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Transgender Microaggressions in the Context of Friendship: Patterns of Experience Across Friends' Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

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Microaggressions are subtle forms of discrimination that occur daily and can manifest as behavioral, verbal, or environmental slights. Whether intentional or unintentional, these microaggressions shape the daily experience of transgender individuals and are central to the way in which they navigate their social and personal relationships. The present study investigated transgender microaggressions in the context of friendships. Participants included 207 adults who self-identified as transgender, transsexual, gender variant, or having a transgender history. Participants completed an online questionnaire and provided both qualitative and quantitative information regarding their experiences of microaggressions in their friendships. Results indicated that the frequency of microaggressions differ across the sexual orientation and gender identity of the friend. Participants reported that although transgender microaggressions were most frequently received from cisgender heterosexual friends, microaggressions were most hurtful when coming from an individual with a similar identity. From their written descriptions of transgender microaggressions, it was clear that the friendship context and the specific identities of the friend in question influenced the way microaggressions were received and interpreted by participants. Given that friendships provide support not often available to transgender individuals through families of origin and through the traditional health care system, discussion focused on the disruption of social support that occurs when microaggressions are present in the context of friendship.

Keywords: transgender, microaggression, sexual orientation, friendship, gender identity

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Using a qualitative/quantitative mixed-method approach, the present research investigated transgender microaggressions in the context of friendships. Microaggressions are subtle forms of discrimination that occur daily and can manifest as behavioral, verbal, or environmental slights (Sue, 2010). Whether intentional or unintentional, these microaggressions directed toward gender identity shape the daily experience of trans*[1] individuals and are central to the way in which they navigate their social and personal relationships. Because of the relative lack of social, familial, and societal support for trans* individuals, friendships often fulfill multiple roles. Friends can provide needed counseling and information unavailable in the traditional health care system, can serve as role models, and step in as chosen families (Galupo, Bauerband et al., 2014; Hines, 2007; Zitz, Burns, & Tacconelli, 2014). Thus, studying microaggressions experienced in the friendships of trans* individuals will reveal how gender identity is negotiated even in some of the most supportive of relationships. In addition, focusing on microaggressions in the context of friendships allows enough specificity to apply an analysis in which the friendship experiences of trans* individuals can be understood as they are informed by the sexual orientation and gender identity of the friend.

Transgender Microaggressions

In general, research has conceptualized gender identity and transgender experience from within the larger lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community. Transgender microaggressions research has taken a similar approach. The majority of past research has either combined the study of transgender microaggressions with those of sexual orientation microaggressions (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011) or has extended the framework for sexual minorities and expanded it to understand trans* individuals (Nadal, Rivera, & Corpus, 2010). Although this work has made significant contributions, future research is needed to further disaggregate experience as it relates to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Even though sexual minority and trans* individuals are often conceptualized as a unified group, trans* persons often experience increased stigmatization (Grant et al., 2011; Weiss, 2003) and a unique brand of discrimination or transphobia (Hill & Willoughby, 2005). In addition, trans* individuals are uniquely impacted by the ways society conflates definitions of sex and gender by defining

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[1] When referring to individuals' identities specifically, we use trans* instead of the more common umbrella term transgender in order to be as inclusive as possible of individuals who identify along a transgender/transexual/gender variant/genderqueer spectrum. The word trans* has been chosen as more inclusive and open to the different identities of people who do not identify with the sex/gender they were assigned at birth, and to also represent individuals who do not identify as transgender but describe their transgender experience as a status or medical history.

gender based upon a person's genitalia (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007). This focus on external genitalia as a criterion for affirming gender identity has practical implications with regard to basic activities such as the use of public restrooms (Hines, 2007) and for marking sex designations on official identification (Currah & Moore, 2009). Transgender concerns have a history of being minimized within the larger LGBTQ community where issues centered on sexual orientation prejudice often take precedent (Hill & Willoughby, 2005). Trans* identities are pathologized (Lev, 2004), resulting in isolation and invisibility of transgender experience even within the larger LGBTQ community (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007). It is likely, then, that microaggressions manifest differently for sexual orientation and gender minority individuals.

Currently, only one line of research exists focusing solely on the content and taxonomy of transgender microaggressions (Nadal, Davidoff, Davis, & Wong, 2014; Nadal, Skolnik, & Wong, 2012). Using a focus group methodology, 12 basic themes were identified encompassing transgender microaggressions: (a) use of transphobic and/or incorrectly gendered terminology, (b) assumption of universal transgender experience, (c) exoticization, (d) discomfort/disapproval of transgender experience, (e) endorsement of gender normative and binary culture or behaviors, (f) denial of the existence of transphobia, (g) assumption of sexual pathology or abnormality, (h) physical threat or harassment, (i) denial of individual transphobia, (j) denial of personal body privacy, (k) familial microaggressions, and (l) systemic and environmental microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2012). Based on a focus group of nine individuals, this research provides a foundation for understanding transgender microaggressions. In their secondary analysis of the same data set Nadal et al. (2014) described the psychological processes and coping strategies used by trans* individuals when encountering transgender microaggressions. Across these two studies, only transgender men and transgender women were included, and no analysis was provided to differentiate participants' experiences in terms of the social context in which they are experienced. Rather, general categories of microaggressions were described. In addition, trans* people who do not conceptualize their identity within the gender binary (e.g., agender, bigender, genderqueer, Two-spirit) were not included, although Nadal does acknowledge elsewhere the need to understand microaggressions toward gender nonconforming individuals (Nadal, 2013). Nadal et al.'s (2012, 2014) research presents as essential foundational work for a general understanding of transgender microaggression and has important counseling implications. Overall, this body of work helps to establish the ways that transgender and sexual orientation microaggressions may differ and offer examples of microaggressions where trans* identity, in particular, is made salient.

