

ANY QUESTIONS PODCAST
EPISODE 6: MINORITY STRESS THEORY

(INTRO MUSIC)

Stephanie: We've all experience stress at some point in our lives, whether it's homesickness, loneliness, or sadness, general stressors can impact a person's health. But what about those who also have a minoritized or marginalized identity?

Hannah: They often get hit by a "double whammy", with stress from prejudice, discrimination, or marginalization also impacting their health on top of general life stressors.

(INTRO MUSIC)

Hannah: This is what we call minority stress. Welcome to this episode of 'Any Questions'. I'm Hannah, I use she/her pronouns and I'm a peer leader on campus.

Stephanie: I'm Stephanie, I use she/her pronouns and I'm also a peer leader on campus.

Hannah: So today we'll be talking a little bit about Minority Stress Theory, our experiences, and how this applies to our daily lives. So what exactly is Minority Stress Theory?

Stephanie: You know Hannah, that is a great question. So Minority Stress Theory was created in 1995 by Dr. Meyers on the idea that individuals may be at a higher risk for health problems due to the societal discrimination expected and enacted on the basis of their identity.

Hannah: Yeah, so it was originally created about gender and sexual minority individuals, but it can be applied way beyond that too.

Stephanie: Before we dive into our own stories, we wanted to give you a little bit more of a background on minority stress. Why exactly do we have a theory like this and what's the point?

Hannah: So the whole purpose of Minority Stress Theory is to inform the people who have power to make changes in policy and social attitudes. It kind of gives language to describe the experiences of minority individuals.

Stephanie: And by identifying the problem, we can also identify possible solutions or buffers to negative health outcomes.

Hannah: So not only does Minority Stress Theory inform those change makers, it also empowers people who are actually affected by minority stress.

Stephanie: Minority Stress Theory actually demonstrates the reality of what minorities experience every day and how it impacts their mental and physical health.

Hannah: So some of you may also be wondering what exactly these negative health outcomes are and are they really that serious.

Stephanie: Studies show that the negative health outcomes really are that serious. Some outcomes to minority stress include hypertension, heart conditions, depression, anxiety, and suicide.

Hannah: So this theory really matters because it can help decrease the disparities of these conditions for minority individuals.

Stephanie: Yeah, and now that we have some background on what minority stress really is, we're going to talk about our own, personal experiences.

(INTRO MUSIC)

Hannah: Hi, I'm Hannah, and I identify as a queer woman. So I have had some experiences with minority stress. But I first want to acknowledge that I also have a lot of privilege as a cis, white, college-going person. I first learned about the idea of minority stress long after I experienced it, in my later years of college.

Stephanie: Same over here.

(BOTH LAUGH)

Hannah: I really do remember my freshman year. I considered myself pansexual at the time and when I told people about my sexuality, I would get comments like 'are you attracted to pans?'. And I also remember the policing of my sexuality in places like frat parties. So I felt the pressure to appear very feminine and to either be with men or with very feminine women at parties because this is what men allowed. And so when I did happen to kiss a woman, we were surrounded by cheers, phones taking pictures, or people trying to join in. There was no respect for me and I felt like entertainment.

Stephanie: Uch, that's just such an uncomfortable situation and I don't think and I don't think anyone should feel like a type of entertainment. Especially because that's what men allowed. I hate that statement.

Hannah: Yeah, it was rough. And even when I dared to bring my more androgynous appearing friends to parties, we would get kicked out because it wasn't seen as attractive enough. The final straw was when another gay couple was physically and verbally threatened at a party I was at. So that was when I realized how much of these experiences scared me, and could possibly end in damage to my physical and mental health.

Stephanie: Yeah that's a very scary situation and I can't imagine what you must've been feeling through, just realizing this.

Hannah: Yeah, definitely. And now I've kind of been able to remove myself from those toxic situations and, despite that, I still find myself anticipating discrimination and prejudice, so oftentimes I'm weighing the concept of coming out, especially in classrooms and in workplaces, like out of fear of what will happen. And on top of everyday general stressors, like school and mental health, I constantly have to keep in mind my identity and how I might be received because of it in society. Learning about Minority Stress Theory made me realize that I'm not alone in my experiences and allowed me to understand part of the reason why I was struggling with my health more than my straight peers. I also now know that being a part of social groups, receiving resources, and learning about good coping skills are all extra important in my own health.

