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Centering the Margins: A Moderation Study Examining Cisgender Privilege Among LGBTQ+ BIPoC College Students Facing Intersectional Microaggressions

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Marginalized college students report experiencing both systemic and everyday discrimination in higher education. Scholars have highlighted the effects of microaggressions on well-being and attitudes toward school persistence. Most studies have used a unidimensional approach to unpack oppressive systems for individuals with multiple marginalized identities and therefore experiences around intersectionality are often not considered. Particularly among sexual minorities of color, differences in experiences with microaggressions for cisgender and gender expansive people are often overlooked when assessing educational outcomes. The current cross-sectional study ($n = 153$) used an intersectional approach to explore experiences of LGBTQ+ Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPoC). We examined the association between intersectional microaggressions (sexual and racial) and school persistence attitudes, comparing differences between cisgender and gender expansive students. According to our findings, intersectional microaggressions negatively impacted attitudes toward school persistence and cisgender privilege emerged as a moderator to buffer this effect. Specifically, gender expansive students were less likely to hold positive attitudes of school persistence compared to cisgender sexual minority students of color when experiencing higher levels of intersectional microaggressions. We used an intersectional approach to explore how cissexism, heterosexism, and racism impact those at the margins among LGBTQ+ BIPoC students highlighting implications for higher education.

Public Significance Statement
This study uses an intersectional framework to examine the negative impact of microaggressions—everyday discrimination—on educational outcomes among LGBTQ+ students of color. Findings suggest that intersectional microaggressions negatively affect attitudes toward school persistence and the burden of these common exchanges is even greater for gender expansive students of color.

Keywords: microaggressions, cisgender privilege, BIPoC, LGBTQ+, school persistence

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College education in the United States has become more valuable in the last few decades, as it signifies upward socioeconomic mobility and higher qualifications for a competitive job market (Pew Research Center, 2016). Since 1970, college enrollment rates have increased 195%, and the presence of racially marginalized groups, such as Latinx students, has increased 441.7% since 1976 (Hanson, 2021). To distinguish the historical oppression some racial groups have experienced in the United States, we use the term "BIPoC" to acknowledge specific differences in racial experiences among Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. As of 2018, college enrollment in the United States hit 19.6 million, where fewer than 45% of students were BIPoC (Hanson, 2021), and approximately 17% identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or gender expansive (LGBTQ+; PNPI, 2020). Among BIPoC, Black and African American college student population has decreased 10.6% since 2010 (Hanson, 2021). Consensus in recent findings showed that BIPoC college students face additional barriers (e.g., structural, and institutional racism, first generation status, less financial resources) that often lead to college dropouts (Blaisdell, 2016; Mustaffa, 2021). In fact, in 2018, Native American and Indigenous students showed the highest dropout rate (36.2%), followed by 30.6% from Black and African American students and 21.4% from Latinx and Hispanic students across U.S. 4-year colleges (Hanson, 2021). Similarly, LGBTQ+ college students have reported lack of inclusivity as well as hostility due to heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia (Hong et al., 2016; Kulick et al., 2017). According to a

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national climate survey (AAU, 2015), 20% of LGBTQ+ college students feared for their physical safety and demands are high to adequately track dropout rates for LGBTQ+ students (APA, 2012). Overall, these emerging findings warrant more attention, particularly for those most vulnerable to systemic barriers and everyday injustices within higher education. The literature on school persistence and retention has addressed aspects of class, race, and sexual injustice (e.g., Cadenas et al., 2022; Pyne & Means, 2013); however, most researchers have used a unidimensional approach and independently examined identities without considering intersectional experiences. In turn, less is known about how systems of oppression cumulatively intersect and impact individuals with multiple marginalized identities in higher education, such as LGBTQ+ BIPoC students.

Intersectionality, which highlights the interconnectedness of multiple oppressive systems (Crenshaw, 1991), has recently received more traction when examining the psychology of marginalized people. In 2017, the American Psychological Association (APA) put forth a task force to re-envision the multicultural guidelines for the 21st century where the major change-centered intersectionality and the importance of considering the multiplicity of oppressive experiences (APA, 2017). Relatedly, the latest APA guidelines for working with sexual minoritized groups highlight the importance of considering other forms of oppression impacting the individual (Nakamura et al., 2022). Both racism—systemic and individual oppression based one's membership to a racial or ethnic group (Perry, 2007) and heterosexism—systemic and individual oppression against anyone who is not heterosexual (Neisen, 1990)—are key intersectional systems considered in the literature for LGBTQ+ BIPoC (Balsam et al., 2011; Fattoracci et al., 2020; Jackson et al., 2020; Kulick et al., 2017; Nadal et al., 2015; Velez et al., 2019; Zelaya et al., 2021).