Transgender Microaggressions in Friendship

Because of the subtle and interpersonal nature of microaggressions, it is likely that the social/relational context in which microaggressions occur can dramatically impact both their expression and the ability of individuals to respond to them. Past transgender microaggression research (Nadal et al., 2014) has featured participant examples of microaggressions where the relational context is salient; that is, who was committing the microaggression (both in terms of relationship and identity) was provided as important information that contextualized how the microaggression was interpreted and experienced. Examples of transgender microaggressions were provided by participants and described as coming from health professionals, partners, parents, family, friends, and former friends (Nadal et al., 2014).

The present research focuses on friendships as the site for studying transgender microaggressions. Friendships are often emphasized for trans* individuals because they become more important during times of social change and are particularly salient when identity is at odds with social norms (Weeks, 1995). Friendship is often characterized as functioning much like familial-type support during times when transgender individuals may experience social isolation or rejection from their families of origin (Galupo, Bauerband et al., 2014; Hines, 2007; Weinstock, 2000).

Past research has established that friendship benefits and barriers differ across the sexual orientation and gender identity of the friend. For example, trans* friends step in as role models in a society where transgender experience is largely invisible, as needed mentors and counselors given that health care systems are not properly equipped to provide fundamental care, and as a general support system (Galupo, Bauerband et al., 2014; Hines, 2007). Friendships with individuals in the larger LGBTQ community (sexual minority friends) were described as drawing on a shared sense of community, family, and belonging. These friendships provided trans* individuals an opportunity to educate about transgender issues and provided them diverse perspectives and social interactions (Galupo, Bauerband et al., 2014). Benefits of friendships outside the LGBTQ community (with heterosexual/cisgender friends) included helping trans* individuals feel "normal," helping trans* individuals present as their desired gender, and providing friendships where sexuality and gender are not a central focus. Overall, this research has emphasized that the friendship experiences of trans* individuals shift in relation to the gender identity and sexual orientation of the friend (Galupo, Bauerband et al., 2014). In addition, friendship dynamics often change with disclosure of transgender identity and status (Galupo, Krum, Hagen, Gonzalez, & Bauerband, 2014). It is likely, then, that friendships would provide a sensitive enough context in which to uncover the subtle differences in the expression of microaggressions across sexual orientation and gender identity.

Methods

Participant Demographics and Recruitment

Participants were 207 adults who self-identified as transgender, transexual, gender variant, or as having a transgender history. Participants self-identified with a range of gender identity labels including female/woman, male/man, trans, trans woman, trans man, male to female (MtF), female to male (FtM), genderqueer, bigender, gender nonconforming, and agender; with many participants utilizing multiple labels simultaneously. After providing their identities, participants were asked to group themselves in one of four gender categories provided by the researchers: transmasculine, transfeminine, gender variant, and agender. Table 1 provides participant demographics for gender identity, sex assigned at birth, and sexual orientation. Close to half of the sample was transmasculine identified, with more than half assigned female at birth (AFaB). When asked how often they are read as the gender with which they identify in public, 8.7% participants indicated

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Table 1
Participant Demographics

	%
Gender identity	
Transfeminine	48.8
Transmasculine	27.5
Gender variant	18.4
Agender	5.3
Sex assigned at birth	
Female	67.1
Male	29.5
Intersex	1.9
No answer	1.4
Sexual orientation	
Queer	26.6
Pansexual	15.9
Heterosexual	17.9
Bisexual	14.0
Lesbian	8.7
Gay	3.9
Asexual	3.9
Fluid	1.9
Other	7.2
Race/ethnic identity	
White/Caucasian	77.8
Bi/Multiracial	7.7
Hispanic/Latino	3.9
Black/African American	1.9
Asian/Asian American	1.9
Other	1.9
No answer	0.5
Education	
High school	54.6
College	28.5
Graduate school	13.0
No answer	3.9
Socioeconomic status	
Lower-middle class	17.9
Middle class	21.3
Upper-middle class	12.1
Upper class	1.0
No answer	15.0

never, 18.4% rarely, 21.7% sometimes, 23.2% often, 26.1% endorsed always, while 1.9% declined to provide an answer.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 65 (M = 31.53, SD = 12.63) and represented all 50 U.S. states and Washington, DC, as well as 11 additional countries (Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Macedonia, Netherlands, Portugal, Singapore, Thailand, and the United Kingdom). Table 1 also includes participant demographics with regard to racial/ethnic identity, highest level of education, and socioeconomic status. There was limited racial/ethnic diversity within the sample, with 77.8% identifying as White/Caucasian and 19.8% of participants identifying as a racial/ethnic minority.