Stephanie: Yeah definitely once you said anticipating discrimination, that hit it right in the heart. I know exactly what you're talking about. Thank you so much for sharing your story and being so brave enough

to be able to tell us this. So now to start off with some questions. How has being aware of the Minority Stress Theory changed how you cope with stress on this campus?

Hannah: Just knowing this theory is out there, that there's words for what I'm feeling helps me externalize coping. Like I can say 'oh there's actually something that explains this, I'm not crazy, I'm not making this up, I'm really going through it'. It also makes me feel like I'm not alone. There are other people out there, whether we share the exact same identity or not, we're all experiencing this rough situation.

Stephanie: Yes. Air snaps all the way. (SNAPS FINGERS) So to the people listening, they might be feeling the same way you felt and they might currently feel this way on our campus. So for those who identify the same as you, do you have any advice for them?

Hannah: Yeah, definitely. So you know that first situation I was mentioning, about going to parties and feeling uncomfortable? I really wasn't listening to that inner voice that told me that things were not okay. I don't really blame myself, but I think, now, that I want to tell people it's okay to listen to that inner voice that tells you that you're uncomfortable. Like, it's alright to just walk away from a situation if you can because it's really not worth it for your mental and physical health. Also, try to find a community, whether they share your identity exactly or are just more empathetic and kind, it's really important to just have those connections. I really enjoy utilizing my resources on campus, like the LGBT Equity Center, where you can meet people who are also LGBT. So those are just some things that might help if you feel like you're dealing with this as well.

(INTRO MUSIC)

Hannah: So now that I've told some of my story, I'm really interested to hear yours, Steph.

Stephanie: Yeah! Hi everyone, I'm Steph. So my story has to do with how I identify as a racial minority. I identify as a Hispanic woman. Same as Hannah, growing up I had some experiences with minority stress, but at the time I didn't even know a name existed for what I was feeling. I didn't learn about this until my sophomore year at UMD and it definitely clicked in my head, everything I was feeling, and it just validated everything. For a little background story, growing up, I grew up in a predominantly white area. Although there were people of color, it was definitely more predominantly white. So growing up I did face subtle comments, asking about my ethnicity, like where was I really from, how I learned English so well, things like that, which made me feel very self-conscious of how I portrayed myself to others because clearly there was something that was distinguishing my ability to someone else's ability. Although I was part of these groups and very vocal about my heritage, I did to an extent, and I hate saying it now, began to whitewash myself, which is the best way I can explain it. Like I just tried to fit in the best I could, so I just wouldn't be so different.

Hannah: That sounds like a really rough situation.

Stephanie: Yeah it really started to heighten once our political climate changed and immigration became more of a focus. I started to feel a bit more excluded in the sense that political beliefs or my racial complexion might cause someone's opinion about me to change. And specifically coming from a family that emigrated to this country, I was very afraid of being vocal about where my family originated from. I felt like it was such a taboo topic and I just felt really uncomfortable to be like 'yeah some of my family doesn't speak great English', but that's just the way it is. It made me, I don't want to say embarrassed,

but it did to an extent make me feel embarrassed about my heritage because I felt like people were looking at me like I was lesser than.

Hannah: That's just awful.

Stephanie: Yeah. So once I got to college, I guess I didn't realize how lucky I was to be living where I was, because I think being away from home and being a first year student specifically, as someone who is first generation, it was really a lot harder. And that whole thing heightened. Not seeing that many people who looked like me definitely hurt in the sense that I couldn't find people who I could culturally relate to. It definitely affected my grades and my mental health. I would say my freshman year was not the best year for myself. But later on I was able to find various cultural groups and organizations that let myself feel comfortable and I felt like I had people who I could relate to. But this all had to do with the Minority Stress Theory and once realizing this I felt way more validated that this is a real thing that exists. I still sometimes feel the stress of being a minority on this campus and I think this theory very much shows that this is a thing that will reoccur.

