given many positive things to the world. I also appreciate the emphasis on education and respect for one’s elders. I like the consciousness of trying to be thoughtful of other people, and the idea that harmony of the group is just as important as individuality. (P24, 52, L, O, 4G)

Freedom from constraints of heterosexuality and oppressive gender norms. Seven participants expressed that they felt a sense of liberation and “freedom from [the] constraints of hetero-

sexuality and oppressive gender norms” and expectations placed upon heterosexual AA women. Participants’ LBW identities have allowed them to redefine beauty, “I find it beautiful to not be restricted to the heteronormative and gender-conforming to escape the heterosexist gender binary” (P12, 21, B, V, 2G), “I am living by my own values, appreciating people and not being confined to one gender or following prescribed gender rules when dating” (P38, 20, B, J, 4G), and shape alternative gender roles of their choosing, “Feeling like I don’t need to meet conventional expectations of Asian women” (P11, 26, O, C, 2G).

Insight into and empathy for self and others. Many participants reported positive experiences of personal insight and reflection, as well as increased empathy for other AA LGB people and marginalized groups. In this domain, three themes emerged: positive sense of self, uniqueness, and increased empathy and compassion for others/world.

Positive sense of self. Eleven participants viewed having a positive sense of self as a positive aspect of their AA LBW identities. Participants described a strong sense of self, “All of it is embracing and loving who I am and who I choose to be . . . and that brings me more peace than keeping in the closet and pretending a life that I don’t have or want” (P13, 26, O, C, 2G), which at times was earned through the difficulties of being an AA LBW, “I think that I have a very strong self-identity that came out of many years of questioning, understanding, disliking, and eventually liking and appreciating my multiple identities” (P3, 27, L, T, 1G).

Uniqueness. Fourteen participants reported that uniqueness was a positive aspect of being AA LBW. Some participants stated that since there were very few AA LGB people, “Everybody knows me or has heard of me” (P7, 30, L, V, 2G), “I get to be everyone’s one and only favorite gay Asian friend” (P16, 22, L, L, 2G), and “Not too many Asian American bisexuals/lesbians are out compared to other ethnicities, so there seems to be a rarity/uniqueness factor, which people tend to like” (P10, 21, B, F, 2G).

Participants also reported that their identity gave rise to “a unique and intersectional perspective on the world” (P31, 25, B, C, 2G), allowing them to “see society in a different way, more critically and intelligently” (P6, 42, L, K, 2G) and “find commonalities with a lot of different communities” (P31, 25, B, C, 2G). For some participants, uniqueness came through having an “in-between” identity, “I appreciate myself as someone who ‘walks between the worlds’ and the emerging pockets of consciousness that I can be a part of” (P43, 33, NS, I, 1G), that adds meaning and value to them and the communities they are a part of, “I think that we bring insight to each of our identity groups, whether it be bringing an Asian American perspective to a queer community or a queer perspective to an Asian American community” (P44, 20, L, O, 4G).

Increased empathy and compassion for others/world. Four participants reported that their AA LBW identities had increased their empathy for others in minority groups and helped them become more open to the world. Participants wrote, “Living at the intersection has made me more empathetic and open to the world. I am politicized by my identity. Because of it, I do the work that I do” (P4, 25, L, T, 2G), “I have greater empathy, knowing what it is like to be a minority within a minority” (P41, 22, B, F, 2G), and “my identities help me empathize more with other historically marginalized groups” (P9, 21, O, C, 1G).

Discussion

The current study aimed to shed light on the multiple and intersecting identities of race, gender, and sexuality among AA LBW, and both the challenges and benefits that can arise in managing these identities. The results reveal support for both risk and resilience perspectives (e.g., Moradi et al., 2010).

In terms of risk, the results of the current study revealed that the majority of participants experienced several types of stress resulting from multiple minority identities related to racism, heterosexism, and sexism such as Asian culture's patriarchal and heterosexist aspects, invisibility and underrepresentation, and racialized and heterosexualized sexual objectification. These findings are consistent with theory (cf., Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000; Greene, 1994) and emerging empirical studies (cf., LGBT People of Color Microaggressions Scale by Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011) suggesting that AA LGB persons may experience additional stress resulting from experiences of both heterosexism within their racial/ethnic community and racism within the LGB community. Our results emphasize some of the unique ways that oppression is experienced by AA LBW, both as a result of cultural values and gendered and racialization processes. The findings that AA LBW experience a great deal of stress and family conflict related to the coming out process and invisibility are consistent with research indicating that White LGB persons describe a greater level of outness than do their racial/ethnic-minority counterparts, particularly to family, and that outness is positively related to their use of and satisfaction with available social support (Faberman, 2003). These results are similar to the findings of AA gay men who reported that they avoided the topic of sexual orientation with their parents and found it difficult to come out to them (Chung & Szymanski, 2006). These findings also resonate with calls for challenging assumptions of heterosexuality and making sexual minorities of color visible in society (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2005; Della, Wilson, & Miller, 2002).

