Published in final edited form as:

Cult Health Sex. 2017 January ; 19(1): 107–120. doi:10.1080/13691058.2016.1208273.

Contextualising family microaggressions and strategies of resilience among young gay and bisexual men of Latino heritage

Michael J. Li^{a,*}, James P. Thing^a, Frank H. Galvan^b, Karina D. Gonzalez^a, and Ricky N. Bluthenthal^a

^aDepartment of Preventive Medicine, Institute for Prevention Research, Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, USA

^bBienestar Human Services, Los Angeles, California, USA

Abstract

Young Latino gay and bisexual men experience discrimination due to heterosexism and racism from within and beyond their communities. Although most research has emphasised overt forms of discrimination, a growing body of research is examining the effects of microaggression, or indirect forms of discrimination, on racial and sexual minorities. The purpose of this study was to explore the contexts of various types of microaggression, as well as describe resilience strategies used by young adult Latino gay and bisexual men living in Los Angeles, California. A sample of 21 young Latino gay and bisexual men aged 18 to 29 years were recruited to complete qualitative, in-depth semi-structured interviews following a phenomenological approach. Three contextual themes relevant to microaggression emerged: (a) microassaults, (b) microinsults, and (c) microinvalidations. Three themes emerged around the resilience strategies to overcome these experiences: (a) self-discovery, (b) adaptive socialisation, and (c) self-advocacy. Family and community-based efforts to reinforce and expand resilience repertoires are needed to help young Latino gay and bisexual men.

Keywords

Microaggression; sexual prejudice; resilience; Latino; gay; bisexual; coming out; USA

Background

Among Latino gay and bisexual men, experiences of homophobic discrimination are associated with a multitude of health problems including suicidality, depression, drug use, and sexual risk behaviours, and often the sources of discrimination came from within their own ethnic communities or families (Mizuno et al. 2012, Diaz et al. 2001, Wohl et al. 2013). However, much research on minority stress and health outcomes in sexual minorities has solely focused on overt experiences of discrimination (Sue 2010). This approach likely underestimates the burden of discrimination for sexual minorities, as manifestations of discrimination have been shifting to more covert forms (Sue 2010).

*Corresponding author. Michael J. Li. limichae@usc.edu.

For this reason, a growing body of research is exploring how indirect forms of discrimination in the form of sexual orientation microaggressions, affect psychological and social adjustment in sexual minorities (Sarno and Wright 2013, Wright and Wegner 2012, Nadal et al. 2014, Platt and Lenzen 2013, Shelton and Delgado-Romero 2013, Nadal, Issa, et al. 2011, Nadal, Wong, et al. 2011). Microaggressions include three subtypes: (1) microassaults are derogations in the form of language or ostracising behaviour, sometimes construed as unintentional; (2) microinsults are communications that indirectly demean; and (3) microinvalidations are communications that unintentionally exclude or negate one's identity or experiences (Sue et al. 2007). Sexual orientation microaggressions can take various forms, including assumptions of sexual pathology or abnormality in sexual minorities, disapproval of sexual minority experiences, bias in favor of heterosexuality, and negative terminology against sexual minorities (Nadal, Issa, et al. 2011). A microaggression can be enacted either consciously or unconsciously by others (Nadal, Issa, et al. 2011), but prejudiced intentions are often obscured by the nature of the act.

Minority identity (e.g., culture, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) and social context (e.g., family cultural practices, socioeconomic status, community, etc.) can shape how a person experiences microaggressions from others (Balsam et al. 2011, Becker et al. 2014, Thing 2010). Latino gay and bisexual men report higher rates of negative reactions from their families compared to white gay and bisexual men and lesbian and bisexual women (Ryan et al. 2009). According to the Human Rights Campaign and the League of United Latin American Citizen, 87% of Latino sexual minorities are exposed to negative messages about their sexual identities; and although 57% indicate that their families were accepting of their sexual identities, 53% say that family was also a source of homophobic messages (Kane et al. 2013). Oftentimes, both acceptance and experiences of prejudice occur side-by-side for Latino gay and bisexual men (Balsam et al. 2011, Guarnero 2007).

According to theories of minority stress, resilience strategies can ameliorate the negative impact of discrimination among vulnerable populations (Meyer 2003). The process of resilience against sexual prejudice in the form microaggressions has been generally described by Nadal, Wong, et al. (2011) as that of embracing one's identity in the face of discrimination. In their example, a participant described how coming out was a part of self-realisation and self-acceptance after years of enduring prejudice from others (Nadal, Wong, et al. 2011). The specific strategies by which one achieves a stronger sense of sexual identity may depend on numerous factors such as available social support and community resources, the extent of harm from the microaggression, interpersonal dynamics with the microaggressor, as well as individual characteristics. Among sexual minorities from Spanish speaking countries, having a flexible, positive sense of identity has been found to be protective against the harmful effects of minority stress (Almarino et al. 2013), which may implications for Latino gay and bisexual men in the USA. More research is needed to identify resilience strategies among US sexual minorities that can be cultivated by future interventions.