Recruitment announcements, including a link to the online survey, were posted on social media sites, online message boards, and e-mailed via transgender listservs. Some of these resources were geared toward specific transgender communities (e.g., nonbinary, gay FtMs, Two Spirit), while others served the transgender community more generally. Most participants heard about the study primarily through online means, including Facebook (76.8%), Tumblr (7.7%), Twitter (0.5%), research oriented websites/message boards (4.3%), and receiving a forwarded e-mail through an acquaintance or listserv (5.3%). Other participants were directed to the survey by a friend or significant other (4.8%). One participant (0.5%) did not provide an answer to this question.

Measures

The present study used a mixed-method approach to best capture the lived experiences of the survey respondents. Using an online survey approach, participants answered questions regarding their experiences of microaggressions in their friendships.

Qualitative Questions: Open-Ended Responses

Survey participants responded to a series of open-ended questions regarding their experience of microaggressions in the context of friendships. The questions were designed to target microaggressions related to eight of the 12 original themes outlined by Nadal et al. (2012). These eight categories of microaggressions were chosen because they were the most relevant to the close personal context of friendship: (a) use of transphobic and/or incorrectly gendered terminology, (b) assumption of universal transgender experience, (c) exoticization, (d) discomfort/disapproval of transgender experience, (e) endorsement of gender normative and binary culture or behaviors, (f) assumption of sexual pathology or abnormality, (g) denial of individual transphobia, and (h) denial of personal body privacy. We did not ask about Nadal's categories of denial of the existence of transphobia, physical threat or harassment, familial microaggressions, and systemic and environmental microaggressions because we felt these were more removed from the friendship context. Based on past research that has emphasized transgender experience of delegitimization of people's gender self-designations (Blumer, Ansara, & Watson, 2013) and authenticity of gender (Levitt & Ippolito, 2014), we added an additional theme of questioning the legitimacy of gender.

Participants were asked to provide an example for each of the nine categories of microaggressions. Prompts followed the following format, were specific to each of the categories, and were framed to make the friendship context salient: "Provide an example from your own experience in which one of your friends used transphobic language or used terminology that did not accurately respect your preferred name and/or pronoun(s). Include both your internal (emotional) reaction to the situation as well as any response or feedback you provided to your friend."

Quantitative Questions: Frequency and Severity of Microaggression

Following each of the qualitative prompts, participants were asked a series of Likert-type questions to rate the frequency of microaggressions (*never, rarely, sometimes, often, consistently*) across friendship type. Participants responded to the following prompts: How often do instances such as these occur in your friendships with: (a) trans* LGBTQ people, (b) trans* heterosexual people, (c) cisgender LGBTQ people, and (d) cisgender heterosexual people. Next, participants were given a series of general questions and asked to rate the degree to which they agree with the following: Experiences such as these: (a) impact how close I feel to my friend(s), (b) are more upsetting when they occur within a

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friendship versus another context, and (c) are more upsetting when they occur with a friend of a similar identity.

Procedures

Participants completed an online survey that sought to explore nine themes of transgender microaggressions that may be present in friendships. Prior to answering research questions, participants provided basic demographic information about themselves. Following this, the nine themes of transgender microaggressions were presented and defined for participants in the order listed above. After each theme was explained, participants were presented with an open-ended question asking them to provide an example from their own experience in which a friend committed a microaggression related to that theme. Following this, the participants first responded to a series of Likert questions targeting the identity of their friends, and then to questions regarding the impact of microaggressions on their friendships.

Data Analysis

For each of the nine categories of transgender microaggressions, we conducted a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) investigating identity of friend on frequency of transgender microaggressions. Planned pairwise comparisons, using a Bonferroni adjustment, were conducted to explore patterns of differences in microaggression frequency across the four groups based on identity of friend (trans* LGBTQ; trans* heterosexual; cisgender LGBTQ; and cisgender heterosexual).

For the qualitative analysis, we used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to extend Nadal et al.'s (2012, 2014) work on transgender microaggressions. Specifically, we aimed to extend an understanding of how transgender microaggressions are experienced within the friendship context. Our research team includes a professor of psychology who self-identifies as a pansexual cisgender woman (first author), an advanced undergraduate student of psychology and LGBTQ studies who self-identifies as a pansexual trans man (second author), and a graduate student in counseling psychology who self-identifies as a pansexual genderqueer trans* guy (third author). In our recruitment announcements, we were upfront that members of our research team included a range of experiences across gender and sexual orientation identity, and often our individual identities were used when posting in identity-specific forums.

Our analysis began with the second and third author independently coding data looking for themes related to identity of the friend. The research team met and discussed the coding categories and agreed upon an initial set of codes. The second and third author then coded and sorted the data set using the initial set of codes and provided the first author (who served as external auditor) with a list of themes and example quotes under each theme. The entire research team agreed upon the coding structure and met several additional times to discuss and choose final representative quotes. Final quotes were chosen to simultaneously exemplify each theme and to ensure that quotes used best represented the diversity of trans* identities endorsed by the sample.

Several checks were included in our data analysis process in order to increase the credibility of our results. First, at the end of the survey, we provided participants with the opportunity to reflect upon how our questions captured (and failed to capture) their individual experiences. Participants were also asked to provide feedback to improve the present and future studies. Responses obtained were incorporated into our analysis. Second, throughout the data analysis process, we discussed the themes and made decisions via consensus. Because of the range of our collective experiences across sexual orientation, gender identity, gender presentation, and relationship experiences, we came to these discussions with different perspectives to our analysis. Third, we presented a portion of this research at a transgender community-based conference. Over 50 individuals attended our workshop. Although our study was conducted anonymously, some of the individuals who attended our session shared with us that they had taken our survey. Conversations and feedback generated during our workshop were incorporated into our final conceptualization of results.

