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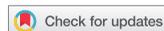
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A Critical and Intersectional Model of LGBTQ Microaggressions: Toward a More Comprehensive Understanding

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ABSTRACT

This article summarizes a proposed critical and intersectional model of LGBTQ microaggressions that can be used by scholars and practitioners from multiple disciplines. Drawing on critical and intersectional paradigms and decades of research from multiple fields, we constructed a model that acknowledges the breadth, depth, scope, and complexity of LGBTQ microaggressions. This proposed model includes the following elements: hegemonic influences, intersectional complexities, perpetration, interpersonal and environmental contexts, and responses.

KEYWORDS

LGBTQ microaggressions;
critical theory; microclimate;
microaggression
perpetration;
microaggression response

Microaggressions are a daily reality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people. However, narrow study foci, limited discipline-specific perspectives, scant inclusion of intersectionality, and the use of different terminology across bodies of literature often hinder understandings of LGBTQ microaggressions. With a few notable exceptions, most LGBTQ microaggressions research has focused largely on interpersonal microaggressions perpetrated by heterosexual and cisgender people based on one (e.g., LGBT or Q) social identity. Often, research has excluded acknowledgment of environmental microaggressions, diversity among LGBTQ people, ingroup perpetration, and/or intersectionality. In this article, we draw on critical and intersectional theories, decades of empirical research from multiple fields, and our own experiences as members of the LGBTQ community to propose a more comprehensive model for understanding LGBTQ microaggressions. This model includes the key aspects of hegemonic influences, intersectional complexities, perpetration, interpersonal and environmental contexts, and responses. After briefly situating our work within relevant literatures, we describe key elements and corresponding components of the model. The article

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concludes with implications for practice. We hope that researchers, practitioners, activists, and students from a host of fields will apply, critique, and improve the model.

For clarity and consistency, we have chosen to mirror the title of this special issue and use the acronym LGBTQ (i.e., lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or transgender, and queer). However, we acknowledge the limitations of any acronym that leaves out certain groups and consolidates people from diverse minoritized identities of sexuality and gender (MIoSG; Vaccaro, Russell, & Koob, 2015). In this article, we use the LGBTQ acronym to reference our ideas and model. However, other terminology and acronyms (e.g., transgender, LGB, LGBT) are used throughout the article to honor, and accurately represent, prior research samples.

Literature review

This literature synthesis provides a backdrop to our work. It is intentionally brief because we infuse references throughout the article to highlight how the proposed model is grounded in, and adds to, prior research. In this section, we have chosen to introduce readers to literature from multiple disciplines (primarily emerging from the United States) that inspired us to begin mapping out a comprehensive LGBTQ microaggression model. Decades of scholarship, in multiple fields, has documented various forms of oppression faced by LGBTQ people. Because this special issue of the *Journal of Homosexuality* is about LGBTQ microaggressions, we limited our focus to publications that elucidate interpersonal and environmental microaggressions for LGBTQ people.

What are microaggressions?

We use the term *LGBTQ microaggressions* to describe the commonplace verbal, behavioral, and environmental forms of discrimination that, regardless of the perpetrator's intent, disparage and oppress people who hold minoritized identities of sexuality and gender (MIoSG; Vaccaro et al., 2015). Seminal writings about microaggressions initially focused on racial microaggressions (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Wills, 1977; Sue et al., 2007), but they have expanded to include gender and sexual orientation (Nadal, Rivera, & Corpus, 2010; Sue, 2010) as well as other minoritized identities. Microaggression writings typically have suggested that minoritized people experience both environmental and interpersonal microaggressions (Nadal, Whitman, Davis, Erazo, & Davidoff, 2016; Sue, 2010; Sue et al., 2007). However, most publications have emphasized the three manifestations of interpersonal microaggressions referred to as microinvalidations, microinsults, and microassaults (Sue, 2010; Sue et al., 2007). Microassaults are

conscious actions meant to harm minoritized people and can include name-calling, bullying, threats, avoidance, or intentional exclusion. This type of microaggression most closely mirrors traditional isms (e.g., racism, sexism) that manifest in overt discrimination (Sue, 2010). Unlike microassaults, the other two types of interpersonal microaggressions (microinvalidations, microinsults) are often perpetrated without conscious awareness. Microinvalidations include communications or cues “that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of certain groups” (Sue, 2010, p. 37). Microinsults are rude or insensitive correspondences, utterances, or expressions that transmit stereotypes and negative messaging about a person’s minoritized identity (e.g., sexuality, gender, race). Environmental microaggressions are less commonly addressed in the literature, but are no less important. This form of microaggression includes “demeaning and threatening social, educational, political, or economic cues that are communicated individually, institutionally or societally” (Sue, 2010, p. 25). In the remainder of this section, we briefly introduce readers to scholarship examining interpersonal and environmental microaggressions for LGBTQ people.

Since Nadal et al. (2010) proposed an initial taxonomy of sexual orientation and transgender microaggressions, literature has proliferated. Instead of reviewing all of those sources here, we refer readers to “Microaggressions Toward Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Genderqueer People: A Review of the Literature” (Nadal et al., 2016), which is a comprehensive synthesis of 35 peer-reviewed articles and dissertations published between 2011 and 2015. In that article, Nadal et al. (2016): (1) analyzed variations in the language and classifications (i.e., taxonomies) used within different fields; (2) highlighted research about LGBTQ microaggressions; (3) discussed similarities and differences among microaggression manifestations for members of the LGBTQ community; (4) examined literature that incorporated intersectionality to understand microaggressions; and (5) articulated how future research should “increase sensitivity and specificity” (p. 16) in order to develop more holistic understandings of LGBTQ microaggressions. Additionally, Nadal et al. (2016) incorporated information about LGBTQ climate and coping into that review.

Since that comprehensive review (Nadal et al., 2016), research has continued to examine how microaggressions manifest and impact LGBTQ people. One strand of contemporary studies aims to remedy the dearth of literature on the specific microaggression experiences of people who identify as trans and/or gender non-conforming (Chang & Chung, 2015; Pulice-Farrow, Brown, & Galupo, 2017; Pulice-Farrow, Clements, & Galupo, 2017; Woodford, Joslin, Pitcher, & Renn, 2017), and people who identify as bisexual or hold other non-monosexual identities (Flanders, Robinson,

Legge, & Tarasoff, 2016)—a significant recommendation from Nadal et al. (2016).