According to the Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1991), institutional racism (see Bennett, 1995 for a review) and heterosexism (see Anderson et al., 2021 for a review) in higher education are nested within larger macrosystems for marginalized people and have often been linked to poor mental health, feelings of exclusion, and lack of support among college students. Everyday discrimination, also known as microaggressions, is nested within the closer microsystems for marginalized people (Bronfenbrenner, 1992) and can manifest in recurrent hostile behaviors and messages toward marginalized students (Sue et al., 2019). Studies have shown that students from underrepresented backgrounds report constant encounters with microaggressions in higher education (see Ogunyemi et al., 2020 for a review). Among college populations, microaggressions have been linked to higher physiological stress (Wong-Padoongpatt et al., 2017, 2020), depression (Torres-Harding et al., 2020), and both internalized racism (Wong-Padoongpatt et al., 2022a) and internalized homophobia (Heiden-Rootes et al., 2020) for marginalized students. However, few scholars have explored the implications of intersectional microaggressions and their relation to student academic success (Morales, 2014; Nadal et al., 2015). In this study, we used an intersectional framework to assess the impact from different systems of oppression within the microsystems on school persistence using a sample of LGBTQ+ BIPoC college students.

Microaggressions Within Higher Education

The term *microaggression* was coined by Pierce et al. (1977) to describe the subtle and stunning negative offenses against Black people. Microaggressions are daily intentional and unintentional verbal and nonverbal hostile interactions targeting a minoritized group (Solorzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2007) to maintain a hierarchical social structure of subordination (Han Sifuentes, 2021). Research on microaggressions has exponentially grown over the last two decades (Wong et al., 2014). However, it is important to highlight and distinguish how experiences with microaggressions in higher education differ from other settings. Factors such as systemic and institutional oppression further perpetrate power differences between marginalized college students and other figures of power (e.g., dominant student groups, professors, and institution administrators). Thus, our study highlights intersectional microaggressions taking place in an environment where there are already preexisting systemic power (macrosystems) differentials for marginalized groups such as LGBTQ+ BIPoC college students.

Racial Microaggressions in Higher Education

BIPoC experience everyday racism—racial microaggressions consistently (Sue et al., 2019), and researchers have shown several concerning implications for college students (Wong-Padoongpatt et al., 2022b; Wong-Padoongpatt et al., 2022a). BIPoC students in higher education report experiencing racial battle fatigue associated (Hernández & Villodas, 2020), physiological distress (Robinson-Perez et al., 2020; Wong-Padoongpatt et al., 2017), emotional distress (Barrita, 2021), lower implicit self-esteem (Wong-Padoongpatt et al., 2020), and suicidal ideation (Hollingsworth et al., 2017), when experiencing racial microaggressions. Environmental microaggressions might further exacerbate these effects given the lack of representation for faculty of color, inadequate resources for undocumented and international students, and performative statements around racial social justice (Mills, 2020). Lee et al. (2020) examined a large sample of students of color ($N = 4{,}800$) and found that racial microaggressions were experienced almost daily in higher education institutions and perpetrators were usually instructors and other figures of power. Particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) majors, Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students are subjected to higher oppression than White and Asian American students (Beede et al., 2011). Racial microaggressions can leave BIPoC students feeling isolated and disconnected from higher education (Lewis et al., 2021) which can directly impact their attitudes toward persistence in attending college (McCullagh, 2016).

LGBTQ Microaggressions in Higher Education

Colleges have systematically tracked racial and ethnic demographic records; however, these same tracking practices are not as common for sexual and gender identities (Sell & Holliday, 2014). More alarmingly, several state legislations prohibit acknowledgment or open discussion about LGBTQ+ identities which renders many sexual and gender minorities invisible within the overall college experience (George, 2022; Stone, 2016). In a U.S. study with sexual minority undergraduate and graduate students ($n = 152$), it was found that students who experienced more microaggressions also had higher intentions to transfer to universities (Crane et al., 2022). Seelman et al. (2017) examined students from the United States and Canada ($n = 497$) and found that heterosexist microaggressions led to lower self-esteem and higher stress and anxiety. Overall, sexual minority students attribute feelings of isolation and

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lack of belongingness in college to heterosexist academic structures (Beagan et al., 2021) and these experiences directly and negatively influence their persistence in school settings.