Results

Quantitative Analysis: Transgender Microaggression Frequency Differs Across Friend's Identity

Table 2 provides mean frequency scores and ANOVA results for transgender microaggressions across identity of friend (trans* LGBTQ; trans* heterosexual; cisgender LGBTQ; and cisgender

Table 2
Frequency of Transgender Microaggressions Based on Friends' Identity

	Trans* LGBTQ *M* (*SD*)	Trans* heterosexual *M* (*SD*)	Cisgender LGBTQ *M* (*SD*)	Cisgender heterosexual *M* (*SD*)	*F*	Partial η^2
Use of transphobic and/or incorrectly gendered terminology†	1.91 (1.24)	2.21 (1.51)	3.04 (1.31)	3.56 (1.26)	237.63, $p < .001$	.383
Assumption of universal transgender experience†	2.40 (1.50)	2.75 (1.64)	3.27 (1.41)	3.68 (1.32)	66.58, $p < .001$	.244
Exoticization/tokenization‡	2.57 (1.90)	2.64 (1.91)	3.34 (1.72)	3.64 (1.64)	68.28, $p < .001$	.249
Discomfort/disapproval of trans* experience‡	2.18 (1.69)	2.34 (1.80)	3.05 (1.57)	3.64 (1.46)	102.08, $p < .001$	.331
Endorsement of gender normative/binary†	2.65 (1.79)	2.91 (1.82)	3.30 (1.57)	3.88 (1.39)	83.83, $p < .001$	.289
Assumption of sexual pathology or abnormality‡	2.96 (2.24)	3.10 (2.23)	3.42 (2.02)	3.83 (1.86)	42.70, $p < .001$	.172
Denial of individual transphobia‡	2.83 (2.09)	2.98 (2.09)	3.59 (1.82)	3.94 (1.71)	67.56, $p < .001$	.247
Denial of personal body privacy‡	2.73 (1.91)	2.85 (1.96)	3.40 (1.65)	3.72 (1.63)	45.05, $p < .001$	.179
Questioning legitimacy of gender†	2.89 (2.05)	3.10 (2.07)	3.53 (1.77)	3.83 (1.70)	43.46, $p < .001$	.174

† All possible pair-wise comparisons significant at .001 level. ‡ All possible pair-wise comparisons significant at .001 level, except for Trans* LGBQ versus Trans* heterosexual, which did not significantly differ.

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heterosexual). For all nine categories, the frequency of microaggressions significantly differed across identity of friend, with effect sizes ranging from medium to large. In all cases, microaggressions were most likely to occur with cisgender heterosexual friends, followed by cisgender LGBTQ friends, and then trans* friends. All pairwise comparisons were significant at the .001 level, with the exception of trans* LGBQ and trans* heterosexual friends. For five of the microaggression categories (exoticization/tokenization, discomfort/disapproval of trans* experience, assumption of sexual pathology or abnormality, denial of individual transphobia, and denial of personal body privacy), there was no significant difference between the two. Table 3 presents descriptive findings for items related to how microaggressions impact friendship. Across the nine categories, the majority of participants agreed that microaggressions impact how close they feel to their friends (73.8–92.0%), are more upsetting when they occur within a friendship versus another context (72.7–96.5%), and are more upsetting when they occur with a friend of a similar identity (75.0–93.7%).

Qualitative Analysis: Transgender Microaggression Experience Differs Across Friends' Identity

In addition to rating the frequency of microaggressions occurring across different friendship types, participants were asked to provide an example from their own friendships to exemplify how each of the different nine categories of microaggressions under study manifested in their friendships. Although participants were asked to provide a specific example, they were not prompted to provide information regarding the identity of their friend discussed in the example. However, many participants included this information as important context for understanding their experience. When they did mention a friend's identity, participants' qualitative examples made salient three different friendship types: friendships with other trans* individuals, friendships within the larger LGBTQ community, and friendships outside of the LGBTQ community. This grouping is consistent with the fact that for five of the nine categories, the frequency of microaggressions did not significantly differ for trans* heterosexual and trans* LGBTQ friends. This grouping is also consistent with past transgender friendship research that has described unique benefits for friendships within and outside of the LGBTQ community (Galupo, Bauerband et al., 2014).

It is important to note that participants experienced all nine categories of transgender microaggressions in their friendships with other trans* individuals, as well as with friends both within and outside of the larger LGBTQ community. However, the way that microaggressions differed in expression were based on the friends' identity. For example, the following participant quotation illustrates how *questioning legitimacy of gender* was experienced within a friendship with a trans* friend:

> This occurs frequently with my trans* friend . . . He frequently disregards my preferred pronouns . . . despite him knowing better. I have frequently been told that "if you're a girl with a vagina and you don't mind being called she, then you're a girl, stop making up stupid terms." (Agender and Gender Fluid)

Another participant described an instance of questioning legitimacy of gender as it was experienced in a friendship within the larger LGBTQ community:

