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**A UNICORN AMONGST A FIELD OF HORSES: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF  
SEXUAL ORIENTATION MICROAGGRESSIONS IN THE WORKPLACE**

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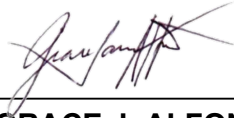
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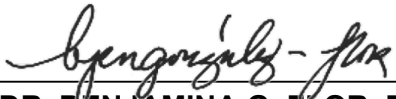
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## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Abraham "Abba" Limpiada is an electrical engineering and psychology graduate who chose to work in the technical writing field. Although he never imagined doing this job, he has been a technical writer for more than ten years and is loving every minute of it. He was a barista in a well-known coffee shop in the Philippines before becoming a licensed electrical engineer.

He likes to binge watch shows and movies, go to the gym, and read young adult novels in his spare time. In addition, he supports LGBTQ equality, mental health awareness, and animal welfare, and he wishes for a better Philippines for the coming generations.

He believes that personal narratives have great power and that we should share our experiences with others so they can learn from them. He hopes that by sharing his own experiences in this thesis, someone would be able to relate to it and realize they are not alone in their journey.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Despite the societal changes and growing acceptance of the LGBTQ community, discrimination persists, both in overt and subtle forms. The study focuses on the subtle form of discrimination and microaggressions in the workplace against members of the LGBTQ, and how these shaped my experiences and communication behaviors as a Filipino LGBTQ individual. I used autoethnography and symbolic interactionism to examine my experiences with microaggressions from 2013 to 2019 after disclosing my sexual orientation at work. I explored how microaggressions shaped how I disclosed personal information and how I interacted and communicated at work. Specifically, I documented (1) the microaggressions I have experienced after my self-disclosure, (2) my interactions after self-disclosure; and (3) how I communicated to resolve the microaggressions.

I experienced verbal and non-verbal forms of microaggressions after disclosing my sexual orientation to my co-workers. To cope with these repeated microaggressions, I ignored or tolerated my coworkers' behavior and became withdrawn from them. However, this approach created a communication gap and was perceived negatively by my coworkers. To resolve the microaggressions, I opened a non-confrontational discussion I termed as 'pagpapaunawa' with my coworkers and 'educated' them about the impact of their words and actions. This approach improved my relationships with my coworkers and emphasized the importance of communication in resolving microaggressions.

**Key words:** LGBTQ+, gender discrimination, dialogue, organizational communication, human rights and inclusivity, educational communication, penetration and depenetration

## **Chapter I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background and Rationale of the Study**

The United Nations outlined important aspects of achieving its goal of creating significant and positive changes worldwide by 2030 through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including promoting gender equality. According to a report from the Asian Development Bank (2018), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes the importance of promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls to achieve the goal of "leaving no one behind." The report highlights how this presents a unique opportunity to positively transform the lives of women and girls, as well as drive progress in all aspects of sustainable development, including the economic, social, and environmental spheres.

The 2030 Agenda aims to create a fair and inclusive society through a set of 17 SDGs that are interconnected and part of its overarching mission to promote universal and transformational change. Stonewall International (2016) similarly stressed the significance of combating discrimination, especially towards the LGBTQ community. They emphasized the principle of "leaving no one behind," which is particularly relevant for LGBTQ individuals who have been overlooked by both national and international development initiatives in the past.

LGBTQ individuals have been systematically disadvantaged due to discriminatory laws, neglectful policies, and negative societal attitudes. This has resulted in reduced income, poor health, and limited education opportunities for LGBTQ groups globally. Due to their intersectional identities, LGBTQ individuals may

experience various forms of prejudice and violence. For instance, lesbians and bisexuals may be taken even less seriously than women when reporting crimes to authorities.

The LGBTQIA+ community in the Philippines has not only brought happiness to the public through their presence in various forms of media and real life, but they have also made significant strides in their respective fields. Personalities such as Boy Abunda, Vice Ganda, Ice Seguerra, Rajo Laurel, Joel Cruz, Monique Wilson, and Angie Mead King are just a few examples of individuals who are openly proud of their identity and should be recognized for their achievements and contributions to society. However, even with recent efforts to promote LGBTQ rights, acceptance, and empowerment, discrimination against LGBTQ individuals persists in the Philippines, where they are merely tolerated rather than truly accepted. Despite the country's claims of providing equal access and opportunities to all citizens, members of the LGBTQ community are still treated as second or third-class citizens (Jocson & Adihartono, 2020).

In 2018, a study was conducted on 100 companies that had a total workforce of 260,000. The study revealed that only 17% of these companies had policies against discrimination that specifically mentioned sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (The Philippine LGBT Chamber of Commerce, 2018). However, of those 17%, less than half had policies that addressed certain behaviors and actions that were not allowed or discouraged towards LGBTQ employees, such as the use of slurs, catcalling, outing, and misgendering. Moreover, research indicated that 25% of respondents experienced harassment from their superiors, 33% experienced harassment from coworkers, and 60% were subjected to slurs and jokes at work

(Enriquez, 2017). These figures demonstrate the pervasive attitude towards LGBTQ individuals in Filipino workplaces, indicating that prejudice against them persists.