LGBTQ+ microaggressions are experiences with everyday heterosexism. LGBTQ+ students in higher education often report lack of representation, tolerance, and support (Morris & Lent, 2019; Smith et al., 2020) both systematically and individually. Sexual minorities in higher education often are subjected to bullying from their peers (Abreu & Kenny, 2018), and lack of inclusion or support from their institutions (e.g., failure to acknowledge pronouns, missing LGBTQ centers or safe spaces). A large portion of the literature on LGBTQ+ microaggressions has used primarily White samples (Aguilera & Barrita, 2021; Nadal et al., 2015), and more scholarship is needed to investigate specific microaggression experiences for LGBTQ+ BIPoC students in higher education (Barrita & Wong-Padoongpatt, 2021). Furthermore, it is unclear whether there are differences among LGBTQ+ communities around other social factors such cisgender privilege when experiencing microaggressions in higher education.

Cisgender Privilege

LGBTQ-research scholars have argued the importance of addressing cisgender privilege (Galupo, Davis, et al., 2014; Riggs, 2007), especially among sexual minorities when such privilege protects them from certain types of oppression. Specifically, gender expansive folks' (e.g., transgender, nonbinary, gender-fluid people) unique experiences under the LGBTQ+ umbrella often go ignored or omitted in research (Barrita & Wong-Padoongpatt, 2021). While society is hyper-aware of gender expansive individuals, the literature rarely captures or makes distinctions on their everyday lived realities (Galupo, Henise, & Davis, 2014). Miller and Smith (2021) explored the concept of visibility and found that people who are "visible," meaning they are visibly perceived as a sexual and/or gender minority, were more likely to experience discrimination. And such visibility was based on physical or behavioral characteristics that do not fit heteronormative or *cisnormative* social expectations. Thus, assumptions around *cisness* might shield some within the LGBTQ+ community from certain types of microaggressions. Transgender individuals for example, not only experience microaggressions from heterosexual people but also from members of the LGBTQ+ community which sometimes are more harmful (Galupo, Henise, & Davis, 2014; Rivera-Mercado et al., 2022). Additionally, nonbinary transgender individuals report experiencing gender microaggressions based on binary assumptions of their gender (Pulice-Farrow et al., 2020). With so many layers of oppression, gender expansive students' experiences with microaggressions in higher education are often kept in the dark.

Cisness or cisgender identity is often defined as those whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021). Among sexual minorities, gender identity can create additional layers of marginalization for those who are not cisgender—gender expansive (Galupo, Davis, et al., 2014; Rider et al., 2022). Even more so, in educational settings, environmental gender microaggression based on policy and procedures (e.g., lack of gender-neutral bathrooms, pronouns, lack of name change policies) can further segregate gender minorities and discourage them from staying in school (Woodford et al., 2017). Cisgender privilege speaks to the systemic and individual power coming from social acceptance cisgender people experience (J. R. Johnson, 2013). Cisgender people's appearances often fit societal standards around gender and therefore they might experience less oppression. Those at the margins, under the LGBTQ+ umbrella (e.g., queer, trans, nonbinary, and gender expansive), often report not fitting harmful binary gender standards most societies impose (Shelton, 2016), feeling invisible (Galupo, Davis, et al., 2014), and experiencing hypervigilance and violence (Wirtz et al., 2020). Yet, when studying LGBTQ+ oppression, cisgender privilege is rarely considered.

Intersectionality and Microaggressions

Although intersectionality is an emerging theme in microaggression research (Nadal et al., 2015), intersectional experiences of racial and sexual oppression in higher education among LGBTQ+ BIPoC have not been fully explored (Balsam et al., 2011; Fattoracci et al., 2020; García, 2021; Kulick et al., 2017; Nadal et al., 2015). Balsam et al. (2011) developed one of the first quantitative measures for intersectional microaggression experiences based on racism and heterosexism. Initial findings suggest LGBTQ+ BIPoC experience psychological distress from intersectional oppression (Balsam et al., 2011; Jackson et al., 2020; Velez et al., 2019; Zelaya et al., 2021). Fewer studies have addressed differences in segmented sexual minorities (e.g., cis lesbian, bisexual, gay, queer, etc.) from gender minorities (e.g., non-cis, trans, gender nonconforming, nonbinary, etc.). Fattoracci et al. (2020) newly developed a quantitative measure for intersectional microaggressions that included everyday racism and heterosexism. This measure has been used to examine nuance experiences with oppression among gender minorities (Sarno et al., 2021).