Hannah: Thank you so much for sharing and I can't imagine how hard it is, especially in these times, but thank you for being able to speak out and hopefully people will be able to relate to some of the things that you're saying. I'm really glad that you've also been able to find cultural groups that make you feel more comfortable. How else do you personally cope with stress?

Stephanie: I want to be very open and say that I don't cope with stress in one way. The way that people cope with stress might be different depending on the situation and the time of day. So I've recently become really open to trying different things, but definitely just talking to someone and being able to validate what I'm feeling helps so much. And just being able to take a day and do nothing, just like a mental health day, always helps.

Hannah: Definitely. If you could recommend any resources to people struggling, what would you recommend?

Stephanie: I would definitely recommend finding any organization you can relate to. It can be like hobby wise or culturally. Speaking from the cultural aspect, there's a lot of cultural organizations on this campus which I find to be very amazing. That way you have a small pool of people that have that, because I definitely didn't know that my freshman year, which is why I think it was so difficult. But for example, for people who identify as Latinx, there's this big group chat and it's just everyone on our campus who identifies as that and I find it really cool that these cultural orgs are very close.

Hannah: That's so cool.

Stephanie: Yeah. I would also recommend the Multicultural Involvement Community Advocacy office, which is located in Stamp. They are also a very big help.

Hannah: Yeah, MICA is awesome. It's so interesting how we have such vastly different stories, but we are both impacted by minority stress. Now that we've talked about our experiences, we want to wrap up with some reminders and calls to actions.

(INTRO MUSIC)

Stephanie: So, throwing a question out to the podcast audience, what do coping, social support, access to quality care, services and resources all have in common? (PAUSE) Dun, Dun Dun... They all lead to good outcomes even in the face of minority stress.

Hannah: So that's why family support, counseling, student orgs, STI testing, all of those things at UMD are all important. Despite the impact of general stressors and minority stress we do have an ability to guide ourselves to positive health and those type of things can help act as a buffer to the negative effects of minority stress.

Stephanie: And this is why advocacy for campus resources and an accepting social environment is so, so important.

Hannah: So, here's our call to action. If you happen to have any privilege, use it to advocate for more resources for minorities.

Stephanie: And if you are impacted by minority stress, know that you're not alone and that your fate isn't sealed because of this phenomenon. It's also important to consider intersectionality, as well.

Hannah: Intersectionality is the concept that different aspects of one's identities interact, creating a unique experience for each individual.

Stephanie: For example, a White woman has a different experience than a Black woman. They may both face minority stress associated with their gender, but these struggles will be different due to their race.

Hannah: So how does intersectionality relate to minority stress theory?

Stephanie: There are people facing multiple minority stressors which could result in a higher negative impact on their health.

Hannah: Someone who is a trans, lesbian, Black woman faces societal discrimination for multiple aspects of their identity that also interact to create a certain unique experience for that person.

(INTRO MUSIC)

Hannah: Thank you so much for talking today Stephanie!

Stephanie: Yeah, thanks so much for sharing your story!

Hannah: And, thank you podcast listeners for listening to this 'Any Questions' episode, a wellness podcast run by students, for students.

(INTRO MUSIC)

Voice 1: Join us next month when Shayna and Lauren sit down to discuss how to balance being a student and being an advocate.

Voice 2: And I think that point about educating yourself is a really big one because I think the first step to really caring about a particular issue is educating yourself on what it is.

Voice 3: There's no correct way to care about something.

Voice 2: And I think part of this too is how much can you balance, especially as a student when you have a lot of other things going on. Maybe like, starting with putting a laptop sticker on my water bottle is a good way to get that conversation going. Because maybe someone will see it and want to know more.

Voice 3: I could always put a sticker on something, and for me that was a really big first step in identifying things that I cared about or that I was passionate about. And then when I wanted to do more, I kind of knew where to go and who to contact.

Voice 1: Tune in on October 12 for the next episode of 'Any Questions'.