

Help-seeking and Drinking Behaviors among Sexual Minority Women: The Impact of Age of Coming Out

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INTRODUCTION

Drinking behaviors tend to be elevated among sexual minority women compared to heterosexual women (Hughes et al., 2020; Schulz et al., 2022); however, it is currently unknown if the age in which one discloses their sexual identity (i.e., “comes out”) is associated with these behaviors. To date, there are no known studies examining the relationship between help-seeking for physical and mental health, the age of coming out (to oneself or others), and drinking behaviors.

METHOD

Participants

- N = 128 sexual minority women (lesbian, bisexual+, queer, etc.)
- Ages 18 - 30

Materials

Demographics

- Age of disclosure to oneself (i.e., “At what age [in years] did you self-identify as being lesbian/gay/bisexual/other?”)
- Age of disclosure to others (i.e., “At what age [in years] did you first disclose your sexual identity to someone?”)

Drinking Outcomes

- Daily Drinking Questionnaire (DDQ, Collins et al., 1985).
- Grid asking for number of drinks per day number of hours spent drinking for each day of a typical week
- Calculated drinks per drinking day (total quantity for the week divided by frequency of drinking days)
- 3 items asking the ages of: first drink, first got drunk, and first regular use

Help-Seeking

- General Help-Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ; Wilson et al., 2005)
- 20 items (10 about physical health, 10 about mental health), 7-point response scale ($\alpha = .87$)

Procedure

- Secondary analysis from HER Life study of health behaviors among women who reported binge eating within the previous 2 weeks (Heron et al., 2022)
- A subgroup of only sexual minority women were analyzed
- Used the baseline and end of study surveys
- Ran 8 regressions (4 outcomes X 2 moderators)
 - Predictor = help-seeking
- Outcomes = drinks per drinking day, standard number of drinks per week, age of first drunk, age of first regular use
- Moderators = age of disclosure to oneself, age of disclosure to others

Figure 1

Drinks per Day Moderated by Age of Disclosure to Others

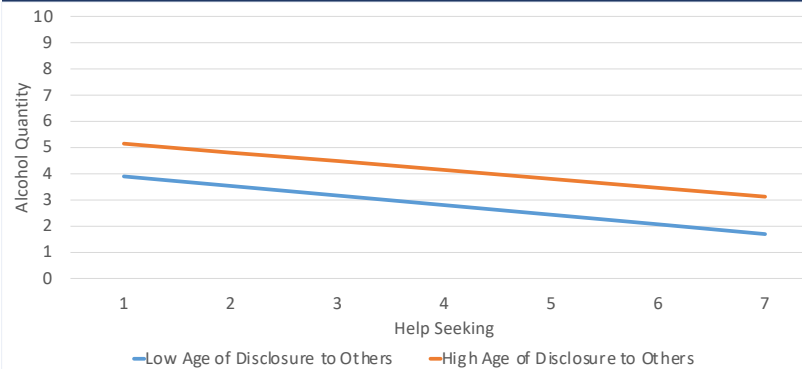


Table 1

Associations Between Help Seeking and Alcohol Outcomes Moderated by Sexual Orientation Disclosure Age

	Quantity		Peak Drinks		Age of First Drunk		Age of First Regular Use	
	B (SE)	p	B (SE)	p	B (SE)	p	B (SE)	p
Models 1-4								
Help Seeking	-0.34 (0.57)	.552	0.06 (0.21)	.773	0.38 (0.30)	.200	0.24 (0.28)	.398
Age of Disclosure to Self	0.60 (0.16)	<.001	0.20 (0.06)	<.001	0.09 (0.08)	.260	0.17 (0.07)	.021
Help Seeking x Age of Disclosure to Self	-0.18 (.19)	.327	0.02 (0.07)	.731	0.14 (0.10)	.167	0.05 (0.09)	.579
Models 5-8								
Help Seeking	-0.35 (0.58)	.545	0.21 (0.29)	.741	0.28 (0.29)	.331	0.13 (0.27)	.622
Age of Disclosure to Others	0.66 (0.16)	<.001	0.06 (0.30)	<.001	0.24 (0.08)	.005	0.27 (0.07)	<.001
Help Seeking x Age of Disclosure to Others	0.02 (0.19)	.934	0.07 (0.11)	.232	0.13 (0.10)	.196	0.05 (0.10)	.621

RESULTS

- There were no significant interactions, meaning no moderation by age of disclosure (either conceptualization)
- Significant positive main effects were found for age of disclosure to others on all alcohol outcomes
- Older age of disclosure was associated with greater drinking
- There were similar findings for the age of self-disclosure (i.e., self-identifying as being lesbian/bisexual/other), with older age of identification associated with greater drinking (excepting the outcome of age at one which first got drunk)

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations

Variables	M	SD
Age of Disclosure to Others	16.85	3.37
Age of Self-Disclosure	16.27	3.30
Age of First Time Drunk	18.22	2.39
Age of First Regular Use	19.29	2.25
Quantity	4.91	6.17
Peak	2.05	2.24

DISCUSSION

- Age of disclosure to oneself or to others may be a risk factor for elevated drinking
 - Those who self-disclose at younger ages have higher rates of life-long drinking, making this an especially vulnerable group (Caba et al., 2024; Hughes, 2011)
- Factors that affect the age of disclosure may need to be accounted for in treatment plans
- Age of disclosure should be considered when creating alcohol-related interventions or education targeting sexual minority women encouraging help-seeking

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