The process of resilience may unfold in different ways among young Latino gay and bisexual men compared to their non-Latino peers. One major reason for this is that among many young Latino gay and bisexual men limited self-sufficiency and strong filial piety

inhibit the type of strategies these men can use when negotiating rapport with their families (Ocampo 2013, del Pino et al. 2014, Severson, Muñoz-Laboy, and Kaufman 2013). So strategies that entail deferring disclosure of one's sexual orientation, suppressing expression of sexuality, or conforming to family expectations upon coming out maybe preferred over more confrontational approaches (Sandfort, Melendez, and Diaz 2007, Severson, Muñoz-Laboy, and Kaufman 2013, Guarnero 2007, Ocampo 2013, del Pino et al. 2014). The decision to negotiate coming out is often changeable in young adults, as young adulthood is often characterised by change and newly acquired autonomy (del Pino et al. 2014, Ocampo 2013, Severson, Muñoz-Laboy, and Kaufman 2013).

The objective of this study was to use qualitative inquiry to describe and contextualise microaggressions and explore strategies of resilience among young adult Latino heritage gay and bisexual men living in Los Angeles, California. Our study was informed by a minority stress model developed for sexual minorities (Meyer 2003) with a specific focus on two of its conceptual domains: (1) experience of sexual prejudice as different types of microaggressions, and (2) psychosocial and behavioural strategies of resilience-based coping. We employed a phenomenological approach with a life course perspective to investigate these experiences and strategies, as this is recommended for describing in detail the structures of phenomena (e.g., interpersonal relationships, social context, reactions to events, history, etc.) that are applicable to the development of health interventions (Kumar 2012). Understanding the contexts of microaggressions and adaptive responses to these acts can inform intervention strategies to overcome stigmatising experiences among young gay/bisexual men and promote help-seeking, self-care, and self-esteem.

Methods

Participants

The study sample consisted of 21 Latino heritage gay and bisexual men from Los Angeles, California. We restricted the sample to those 18 to 29 years of age and of Mexican or mixed-Mexican descent in order to reduce heterogeneity pertaining to life stage and cultural context. We recruited participants from community-based organisations and college campuses across Los Angeles County, and by snowball or chain referral sampling. The average age of the participants was 23 years. Participants were born in the USA (n = 16) or Mexico (n = 5). Most participants were employed either part-time or full-time (n = 14), while some were unemployed (n = 7). One participant had a bachelor's degree, while the remaining had some college or professional school experience (n = 15) or a high school degree (or general education development) (n = 5). Sexual orientations reported by participants were gay (n = 18), bisexual, (n = 2), and queer (n = 1). All but one participant reported having disclosed their sexual orientations to at least one family member.

Procedures

After confirming eligibility for the study, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face in a private room at community-based organisations and universities between January and April 2014. Before commencing the interviews, the study procedures were explained and informed consent was obtained. All interviews were audio-recorded and

subsequently transcribed verbatim by a third-party professional transcription service. Participants received a \$35 gift card upon completion of the interview.

Interview Domains

At the start of each interview, participants answered closed-ended questions regarding age, place of birth, employment status, level of education, sexual orientation, and whether they had disclosed their sexual orientation to at least one family member. We developed a semi-structured interview guide that followed a life course perspective to capture lived experiences of sexual prejudice as microaggressions, as well as strategies of resilience across difference life stages of the participants (Giele and Elder 1998). Although the results of this study are not reported in a life history format, using the life course approach provided clearer understanding of the order of events and how each informed subsequent experiences (Lefler 2012)—particularly the times when participants experienced microaggressions, when they employed resilience strategies, and what prior or current experiences informed those events.

We elicited participant recounts of microaggressions using questions such as “What kinds of things did your family say about gay/bisexual people when you were growing up?” “What things did they do that made you think they disliked gay/bisexual people?” and “Tell me about a time someone did something that seemed prejudiced against gay/bisexual people, but wasn't directed at you.” To explore strategies of resilience against microaggressions, we asked participants questions such as “How did you respond to that?” “What made you decide to do deal with things that way?” “What do you think you did that helped them change their perspective?” and “What helped you stay self-assured during this time?”

Using ATLAS.ti Version 7 (Scientific Software Development 2014), we performed a directed content analysis on the transcriptions. We used line by line coding for content analysis using an iterative process for the assignment of more specific codes. Sexual prejudice was used as a general code for all forms of non-heterosexual or non-gender-conforming discrimination (Dermer, Smith, and Barto 2010, Herek 2004), and this was later co-coded as either microaggressions or overt discrimination, and microaggressions were later coded by subtype (i.e., microinvalidation). We used directed content analysis identify quotes reflecting resilience more broadly, but parsing out the specific strategies of resilience involved a more inductive approach where we would describe each resilience strategy more distinctively and arrive at consensus for the classifications.

The minority stress model for sexual minorities (Meyer 2003) guided our analysis toward exploration of two of its conceptual domains: (1) experience of sexual prejudice as different forms of microaggressions and (2) resilience strategies. During analysis, researchers identified and classified microaggressions (e.g., microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations) based on existing research on this topic (Nadal, Issa, et al. 2011, Sue 2010) and ascertained the various contexts of these experiences, such as whether these microaggressions were perpetrated by otherwise accepting family members or those who are unaware of the participant's sexual orientation. We also developed descriptions and classifications for the different strategies of resilience (Nadal, Wong, et al. 2011) to

overcome these microaggressions. Each participant was labeled with a pseudonym for the reporting of findings.