Historically, microaggression literature has described perpetration by a generalized other. However, recent research has broadened this focus to include the relationships between perpetrators and targets. Scholarship has examined perpetrator and target interactions in the contexts of romantic relationships (Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017), family settings (Haines, Boyer, Giovanazzi, & Galupo, 2017), friend groups (Galupo, Henise, & Davis, 2014; Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017), workplaces (Galupo & Resnick, 2016), international K-12 schools (Francis & Reygan, 2016), and universities (Flanders et al., 2016; Hong, Woodford, Long, & Renn, 2016; Woodford et al., 2017).

Scholars have also examined the impact of microaggressions and how targets respond. Sue (2010) proposed a five-phase microaggression process model where targets: (1) experience the microaggression incident; (2) question the incident; (3) engage in internal and external reactions; (4) interpret the incident and attribute meaning; and (5) incur the consequences and impacts of both the microaggression and their responses. Scholars from a variety of fields have explored the connections between LGBTQ microaggressions and psychological distress, posttraumatic stress, and other mental health issues (Nadal et al., 2011; Robinson & Rubin, 2016; Seelman, Woodford, & Nicolazzo, 2017; Swann, Minshew, Newcomb, & Mustanski, 2016; Woodford, Kulick, & Sinco, 2014). While Sue's (2010) work implies that the five-step microaggression process (including target response) is similar across social identity groups, recent scholarship has documented unique harms caused by LGBTQ microaggressions and the specific ways that individuals cope (Nadal, Davidoff, Davis, & Wong, 2014; Nadal et al., 2011). For instance, one qualitative study documented coping domains used by 26 lesbian, gay, and bisexual people to respond to microaggressions, including behavioral reactions (e.g., passive, confrontational, protective); cognitive reactions (e.g., resiliency, empowerment, conformity, acceptance); and emotional reactions (e.g., discomfort, unsafe, anger, frustration, sadness, embarrassment, shame; Nadal et al., 2011). A different study documented three main coping responses for transgender participants, such as emotional reactions (anger, betrayal, distress, hopelessness, exhaustion, misunderstood); cognitive reactions (rationalization, vigilance, self-preservation, resiliency, empowerment), and behavioral reactions (direct confrontation, indirect confrontation, passive coping; Nadal et al., 2014).

Recent microaggression research has noted the importance of context in general, and environmental microaggressions in particular (Kia, MacKinnon, & Legge, 2016; Nadal et al., 2011, 2014; Woodford et al., 2017). For instance, scholars have documented connections between microaggressions and workplaces (Galupo & Resnick, 2016), health settings (Kia et al., 2016), and higher

education institutions (Bilimoria & Stewart, 2009; Hong et al., 2016; Platt & Lenzen, 2013; Seelman et al., 2017; Woodford et al., 2017) as well as the general social climate (Woodford, Pacey, Kulick, & Hong, 2015). These works highlight the importance of specifically examining environmental microaggressions. In one mixed-methods study, Woodford et al. (2017) documented five types of environmental microaggressions experienced by trans* collegians: lack of safe bathrooms; exclusionary and binary options (male/female) on forms; limited sexual health information; healthcare assumptions; and the availability (or lack) of gender-inclusive housing options. Another study noted eight ways environmental microaggressions negatively influenced the mental health of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth (Nadal et al., 2011). Although Sue (2010) initially argued that environmental microaggressions were synonymous with hostile and invalidating campus climates, only recently have scholars begun to adopt microaggression terminology in reference to collegiate climates (Hong et al., 2016; Platt & Lenzen, 2013; Seelman et al., 2017; Woodford et al., 2017). Despite the lack of explicit microaggression language, higher-education literature has long documented the significance of social environments and sociopolitical contexts through research on oppressive campus climates (e.g., environmental microaggressions) for LGBTQ people (Bilimoria & Stewart, 2009; Bilodeau, 2009; Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Nicolazzo, 2017; Rankin, 2003; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010; Woodford & Kulick, 2015).

Grounding frameworks

We adopted critical and intersectional lenses to frame our work. We use the word *critical* to reference an array of scholarly perspectives that expose inequitable social systems and structures. Critical lenses foreground and challenge social inequities and their underlying causes (Giroux, 2003). Critical scholars “illuminate the relationship between power and culture... [and critique] the way dominant ideologies are constituted and mediated” (Giroux, 2003, p. 54). Scholars using critical paradigms produce empirical and theoretical works intended to inspire social change by explicating historical and contemporary social inequities.

Intersectionality has historically been situated within critical paradigms and is inherently tied to movements for social justice. Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, and Tomlinson (2013) explained:

the goal [of intersectional theory] was not simply to understand social relations of power, nor to limit intersectionality’s gaze to the relations that were interrogated therein, but to bring the often hidden dynamics forward in order to transform them. Understood in this way, intersectionality, like Critical Race Theory more generally, is a concept animated by the imperative of social change. (p. 312)

Carbado et al. (2013) further described how intersectionality is applied in social movements by scholars who use it as a “method and a disposition, a heuristic and analytic tool” (p. 303). Yet Bowleg (2008) argued that using a true intersectional (versus an additive) analytic approach is a challenge for most researchers because it is difficult to measure the complex ways inequality and social identity are interdependent and mutually constituting for each individual—such as a Black lesbian woman with a disability. While we acknowledge this measurement challenge, we also agree with Berger and Guidroz (2009), who argued that more scholars need to adopt intersectional perspectives in, and beyond, the academy.

Initial (and more contemporary) literature about intersectionality has been written by women of color to explicate the educational, personal, legal, familial, and communal experiences of individuals living at the intersections of multiple marginalizing (i.e., race, class, gender) identities (Bowleg, 2008; Carbado et al., 2013; Collins, 2000; Combahee River Collective, 1977/1995; Crenshaw, 1989; May, 2015). Foundational works have highlighted the pervasiveness of oppressive sociopolitical structures—or the matrix of domination (Collins, 2000)—that influence the everyday lives and life chances of women of color. Specifically, May (2009, p. 9) explained how “intersectionality links the material with the discursive and the structural (or macropolitical) with the lived (or micropolitical).” This simultaneous macro and micro view of oppression aligns nicely with Sue’s (2010) contention that microaggressions happen at the micro (interpersonal) and macro (environmental) level. As such, intersectionality was an effective lens for our work.

