



# *Sexual Orientation and Alcohol Use Disorders*

NIAAA Social Work Education  
Module 10G

(revised 03/04)



# Outline

- λ Definitions
- λ Research Limitations
- λ Prevalence of Gay & Lesbian Alcohol Use
- λ Risk and Protective Factors



# *Definitions*

“As an oppressed and often invisible population, we don't even know how many of us there really are, much less what percentage of us fall into any category.”



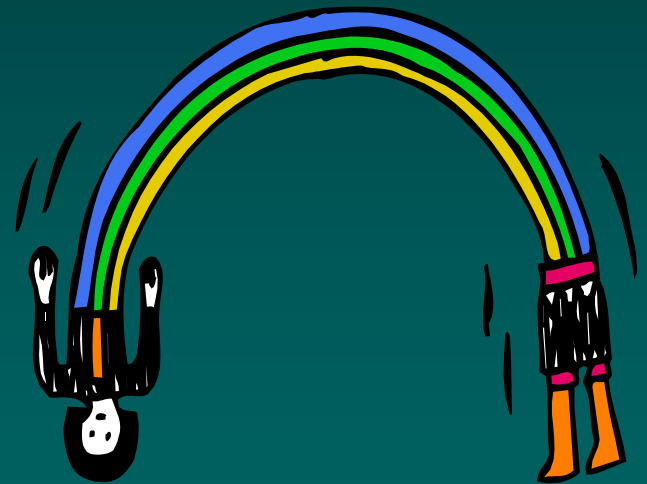
*@2002 Microsoft Corporation*

# Definitions (continued)

*λ Sexual orientation and gender identity are complicated constructs*

*λ Individuals may not agree with labels*

*λ Tremendous variability and diversity exist*





# *Definitions (continued)*

## *λ Gay or lesbian*

*- Primary sexual and emotional attachments to persons of the same gender*

## *λ Bisexual*

*- Individuals who have sexual and/or emotional attachments to both men and women*

## *λ Transgender*

*- Individuals who experience lack of fit between societal expectations for sex (male/female) or gender (masculine/feminine)*



# Research Limitations

λ Researchers and funding agencies hesitant

Bias in participant samples:

- 
- Definitional confusion
  - Convenience sample bias to bar/club-goers
  - Convenience bias toward “out” individuals
  - Sampling bias toward white, well-educated lesbians and gay men

- Little known about other:

- ethnicities
- socio-economic backgrounds
- educational backgrounds
- bisexuals or transgendered persons
- “closeted” persons



# Prevalence of Gay/Lesbian Alcohol Use: Early Research

Study	Lesbian & Gay Respondents		Heterosexual Respondents	
	LESBIANS	GAY MEN	FEMALES	MALES
Saghir & Robins, 1973	(N = 57) 35% excessive or dependent	(N = 89) 30% excessive or dependent	(N = 43) 5% excessive or dependent	(N = 35) 20% excessive or dependent
Fifield, et al., 1977	N = 200 bar users, 98 bartenders, 53 recovering alcoholics, 132 users of G/L service center. Lifetime prevalence rate of 31.4% problem drinkers and alcoholics among both lesbians and gay men		no comparison group provided	
Lohrenz et al., 1978	(N = 29) not analyzed	(N=145) 29% alcoholic (MAST)	no comparison group provided	



# *Prevalence of Gay/Lesbian Alcohol Use: Recent Research*

*Bradford & Ryan (1988)*

*λ Lesbian respondents only (no comparisons)*

*λ N=1,852*

*λ 83% drink occasionally*

*λ 25% drink more than once per week*

*λ 6% drink daily*

*λ 14% worried about drinking*





# Recent Research (continued)

*Stall & Wiley (1988)*

<i>N=748 gay men</i>	<i>N=286 heterosexual</i>
<i>λ 19% frequent heavy drinking in past 12 months</i>	<i>λ 11% frequent heavy drinking in past 12 months</i>
<i>λ 6% abstained in past 12 months</i>	<i>λ 3% abstained in past 12 months</i>



# *Recent Research (continued)*

*McKirman & Peterson (1989) {Chicago}*

N=748 lesbians	N=2,652 gay men	Nat'l averages comparison for general pop
15% abstainers	13% abstainers	34% females 23% males abstainers
78% moderate users	70% moderate users	59% Female 54% male Moderate users



# *Recent Research (continued)*

*McKirman & Peterson 1989 (continued)*

N=748 lesbians	N=2,652 gay men	Nat'l averages comparison for general pop
9% heavy users	17% heavy users	7% females 21% males heavy users
23% report problems	23% report problems	8% Female 16% male report problems



# *Recent Research (continued)*

*Skinner (1994) {Trilogy Project, KY}*

N=500 lesbians	N=567 gay men	NHSDA survey comparison groups of women/men
31% abstained in past month	21% abstained in past month	58% women 40% men abstained
7.5% frequent, heavy drinking	13.2% frequent, heavy drinking	2.5% women 11.5% men heavy drinking



# *Recent Research (continued)*

*Bloomfield (1993) {San Francisco}*

N =58 lesbians	N =397 heterosexual women
13% recovering	3% recovering



# *Recent Research (continued)*

*Hughes, et al., (2000) {Chicago}*

N =58 lesbians	N =397 heterosexual women
24% abstaining past 12 months	17% abstaining past 12 months
73% light drinkers	82% light drinkers
3% heavy drinkers	1% heavy drinkers
21% problem past yr	15% problem past yr
14% AOD help past yr	6% AOD help past yr