Our participants' experiences with sexual objectification illuminate how they intersect with and are influenced by their other sociocultural identities, particularly race and sexual orientation, to produce stereotypes about Asian women as being sexually "exotic" which are then amplified by the fact that some heterosexual men have distorted, oversexualized perceptions of same-sex female relationships (Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009). These stereotypes and acts of sexual objectification feed into a broader phenomenon of "ethnosexual mythology," the sexual myths that dominant culture generates and maintains about women of color (Greene, 1996), and these sexual myths are propagated not only by general bystanders, but also play out in AA LBW's experiences with dating and choosing partners.

Finally, consistent with a fairly large research base on predominantly White LGB persons (for reviews, see Szymanski et al., 2008a; Szymanski & Moffitt, 2012), experiencing both overt and more subtle insidious forms of external and internalized sexual orientation-based oppression were noted as daily stressors. Interestingly, however, experiences of racism only and internalized racism did not emerge as a separate theme. This is similar to other studies suggesting that AA LGB persons may experience more discrimination because they are sexual minorities rather than because they are Asian (Chan, 1989; Chung & Szymanski, 2006). Issues related to AAs being viewed as the "Model Minority"

and/or invisible, having stronger connections with the Asian community and perhaps stronger ethnic identity and pride, as well as experiences of heterosexism both within the dominant White and Asian cultural contexts may make sexual orientation based discrimination more salient for AA LBWs.

The results also revealed that participants used various coping strategies to manage multiple oppressions in their daily lives and relationships within complex and challenging contexts containing pervasive social stigma toward sexual minorities as well as invisibility and marginalization of AA LBW. Drawing from Boykin's concepts (1986) of mental colonization and resistance as coping strategies to deal with racism among African Americans, Della, Wilson, and Miller (2002) identified that their African American gay and bisexual male participants used different coping strategies that "fall along passive-active and engagement-disengagement continua" (p. 387). Similarly, some participants in this study employed relatively passive strategies for dealing with stigma and prejudice, such as maintaining silence about their sexual orientation and/or making themselves invisible (e.g., using cultural camouflage, hiding/de-emphasizing). These coping strategies can be characterized as mental colonization because these strategies contribute to maintaining the status quo and do nothing to challenge oppression or instigate social change (Boykin, 1986; Della, Wilson, & Miller, 2002). In addition, some participants reported utilizing active coping styles of empowerment that challenge the oppressive status quo. These can be identified as individual/interpersonal resistance to oppression, such as confronting other's oppressive actions, and macro level/system change strategies, such as building social support systems/creating safe spaces and engaging in social activism. The findings about the importance of social support systems are consistent with qualitative findings on African American lesbians (Bowleg et al., 2003) and African American, Latino, and AA sexual minority men (Chung & Szymanski, 2006; Emano, 2007; Della, Wilson, & Miller, 2002).

In terms of positive aspects, themes such as belonging to a community, freedom from oppressive gender roles and/or sexual expression, positive sense of self, and empathy for others were consistent with those found among predominantly White LGB people (Riggle et al., 2008; Rostosky, Riggle, Pascale-Hague, & McCants, 2010). These similarities may indicate that regardless of race/ethnicity, LGB people strive to create their own positive identity, worldview, and meaning of complex experiences in a heterosexist society. However, our data also reveal that AA LBW have different positive aspects in the context of Asian culture and multiple minority identity, such as Asian cultures/values as sources of strength, unique identity, and having an intersectional perspective on the world. It is also interesting to note that some Asian cultural values were seen as sources of stress (as described in the Challenges section) but others were experienced as sources of pride and strength. Surprisingly, there was little evidence of certain positive aspects found in past theory about AA LGB persons related to Asian culture or the blend of both Asian and Western values, such as more flexible and adaptable views (Liu & Chan, 2003) and sexual fluidity (Chan, 1997).