We cross-checked coding patterns within each transcript to ensure consistency between each other. Categories were derived from the analysis and assigned corresponding quotes that would best illustrate those categories. We discussed any discrepancies in analysis until consensus was achieved on which theme and quote assignment was most appropriate. We introduced discussed newly emerged themes and discussed the appropriate taxonomy to describe those themes. All research procedures are approved by the Institutional Review Board of the authors' home institutions.

Results

Contextualizing various microaggressions

The sample of young Latino heritage gay and bisexual men reported varied experiences and strategies with disclosing their sexual orientation to others and adapting to others' reactions. From these experiences, three types of sexual prejudice-based microaggressions emerged: (a) microassaults, (b) microinsults, and (c) microinvalidations. Under each of these themes, we detail the different underlying contexts in which these microaggressions manifested.

Microassault—The first theme, microassault, refers to a purposeful act, gesture, or communication of sexual prejudice that might not be directed at the person affected. Therefore, the microassault can be enacted by either someone who is aware or someone who is unaware of the participant's sexual orientation. Miguel (aged 27) explained that he had been raised in an overtly prejudiced household. He described how his parents who regularly spoke spitefully and belligerently about gay people, and how this has affected his decision to defer coming out:

I grew up with my parents talking about homosexuality and saying that, 'You know, if I ever have a gay son I'm going to hang him from the balls on the fence outside until he turns straight.' So that's what kept me away from them, like, you know, I'd rather not tell my brothers, you know, I'm scared already enough of, to be scared of my parents, I don't want them to hate me, I don't want them to like do stuff like that to me, you know.

The statement made by Miguel's parents was threatening in nature, but their hypothetical language obscures whether it was directed at the participant. Because Miguel was hesitant to disclose his sexual orientation to his parents, it is unclear whether or not they believed he was gay. Therefore, this manifestation of sexual prejudice qualifies as a microassault in the context of negotiating coming out.

The following participant, Marco (aged 23), described how his older brother made a malicious statement against him, but qualified it by claiming to be joking:

He says he feels like he doesn't know me no more, he doesn't want to know me no more, he just wishes that I wasn't born [...] But in the end he's just saying, "Oh, I'm

just joking with you, I'm just joking with you,” but I know for a fact he wishes I wasn't born because I'm gay.

In his interview, Marco reported that his brother did not accept him or his sexual identity when he came out. Therefore, Marco experienced his brother's remark as a microassault stemming from rejection of his sexual identity.

Microinsult—Participants also described experiences of microinsults where people in their lives used language or terms that were not directed at them but were still demeaning toward their sexual identities. Hugo (aged 21) believed that his father, who is separated from his mother, suspected he was gay after learning about a conversation between his aunt and his father. Since then, Hugo describes how his father began to use sexually prejudiced profanities when he would visit him in Northern California.

I was feeling awkward for some instances because he kept using the word ‘faggot’ and ‘*maricón*’ and in my head I'm just like, “I want to leave.” [Justin Bieber] came on TV and he's like, “Oh, that faggot,” but he said it in Spanish, he's like, “*maricón*.”

Although Hugo's father never directly called him a faggot or a *maricón*, Hugo still experienced these diatribes as insulting because he personally identified as gay. Furthermore, Hugo believes his father began using these derogatory terms around the time—he suspects—his father may have learned about his sexual identity.

Diego (aged 25) described how he was out to everyone in his family except for his mother because he was uncomfortable with how she generally spoke of gay people. Diego recalls experiencing microinsults from his mother when she would use derogatory language directed at people in the media:

I wouldn't even discuss really my gay friends or my gay lifestyle because my mum would just disrupt into a spout of, “Oh, those fucking faggots,” or, “those queers.” [...] Because she'll see something on television [or] a news article, and she just brings up, “queers,” “fags.” [...] It could just be a nonchalant thing that comes up and she just releases all this vitriol and hatred.

Similarly to Hugo, Diego experienced his mother's comments as distressing despite her directing her words at other people in the media. Furthermore, this prevented Diego from coming out to his mother, as he stated, “That's like a running joke in our family because she's honestly the last person who knows.”

Microinvalidation—The third theme, microinvalidations, emerged from participants' recollections of others discounting their experiential realities of being gay/bisexual without overt intention to harm.

The following participant, Gabriel (aged 22), experienced a similar microinvalidation but within a different context. Gabriel was out to his father and had a general impression that his father supported him upon coming out. As a result, Gabriel felt betrayed when his father encouraged him to have sex with his female friends and proceeded to suggest that his sexual orientation was transitory and changeable.

When I told [my father] I was gay, [...] he'd kind of like brushed it off. Then he never really mentioned anything. You know, I had neighborhood girlfriends and every time I was with them he's like, "Oh, are you going to go hookup with her, like are you going to go have sex with her?" And I was like, "No, dad, like, you know, they're just my friends," and he would be like, "Oh, why aren't you going to do that, like go hookup with them," you know. It's like he wanted so badly for me to be straight. [...] Two different times, he got drunk, then he told my friend, "Can you make my son straight?" So that, you know, that was very hurtful for me, you know, to hear that from your own father who I thought was supporting me.

His father's words undermined the authenticity of Gabriel's identity and experience as a young gay man, but may not have been intended to harm Gabriel. Still, this was enacted by someone who was both aware of Gabriel's identity and otherwise accepted him as his son.

