

# Using Alcohol to Cope with the COVID-19 Pandemic: Differentials According to Sexual and Gender Identities



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## Background

- COVID-19 related stressors have taken a toll on people's social and emotional health
- Alcohol sales and usage have increased since the pandemic
- Sexual and gender minority (SGM) people have lower than average levels of socioemotional and physical well-being, and greater alcohol use and use of alcohol to cope
- Yet, SGM people are mostly excluded from studies of alcohol use since COVID-19 and/or results are mixed

## Data and Methods

**Data:** The National Couples' Health and Time Study (NCHAT) partnered individuals, September 2020-April 2021, ages 20-60

### Dependent Measures:

- Whether use alcohol to cope, yes/no
- Among individuals who drank in the last 30 days:
  - Regularity of drinking over last 30 days (1-7)
  - Typical number of drinks per day (1-20)

**Key Covariates:** Sexual/Gender Identities; COVID-19 stress (1-5); COVID-19 disruption (1-4); microaggressions (1-5); supportive climates (1-8); and sociodemographic variables

**Analyses:** Multivariate, step-wise linear and logistic regression

## Findings

- The use of alcohol to cope, regularity of drinking, and number of drinks vary by SGM status
- COVID-19 disruption associated with increased odds of drinking to cope
- COVID-19 stress associated with more drinks per day
- Pandemic-related stress and disruption do not explain these differences, nor do microaggressions and supportive climates

## Hypotheses

**Minority Stress Theory** suggests that:

**Hypothesis 1:** SGM people have higher post-pandemic levels of alcohol use, and use of alcohol use to cope, than cisgender people

**Hypothesis 2:** Differentials are in part explained by pandemic-related stress and disruption

**Hypothesis 3:** SGM-specific stress accounts for differences in alcohol consumption by sexual and gender identity

Figure 1. Drinking to Cope by Gender and Sexual Identity (n = 3,593)