It is also important to note that 20% of the participants described that there was nothing positive about being an AA LBW or they were "not sure." On one hand, it may be associated with self-selection bias or a general tendency to respond negatively. On the other hand, the greater challenges, greater multiple minority stress,

and/or triple jeopardy may be outweighing any positive aspects (such as those reported by certain participants) which account for the “not sure” or “nothing” responses of some of the participants.

Finally, it seems noteworthy that many of the themes identified under Challenges had a corresponding theme in either the Coping/Resistance or Positive Aspects section, particularly with regard to themes related to intersectionality. For example, the themes related to the stressors of living with multiple minority identities appear to have corresponding positive aspects in the area of insight and empathy for self and others and unique identities and perspectives. Similarly, the coping theme of cultural camouflage seems relatable to the stressor subthemes of cultural views of homosexuality and/or traditional gender roles. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that some of the challenges (e.g., heterosexism, racism) that are generally linked to negative mental health outcomes, seem to also become sources of resilience and strength for some AA LBW.

Collecting qualitative data using Internet-based surveys can provide a safe and less threatening place for a wide range of participants (i.e., marginalized and underrepresented groups) to share more thorough and personal responses through heightened anonymity. In addition, a population of non-native English speakers can benefit from this method by submitting their written responses within their language proficiency. These advantages of Internet-based surveys may result in larger sample sizes, strengthen reliability, and ensure trustworthiness of data (Van Eeden-Moorefield, Proulx, & Pasley, 2008). In this context, we were able to collect open-ended responses via the Internet from a large number of participants for a qualitative study, and there was significant diversity of participants in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic status. However, one of the limitations of this method was the inability to probe more deeply, clarify, and pursue greater understanding of our participants' meaning.

Another limitation of this study was using “Asian/Asian American” as an umbrella term because of the diversity of the peoples it includes. Although the AA population in the United States may share some common cultural values and views about gender and homosexuality as described earlier, we need to consider that each AA subgroup has its own unique language, culture, values, and historical, sociopolitical, economic, and religious backgrounds. For example, a recent survey of 3,511 AA persons revealed that AA persons' views about homosexuality varied depending on several factors such as young versus older generations, ethnicity, native born versus foreign born, and religious affiliation (Pew Research Center, 2012). Although early on in data analysis we did try to examine variability across racial/ethnic subgroups, no differences emerged and we abandoned this strategy. We believe that this is likely attributable to low numbers in each subgroup rather than a lack of potential difference. Future research is needed with larger numbers of participants in each subgroup to meaningfully explore differences among the various subgroups of Asian cultures and communities.

With regards to terminology, it is also important to recognize that there are limitations to using terms such as “lesbian,” “bisexual,” and “woman,” given that there are various cultural understandings of LBW identity (e.g., no existence of terminology for a lesbian in some Asian cultures). Although having an experience of same-sex attraction was also implied in the recruitment procedures, the experiences of participants who self-identified as “questioning,” “not sure,” and “other” regarding sexual orientation were

not elaborately contextualized within the limited online responses. Therefore, it may be valuable to examine the different experiences of AA sexual minorities who self-identify with other forms of nonheterosexual identity.

In addition, our sample was skewed toward more educated AA LBW, which may limit generalizability to AA LBW with lower levels of educational attainment. AA LBWs in this study who were able to complete online surveys and articulate their complicated experiences regarding sexual orientation and racial/ethnic related issues may be different from nonparticipants in various ways. For instance, AA LBW in the study may be more likely to build social support systems and engage in social activism through using Internet access and obtaining information on their sexual orientation and/or racial/ethnic identity from different online sources related to Asian American and/or sexual minority groups and communities. They would also be more likely to enhance their coping strategies and resilience through connecting to these kinds of sociocultural support systems.

Methodologically, future research might consider utilizing different methods to more effectively contextualize multiple identities within a social matrix and assess the processes of intersecting identities and development. For example, a longitudinal study, focus groups, or a case study in qualitative methods may be used (Warner, 2008), and the domains/themes identified in this study may be employed as part of an interview protocol for in-depth interviews (Rostosky et al., 2010). Furthermore, the findings of this study could be used to create scales that tap into AA LBW's unique experiences, and then later used in quantitative studies of AA LBW. For example, studies examining whether the unique challenges associated with being an AA LBW are related to poorer psychological and relational outcomes and whether positive aspects are related to well-being. Additionally, examination of coping strategies and positive aspects found in this study might be investigated as potential moderators or mediators of the multiple oppressions-psychological distress links.

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