We honor seminal and contemporary intersectionality writings that focus on the lived realities of women of color (Bowleg, 2008; Carbado et al., 2013; Collins, 2000; Combahee River Collective, 1977/1995; Crenshaw, 1989; May, 2009). However, during model construction, we adopted a broader intersectional perspective that moves beyond race, class, and gender to examine all types of social identities (Museus & Griffin, 2011; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). We agree with Museus and Griffin (2011), who argued “the confluence of one’s multiple marginalized and privileged identities is an interaction that creates a unique experience” (p. 8). LGBTQ people have multiple intersecting social identities—some that may be marginalized and some that may be privileged in various contexts. For instance, a person of color who identifies as a man, same gender loving, middle-income, and cisgender and who expresses his gender as masculine may experience marginalization because of his sexuality or race within the contexts of Whiteness and heteronormativity. However, he may also experience multiple privileges in other contexts due to the intersections of his gender expression, gender identity, and class.

Historically, microaggression studies have focused on a single identity, such as race, gender, or sexuality. More recently, scholars have examined

the ways LGBTQ and other social identity microaggressions are experienced simultaneously (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011; Bowleg, 2013; Cole, 2009; Follins, Walker, & Lewis, 2014; Grzanka, 2016; Kulick, Wernick, Woodford, & Renn, 2017; Morales, 2014; Nadal et al., 2015; Sterzing, Gartner, Woodford, & Fisher, 2017; Wong, Derthick, David, Saw, & Okazaki, 2014). Many of these works focus on the intersection of sexuality and race. In 2011, the LGBT People of Color Microaggressions Scale was published (Balsam et al., 2011). This 18-item self-report scale measures racism in LGBT communities, heterosexism in racial and ethnic communities, and racism in relationships. Among the many findings in their research, Balsam et al. (2011) found LGBT Asian Americans experienced significantly more microaggressions than their African Americans and Latinx LGBT peers. Intersectional qualitative studies have examined the microaggression experiences of gay and bisexual Black men (Bowleg, 2013) and racially diverse sexual minorities (Weber, Collins, Robinson-Wood, Zeko-Underwood, & Poindexter, 2017). One recent publication reanalyzed data from six prior microaggression studies with single identity samples (Nadal et al., 2015) to reveal how intersecting gender and sexual oppressions manifested in stereotypes of gay men as feminine, lesbian women as masculine, and Asian men as desexualized (Nadal et al., 2015). Scholars from multiple disciplines have called for increased intersectional microaggression work that considers how developmental factors and social contexts impact the frequency, content, and effects of microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2015; Sterzing et al., 2017; Vaccaro et al., 2015).

In line with critical scholarly traditions, we situate ourselves within the context of our work. As authors we hold a multitude of intersecting privileged and oppressed identities and have differential access to power due to these identities and our professional roles. Vaccaro self-identifies as a middle-aged, White, middle-class, queer, cisgender woman who is not spiritual/religious and who does not currently have a disability. As a White, tenured full professor, she holds positions of power within her institution, which are complicated by her intersecting minoritized gender and sexual identities. Koob identifies as a gay, queer, White, middle-class, assigned male at birth, educated, English-speaking U.S. citizen and does not currently have a disability. Both authors have experienced a variety of microaggressions related to gender and sexuality.

A proposed critical intersectional model of LGBTQ microaggressions

Drawing on critical and intersectional theories as well as decades of research from multiple fields, we propose a comprehensive model for understanding LGBTQ microaggressions. The model offers a view of LGBTQ microaggressions that is simultaneously broad and deep. It includes the source and

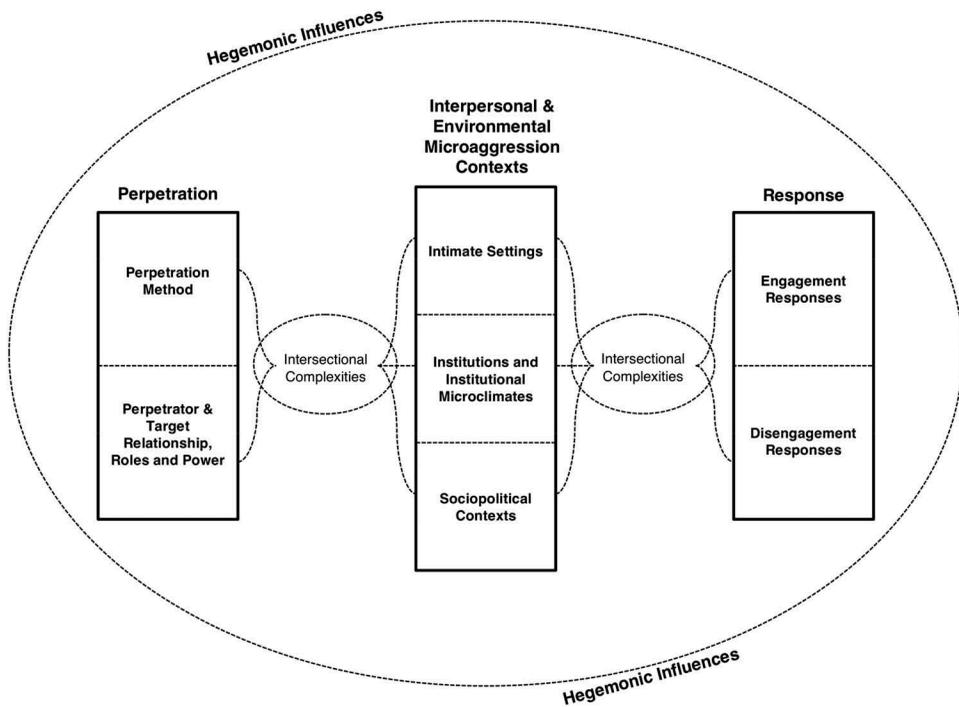


Figure 1. Critical and intersectional model of LGBTQ microaggressions.

method of perpetration, the interpersonal and environmental contexts within which they occur, and the engagement and disengagement responses from targets. These broad microaggression elements (i.e., perpetration, contexts, response) appear in [Figure 1](#) as three vertical sections. The boxes within each column portray important components of each element and allude to the depth and complexity of each. Dotted lines within the columns signify the permeability and interconnections between components. In the following pages, we describe the main elements (and corresponding components) of our model, providing a myriad of examples. We cite prior research throughout this section to show how the proposed model is informed by, and builds upon, that scholarship.