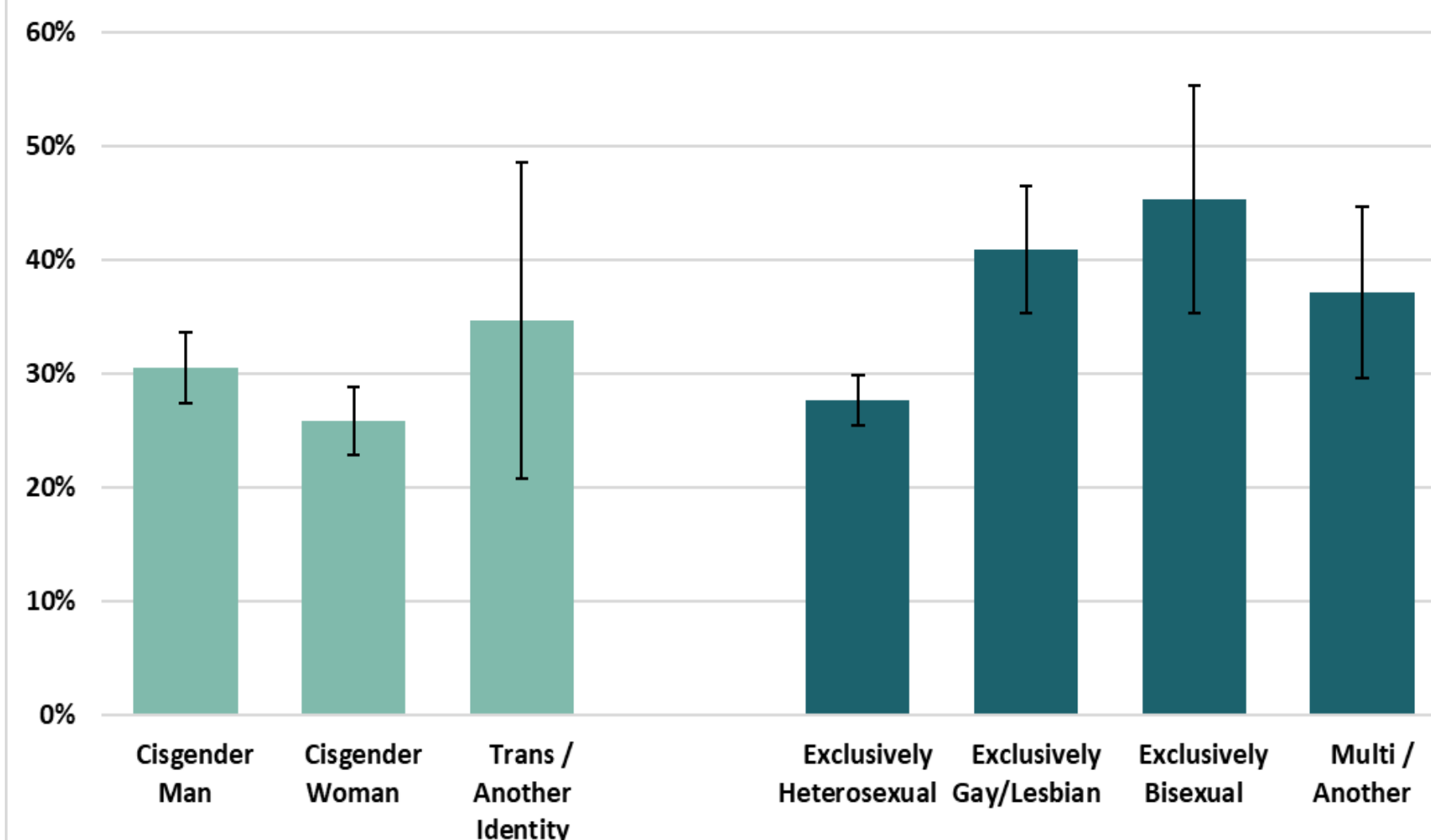


Figure 2. About how regularly do you drink alcoholic beverages? by Gender and Sexual Identity (n = 2,429)