Researchers of LGBTQ+ and racial discrimination have argued that other axis of power, such as cisgender privilege, should be considered when studying minorities in higher education (Downing & Przedworski, 2018; Flores et al., 2016; Galupo, Davis, et al., 2014; Kachen & Pharr, 2020). Particularly among sexual minorities, gender minorities (e.g., transgender, queer, and gender expansive) have fewer resources in educational settings to counter systemic, institutional, and everyday oppression (Barrita & Wong-Padoongpatt, 2021). We used an intersectional approach to explore the effect from intersectional microaggressions (racism and heterosexism) on school persistence and compare implications for cisgender and gender expansive LGBQ+ BIPoC college students.

School Persistence for LGBTQ BIPoC

Although there have been previous studies on microaggressions in higher education (see Ogunyemi et al., 2020 for a review), there has been little research on the relationship between educational outcomes such as persistence or dropout attitudes. Researchers that have examined school attitudes and oppression have routinely used methods that isolate one system of oppression to investigate rather than consider multiple dimensions. Attitudes around quitting higher education have been linked to experiences with racial microaggressions (Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure Roholt, 2017), sexist microaggressions (Woodford et al., 2014), and heterosexist microaggressions (Crane et al., 2022). Our study is among the first to explore the interconnectedness between multiple systems of oppressions in the context higher education, specifically examining microaggressions and the link to attitudes about persisting in school. Experiences with everyday racism have led to higher rates of drop-

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out for cis-heterosexual racial and ethnic minoritized students (Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure Roholt, 2017). Structural racism in higher education has been named as a fundamental barrier to academic achievement among Black students (Merolla & Jackson, 2019). Research on LGBTQ+ samples (primarily White) has also found institutional heterosexism and cissexism are linked to lower sense of belonging in higher education (Crane et al., 2022; Woodford et al., 2014). Research has suggested that those who present as "atypical" gender expression or being sexually minoritized on college campuses experience higher rates of heterosexism and victimization, which can then lead to higher rates of anxiety and stress (Woodford et al., 2014). In addition, previous research has indicated that LGTBQ+ and BIPoC students face unique experiences in college that, in turn, affect their overall satisfaction with schooling (Crane et al., 2022). Tilley et al. (2020) found that LGBTQ+ students reported less overall well-being than heterosexual students. LGBTQ+ college students experiencing microaggression in their classroom report higher discomfort and higher attitudes toward transferring out from their current school, as well as less intentions to continue their education (Crane et al., 2022).

Microaggressions occur in everyday life at various social environments (Sue et al., 2019); therefore, it is not surprising that microaggressions can occur in educational settings (Solorzano et al., 2000). Academic institutions have a long history of being white-centering, masculine, and heteronormative (Fotaki, 2013; Krishen et al., 2020). After examining 60 diverse classrooms across three different college campuses, Suárez-Orozco et al. (2015) found that microaggressions were reported in nearly 30% of those classrooms. In a recent study, Morris and Lent (2019) found that heterosexist harassment led to lower rates of academic satisfaction and persistence. A national survey (Smith et al., 2020) found that Black and African American college students ($N = 3{,}320$) who experienced more microaggressions were generally less satisfied and happy. Additionally, it was found that the lower rates of academic satisfaction were largely due to a perception of poor environmental support.

Despite previous research on microaggressions in higher education for intersectional oppression, there is a need for studies to center LGBTQ+ BIPoC students' specific experiences with these daily aggressions. More particularly, research that explores the impact of school retention, satisfaction, and persistence given the recent efforts most institutions have committed to around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Present Study

This study explored how racial and sexual microaggressions across cisgender and gender expansive LGBTQ+ BIPoC college students relate to school persistence attitudes. The scholarship on racial, sexual orientation, and gender microaggressions has often addressed these attacks as separate dimensions. Our study quantitatively examined multiple layers of oppression (e.g., racism, heterosexism, cissexism) experienced by sexual, racial, and gender-minoritized students in higher education. Based on previous findings, we aimed to answer: (a) Do LGBTQ+ BIPoC college students experience intersectional microaggressions differently when considering cisgender privilege? (b) Do LGBTQ+ BIPoC college students report school persistence attitudes differently when considering cisgender privilege? and (c) Is cisgender privilege a protective factor in school persistence when LGBQTQ+ BIPoC college students experience intersectional microaggressions? We hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: Gender expansive LGBTQ+ BIPoC students will report significantly more intersectional microaggressions than cisgender LGBTQ+ BIPoC students.

Hypothesis 2: Gender expansive LGBTQ+ BIPoC students will report significantly lower attitudes of school persistence.

Hypothesis 3: Cisgender identity will moderate the relation between intersectional microaggressions and school persistence attitudes among LGBTQ+ BIPoC students.