Hegemonic influences

Inspired by our critical lens, the entire model is ringed with what we call hegemonic influences. Hegemony refers to the ways that social, cultural, and ideological paradigms of normalcy are shaped by those with power (Giroux, 2003). The all-encompassing and perforated circle represents the pervasiveness of hegemonic notions regarding what is normal, right, worthy, or appropriate in terms of sexuality and gender. Hegemonic ideals (e.g., heteronormativity, normative usage of binary sex categories) serve as the

foundations of heterosexism, monosexism, cissexism, and genderism. These forms of gender and sexual oppression overtly and covertly shape every aspect of modern life—including LGBTQ microaggressions. We chose the phrase *hegemonic influences* (instead of listing heterosexism, cissexism, monosexism, and genderism in the ring) to honor the intersectional complexities that are central to our model. Forms of gender and sexuality oppression are interlocked (Adams & Bell, 2016) with racism, classism, ageism, ableism, and other forms of oppression in a matrix of domination (Collins, 2000) that normalizes the dominant groups (e.g., documented citizens, Christians, heterosexual people, cisgender men, Whites) and marginalizes all others.

Intersectional complexities

In the model, intersectional complexities appear as dotted circles between the columns. In accordance with interdisciplinary (e.g., Berger & Guidroz, 2009; Bowleg, 2008; Carbado et al., 2013; Collins, 2000; Combahee River Collective, 1977/1995; Crenshaw, 1989; May, 2014) and microaggression (e.g., Nadal, 2013; Nadal et al., 2015) scholars who have preceded us, we contend that all scholarship—including LGBTQ microaggression research—must address intersectionality to be comprehensive. Intersectional realities are relevant to every part of this model from the perpetrator and target identities, to the contexts for microaggressions, to target responses. As such, we have portrayed intersectional complexities as perforated circles in the heart of the model with dotted lines connecting these circular images to the rest of the model.

LGBTQ people possess a variety of mutually constituting social identities (e.g., race, gender expression, class, age, ability, national origin) that intersect to shape the type, prevalence, and severity of microaggressions they experience (Balsam et al., 2011; Bowleg, 2013; Cole, 2009; Follins et al., 2014; Grzanka, 2016; Kulick et al., 2017; Morales, 2014; Nadal et al., 2015; Sterzing et al., 2017; Wong et al., 2014). An intersectional lens holds that LGBTQ individuals will experience qualitatively different manifestations of microaggressions based on their differing intersecting social identities. Microaggressions are rooted in stereotypes and prejudices about minoritized social identity groups (e.g., Muslims as terrorists, Latinos as undocumented or criminals; older women and Asian men as not sexual). As such, the complex intersection of LGBTQ and other identity-based stereotypes combine to create unique manifestations of oppression for diverse LGBTQ people. For instance, manifestations of, and responses to, microaggressions for a 60-year-old White, cisgender, lesbian woman with a “butch” gender expression living in California will likely be different from a 40-year-old Latino, cisgender, gay man living in rural Texas, or a trans, Muslim Syrian

immigrant who attends college in New York City. In their national study of the experiences of more than 5,000 LGBTQ people across the United States, Rankin et al. (2010) reported that individuals with multiple intersecting minoritized identities (e.g., gender, race, sexuality) were more likely to encounter multiple forms and qualitatively different types of oppression than their White LGBTQ counterparts. For instance, “transmasculine, trans-feminine, and GNC (gender non-conforming) Respondents of Color were more likely than [cisgender/gender conforming] Men and Women of Color to experience harassment” (Rankin et al., p. 11). In the proposed model, perforated lines representing intersectional complexities reflect this diversity of microaggression experiences for members of the heterogeneous LGBTQ community.

Perpetration

One of the main (columnar) elements of our model is called perpetration. It includes a focus on the perpetrator and the relation to the LGBTQ target. Perpetration methods refer to the type of microaggressions (i.e., environmental microaggressions, microassaults, microinsults, microinvalidations). The second component of the perpetration element includes the role and power of the perpetrator as well as the relationship between the perpetrator and LGBTQ target.

Perpetration method

Since the seminal work from Sue et al. (2007) about racial microaggressions, the literature has largely reported taxonomies that follow the format of initial works (Sue, 2010; Sue et al., 2007). Our model builds on these works by embedding four common microaggression themes (microassaults, microinsults, microinvalidations, and environmental microaggressions) from that literature into the perpetration method.

Microassaults. Microassaults are conscious and intentional actions meant to exclude and/or harm LGBTQ people. They manifest in a variety of ways. Individuals in one study who self-identified (or were perceived as) transgender in elementary, middle, or high school reported experiencing verbal harassment (54%), physical attacks (24%), and sexual assault (13%; James et al., 2016). Microassaults may also manifest in other forms of discrimination toward LGBTQ people, such as business owners refusing to hire, serve, or rent space to LGBTQ people. In a national survey of transgender adults ($N= 27,715$), approximately 30% of employed respondents believe they were denied a promotion or fired because of their transgender identity or gender expression in the year preceding the study (James et al., 2016). Microassaults can also manifest in pejorative terms, exclusionary phrases, and derogatory statements

used to describe LGBTQ people or issues (e.g., “that’s so gay”). Finally, micro-assaults may manifest in something as subtle and difficult to interpret as a person glaring (with seemingly hostile intent or disgust) at an LGBTQ person. LGBTQ college students in one study (Vaccaro, 2012) reported being glared at for wearing rainbow ribbons. They explained: “Four frat guys [were] staring at us ... They were basically just like looking at [us] and just kind of disgusted with it” (Vaccaro, 2012, p. 435).

Microinvalidations. This type of microaggression includes cues or communications that deny, dismiss, or invalidate the lived realities of LGBTQ people. Microinvalidations happen when people, groups, or organizations convey messages that deny the prevalence of heterosexism, homophobia, genderism, monosexism, cissexism, and transphobia in contemporary society. When someone tells an LGBTQ youth that they are just confused, experimenting, or will grow out of it, they are perpetrating a microinvalidation. Or individuals who identify as pansexual and polyamorous may receive covert and overt messages from family, coworkers, and society that communicate a preference for, and acceptability of, heteronormative and monogamous relationships. Perpetration of microinvalidations can also include refusal to acknowledge the oppressive content or impact of a person’s thoughts and/or behaviors. Friends or family members of someone who identifies as trans or genderqueer may say they are “fine” with the individual’s gender identity but cite examples of “good” or “well-adjusted” trans people who have undergone gender confirmation processes. Another example is when family members say that they are “okay” with a loved one’s sexuality but would prefer not to meet their partner or discuss their relationship (Mena & Vaccaro, 2013). These microaggressions invalidate the lived realities of LGBTQ people.