Adrian (aged 24) was receiving therapy to address stress and conflict in his family. After he disclosed his sexual identity to his mother, she dismissed his sexual identity as part of his mental illness and repeatedly suggested that it was changeable. Adrian reacted aversely to hearing these words:

[My mother] was like, "Oh, you don't know what you're talking about, you know, it's just a phase or it's just part of the mental illness that you're going through." [...] So, I mean, she questioned me a lot, or sometimes she would just be like, you know, "Are you sure, you know, that's what you want?" I mean, she would tell me the strangest things, [...] "The vagina feels good, too, you know, you should go after that," or something like that [...] But, you know, she knew that I [...] didn't want to listen to any of that, so she would keep it short, and she wouldn't bring it up for like a while.

Strategies of resilience

Three themes emerged regarding strategies of resilience used to endure or overcome the different types of microaggression described above: (a) self-discovery, (b) adaptive socialisation, and (c) self-advocacy.

Self-discovery—The participants shared how they had achieved self-acceptance and came to their own understanding of what it meant to be a Latino gay or bisexual man. The strategy of self-discovery described by the participants included seeking information and education, engaging in community mobilisation, and confiding in peers and community leaders. Marco (aged 23)—whose experiences of microassaults were previously described—shared how joining an HIV services community-based organisation geared toward the Latino community had helped him become more accepting of himself. A particular leader in the group had inspired him to grow into a self-assured person. He stated:

It's helped me because I'm more comfortable with myself. I feel like I can be myself no matter what, I can't let nobody bring me down. I've seen, I see Oscar [a peer mentor] here, I see him as a role model. He's always so positive. I see him as a leader, and that's what I admire the most, like I want to have that confidence, that

leadership in me. So that's why I come and try to put myself out there, so I can be more comfortable in my own skin.

Marco's experience is an example of self-discovery, as he leveraged social support and community resources to succeed in spite of the social burdens associated with being a gay male.

Omar, a 19 year-old bisexual man, sought social support and affirmation of his sexual orientation at a social justice retreat that he attended during high school:

That was really the first time that I stood up in front of a crowd and I said it openly, that I am a bisexual man. And so, I don't know, once that happened I started getting all this support from people [...] I told these people all these experiences I had went through and a lot of it revolved around [my father] and I hated him so much for it.

It was not until a year later that Omar came out to his father, but the retreat had kindled a sense of understanding and empowerment that help him cope with his father's prejudiced reaction:

But now I realise [...] he probably needs help. [...] He's probably dealing with something that I don't, that I probably don't even understand [...] You know, and then the misogyny, the homophobia, that's just, that has to stem from something.

For Omar, self-discovery was about exploring his identity as a bisexual man and finding the strength to forgive his father's prejudices and mistreatment.

Adaptive socialisation—Several participants who experienced microaggressions found ways to avoid internalising these experiences, a strategy best described as adaptive socialisation. This term refers to the process of orienting oneself to thrive socially by being aware of but not consumed by hostile influences (Stevenson 1998). In the following interview excerpt, Javier (aged 25) discussed how he was previously burdened by shame from his church for being gay:

I think after many years, it did cause a lot of like harm [...] thinking that, “Oh, I'm just, I'm not what God wants me to be.” But now I'm over it, [laughter] like I don't have any need to go to church anymore, I'm just like “It's okay, I don't have to be there, I don't have to go to church.” [...] Sometimes I still pray [...] and then I think about like the open and affirming churches and I just don't want to go. [...] So, I do believe that there's a Higher Power, maybe God or whatever, so I do pray, and I don't say “God.” I say “Creator,” you know, and I just like want to surround myself with positive energy.

Although that church's microinsults against Javier—claiming that homosexuality was a sin and needed to be changed—initially affected him, he eventually reevaluated his reliance on that church for validation. He intentionally strived to free himself of its shaming and pursued his own avenue of faith. Adaptive socialisation encapsulates two aspects of Javier's process of resilience: his recognition of his church's sexual prejudice and his quashing of his church's negative influence him.

Marco described how his two oldest brothers expressed a mix of acceptance, discomfort, and religious stigma when he came out to them. However, above all, he valued their affirmed love for him and saw it as an important step toward accepting him fully:

My 30-year-old brother, he just told me that, “It’s okay, I still love you, we’re still family, just don’t bring any of your boyfriends near the house.” So I’m like, “Okay, that’s fine, accepting me is the first step.” And my last brother told me the same thing, he loves me no matter what, who I am, but he said that in God’s eyes it’s wrong, but he still loves me.

Marco exhibited adaptive socialisation by being aware of his brothers’ microinsults—claiming that being gay was wrong—but focusing more on their acceptance of him as their brother.

Another participant, Isaac, described how he selectively conformed to family expectations to avoid family backlash and conflict in the household. He explained that he accepted not being able to bring significant others to his own home:

If [my father] doesn’t want guys over, that’s fine. I mean, I can have friends [...], but other than that, like he wasn’t just comfortable with it, so it’s his house, and I’m going to respect him and his house. No, it didn’t bother me, I would just go somewhere else.