> When I first came out to one friend and explained that I was now gay as well as trans, she seemed confused and told me, "You don't have to become a man just to get with another guy. You can get plenty of guys and stay female!" I tried to explain there is a *world* of difference between being with a man as a straight woman versus as a gay man . . . What really confused me was that she's bi and polyamorous, and has world as a semipro Domme. If any of my friends "got" it, I'd expected it to be her! (FtM, Male)

From a friend outside of the LGBTQ community, questioning legitimacy of gender was described by a participant in the following way:

> A friend who's one of those heteroflexible girls who has a boyfriend was getting really handsy and flirty with me when she was drunk. "When I'm drunk, I get really gay," she said. It hurt me that she was still seeing me as a woman, but I shrugged it off. (Male)

These three participant quotations, taken together, exemplify the differences in how microaggressions are experienced across friendship type. Microaggressions from trans* friends were often experienced as an invalidation or questioning of whether the individual is "trans* enough." Microaggressions from friends within the larger LGBTQ community were met with the feeling that LGBTQ friends should have really known better and illustrated the many ways sexual orientation and gender identity intersect to create a unique friendship context. From friends outside of

Table 3
Impact of Microaggression on Friendship: Percentage of Participants who Agreed With Statements

	Impact how close I feel to my friends	Are more upsetting when they occur within a friendship versus another context	Are more upsetting when they occur with a friend of a similar identity
Use transphobic or incorrectly gendered terminology	86.1	92.2	83.4
Assumption of universal transgender experience	73.8	80.2	84.9
Exoticization/tokenization	85.1	84.8	80.1
Discomfort/disapproval of trans* experience	92.0	96.5	93.7
Endorsement of gender normative/binary	84.6	83.7	86.8
Assumption of sexual pathology or abnormality	87.8	87.8	86.5
Denial of individual transphobia	88.7	92.2	81.6
Denial of personal body privacy	75.7	72.7	75.0
Questioning legitimacy of gender	87.5	92.5	88.3

Note. Percentages include participants who indicated *slightly agree, agree, or strongly agree* to each of the statements.

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the LGBTQ community, microaggressions represented a general feeling of rejection and a sense from our participants that their "feelings are a bother to most cis people." Many of our participants' responses included direct comparisons that made clear the subtle shift in the expression of microaggressions across communities.

> Outside of trans communities, it feels like my identity lacks legitimacy period. Full stop, Inside trans communities, there can be pressure to be even better gender performers than cis people. (Female)

Our analysis further characterizes the nature of transgender microaggressions across friendship contexts: friendships with other trans* individuals, friendships within the larger LGBTQ community, and friendships outside the LGBTQ community.

Not Trans Enough: Friendships With Other Trans* Individuals

Even though transgender microaggressions were least likely to occur from trans* friends, unique dynamics were apparent in the few examples participants provided. Participants described microaggressions from trans* friends that stemmed from a sense of comparison and competition, where there was an implied hierarchy of trans* experience.

> I have a friend who, like me, identifies as FtM. He believes that all trans* people are the same and should be the same, and he gets pretty angry when I have a different interpretation of an experience than he had or when we're in a social media chat room and others express different opinions. He's especially adamant that all trans* people are part of the binary of male/female, and he denies the genderqueer experience. I'm not the same in that regard, and it pisses me off when he goes on his tirades about binaries being right and people who deny them being less than. (FtM)

> My genderqueer friend, who is also my ex, always talks like they're better than other people for not liking labels for gender and sexuality. I have explained to them over and over why labels are not a bad thing and why they're really important to me, and we always seem to come to a mutual understanding, but then they'll say something else about it that makes me uncomfortable later. (Nonbinary)

> I have encountered many trans people who only believe that an ultrafeminine woman that obsesses about clothes, hair, and makeup are real transwomen. They cannot have any masculine hobbies, and they must be attracted to men. Views like this made me question if I should transition . . . I thought I cannot transition because I am primarily attracted to women, and I have many masculine hobbies and interests. (Transwoman)

> One of my dearest, kindest friends is a trans man living stealth. When I came out to him as nonbinary, his response was to assure me that he had a period in which he was "in between" as well, and he'd accept me "every step of the way" . . . I am intersex but had my genitals mutilated to "female" assignment at birth, so it is assumed that if I am trans*, I am headed toward the "opposite" sex. It was incredibly upsetting and invalidating to realize that even in the trans* community, my identity is viewed as a "make up your mind" kind of thing, or that I will inevitably identify as male. (Nonbinary)

Participants often received the message that they were not trans enough, or that they were not expressing themselves or their gender in the correct way as judged by their trans* friends.

> She was herself trans* and felt that I was hurting the cause of trans* women by not adhering to gender-conforming appearances for women. She insisted on doing my makeup and asked me to switch my flats for heels. (Woman/Female)

> There are often things I feel uncomfortable talking about with trans friends, such as the idea of pregnancy as a man, or the fact that my period (though I dislike it) doesn't actually make me dysphoric. I get uncomfortable and doubt myself when I rub up against "you're not trans enough!" types. (FtM/Genderqueer)

In their qualitative accounts, participants registered disappointment that they still experienced microaggressions in their friendships with other trans* individuals, and this was substantiated by the quantitative data where participants agreed that microaggressions were more upsetting when they occurred with a friend of a similar identity (see Table 3). Trans* friends provide necessary support not readily afforded by society in general or by mental health professionals in particular. Thus, trans* friends often act as a first-line of counsel before seeking professional therapy (Hines, 2007). This support may even aid in preparation and advice for seeking counseling, as the pathologization of transgender persons has resulted in mistrust of mental health professionals (Burnes et al., 2010). In addition, these friendships offer support and the opportunity to share lived experiences and knowledge in relation to decisions around transitioning and/or other situations that may be specific to transgender experience.