Microinsults. Microinsults include “communications that convey stereotypes, rudeness, and insensitivity and that demean a person’s ... sexual orientation [or gender identity]” (Sue, 2010, p. 31). Microinsults can include treating LGBTQ people as if they do not belong in a social group or work environment (Galupo & Resnick, 2016; Mena & Vaccaro, 2013; Miller & Vaccaro, 2016; Pitcher, 2017; Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017; Vaccaro, 2012; Zurbrügg & Miner, 2016). This manifestation can include comments about the “appropriate” bathroom cisgender, transgender, genderqueer, or gender non-conforming people should use. Microinsults can also emerge in critical comments about a person’s choice of clothing—especially when an LGBTQ person’s gender expression runs counter to traditional and restrictive gender norms (e.g., ties for men; dresses and heels for women; Galupo et al., 2014).

Environmental microaggressions. Environmental microaggressions appear in the form of exclusionary policies and practices in local, state, national, and international settings. Scholars have recently documented LGBTQ environmental microaggressions in health care settings, on college campuses, and in local communities (Kia et al., 2016; Nadal et al., 2014; Woodford et al., 2017). Exclusionary mandates of the Food and Drug Administration on blood donation (due to HIV-related stigma) represent environmental microaggressions. The relative invisibility and stereotypical portrayals of LGBTQ people and issues in everyday society are also forms of environmental microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2011; Vaccaro et al., 2015). Positive portrayals of LGBTQ people and issues are often absent from television, magazines, film, and educational curriculum (Vaccaro, August, & Kennedy, 2012). Moreover, images that do exist often reinforce stereotypes such as gay men as fashionistas or bisexuals as confused or promiscuous. In an academic realm, LGBTQ issues may exclusively appear in curricula when health textbooks inexorably link gay men to HIV/AIDs. Such stereotypical and deficit-laden portrayals emerge from, and contribute to, oppressive local, state, national, and international environments where LGBTQ people and issues are marginalized.

Perpetrator relationship, role, and power

Much of the LGBTQ microaggression literature focuses on microaggression themes (e.g., thoughts, behaviors, environmental cues), with only a few studies emphasizing characteristics of perpetrators or their relationship to the target (e.g., Galupo et al., 2014; Nadal et al., 2011; Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017, 2017). The relationships between and the roles of perpetrator and target lead to unique manifestations and impacts of microaggressions. As such, roles, power differentials, and relationships between perpetrators and targets are important components of a comprehensive LGBTQ microaggression model.

Perpetrators with power can create and/or maintain environmental microaggressions by developing and enforcing exclusionary policies (e.g., heterosexual-only dates at prom, workplace dress codes, binary gendered restroom spaces) or by refusing to remove hostile environmental cues (e.g., heterosexist office images, genderist signage). In terms of interpersonal microaggressions, the relationship between perpetrator and target makes each microaggression qualitatively different from others. For instance, the perpetration of a microaggression may be received, felt, and responded to differently when a friend, parent, coworker, supervisor, or stranger is the perpetrator. This is because different relationships correspond to various levels of emotional investment. It may be more painful to experience a microaggression from a loved one—as the microaggression can erode trust and strain emotional connections (Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017).

However, LGBTQ people may also be able to forgive (or more easily excuse) microaggressions perpetrated by those they trust and love because they want or need to maintain the relationship. Thus, the emotional connection between perpetrator and target can be quite complex depending on the type, depth, and importance of the relationship. Studies of transgender, genderqueer, and gender variant adults have documented variations in types and effects of microaggressions perpetrated by peers with diverse sexual and gender identities (Galupo et al., 2014; Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017). In one study, heterosexual and cisgender friends perpetrated nine different types of microaggressions that most often included microinsults about appropriate ways to behave, dress, or present (Galupo et al., 2014). Microaggressions perpetrated by transgender friends frequently manifested as microinvalidations suggesting the person was not authentic or trans enough (Galupo et al., 2014; Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017). Other friends have sexualized and exoticized transgender participants or invalidated their gender as a legitimate identity (Galupo et al., 2014). Scholars have found that ingroup microaggressions perpetrated by LGBTQ friends were often the most painful, due to heightened feelings of betrayal (Galupo et al., 2014; Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011).

Our model is contextualized by critical and intersectional paradigms that explicate how power is embedded in everyday life. When a perpetrator holds a position of authority, the microaggression may take on heightened meaning. Some power-laden roles that perpetrators can hold include politician, supervisor, coworker, law enforcement officer, parent, guardian, teacher, advisor, health care provider, social worker, or religious/spiritual leader. Perpetrators can hold power over an LGBTQ person's housing, health, livelihood, academic success, or employment (Sue, 2010). For instance, respondents in the *U.S. Transgender Survey* described high instances of harassment and mistreatment by law enforcement, including: "being verbally harassed, repeatedly referred to as the wrong gender, physically assaulted, or sexually assaulted, including being forced by officers to engage in sexual activity to avoid arrest" (James et al., 2016, p. 12). Power differentials may not always be as explicit as those between police and the community. For instance, a queer-identified graduate student may want to study LGBTQ issues but might be told by advisors that their topic is inappropriate, unimportant, or not marketable. Without approval and ongoing support from faculty, students may not be able to complete research necessary to graduate. Another example includes parents, guardians, foster parents, or other relatives who utter painful microinsults or microinvalidations. Youth might not confront adults with power out of fear that challenges could lead to more extreme microassaults such as caregivers refusing to provide food/shelter or forcing participation in anti-LGBTQ programs or conversion therapy.

While our prior examples have explicated the danger of perpetrators who hold positions of power due to their role (e.g., parent, supervisor, officer) and/or privileged social identity (e.g., cisgender, heterosexual), intersectional complexities further complicate these boundaries. Take, for instance, a situation where the supervisor receiving an LGBTQ microaggression is a White, gay cisgender man and the perpetrator is a heterosexual, cisgender, Latina woman employee. The confluence of power differentials embedded in their roles (employee/supervisor), gender (cisgender man/cisgender woman), sexuality (gay/heterosexual), and race (White/Latina) make for an exceptionally complex microaggression dynamic.