Method

Participants and Procedure

We developed an online study using quantitative measures to assess (a) intersectional microaggressions experiences and (b) school persistence attitudes. The data collection for this study was carried out from January to April 2021. We used Qualtrics to nationally advertise our online study titled "Microaggressions, Intersectionality, and Academic Progression," providing full disclosure of the purpose of the study on the initial consent page and offering a $5 dollar compensation for their participation. Compensation was distributed by Qualtrics® immediately after survey was completed. The inclusion criteria to participate was (a) being 18 years old or older, (b) currently attending a U.S. university or college, (c) identify as black, indigenous, or person of color, and (d) identify as a gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, queer, trans, nonbinary, or gender expansive. We set specific quotas based on our inclusion criteria around race and sexual orientation to meet minimum sample sizes for our analysis. Initially, 155 participants fully qualified and completed the study. The survey included a consent form, demographics, quantitative and qualitative measures, and a debriefing part with additional resources. The average time of participation was 20 min. Two participants were dropped for failure to accurately complete attention check questions, leaving a final sample of 153 adult students ($M_{age} = 21.2$, $SD = 1.7$). Using G*Power 3.1, we performed a power analysis which suggested that our sample size ($n = 153$), with 80% power ($1 - \beta$), generated enough power to uncover large- to medium-sized effects.

The racial breakdown of our sample was 83 Black or African American (54.2%), 41 Non-White Latinx or Hispanic (26.8%), 16 Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander (10.5%), 3 Middle Eastern (2.0%), and 10 Native American (6.5%). Our sample included 32 people who self-identified as Gay (20.9%), 34 as Lesbian (22.2%), 61 as Bisexual (39.9%), 7 as Pansexual (4.6%), and 19 as Queer (12.4%). From the 39 participants who identified as gender expansive, 18 were Transgender (46.2%), 6 were Genderfluid (15.3%), and 15 were non-Binary (38.5%). See Table 1 for full breakdown by cisgender and gender expansive.

Measures

School Persistence Attitudes

The Persistence/Voluntary Dropout Decision Scale (P/VDD; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980) is a 30-item Likert scale that measures students' attitudes toward whether to persist or drop college. Items such as "I am satisfied with my academic experience at my

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Table 1
Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants (n = *153)*

Baseline characteristic	Cisgender ($n = 114$)		Gender expansive ($n = 39$)	
	n	%	*n*	%
Race/ethnicity				
Latina/o/x or Hispanic	29	25.5	12	30.8
Asian/Asian American	12	10.5	4	10.2
Black/African American	61	53.5	22	56.4
Middle Eastern	3	2.6	0	0
Native American	9	7.9	1	2.6
1st generation student				
Yes	50	43.9	16	41.0
No	64	56.1	23	59.0
Immigrant generation				
1st generation	10	8.8	1	2.6
1.5 generation	9	7.9	5	12.8
2nd generation	41	36.0	12	30.8
3rd generation	9	7.9	5	12.8
4th or above generation	45	39.4	16	41.0
Sexual orientation identity				
Gay	31	27.1	1	2.7
Lesbian	27	23.6	7	17.9
Bisexual	45	39.4	16	41.0
Pansexual	5	4.3	2	5.1
Queer	6	5.6	13	33.3
Gender identity				
Transgender	0	0	18	46.2
Genderfluid	0	0	6	15.3
Nonbinary	0	0	15	38.5

university) are rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Previous studies exploring microaggressions and P/VDD have found strong reliability using BIPoC college samples with coefficient αs from .79 to .86 (Castillo et al., 2006). For this study, Cronbach's α was .81. P/VDD has been used to explore the relationship between school persistence attitudes and social support (Nicpon et al., 2006), coping mechanisms (Lesure-Lester, 2003), and depressive symptoms (Boyraz et al., 2013).

Intersectional Microaggressions

The Intersectional Microaggressions Scale (IMS; Fattoracci et al., 2020) is a 36-item Likert-style construct that quantifies different types of microaggressions experienced by LGBTQ+ BIPoC individuals. Items such as "I was threatened because I am a person of color who is part of the LGBTQ+ community" are rated on a scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*all the time*) when responding to the question, "How often does this occur to you?". The IMS was recently published as one of the first to assess intersectional experiences with microaggressions for individuals with multiple marginalized identities. For this study, IMS showed Cronbach's α of .97.

Cisgender Identity

As part of the demographic questions, we asked participants if they identified as cisgender, followed by a brief definition: "a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their sex assigned at birth." Participants were given *Yes*, *No*, or *prefer not to respond* as their options to answer. All participants selected *Yes* or *No*. Based on their responses, the sample was divided into two groups: (a) *cisgender privilege* if they identified as cisgender, and (b) *gender expansive* if they did not.