Past research has described unique benefits of friendships with other transgender individuals (Galupo, Bauerband et al., 2014). When compared with their other friendships, transgender individuals find that with their transgender friends they are more likely to have shared experiences, be able to talk about transgender issues, receive support through mentoring and shared resources, and are more comfortable being themselves (Galupo, Bauerband et al., 2014). Consistent with past research, our participants often described microaggressions from trans* friends as occurring within a mentoring/role model context. Microaggressions experienced in these mentoring friendships added to participants' uncertainty, doubt, and discomfort. In addition, addressing microaggressions was particularly difficult given the increased reliance on these friendships. Microaggressions, then, introduced a disruption of the type of supports that are uniquely found among other trans* friends.

They Should Have Known Better: Friendships Within the Larger LGBTQ Community

In their descriptions, participants often made distinctions among their LGBTQ friends by using both gender identity (cisgender) and sexual orientation labels (LGBTQ), acknowledging their conscious awareness that their friendships were simultaneously impacted by this specific intersection of identities. Responses further indicated that participants considered themselves to be somehow aligned with cisgender LGBTQ individuals and considered them as having a similar identity. Similar to friendships with other trans* individuals, participants registered disappointment when describing microaggressions occurring in their friendships with individuals in the LGBTQ community and often expressed that they thought these friends "should have known better." Nadal et al. (2014) described betrayal as being one potential emotional reaction to

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microaggressions. Our participants' feelings of betrayal were heightened in response to microaggressions from LGBTQ friends based on this sense of shared experience and alignment. After describing a microaggression occurring in her friendship, one participant explicitly expressed, "I felt betrayed in a way, since not only was she my friend but also a part of the LGBTQ community." Another participant remarked, "I feel like it shouldn't hurt, but it hurts. We spent our early teens together figuring out we were queer in a conservative Christian environment."

Sometimes these intense feelings of betrayal led to loss of friendships:

> I lost some friends because they were disgusted by me being trans; it really hurt especially since a lot of them were gay- and lesbian-identified, and I could not understand how one marginalized community would be disgusted by me. It just really hurt me. I ended relationships with these people. (FtM)

> I had a couple of gay male friends I went to church with long ago that loved throwing around the term tranny, if not toward me, and I called them on it. But they just didn't give a damn and kept using it. Which is when I began to figure out that just because one group is oppressed and has hate slurs thrown at them, they thought nothing of marginalizing another group. Pissed me the hell off, and we parted ways after that. (Woman)

Because trans* people's friendships within the LGBTQ community are often characterized as centering on an assumption of shared experience (Galupo, Bauerband et al., 2014), microaggressions from cisgender LGBTQ friends were often expressed as an invalidation of the ways in which trans* experience may be distinct from being a sexual orientation minority.

> When I came out to my friend who is a gay-identified cis male, he said that he thought it was weird I thought I was a guy and asked why I wasn't comfortable just being a dyke. This pissed me off and made me feel angry, depressed, and invalidated. (Transman)

> A gay friend of mine really felt I'd "betrayed the team" and why couldn't I just be gay? When I tried to explain that gender identity had nothing to do with sexual orientation, they got argumentative about it. (Male, FtM)

> He, a cisgender gay man, asked me what it was like being transgender and asexual. When I told him, he said, "oh, you must be just attracted to yourself, then." I felt uncomfortable and blew it off, because he was completely, massively wrong. (Female to Male Transgender)

> At the time, I experienced questions and statements such as "drag queens are just gay men," "why don't you just be a gay man?," "you'll never be a real woman," and most of these people thought that every sexual minority was all alike. (Female)

Often, participants' examples highlighted the unique tension that exists within the LGBTQ community around the intersection of sexual orientation and gender identity.

> I was dating a stone butch dyke when I started testosterone. She was ultimately supportive in terms of going with me to get my first shot and so forth, but really distanced herself emotionally and said she didn't understand why I needed to go through with it and that being a woman was enough. I felt frustrated by this, but also pained because it was mixed with her acknowledgment that she would have transitioned had it been possible in her younger days. It made me recognize the long history of tensions between butches and transmen. (Queer/Trans)

> (My friends) are very offended by the word "cisgender," as they feel that their existence is being defined by the not "normal" group. They say they are women and that's the end of it. I feel like they're not supportive of FtMs, but their bigger issue is MtFs invading women's spaces such as the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. I have lots of lesbian feminist friends that I refuse to discuss this issue with. (Nonbinary)

In addition, many of the examples of microaggressions provided by participants focused on the ways in which trans* individuals were exoticized and sexualized by friends from within the larger LGBTQ community, as exemplified by the following participant quotations:

> I met a new friend on OKCupid and was going to hang out with him soon. He was a cisgender gay guy. He sent me a huge message about how he found my identity fascinating and my pronouns quaint and interesting. (Nonbinary)

> I had a friend that would come to LGBTQ meetings that would grab my crotch every time I saw her to see if I was packing. I felt violated because I don't feel she would have done this to cis gender people. (Male)