However, Isaac continued to express himself in other ways that may be minor but still authentic to his sexual identity:

I sit any way I want, I do all the actions that I want. I mean, like my mom will like give me like a look like, “Stop that,” because, because like one time I was laughing and then it was like super hot so then I started like fanning myself, laughing, and then she looked at me and she’s like, “Stop that.” I was like, “Why? I’m hot,” and she’s like, “Guys don’t do that.” I was like, “What, am I just supposed to sit here and burn while you get to fan yourself?”

In both situations, Isaac was subjected to microassaults in the form of restrictions on his behaviour. However, Isaac only selectively adhered to these restrictions while defying others.

Self-advocacy—Self-advocacy refers to empowering behaviours used to represent oneself and values, such as by challenging harmful norms or educating others. Participants described seizing opportunities to constructively confront persons who were subjecting them to heterosexual microaggressions. In the following quote, Gabriel (previously mentioned) shared how he attempted to appeal to his father’s feelings by expressing how he was hurt by this microinvalidation:

I did tell him like, you know, “You did, you hurt my feelings really bad and it was harsh to really hear that from you.” And he, and then he apologised but it wasn’t really like sincere, you know, it was like it’s not the same, you know. So now I think he’s trying to, to come closer. He doesn’t mention anything about like girls. We

don't really talk about partners that I've had. No, I'm not that close with him but we do talk every now and then.

Although Gabriel's father initially did not show remorse for his actions, Gabriel believed that his father was gradually trying to make amends, likely because of their exchange. This quote illustrates Gabriel's process of self-advocacy, as he affirms the validity of his sexual identity by constructively challenging his father's microaggressive behaviour.

In the following example, Xavier (aged 23) describes responding to a subtle microinsult by his father, who commented on how it seemed abnormal for the gay men on television to behave effeminately. Xavier used this as an opportunity to challenge his father's way of thinking and responded by coming out to him:

I realised I left it on the *Logo* TV channel and, you know, they were talking about gays and my dad just looked and he's like, "Are those men?" I was like, "Yeah, dad, those are guys," He was just like, "Oh, okay," just like that's weird. And I [asked] him, "Is that okay?" He's like, "Yeah, that's okay kind of." I'm like, "Why kind of?" He's like, "Well, you know, men are supposed to be men, they're macho, they're not supposed to be dressing up as women." [...] I was like, "What if there's men that are macho and gay?" He's all, "I can't see that happen." So that's when I said, "Well, I'm gay, dad," [...] "I'm gay. I like men." He was just like, he seemed a little shocked, he was quiet at first [...] But then he gives me a hug and said, "It's okay," and he just left.

Xavier presented an example of self-advocacy through his empowered decision to come out. For him, this process was a means to openly represent himself while challenging his father's preconceptions of gay men.

Although Hugo has not explicitly told his father that he is gay, he contested a sexually prejudiced microinsult by his father, who criticised his choice of clothing while using an anti-gay slur in the following way.

And [my father's] like, "You shouldn't wear that because people are going to think you're a faggot." And I told him, "You know what? I really don't care because it's my life and I'm living for myself, not for anyone else," and he just laughed and he didn't bring it up no more. So I have a feeling that he knows but he's in denial.

Hugo's father did not deliver the anti-gay slur in a direct manner—rather, he inferred that others would view Hugo negatively. Hugo adopted a similar approach to his retort, not directly condemning his father and not explicitly articulating his sexual identity, but rather, conveying that the opinions of others was not as important as his right to live authentically.

Discussion

The present study sheds light on the how exposure to microaggressions can be commonplace for many young Latino gay/bisexual men, as these can occur even in the absence of overt rejection or prejudice. All three forms of microaggressions described in previous research—microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations—appeared throughout interview transcripts (Sue 2010, Sue et al. 2007). Participants expressed how microaggressions

strained their relationships with others and were a major source of distress in their daily lives. Although overt discrimination such as physical or verbal victimisation has been the most commonly acknowledged form of discrimination in research and considered a major cause of psychosocial problems (Ryan et al. 2009, Mizuno et al. 2012, Diaz et al. 2001, Russell et al. 2011), the repeated and systemic nature of microaggressions creates a burden which Nadal, Issa, et al. (2011) have described as a “death by a thousand cuts” for sexual minorities.

Similarly to findings from previous research (Nadal, Issa, et al. 2011, Nadal, Wong, et al. 2011, Shelton and Delgado-Romero 2013, Ryan et al. 2009), the family appeared to be the primary source of microaggressions. The interviewers inquired and probed about experiences of prejudices in all aspects of the participants lives, though most instances of microaggressions occurred at home. Even when participants perceived their family members to be otherwise accepting, microaggressions were still difficult to endure because these acts often felt like betrayals to the participants. Among participants who were not out to their families or to certain family members, a history of microaggression presented challenges for them as it often prevented them from expressing their sexual identities, induced fear and hesitation to come out, and created rifts in their relationships. Not surprisingly, both microaggressions and overt discrimination were commonplace behaviours among persons who rejected the sexual identities of participants.

Research by Nadal, Wong, et al. (2011) has identified resilience as one of several coping-based strategy from their focus groups of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. The present study expanded on their work by identifying specific strategies of resilience undertaken by young gay and bisexual Latino men in response to experiences of microaggressions.