With few exceptions (e.g., Galupo et al., 2014; Nadal, 2013; Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017), the literature typically has implied that microaggression perpetrators hold privileged, outgroup status (e.g., racial microaggressions perpetrated by Whites, sexist microaggressions perpetrated by cisgender men). Heterosexual and cisgender people certainly perpetrate interpersonal microaggressions (e.g., LGBTQ slurs, violence) and use their privilege to create and maintain exclusionary environments for LGBTQ people (e.g., proposing and voting for anti-LGBTQ legislation or policy makers). However, this rigid perspective on ingroup and outgroup status of targets and perpetrators ignores the heterogeneous nature of most minoritized social identity groups, including the LGBTQ community. Because the LGBTQ acronym includes individuals from diverse sexual and gender identities, ingroup perpetration of LGBTQ microaggressions is a constant reality (Galupo et al., 2014; Kirk, 2016; Nadal, 2013; Mena & Vaccaro, 2013). For instance, trans and genderqueer people can experience gender policing from gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. Ingroup perpetration of intersectional microaggressions can also emerge as body shaming (gender/sexuality) or age shaming (gender/sexuality/age; Kirk, 2016). Another example that explicates ingroup perpetration as well as intersectional complexities is when LGBTQ people of color attempt to include racial justice narratives into LGBTQ activist efforts (e.g., Pride parades) and are met with resistance from White LGBTQ organizers. In situations such as this, targets experience ingroup microaggressions invalidating their intersectional realities as queer people of color (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011).

Perpetration element summary

This element of the model builds on seminal and contemporary microaggression literature to highlight various perpetration methods such as microassaults, microinvalidations, microinsults, and environmental microaggressions. The complex relationships of perpetrators and targets can uniquely shape microaggression experiences for LGBTQ people. Moreover, the roles, power differentials, and relationships between

perpetrator and target have important implications for the way microaggressions are felt, understood, and navigated by LGBTQ people.

Interpersonal and environmental microaggression contexts

Intimate settings

LGBTQ people experience a myriad of microaggressions perpetrated in what we label as *intimate settings* because they occur in the context of close relationships such as those with family, friends, partners, or counselors. Microaggressions that occur within intimate settings can be especially impactful when they emanate from perpetrators who LGBTQ individuals trust, love, or respect. For instance, the counseling relationship is inherently an intimate one, and it is a setting where microaggressions against clients have been documented (Bigner & Wetchler, 2012; Nadal et al., 2010; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011). As noted in prior sections, studies have documented friendship microaggressions perpetrated against transgender people (Galupo et al., 2014; Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017). For instance, intersectional complexities were described by Pulice-Farrow, Clemens et al. (2017) in regard to transmasculine people experiencing microaggressions from lesbian friends who reinforced the message that their transmasculine friends did not belong in women-only spaces (e.g., Michigan Womyn's Festival).

Pervasive microaggressions also happen within the intimate settings of families (Mena & Vaccaro, 2013; Nadal, Skolnik, & Wong, 2012; Nadal et al., 2016; Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017). In one qualitative study, Nadal et al. (2012) titled an emergent theme *familial microaggressions* to explicate their prevalence. Even seemingly supportive families can inflict painful microaggressions by expressing sentiments such as, "We accept you, but" (Mena & Vaccaro, 2013). A recent article documented a variety of microaggressions experienced by transgender people in the context of romantic relationships and explicated the complex power dynamics between couples (Pulice-Farrow et al., 2017).

Institutions and institutional microclimates

In addition to intimate relationship settings, microaggressions happen in social institutions such as religion, employment, education, media, health care, and the military (Kia et al., 2016; Nadal et al., 2014, 2011). There is also a growing body of literature about localized LGBTQ exclusion in particular institutional microclimates (Vaccaro, 2012) such as workplaces, college campuses, therapeutic settings, health care settings, and community groups (Battle & Harris, 2013; Hanley & McLaren, 2015; Harris, Battle, Pastrana, & Daniels, 2015; McCallum & McLaren, 2010; Moorhead, 1999; Woolwine, 2000; Zurbrugg & Miner, 2016). We refer to these contexts as institutional microclimates (Vaccaro, 2012) because they are localized institutional

settings (e.g., campuses, buildings, offices, synagogues, community groups) where LGBTQ people can experience both interpersonal and environmental microaggressions. In this section, it would be impossible to examine all types of institutions and institutional microclimates. Instead, the next two paragraphs explicate how interpersonal and environmental microaggressions can manifest in grand-scale social institutions (e.g., employment, religion) as well as more localized microclimates (e.g., specific workplace, place of worship) within those institutions.

The social institution of religion has a long history of exclusion toward sexual minorities (Nadal et al., 2015, 2016; Vincent, Parrott, & Peterson, 2011). Institutional microaggressions can be embedded in policies that exclude LGBTQ people from holding leadership positions. In more localized religious or spiritual microclimates (e.g., synagogue, mosque, church, temple, spiritual gathering spaces), microaggressions can manifest when leaders and members subtly or overtly send messages that they do not accept LGBTQ people. An example is that the spiritual community “loves the sinner, but hates the sin.”

Given the lack of sexual orientation and gender identity workplace protections in most U.S. states, the social institution of employment can be hostile for LGBTQ people who can legally be fired because of their identity. LGBTQ employees working in a variety of industries have reported high levels of interpersonal microaggressions (Bilimoria & Stewart, 2009; Galupo & Resnick, 2016; Pitcher, 2017; Zurbrügg & Miner, 2016). Scholars have also documented environmental microaggressions in workplace microclimates that range from organizational structures that empower perpetrators (e.g., supervisors, employee hierarchies) to policies (e.g., dress codes, bathroom usage) that marginalize LGBTQ people (Galupo & Resnick, 2016; Zurbrügg & Miner, 2016). In sum, LGBTQ people experience workplace microaggressions in a host of institutions and institutional microclimates.

Sociopolitical contexts

Despite calls to focus on sociopolitical contexts (Vaccaro et al., 2015), only a few microaggression writings have done so (Nadal et al., 2015, 2011; Sterzing et al., 2017; Woodford et al., 2015). There are a variety of sociopolitical contexts within which LGBTQ microaggressions occur. We categorize them as local, state, federal, and international. At the local level, LGBTQ people experience microaggressions in the form of school and work dress codes, lack of nondiscrimination workplace and residential protections, and exclusionary city ordinances (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.; Vaccaro et al., 2015). At the state level, LGBTQ people contend with a plethora of exclusionary LGBTQ policies and laws related to education, employment, hate crimes, housing, relationship recognition, public accommodation, bullying, and gender marker changes on documentation

(Human Rights Campaign, n.d.). Environmental microaggressions, in the form of religious freedom or bathroom bills, codify oppression into law by legalizing the rights of organizations, businesses, or schools to discriminate against LGBTQ people. These forms of discrimination may include restriction of restrooms or refusal to offer services to LGBTQ people. There were more than 200 anti-LGBTQ bills proposed across the United States in 2016 and over 100 in the first two months of 2017 (Kralik, 2017; Miller, 2017). All these state policies are environmental microaggressions rooted in hegemonic notions of normalcy that send the message to LGBTQ people that they are unwelcome, illegal, or abnormal. Woodford et al. (2015) studied environmental microaggressions and psychological wellbeing of emerging LGBTQ adults and found that living in a state with anti-LGBTQ legislation (e.g., same-sex marriage laws) was associated with lowered self-esteem.