# *Research Conclusions: Lesbians*

- λ Fewer lesbians than heterosexual women abstain from alcohol*
- λ Lesbians report more alcohol-related problems than heterosexual women at comparable levels of drinking*
- λ Lesbian drinking does not decline with age as it does among heterosexuals*
- λ Use among lesbians appears to be declining with changes in drinking norms in some communities*



# *Research Conclusions: Gay Men*

- λ Gay men are less likely to abstain or to drink heavily than heterosexual men*
- λ Gay men report more alcohol-related problems than heterosexual men at lower levels of use*
- λ Alcohol use norms among gay men appear to be declining, similar to the pattern with lesbians*





# *Risk/Protective Factors: Dominant Hypotheses*

- λ Centrality of gay bar/club for socialization and support*
- λ Conflicts related to gay/lesbian identity*
- λ Internalized homophobia*
- λ Heterosexism*
- λ Stressors inherent to gay/lesbian lifestyles*
- λ Incongruities in gender roles and expectancies*



# *Risk/Protective Factors (continued)*

## *Risk factors/variables*

- λ positively associated with alcohol or substance problems*
- λ having etiological significance in development of alcohol/substance problems*

## *Protective factors/variables*

- λ negatively associated with alcohol or substance use problems*
- λ having preventive significance*



# *Risk/Protective Factors (continued)*

## *λ Lifestyle:*

- Homophobia/heterosexism*
- Gay bar/club*
- Coming out/identity*

## *λ Demographics:*

- Age*
- Gender*
- Race/ethnicity*
- Social roles/responsibilities  
(e.g., parenting, civil unions)*

## *λ Psychosocial:*

- Depression*
- Stress*

## *λ Interpersonal:*

- Childhood sexual abuse*
- Intimate partner/  
domestic violence*
- Peer & partner drinking*

# Barriers to Prevention

- λ Intolerance for sexual diversity not addressed (especially for adolescents)*
- λ Lack of positive role models*
- λ Target marketing*
- λ Inadequate/low visibility social services*
- λ Lack of substance free environments for socialization*



@2002 Microsoft Corporation

# *Barriers to Identification and Assessment*

- λ Lack of professional training/knowledge about LGBT population*
- λ Distrust of treatment systems by LGBT individuals*
- λ Lack of unbiased, population-sensitive assessment tools*



*@2002 Microsoft Corporation*

# Barriers to Treatment/Recovery

*λ Stigma, homophobia, heterosexism among treatment providers and self-help groups*

*λ Poor access to/ awareness of gay affirming support systems*



@2002 Microsoft Corporation



# *Prevention Strategies*

- λ Training professionals (police, social service providers, educators)*
- λ Community understanding and acceptance efforts*
- λ Support & inclusion of LGBT individuals and families in prevention efforts*
- λ Provide structured workshops on coming out*
- λ Establish linkages with existing LGBT organizations*

# Treatment Approaches

- $\lambda$  Attend to importance of social/support networks and affirmation of identity
- $\lambda$  Involve members of network in treatment
- $\lambda$  Develop variety of strategies to support abstinence (avoidance of LGBT people/places/things is not an advisable option)

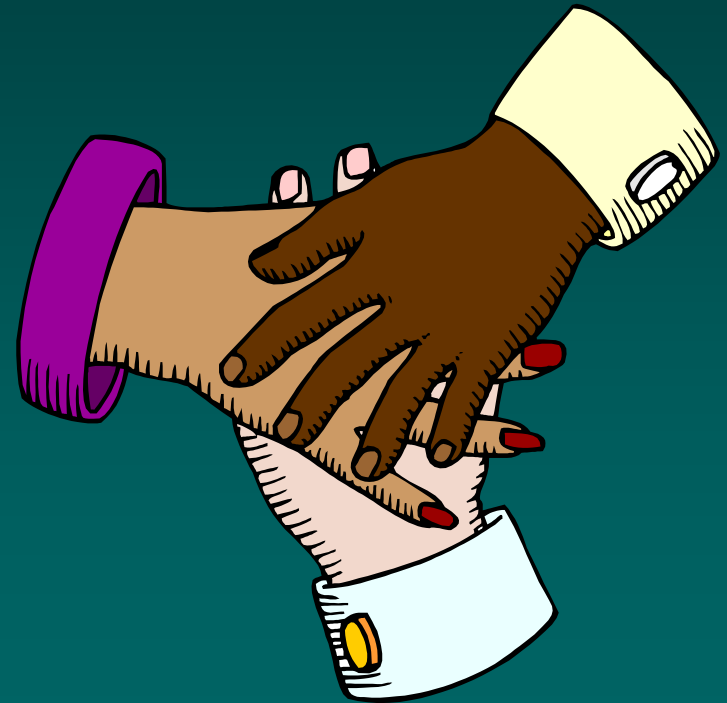


©2002 Microsoft Corporation



# Treatment Approaches (continued)

- λ Learn about, develop linkages with lesbian/gay community, gay AA, and gay bar alternatives*
- λ Acknowledge sense of empowerment, self-efficacy, and personal responsibility gained from addressing problematic substance use.*



@2002 Microsoft Corporation

# Treatment Approaches (continued)

- λ Include measures of sexual orientation in national studies of substance abuse*
- λ Devise methods to involve under-represented groups in AOD research*
- λ Examine protective factors to AOD use*



@2002 Microsoft Corporation

# *Treatment Approaches (continued)*

- λ Explore lifespan risk and protective factors for LGBT persons*
- λ Conduct treatment outcome studies to identify effective treatment approaches*



*@2002 Microsoft Corporation*