Many participants who employed self-discovery during or following experiences of microaggressions became self-assured and more socially aware in spite of these experiences. In some cases, self-discovery strategies imbued participants with resilience against future microaggression or helped them eventually arrive at an understanding of these acts. Self-discovery can take the form of identity strengthening and community involvement, both of which may attenuate the negative effects of sexual and racial stigma on psychosocial health problems, sexual risk behaviours, and substance abuse among gay and bisexual men and transgender persons of Latin American descent (Ramirez-Valles et al. 2010, Almarino et al. 2013). For those who seek anonymity, informational support and limited emotional support are available via internet and mobile networks (Baams et al. 2011). Still, in-person networks appear to provide higher quality interaction and greater benefits for sexual minority youth who experience stigma (Ybarra et al. 2014).

Adaptive socialisation may provide a practical and safe coping option for persons—regardless of their coming out status—to reframe their experiences of sexual prejudice in ways that ameliorate distress. Interestingly, participants who employed adaptive socialisation were largely open to others about their sexual identities. For these participants, understanding others' feelings toward their sexual identities—who accepted them, who did not, who seemed conflicted—informed how they oriented themselves both emotionally and

socially to thrive as young gay and bisexual men. This was strategy was employed against all microaggression subtypes (microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations).

Lastly, self-advocacy, may be difficult for those who are still negotiating coming out or fear repercussions for engaging in critical dialogue with microaggressors. Participants appeared to use discretion when engaging in this process, particularly with the expectation that it would bring positive change (i.e., changing the perceptions of a family member). Both participants who had and had not previously disclosed their sexual identities to microaggression enactors employed self-advocacy against all microaggression subtypes. Interestingly, acts of self-advocacy were often declarations or implied declarations of coming out. By confronting an anti-gay microinsult, the participants were taking offense on behalf of the community with which they identified.

Community programmes for young Latino heritage gay and bisexual men should support clients in expanding their repertoire of resilience-based strategies against microaggressions and overt discrimination. Best practices may require consideration of intersectional identities and needs, the context of heterosexism and racism experienced by the individual, as well as the balance between feasibility and impact of the different resilience-based strategies. As described in our findings, appropriateness of strategies for young Latino gay and bisexual men often depend on the nature of the microaggression and their social context pertaining to their “outness” and others' acceptance of their sexual identities. For example, engaging in self-advocacy against a microassault may be unfeasible if the person lives in the household of the enactor, is not open about their sexual identity, and fears rejection and hardship from self-advocacy. Self-discovery and adaptive socialisation may be safe strategies for those in more tenuous social situations.

Given that microaggressions have only recently been acknowledged as a psychosocial health concern, most interventions or intervention frameworks for sexual minorities tend to broadly address minority stress (Alessi 2014) or address microaggressions specifically in psychotherapy settings (Smith, Shin, and Officer 2012). A myriad of therapeutic approaches may have promise for instilling resilience in young Latino gay and bisexual men, including support groups, cognitive behavioural therapy and other forms of counseling (Nadal, Wong, et al. 2011, Nadal et al. 2014, Wong et al. 2014), and mindfulness-based practice for coping with adversity (Chiesa, Anselmi, and Serretti 2014, Thompson, Arnkoff, and Glass 2011, Garland, Gaylord, and Park 2009). Finally, the tendencies for participants to report family members as enactors of sexual prejudice and outside resources for as sources of affirmation together underscore a need for new interventions to assist parent-child dyads to navigate these issues and improve parent-child understanding and compassion.

Limitations

This data is not suited to accurately convey the prevalence of prejudice against young Latino gay and bisexual men. Rather, the study describes the phenomenological aspects of sexual prejudice-based microaggressions, their social contexts and the strategies of resilience involved in coping with these experiences. The interviews are limited in information regarding microaggressions enacted by non-family as well as other forms of prejudice such as those racially or culturally motivated. Participants rarely shared such events, though it is

difficult to ascertain whether these events were simply uncommon in our sample or if the interview questions would have required added emphasis in these areas.

The sample has limited representation of bisexual or other non-gay identified persons, which may obscure differences in experiences from their gay-identified peers. Current research on bisexual health indicates that bisexuals experience discrimination from both heterosexual and homosexual persons and may be disparately prone to some health problems such as substance abuse and depression, even compared to homosexual persons (Ebin 2012). Behaviourally bisexual men also tend to be dynamic or non-conforming in the labels they adopt (Baldwin et al. 2015), which may impact how they experience minority stress and strategically adapt to different social contexts. Additionally, the sample consisted solely of Mexican and mixed-Mexican descent living in Los Angeles, and so findings may not be representative of other Latino communities. Furthermore, the interviews may have only captured a limited scope of resilience strategies adopted by our study population.

Conclusion

Our study presents several contexts in which sexual prejudice is expressed through different forms of microaggression, as well as a preliminary repertoire of resilience-based strategies employed by young Latino heritage gay and bisexual men to cope with those experiences. Future research should focus on community and family-based interventions that build resilience, improve coping, and identify new strategies for reducing microaggressions and other forms of discrimination directed at young gay and bisexual Latino men.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported by NIH training grant 5T32CA949226-28 and the Community Foundation of Silicon Valley, CA.