Other Demographics

Participants provided additional demographic information such as age, socioeconomic status (SES), school generation, location of their university, and immigration generation.

Analysis

We used SPSS Version 27 and R Software to analyze our data. We conducted two independent *t*-test analyses to test the differences of intersectional microaggressions (H1), and school persistence attitudes (H2) between cisgender and gender expansive LGBTQ+ BIPoC. Given cisgender identity was measured as a categorical variable of two levels, we used PROCESS 3.5 (Hayes, 2012) to run a single model bootstrap approach (Model 1) to test cisgender privilege as a moderator for the impact of intersectional microaggressions on school persistence attitudes (H3).

Results

Preliminary Analysis

We computed descriptive statistics of quantitative measures and demographics prior to conducting the main statistical analyses to test hypotheses (see Table 1). We used Pearson's correlation analyses to test associations between intersectional microaggressions, school persistence, SES, and age. Point biserial correlation analysis was used to test the relationship between racial microaggressions and school persistence with first generation identity. Bivariate relationship analysis showed SES to be significantly associated ($r = -.30$, $p < .001$) with school persistence but only for cisgender participants, other correlations did not indicate any possible covariate for our main analysis (see Tables 2 and 3). Additionally, tests for data normality and assumptions showed normal distribution and no signs of kurtosis or multicollinearity.

Who Reports More Intersectional Microaggressions among LGBTQ+ BIPoC?

We used an independent *t*-test analysis to compare the level of reported intersectional microaggressions between cisgender LGBQ+ BIPoC college students ($n = 114$) and gender expansive LGBQ+ BIPoC college students ($n = 39$). Although the gender expansive respondents reported experiencing more intersectional

Table 2
Bivariate Correlation with Demographic Variables for Cisgender Group

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. IMS	—				
2. School persistence	.145	—			
3. Age	−.118	.073	—		
4. First generation[a]	−.015	.198*	−.087	—	
5. SES	.116	−.303**	.221*	.284**	—

Note. $n = 114$.
[a]Point-biserial correlation used for this analysis.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

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Table 3
Bivariate Correlation with Demographic Variables for Gender Expansive Group

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. IMS	—				
2. School persistence	−.322*	—			
3.Age	−.102	.106	—		
4. First generation[a]	−.250	.069	.071	—	
5. SES	−.063	−.130	.348*	.047	—

Note. $n = 39$.
[a] Point-biserial correlation used for this analysis.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

microaggressions ($M = 139.25$, $SD = 48.42$) than cisgender respondents ($M = 134.77$, $SD = 44.99$), H1 was not supported since that difference was not significant $t(151) = 0.508$, $p = .612$.

Who Reports More School Persistence among LGBTQ+ BIPoC?

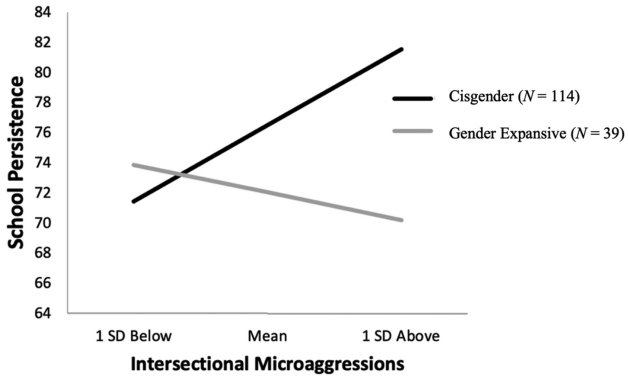
Similar to H1, we used another independent *t*-test analysis to compare the level of reported school persistence attitudes between cisgender LGBQ+ BIPoC college students and gender expansive LGBQ+ BIPoC college students. Cisgender students reported more positive school persistence attitudes ($M = 76.15$, $SD = 14.82$) compared to gender expansive students ($M = 71.99$, $SD = 12.88$). This difference in school persistence attitudes approached significance $t(151) = -1.68$, $p = .088$, but H2 was not supported. However, it is worth noting the trending *p* value of .088.

Is Cisgender Privilege a Moderating Factor among LGBTQ+ BIPoC Facing Intersectional Microaggressions?