At the federal level, environmental microaggressions can be seen in the lack of support for nation-wide nondiscrimination protections that include both sexual orientation and gender identity (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.). Or environmental microaggressions come in the form of embedded messages. When the U.S. federal government continuously fails to address the imprisonment (and in some cases capital punishment) of people accused of being LGBTQ or espousing LGBTQ values around the world (e.g., Chechnya, Nigeria, Russia), this sends a clear message that LGBTQ people are not valued. Recently, federal environmental microaggressions manifested in the move to ban transgender people from serving in the United States military. An in-depth description of LGBTQ microaggressions around the world is well beyond the scope of this article. However, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge that LGBTQ people experience a variety of microaggressions around the world.

Context element summary

We end this section by reminding readers of the permeability between intimate settings, institutions, institutional microclimates, and sociopolitical contexts. LGBTQ people may experience interconnected interpersonal and environmental microaggressions as they move between these settings. For instance, a transgender man might experience microaggressions at multiple contextual layers as they seek health care services (Kia et al., 2016). Microaggressions might begin as interpersonal microinvalidations or microinsults in intimate settings when a family member responds uncomfortably (or with snide comments) when a transman mentions the challenge of finding a culturally competent gynecologist. Microaggressions in the microclimate of a health care office can start from the initial contact when office staff answer the phone and mis-gender the caller, refuse to use their correct name, or question the caller's reason for the office visit. Interpersonal and

environmental microaggressions might also occur in the institutional microclimate when the transman sees no affirming LGBTQ symbols or literature in the office space or when they experience stares from other clients or staff in the waiting room. They might experience further microinvalidations in the institutional microclimate when health care providers make assumptions about their gender or sexuality and/or fail to ask appropriate health background questions. Results of the *2015 U.S. Transgender Survey* (2015) revealed:

one-third (33%) of those who saw a health care provider had at least one negative experience related to being transgender, such as being verbally harassed or refused treatment because of their gender identity. Additionally, nearly one-quarter (23%) of respondents reported that they did not seek the health care they needed in the year prior to completing the survey due to fear of being mistreated as a transgender person. (James et al., 2016, p. 3)

Finally, the experiences of transgender patients in institutions and institutional microclimates (e.g., hospitals, clinics, doctor's offices) are shaped by a cis-heteropatriarchal health care sociopolitical system that fails to address transgender issues or deems health care necessities such as hormones or gender confirmation surgery as voluntary (James et al., 2016). These instances demonstrate the permeability between and interconnectedness among microaggression contexts.

Response

LGBTQ microaggression literature has moved beyond mere description of taxonomies to examine the coping processes or responses of LGBTQ targets (Nadal et al., 2014, 2011). This literature typically has reported microaggression responses in three categories: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional. While they are often described as distinct coping domains, an individual might respond to an LGBTQ microaggression with a complex combination of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses.

As critical scholars, we bring an activist and educational (versus a psychological) lens to this section of the model. We build on the coping literature, but frame this section in a way that moves away from a mental health paradigm to frame responses in a more holistic, intersectional, and critical context. We do not intend to downplay the importance of psychological research on coping. That research is incredibly informative to counselors, social workers, family members, and other experts who work in individualized settings with LGBTQ people. However, as educators writing for an interdisciplinary journal, we believe a more activist and social justice (versus a therapeutic) lens to microaggression responses might be useful to the broad, interdisciplinary readership. Our model focuses on the ways that

individuals respond to microaggressions by engaging and/or disengaging with the perpetrator, issue, and/or context.

Engagement responses

What does it mean to engage in a response to a microaggression? Engagement can manifest in direct and indirect ways such as confrontation, problem solving, advocacy, activism, or resistance (Kia et al., 2016; Nadal et al., 2014, 2011). These types of responses signal engagement with a person, issue, or context in order to enact change at the intimate, institutional, microclimate, and/or sociopolitical level. In the most basic sense, engagement can mean responding to a perpetrator by directly challenging or questioning a comment or action. It can also include engagement with an issue related to the microaggression. For instance, if a person experiences microaggressions from a religious peer who declares homosexuality a sin, they might request that the spiritual leader talk to the community about inclusion, love, and acceptance of LGBTQ people. LGBTQ individuals might engage with a setting to combat both environmental and interpersonal microaggressions. For instance, LGBTQ individuals who experience interpersonal microaggressions (e.g., comments, slurs, hostility) from co-workers and supervisors or environmental microaggressions (e.g., exclusionary policies) might start or join an Employee Resource Group (ERG). Since the 1970s, ERGs have challenged organizational policies affecting LGBTQ employees and have taken action to increase workplace satisfaction and climate (Briscoe & Safford, 2011; Githens, 2009). Responses to intimate and/or institutional microaggressions might also be aimed at engaging social institutions or larger sociopolitical contexts. LGBTQ individuals who experience patterned and repeated microaggressions may look beyond an individual perpetrator, or microclimate, and focus on systematic and sociopolitical opportunities for change (i.e., trans-inclusive health care coverage, pro-LGBTQ adoption policies). Individuals might join state, local, national, or international LGBTQ groups that work for large-scale policy change.

In the age of social media, simultaneous engagement within multiple contexts can easily occur (Miller, 2017; Mock, 2012). In 2012, author and activist Janet Mock challenged the everyday microaggressions trans women face when the legitimacy of their identities and expressions were questioned. Mock tweeted how the activist hashtag “#girlslikeus is for ALL trans women, regardless of color, but all who lend their voice to amplify ours knows that intersectionality matters” (Mock, 2012). LGBTQ targets can also call out, challenge, or shame individual perpetrators via social media. Or LGBTQ people can engage in activism by mass education (e.g., blogging, educational workshops, speeches, op-ed columns) about the inappropriateness of, and harms caused by, microaggressions without naming or shaming a specific

perpetrator. In sum, engagement responses can be direct or indirect and take a variety of forms (e.g., confrontation, education, lobbying, social media).