References

- Alessi, Edward J. A framework for incorporating Minority Stress Theory into treatment with sexual minority clients. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*. 2014; 18(1):47–66.
- Maria, Almario, Riggle, Ellen DB., Rostosky, Sharon S. Maria Cristina Alcalde. Positive Themes in LGBT Self-Identities in Spanish-Speaking Countries. *International Perspectives in Psychology: Research, Practice, Consultation*. 2013; 2(1):1–13.
- Baams L, Jonas KJ, Utz S, Bos HMW, van der Vuurst L. Internet use and online social support among same sex attracted individuals of different ages. *Computers in Human Behavior*. 2011; 27(5):1820–1827.
- Baldwin, Aleta, Dodge, Brian, Schick, Vanessa, Hubach, Randolph D., Bowling, Jessamyn, Malebranche, David, Goncalves, Gabriel, Schnarrs, Phillip W., Reece, Michael, Fortenberry, J Dennis. Sexual Self-Identification Among Behaviorally Bisexual Men in the Midwestern United States. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. 2015; 44(7):2015–2026. [PubMed: 25344028]
- Balsam, Kimberly F., Molina, Yamile, Beadnell, Blair, Simoni, Jane, Walters, Karina. Measuring Multiple Minority Stress: The LGBT People of Color Microaggressions Scale. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*. 2011; 17(2):163–174. [PubMed: 21604840]
- Becker, Davida, Thing, James P., Baezconde-Garbanati, Lourdes, Schwartz, Seth J., Soto, Daniel W., Unger, Jennifer B. Cultural measures associated with risky sexual behaviors among Latino youth in Southern California: A longitudinal study. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*. 2014; 46(4):193–201. [PubMed: 24786352]

- Chiesa, Alberto, Anselmi, Roberta, Serretti, Alessandro. Psychological Mechanisms of Mindfulness-Based Interventions: What Do We Know? *Holistic Nursing Practice*. 2014; 28(2):124–148. [PubMed: 24503749]
- del Pino, Homero E., Moore, Mignon R., McCuller, William J., Zaldívar, Richard L., Moore, Alison A. Negotiating Emotional Support: Sober Gay Latinos and Their Families. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*. 2014; 26(2):222–243. [PubMed: 25057235]
- Dermer, Shannon B., Smith, Shannon D., Barto, Korenna K. Identifying and Correctly Labeling Sexual Prejudice, Discrimination, and Oppression. *Journal of Counseling & Development*. 2010; 88(3): 325–331.
- Diaz RM, Ayala G, Bein E, Henne J, Marin BV. The impact of homophobia, poverty, and racism on the mental health of gay and bisexual Latino men: findings from 3 US cities. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2001; 91(6):927–932. [PubMed: 11392936]
- Ebin, Julie. Why Bisexual Health? *Journal of Bisexuality*. 2012; 12(2):168–177.
- Garland, Eric, Gaylord, Susan, Park, Jongbae. The Role of Mindfulness in Positive Reappraisal. *EXPLORE: The Journal of Science and Healing*. 2009; 5(1):37–44.
- Giele, Janet Zollinger, Elder, Glen H. *Methods of life course research: qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE; 1998.
- Guarnero, Peter A. Family and Community Influences on the Social and Sexual Lives of Latino Gay Men. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*. 2007; 18(1):12–18. [PubMed: 17202524]
- Herek, Gregory M. Beyond “Homophobia”: Thinking About Sexual Prejudice and Stigma in the Twenty-First Century. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy: Journal of NSRC*. 2004; 1(2):6–24.
- Kane, R., Nicoll, AE., Kahn, E., Groves, S. *Supporting and caring for our Latino youth*. Washington, D.C: Human Rights Campaign Foundations and League of United Latin American Citizens; 2013.
- Kumar, Ashwin. Using phenomenological research methods in qualitative health research. *International Journal of Human Sciences*. 2012; 9(2):790–804.
- Lefler, P. *The Health of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people: building a foundation for better understanding*. Middletown: American Library Association CHOICE; 2012.
- Meyer, Ilan H. Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*. 2003; 129(5):674. [PubMed: 12956539]
- Mizuno, Yuko, Borkowf, Craig, Millett, Gregorio A, Bingham, Trista, Ayala, George, Stueve, Ann. Homophobia and Racism Experienced by Latino Men Who Have Sex with Men in the United States: Correlates of Exposure and Associations with HIV Risk Behaviors. *AIDS and Behavior*. 2012; 16(3):724–735. [PubMed: 21630014]
- Nadal, Kevin L., Griffin, Katie E., Wong, Yinglee, Hamit, Sahran, Rasmus, Morgan. The Impact of Racial Microaggressions on Mental Health: Counseling Implications for Clients of Color. *Journal of Counseling & Development*. 2014; 92(1):57–66.
- Nadal, Kevin L., Issa, Marie-Anne, Leon, Jayleen, Meterko, Vanessa, Wideman, Michelle, Yinglee, Wong. Sexual Orientation Microaggressions: ‘Death by a Thousand Cuts’ for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youth. *Journal of LGBT Youth*. 2011; 8(3):234–259.
- Nadal, Kevin L., Wong, Yinglee, Issa, Marie-Anne, Meterko, Vanessa, Leon, Jayleen, Wideman, Michelle. Sexual Orientation Microaggressions: Processes and Coping Mechanisms for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Individuals. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*. 2011; 5(1):21–46.
- Ocampo, Anthony C. The Gay Second Generation: Sexual Identity and Family Relations of Filipino and Latino Gay Men. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. 2013; 40(1):155–173.
- Platt, Lisa F., Lenzen, Alexandra L. Sexual Orientation Microaggressions and the Experience of Sexual Minorities. *Journal of Homosexuality*. 2013; 60(7):1011–1034. [PubMed: 23808348]
- Ramirez-Valles, Jesus, Kuhns, Lisa M., Campbell, Richard T., Diaz, Rafael M. Social Integration and Health: Community Involvement, Stigmatized Identities, and Sexual Risk in Latino Sexual Minorities. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. 2010; 51(1):30–47. [PubMed: 20420293]
- Russell ST, Ryan C, Toomey RB, Diaz RM, Sanchez J. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adolescent school victimization: Implications for young adult health and adjustment. *Journal of School Health*. 2011; 81(5):223–30. [PubMed: 21517860]