> I was talking to one of my lesbian friends, and we got on the subject of previous partners . . . when she spoke of her past trans* partners, she came across as very smug and self-righteous; it was very evident that she felt that she should receive a pat on the back for being open-minded enough to sleep with a lesbian transgender woman, or with a AFaB genderqueer individual. Those people were reduced to "progressiveness points," . . . I was very cynical and sad about the whole affair, and wondered if I would be viewed as an achievement, as proof of open-mindedness by my partners. As a trans* woman who prefers women, I do worry about such things quite a lot. (Trans* Woman)

This sexualization is consistent with past research that has suggested that one barrier for trans* individuals forming friendships with LGBTQ individuals is that issues of sexuality dominate the friendship (Galupo, Bauerband et al., 2014). Participants described friendship experiences with LGBTQ friends where the expression of microaggressions had implicit assumptions about sexuality that were not always appreciated, comfortable, or relevant to their trans* experience.

Friendships within the LGBTQ community are often characterized as social networks that make up larger LGBTQ (Esterberg, 1997) and transgender specific (Hines, 2007) communities. Within-community relationships allow for the processing of marginalization and an experience of equity not easily achieved in friendships where sexual orientation and gender identity differences are more salient, require constant mediation (Berger, 1982; Galupo, 2007a, 2009; Hines, 2007; Nardi, 1999; Stanley, 1996), and where the friendship is maintained at the expense of acknowledging minority experience (Galupo, 2007b; Galupo & Gonzalez, 2013). Connecting to the larger LGBTQ community through friendships with those of a similar identity can allow for a more positive experience of transgender identity (Riggle, Rostosky, McCants, & Pascale-Hague, 2011).

Friendship is characterized as functioning much like familial-type support during times when LGBTQ individuals experience social isolation or rejection from their families of origin (Hines,

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2007; Nardi, 1992; Weinstock, 2000; Weston, 1991). Because friendships with LGBTQ individuals are most likely to be described by transgender individuals as providing a sense of "family" (Galupo, Bauerband et al., 2014), microaggressions occurring with friends within the larger LGBTQ community can be seen as potentially disrupting an important type of familial support.

My Feelings Are a Bother to Most Cis People: Friendships Outside of the LGBTQ Community

Participants often referred to cisgender heterosexual friends by using gender identity and sexual orientation labels and referenced these friendships as occurring outside the LGBTQ community. Participants' quantitative ratings suggested that microaggressions across all nine categories were most likely to occur with cisgender heterosexual friends. In addition to happening most frequently, qualitative descriptions portrayed microaggressions from friends outside of the LGBTQ community as less subtle in nature and more likely to overtly deny trans* experience. Microaggressions from these friends were more likely to take the form of directly instructing trans* friends about how to behave appropriately, interpret their experience, and even how to identify.

> When I came out as nonbinary to my best (cis, straight) friend of 8 years, she asked me if I was currently high or tripping. I gave her some more information and she laughed at me, told me repeatedly I couldn't just be "an it" (this is my preferred pronoun—as a reclamation of dehumanization—although I will also use they/them). She has never gendered me correctly. (Nonbinary)

> A friend was surprised when he found out I am in a relationship with another woman. He told me that he thought all trans* women transitioned, so they could have sex with men. I actually started to laugh at him because it was such a ridiculous thing to think. (Female)

> A few people have questioned my gender's legitimacy due to my eating habits and the fact that I like heavy metal . . . but you know what? There is nothing wrong with cooking an entire Totino's pizza all by yourself, sitting down, listening to Slayer, and folding the round pizza into a taco shape and eating it like a pizza-flavored taco. I'm a strong, independent metalhead White woman *who don't need no diet.* Mostly with accusations like that, I just ignore them. They can't legitimatize my gender due to their ideas of what a woman should be. (Female)

Friendships with individuals outside of the LGBTQ community were also more likely to be described by participants as having ended or only going so far in terms of reaching a mutual understanding.

> The majority of my straight friends from undergrad and high school outright left when I announced that I was transitioning. It started off with a "we'll support you," "you're still you," and gradually devolved. People outright walked away over time and basically stopped communicating with me. (Female)

> I had a friend (cis, straight, "ally") who was consistently very binarist about me, trans men, and trans women. Whenever it was brought up to her, she would argue it down to exhaustion and never take responsibility for the cissexist shit she was saying. She wanted to be able to be gender essentialist without being called on it. It was frustrating and maddening. (Nonbinary)

Past research on transgender friendships has described the benefits of friendships with individuals outside the LGBTQ community as providing an avenue for feeling "normal" and providing a sense of validation that is more powerful when coming from someone with a normative identity (Galupo, Bauerband et al., 2014). Friendships with individuals outside the LGBTQ community are also viewed by some trans* individuals as a sign of integration and acceptance from larger culture. Microaggressions, then, from cisgender heterosexual friends, compromised this sense of normalcy and acceptance from larger society. Microaggressions were often discussed as evidence of an insurmountable gap between trans* existence and the larger system of gender that cisgender heterosexual friends were seen as unable or unwilling to bridge. With cisgender heterosexual friends, participants were most likely to have given up pointing out microaggressions opting instead for self-preservation. Regarding how she reacted to a microaggression, one participant noted, "I don't react anymore." Another explained, "I don't feel as though I would be able to convince anyone . . . so I choose avoidance instead. It makes me feel guilty and bad about myself, because all the microaggressions make me angry, but I remain passive." One participant summed up the general sentiment by saying, "I just feel like my feelings are a bother to most cis people."