A Pearson's correlation analysis between intersectional microaggressions and school persistence attitudes comparing cisgender students (see Table 2) and gender expansive (see Table 3) showed a significant relationship in the gender expansive group. The hypothesized moderation model (H3) was tested using PROCESS macro model 1, which assesses if cisgender privilege moderates the effect of path intersectional microaggression and school persistence attitudes (Figure 1; Hayes, 2012). The overall model was significant, $R^2 = 0.253$, $F(3, 149) = 3.40$, $p = .022$ (see Table 4). Intersectional microaggressions were a significant predictor of school persistence attitudes, $b = -0.184$, $t(149) = 9.19$, $p = .009$, and being gender expansive compared to cisgender was also a significant predictor of school persistence, $b = -15.548$, $t(149) = -2.01$, $p = .045$. The interaction of intersectional microaggressions and being gender expansive was found as a significant moderator adding to the variance $\Delta R^2 = 0.045$, $\Delta F(3, 149) = 7.23$, $p = .011$, $b = -0.145$, $t(149) = 2.69$, $p = .008$.

To further explore the nature of the interaction between intersectional microaggressions and cisgender privilege for LGBQ+ BIPoC college students, specific regions (i.e., 1 *SD* below mean, mean and 1 *SD* above mean) were calculated using simple slope analysis (P. O. Johnson & Fay, 1950). This technique helps to locate regions of significance for the interaction and is considered a superior method to analyze moderating effects (Hayes, 2012). Our plot (see Figure 1)

Figure 1
Interaction of Intersectional Microaggressions and Cisgender Privilege



shows that when both cisgender and gender expansive students experience lower intersectional microaggressions (1 *SD* below mean), there are minimal difference in school persistence attitudes effect = −0.039, $SE = 0.026$, $p = .132$, 95% CI [−0.089, 0.012]. However, when cisgender and gender expansive students experience higher intersectional microaggressions (1SD above mean), cisgender students' school persistence attitudes are higher whereas gender expansive students report lower school persistence attitudes effect = 0.106, $SE = 0.048$, $p = .031$, 95% CI [0.013, 0.200]. These results suggest that cisgender privilege serves as a protecting factor when facing everyday discrimination and supported our H3.

Discussion

Overall, our findings suggested that the role of cisgender privilege is important to consider when examining the effects of intersectional microaggressions on school persistence attitudes among LGBTQ+ BIPoC college students. Not all hypotheses were supported given that cisgender and gender expansive students were not significantly different for frequencies of intersectional microaggressions (H1) and school persistence attitudes (H2). However, it should be noted that for H2, difference across gender privilege was trending to significant as findings showed cisgender students endorsed slightly higher school persistence compared to gender expansive students. As predicted, cisness did moderate the effect of intersectional microaggressions on school persistence. Cisgender privilege did seem to buffer the effects of intersectional microaggressions with gender expansive participants endorsing significantly lower school persistence

Table 4
Cisgender Privilege Moderates School Persistence

Predictor	*b*	*p*	95% CI
IM	−0.184	.009	[−0.322, −0.046]
Gender privilege[a]	−15.548	.045	[−30.80, −0.293]
IM × gender privilege[a]	−0.145	.008	[−0.252, −0.038]

Note. IM = intersectional microaggressions. Overall model: $R^2 = 0.253$, $F(3, 149) = 3.40$, $p = .022$.
[a]Compared to cisgender ($n = 114$). Gender expansive ($n = 39$).

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compared to cisgender participants when experiencing more consistent intersectional microaggressions.

Cisgender privilege often operates as a heteronormative acceptance both systemic and individual based on assumptions around one's gender or sexual identity (Galupo, Henise, & Davis, 2014) and our results for H3,suggest the idea that such social acceptance can partially shield cisgender people from racial and sexual microaggressions regardless of their racial or sexual identity. Our results support previous findings where gender expansive people report experiencing higher social violence and having less supportive systems in academic spaces (Wirtz et al., 2020). Large-scale diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts might provide valuable resources for cisgender students to thrive while not adequately serving gender expansive students. The lack of adequate resources for gender expansive students might leave them more vulnerable to intersectional oppression. Discussions in academia around pronouns, binary language, and gender-inclusive spaces have increased in the last few years (Nicolazzo et al., 2018) often highlighting a lack inclusivity and therefore additional stressors for gender expansive students. Gender minorities' rights, equity, and inclusion continue to be challenged at the legislative level in many states and therefore institutions might have a difficult time properly recognizing the existence of gender minority communities. Our findings bring to light the important issue of cisgender privilege and the disproportionate burden of intersectional microaggressions on gender expansive students, particularly around attitudes toward quitting school. Current academic resources and inclusive initiatives might need re-evaluation particularly around providing adequate support to gender expansive sexual minorities of color.