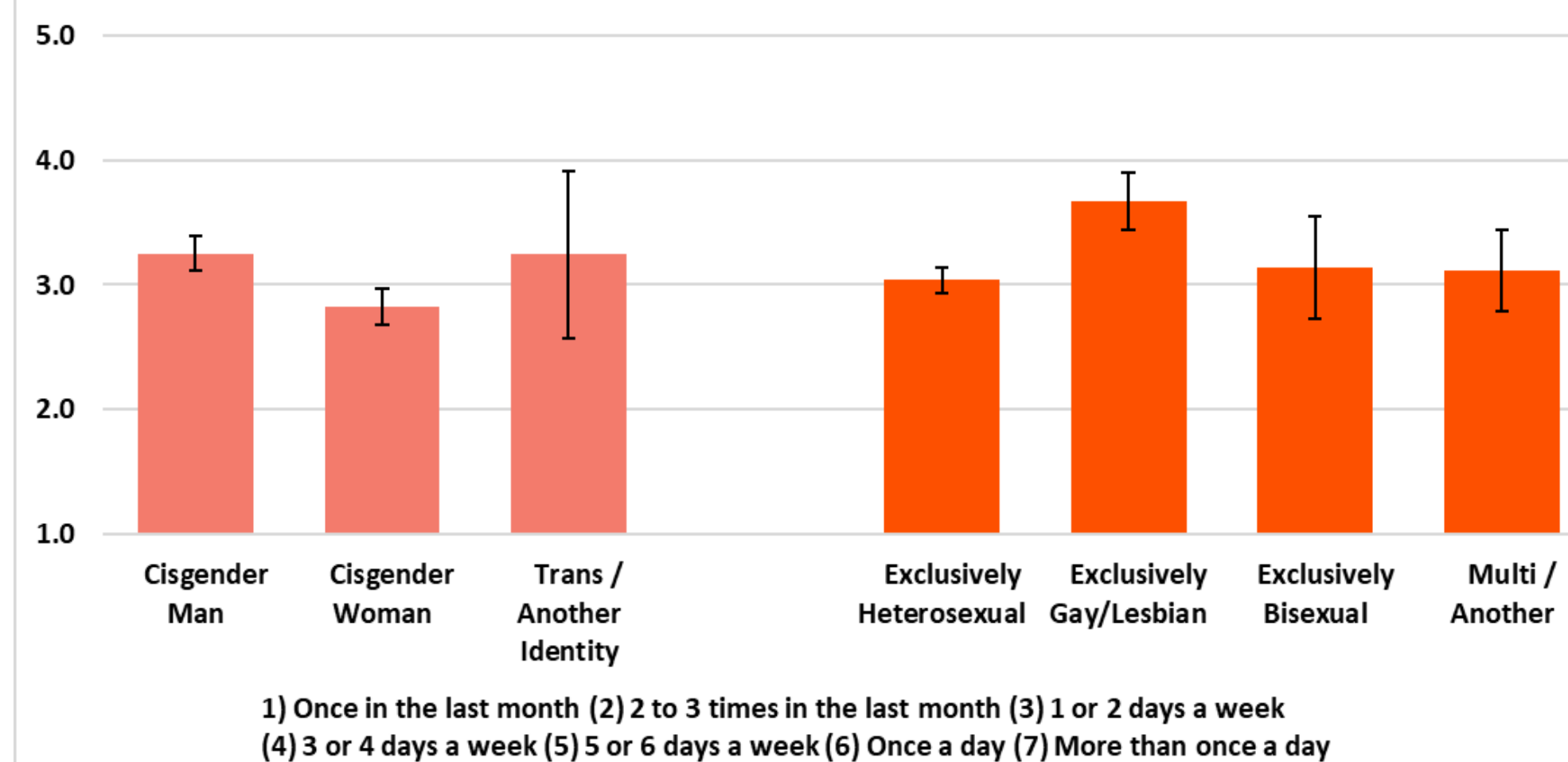
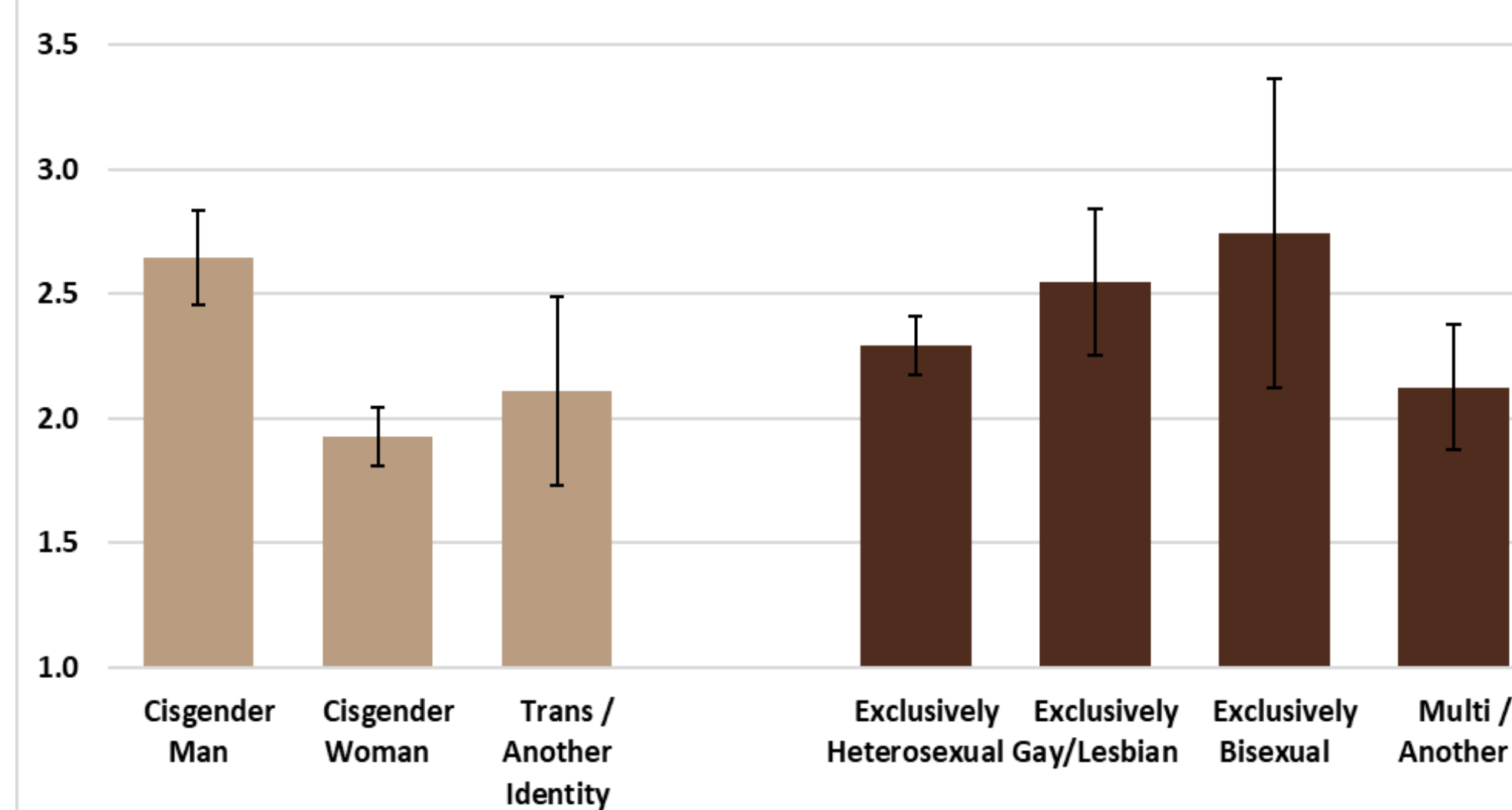


Figure 3. About how many drinks do you have when you drink? by Gender and Sexual Identity (n = 2,429)



## Conclusion

- COVID-19 stress and disruption remain elevated and alcohol consumption remains high
- Several categories of SGM status have particularly high levels of drinking and using alcohol to cope
- Minority stress does not account for SGM differentials in drinking
- Need to continue to monitor SGM people's and other vulnerable population's health and well-being and identify factors associated with poor health outcomes

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