Discussion

The present research makes a significant contribution to the literature by providing a more nuanced understanding of transgender microaggressions through considering their occurrence within the context of friendship. Because of the relative lack of social, familial, and societal support for trans* individuals, friendships take on increased significance. Friends often provide needed counseling and information unavailable in the traditional health care system, can serve as role models, and step in as chosen families (Galupo, Bauerband et al., 2014; Hines, 2007; Zitz et al., 2014). Thus, understanding microaggressions in the friendships of trans* individuals provides insight into the challenges of negotiating gender identity within even the most supportive of relationships.

Implications for Psychology

The present findings established that the frequency of transgender microaggressions varies based on the sexual orientation and gender identity of the friend. Transgender microaggressions occur most often from cisgender heterosexual friends and least often from other trans* individuals. Thus, trans* microaggressions become less frequent when the friend shares a similar identity. However, trans* participants rated microaggressions as more upsetting when they occur within the friendship context and when they come from friends of similar identities.

Although friendship loss has been described as one outcome related to disclosure of trans* identity (Galupo, Krum et al., 2014), in most cases our participants described microaggressions as occurring within existing friendships. When analyzing written descriptions of transgender microaggressions, three different friendship types emerged as salient, each with distinctive characteristics and roles (trans* friends, friends within the larger LGBTQ community, and friends outside the LGBTQ community). Consistent with past research on the benefits of trans* friendships (Galupo,

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Bauerband et al., 2014), microaggressions in these friendships disrupt the unique sources of support provided by each friendship type. Microaggressions, when they occur in friendships with other trans* individuals, can compromise the unique mentoring/role modeling relationship that often connects individuals to trans*-specific information and resources. Microaggressions occurring in friendships within the larger LGBTQ community may disrupt the unique sense of family and community traditionally provided by these friendships. In addition, microaggressions occurring in friendships outside the LGBTQ community, may disrupt the sense of connection to, and validation from, larger society that these friendships often represent to trans* individuals.

Nadal and colleagues (2014) describe a range of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions in response to transgender microaggressions and further suggest clinical implications for their findings. The present research suggests that the content and expression of microaggressions differ based on the source of the microaggression (trans* friends, friendships within the larger LGBTQ community, friendships outside the LGBTQ community). Future research is needed to consider how emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions to transgender microaggressions may differ across friendship type. This information may be particularly helpful to clinicians in helping transgender individuals address strategies for coping with microaggressions and for building stronger friendships.

Limitations of Present Study and Directions for Future Research

One limitation of the present research is that our participants represent a convenience sample collected online. Online recruitment and sampling is particularly useful for LGBTQ research where participants may have heightened concern about privacy and where participants may not otherwise have access for participation (Riggle, Rostosky, & Reedy, 2005). Samples recruited and collected online, however, have been shown to disproportionately represent educated, middle class, White individuals (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2008), and the present sample is no exception. Thus, interpretation of these data should be noted within the sample demographics. The majority of our participants (77.8%) identified as White, which could have led to more positive experiences being reported, as transgender individuals of color are at a greater risk for discrimination and violence (Grant et al., 2011; Xavier, Bobbin, Singer, & Budd, 2005) and are simultaneously negotiating both transphobia and racism (Lennon & Mistler, 2010; Patton & Reicherzer, 2010).

In addition, we recruited participants who identify as transgender, transsexual, gender variant, or having a transgender history, which we used as broad terms intended to encompass many different gender identities. However, this terminology may have resonated with some individuals more than others. Potential participants may have been excluded if they did not see themselves reflected in the terminology we used. In particular, not all trans* individuals consider their transgender experience as an identity and instead see their trans experience as more of a history or status (Zimman, 2009). Because our recruitment strategy relied heavily on recruiting through transgender community resources, those participants may be underrepresented within our sample. It is likely that those individuals may experience trans* microaggressions differently than the majority of participants in our study.

Despite the limitations of recruitment, we received a geographically diverse sample with a strong representation across gender identities. The present research extends the current transgender microaggression research by including individuals who identify as gender variant/nonbinary as well as individuals who identify as agender. This proved to be important for better representing a range of transgender identities and experiences. In addition, the microaggressions described as coming from other trans* friends revealed the ways that some microaggressions centered different experiences in transgender experience across binary/nonbinary lines. Although the present findings highlight the ways that the sexual orientation and gender identity of the friend are important in shaping the context in which transgender microaggressions are experienced, we did not directly investigate how the experience of microaggressions may differ based on the participants' trans* identity. This would be an important direction for future research.

Conclusion

The present research provides a more nuanced understanding of transgender microaggressions by considering their occurrence and expression within the context of friendship. The present findings established that the frequency of transgender microaggressions varies based on the sexual orientation and gender identity of the friend. Transgender microaggressions occur most often from cisgender heterosexual friends and least often from other trans* individuals. However, when they do occur within LGBTQ friendships, microaggressions are more upsetting and more disruptive to the existing social support system. Understanding microaggressions in the friendships of trans* individuals provides insight into the challenges of negotiating gender identity within even the most supportive of relationships.

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