- Ryan, Caitlin, Huebner, David, Diaz, Rafael M., Sanchez, Jorge. Family Rejection as a Predictor of Negative Health Outcomes in White and Latino Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults. *Pediatrics*. 2009; 123(1):346–352. [PubMed: 19117902]
- Sandfort, Theo GM., Melendez, Rita M., Diaz, Rafael M. Gender Nonconformity, Homophobia, and Mental Distress in Latino Gay and Bisexual Men. *The Journal of Sex Research*. 2007; 44(2):181–189. [PubMed: 17599275]
- Sarno, Elissa, Wright, A Jordan. Homonegative Microaggressions and Identity in Bisexual Men and Women. *Journal of Bisexuality*. 2013; 13(1):63.
- Scientific Software Development. ATLAS.ti Qualitative Data Analysis 7. Berlin, Germany: Scientific Software Development; 2014.
- Severson, Nicolette, Muñoz-Laboy, Miguel, Kaufman, Rebecca. ‘At times, I feel like I’m sinning’: the paradoxical role of non-lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender-affirming religion in the lives of behaviourally-bisexual Latino men. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*. 2013; 16(2):136–148.
- Shelton, Kimber, Delgado-Romero, Edward A. Sexual orientation microaggressions: The experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer clients in psychotherapy. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*. 2013; 1(S):59–70.
- Smith, Lance C., Shin, Richard Q., Officer, Lindsay M. Moving Counseling Forward on LGB and Transgender Issues: Speaking Queerly on Discourses and Microaggressions. *The Counseling Psychologist*. 2012; 40(3):385–408.
- Stevenson, Howard. Managing Anger: Protective, Proactive, or Adaptive Racial Socialization Identity Profiles and African-American Manhood Development. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*. 1998; 16(1):35–61.
- Sue, DW. Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender, and sexual orientation. New York, NY: Wiley; 2010.
- Sue DW, Capodilupo CM, Torino GC, Bucceri JM, Holder AM, Nadal KL, Esquilin M. Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*. 2007; 62(4):271–86. [PubMed: 17516773]
- Thing, James. Gay, Mexican and immigrant: intersecting identities among gay men in Los Angeles. *Social Identities*. 2010; 16(6):809–831.
- Thompson, Rachel W., Arnkoff, Diane B., Glass, Carol R. Conceptualizing mindfulness and acceptance as components of psychological resilience to trauma. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*. 2011; 12(4):220–235.
- Wohl, Amy Rock, Galvan, Frank H., Carlos, Juli-Ann, Myers, Hector F., Garland, Wendy, Witt, Mallory D., Cadden, Joseph, Operskalski, Eva, Jordan, Wilbert, George, Sheba. A Comparison of MSM Stigma, HIV Stigma and Depression in HIV-Positive Latino and African American Men who have Sex with Men (MSM). *AIDS & Behavior*. 2013; 17(4):1454–1464. [PubMed: 23247362]
- Wong, Gloria, Derthick, Annie O., David, EJ.R., Saw, Anne, Okazaki, Sumie. The What, the Why, and the How: A Review of Racial Microaggressions Research in Psychology. *Race and Social Problems*. 2014; 6(2):181–200. [PubMed: 26913088]
- Wright, A Jordan, Wegner, Ryan T. Homonegative Microaggressions and Their Impact on LGB Individuals: A Measure Validity Study. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*. 2012; 6(1):34–54.
- Ybarra, Michele L., Mitchell, Kimberly J., Palmer, Neal A., Reisner, Sari L. Online social support as a buffer against online and offline peer and sexual victimization among U.S. LGBT and non-LGBT youth. *Child Abuse & Neglect*. 2014; 39:123–136. [PubMed: 25192961]

Table 1**Participant characteristics**

Characteristic	N	%
Age (mean, standard deviation)	22.6	2.1
Birthplace		
Mexico	5	23.8
USA	16	76.2
Employment		
Employed (part-time or full-time)	14	66.7
Unemployed	7	33.3
Education level		
High school diploma / GED	5	23.8
Some college / professional school	15	71.4
Bachelor degree	1	4.8
Sexual orientation		
Gay	18	85.7
Bisexual	2	9.5
Queer	1	4.8
Out to a family member		
Yes	20	95.24
No	1	4.76