Disengagement responses

This type of response might include avoidance, walking away from an incident, or delaying an outward reaction. LGBTQ targets might disengage from a perpetrator, issue, or setting for a variety of reasons described in the LGBTQ coping literature such as discomfort, anger, betrayal, distress, exhaustion, frustration, embarrassment, or shame (Nadal et al., 2014, 2011). Another reason a target may disengage is because they might be unsure of how to best respond. Sue (2010) explained how targets often spend time and energy trying to figure out if an incident was bias motivated. If it was, targets ponder if, and how, to respond to the microaggression. LGBTQ people might question their capacity to effectively challenge the offender depending on power differentials and the context within which a microaggression occurs. They may ask themselves questions such as: “Will saying something change the perpetrator’s mind?” or “Will they continue this type of microaggression whether or not I confront them?” Targets may also contemplate whether addressing the perpetrator is worth their emotional energy.

Power differentials between perpetrators and targets can lead to personal and professional dangers for LGBTQ people. These very real threats can be physical, emotional, professional, and/or reputational. Due to the prevalence of violence toward people who are transgender, participants in one study were “especially aware of the physical consequences that can occur if they confront their microaggressor” (Nadal et al., 2014, p. 79). In sum, disengagement can be complicated by power and very real concerns about safety and wellbeing. It can also emanate from a lack of desire, capability, or readiness to confront, educate, or fight at the present moment.

Response element summary

Engagement and/or disengagement is inherently tied to prior aspects of the model. Targets consider an array of factors when deciding if, and how, to respond (Sue, 2010), such as relationships, roles, power differentials, and context. The method of perpetration might also shape the response. For example, challenging an environmental microaggression (e.g., workplace, policy) might require very different strategies than confronting an interpersonal microassault (e.g., LGBTQ slur). The perforated line between engagement and disengagement reflects the fluidity and interconnectedness between these response categories. Vaccaro and Mena (2011) documented burnout and compassion fatigue among queer activists of color who alternated between engagement and disengagement responses. Temporary disengagement might be necessary for targets to prioritize self-care (e.g., through help seeking, self-soothing, or avoidance). For example, an LGBTQ teacher or

student might be too triggered, tired, or ill-equipped to respond to a microaggression at a particular moment. However, momentary disengagement might be later followed by confrontation, education, or advocacy within a class, school, or local community. In sum, disengagement and engagement responses may be interrelated and fluid.

Implications for practice

The purpose of any model is to help explain a phenomenon. Models are not intended to be static. Instead, they are meant to be applied, tested, critiqued, and expanded by researchers, clinicians, educators, and activists. We encourage researchers to test and augment this model through empirical and theoretical means. Qualitative and quantitative scholars can collect evidence that confirms, contradicts, and reshapes the model. Using this model, researchers can begin to expand the empirical foundations of LGBTQ microaggressions in a way that brings together disparate bodies of literature (e.g., psychology, social work, higher education, organizational studies, gender studies) that frequently focus on either environmental or interpersonal LGBTQ microaggressions. Researchers who use this model can move the field toward more comprehensive scholarly understandings of these complex phenomena.

We hope educators, clinicians, and organizational leaders will also find this model useful. Educators, clinicians, community leaders, and supervisors should ask if, and how effectively, this model can inform their everyday work with LGBTQ family members, clients, staff, students, residents, and customers. Educators, counselors, community leaders, and supervisors can draw on this model to assist targets in brainstorming potential engagement and/or disengagement responses to microaggressions. Specifically, they can help targets consider individual internal coping resources as well as the implications of relationships, roles, and potential power differentials regarding their response options. Those who hold activist and educational roles in communities, schools, or other professional organizations may also use this model to inspire social change. Practitioners can draw on this model, and the scholarship used to construct it, to fight organizational, local, state, and national anti-LGBTQ policies that continue to proliferate in the United States (Human Rights Campaign, *n.d.*; Kralik, 2017; Miller, 2017). Often, social change efforts include educating the public. Social justice education (e.g., workshops, professional development) might draw on, or summarize, microaggression taxonomies that explicate the “what” of microaggressions. Our proposed model can help educators and learners situate LGBTQ taxonomies within larger critical and intersectional contexts. This proposed model can also serve as a useful framework to help learners wrestle with tough questions such as: What does it mean for me to perpetrate, or to be a target of, LGBTQ

microaggressions given my role and power in this organization? How do microaggressions manifest in this organization generally, and the specific microclimates within the organization? How can this model help me understand the myriad of ways I (and others) can effectively respond to interpersonal and environmental microaggressions?

Despite differences in disciplines and professional roles, we contend that all readers can find educational value in this model. Whether they have been targets or perpetrators (or both) of LGBTQ microaggressions, we hope this model prompts individual reflection. Candid reflection on one's awareness, knowledge, and skills is the core of cultural competence and liberatory praxis (Adams & Bell, 2016; Sue, 2001). As such, we encourage all readers to ponder how this model can inform their awareness and knowledge of microaggression manifestations, contexts, and responses. Readers should ask themselves whether they have perpetrated ingroup or outgroup microaggressions against family, friends, clients, students, or co-workers. We hope this publication also prompts perpetrators to consider how this model can inform more inclusive and affirming behavior in the future. Targets of LGBTQ microaggressions may find validation of their lived realities in this model. Sue (2010) argued that one of the many ways microaggressions cause harm is by forcing targets to expend emotional energy wondering things such as: Did that just happen? Should I be offended? What, if anything, should I do in response? Moreover, the trauma caused by microaggressions is often dismissed by bystanders as no big deal (Sue, 2010). This model builds on prior taxonomies and reinforces that LGBTQ microaggressions are very real and harmful phenomena composed of multiple elements (perpetration, contexts, responses), complicated by intersectional realities, and situated in hegemonic sociopolitical backdrops.

Conclusion

By synthesizing LGBTQ literature and adopting critical and intersectional perspectives, we developed a model intended to honor the breadth, depth, and scope of LGBTQ microaggressions. This model emphasizes the important interconnections among of various microaggression elements, such as perpetration (relationship, role, power, method), contexts (intimate settings, institutions, institutional microclimates, sociopolitical contexts), and responses (engagement, disengagement). Importantly, the model acknowledges hegemony and foregrounds intersectional complexities. Our aim was to design a model that could prompt practitioners, scholars, and activists from a variety of disciplines to adopt more comprehensive, critical, and intersectional perspectives on LGBTQ microaggressions in their everyday work. This model is not perfect, but we hope it will serve as a useful starting point for

future conversations, research, and inclusive praxis related to LGBTQ microaggressions.

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