A key aspect of our study involved unpacking the different layers of oppression (e.g., cissexism, heterosexism, racism) using an intersectional approach. Researchers are beginning to use intersectional approaches to explain the effects of microaggressions on students with multiple marginalized identities. To our knowledge, the current study is among the first to explore cisgender privilege using both racial and sexual minoritized participants exclusively. Our results highlight the need to raise consciousness around issues of cisgender privilege, particularly for BIPoC gender expansive people.

Implications

Overall, our findings suggest a crucial need to unpack the nuanced experiences of students with multiple oppressed identities, particularly in higher education. More experiences with intersectional microaggressions seemed to significantly burden gender expansive students compared to cisgender students. The close associations between attitudes of quitting school and the frequency of intersectional microaggression experiences for gender expansive students are alarming and demand further investigation and additional support. Academic institutions should be aware of these experiences and facilitate mechanisms through which students, faculty, and staff can report and document intersectional microaggressions (Pinedo et al., 2022). Perhaps implementing routine assessments of the cultural climates and asking directly about experiences with intersectional microaggressions would be important initial steps toward creating an inclusive environment for gender expansive students to thrive. Universities may be more successful with retaining students with multiple marginalized identities if these institutions build more awareness around intersectional microaggressions and disrupt the social subordination and *othering* of intersectional identities.

This current study also builds on the existing theoretical work on intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), paying particular care to dimensions of oppression. A common misperception of intersectionality and intersectional approaches is that identities are different without the critical consciousness around privileged identities. Our findings are among the first to highlight the important difference between cisgender and gender expansive experiences with intersectional microaggressions, particularly with LGBTQ+ BIPoC college students. Although LGBTQ+ BIPoC students hold multiple identities, our findings suggest that cisgender privilege might be buffering the negative effects of intersectional oppression. More experiences and awareness of intersectional microaggressions for cisgender BIPoC students might even be empowering them to persist in school. Schools may already have an infrastructure and resources in place to elevate cisgender LGBTQ+ BIPoC college students and our findings might be highlighting the need to have more specific support for gender expansive LGBTQ+ BIPoC college students. Our findings align squarely with experts in the field (APA, 2017; Nakamura et al., 2022) who strongly suggest the use of intersectional methods to capture the nuance experiences of people with multiple marginalized identities. The academic implications of our findings build upon the existing efforts of research on microaggressions which has mostly focused on psychological and physiological implications. Efforts to challenge systemic oppression and to create strategies to retain marginalized students are widespread in most U.S. college institutions and our study echo existing calls to use an intersectional lens to explore various systems of oppression.

Limitations and Future Research

Whereas our study offers important findings regarding intersectional microaggressions for student populations on university campuses, it also has limitations that provide the groundwork for future research. First, our data collection was limited to a single point in time for each individual; future research can augment our findings by collecting longitudinal data to overlay the aging/experiential process and identify cohort and generational effects of intersectional microaggressions. Our research provides a quantitative design, future research can expand our findings by exploring a netnographic secondary dataset of one or more online communities (Kozinets, 2020) and incorporate rigorous qualitative or mixed methods that further explain experiences with intersectional microaggressions. A second potential limitation was the uneven sample sizes due to the difficulty in gathering underrepresented populations. Future research can include more diverse student populations, such as additional levels of students (e.g., graduate students) or a global assessment (e.g., cross-cultural settings). Future studies should also assess other forms of privilege (e.g., white privilege, able privilege, male privilege) since academic settings can foster highly competitive environments where the inequity of various privileged identities may often be less visible. Moreover, additional protective factors—such as strengths, supportive systems, and coping mechanisms—should also be considered when assessing the impact of intersectional microaggressions. Future research can also include social and emotional measures such as loneliness, anxiety, depression, social exclusion, and fear of missing out, to build upon our findings with cognitive measures. Lastly, our sample size prevented

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us to conduct further analysis within groups to highlight nuance based on race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Future studies should aim to address differences in experience with intersectional microaggressions among LGBTQ+ BIPoC.

Conclusion

Intersectional theory expert Kimberlé W. Crenshaw once said, "if we are not intersectional, some of us, the most vulnerable, are going to fall through the cracks." Our project aimed to explore the impact of multiple forms of oppression among minoritized college students. Our findings highlight important aspects of the educational experiences of LGBTQ+ BIPoC college students. While other studies have addressed the impact of oppression among LGBTQ+ BIPoC individuals, our study focused on distinguishing the differences within these communities particularly for gender expansive individuals. Specifically, our results highlight the protective factor certain identities such as cisgender can provide to marginalized students.

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