In another study conducted by the United Nations in 2018, about 30% of participants in the Philippines said they have experienced harassment, bullying, or discrimination at work due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, or sex characteristics (UNDP, 2018). The study's participants described a variety of unpleasant workplace encounters, including jokes and slurs directed at LGBTQ individuals, rumors, and gossip, as well as comments about how they dress, act, and speak (UNDP, 2018).

### *Microaggressions as Subtle Discrimination*

Although overt gender-based discrimination remains prevalent and easily identifiable, there is another type of discrimination. This type of discrimination is nearly imperceptible, subtle, and covert, which can affect anyone, particularly individuals who are part of the LGBTQ community, as they may not be protected by laws against discrimination. These forms of discrimination or microaggressions may include comments, jokes, or actions that appear harmless initially, but later prove to be subtle attacks on a person's gender expression, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

Microaggressions refer to a new moral category that characterizes the subtle yet harmful types of discriminatory conduct that marginalized people confront. The term "microaggression" was first used by Chester Pierce, a psychiatrist at Harvard University, in 1970, but the notion remained relatively unnoticed until 2007 when Derald Wing Sue and his colleagues introduced it to a mainstream academic audience

in an influential article from Columbia University on counseling psychology (Sue, 2010).

According to Sue, the ambiguity of microaggressions is a significant factor in their toxic nature (2010). Perpetrators are frequently unaware of the harm they have caused because of implicit bias, which often leads to such conduct. Furthermore, microaggressions are often dismissed as insignificant since they do not cause real or morally significant harm (Friedlaender, 2018). Microaggressions are insidious, and individuals frequently do not realize that they have been targeted until it is too late, affecting how they interact, communicate, and express themselves in any context.

Smith (2022) outlines various types of microaggressions, which include verbal microaggressions that involve making harmful or stigmatizing remarks or inquiries towards individuals or groups in the minority; behavioral microaggressions that entail acting in a discriminatory or harmful manner towards minority persons or groups; and environmental microaggressions, which usually occur within a broader societal context and involve subtle forms of discrimination.

"You're so gay!" used in a negative manner is an example of a verbal microaggression directed at LGBTQ individuals. The term "gay" is insultingly used in this sentence. For those who have experienced bullying as well as for their actual or perceived sexual orientations, it can be traumatizing. Environmental and behavioral microaggressions target minority group members through acts or behavior and are frequently nonverbal. Assuming that a gay man is hypersexual or that a transwoman is a sex worker are examples of behavioral microaggressions against LGBTQ people. Examples of environmental microaggressions include avoiding hiring LGBTQ

individuals for leadership positions or other important positions or refusing to build restrooms with gender-neutral facilities to better accommodate transgender persons.

Furthermore, psychologist Derald Wing Sue (2010) identified various categories of microaggressions, including microassaults, which occur when a person intentionally behaves in a prejudiced way without intending to cause offense. Examples of microassault is calling someone a “faggot” or a “dyke”, or objectifying queer women as sex objects of heterosexual men. There are also the microinsults which are unintentionally prejudiced remarks or action. Examples of microinsults are statements such as “You don’t look gay” or “How did you turn gay?”. Lastly, there are microinvalidations, which refer to a person’s remark that invalidates or undermines a minority group’s experiences. Examples of microinvalidations are “You are just confused,” “It’s just a phase,” or “How can you be queer if you’ve never had sex with a member of the same sex?” There are various types of microaggressions that exist in society, and anyone, regardless of their race or background, can be subjected to them.

### *Microaggressions in the Workplace*

Microaggressions directed towards the LGBTQ community also occur in the workplace (Galupo & Resnick, 2016). Studies have focused on various types of microaggressions in different settings. For instance, there are studies on racial microaggressions in the workplace (DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016), among black educators (Carr, 2017) and government workers (Dickenson, 2018); sexual orientation microaggressions among LGBTQ youth (Kiekens et al., 2021) and young adults (Tsai et al., 2021), as well as in the workplace (Rivera et al., 2013). In a previous study, it was found that employees who can disclose their true selves at work tend to have a

stronger sense of self when they have close ties with their coworkers (Mao et al., 2012 as cited in Crossman, 2015).

According to Williams (2019), microaggressions refer to small, everyday verbal, behavioral, and environmental insults that are directed at people based on their race, gender, sexual orientation, or religion, regardless of whether they are intentional or not. Microaggressions are common in the workplace, and often go unnoticed because they are not intended to discriminate or exclude. These actions are typically a result of people's unconscious biases (Agarwal, 2019).

It is crucial to understand that cracking jokes about someone's race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation is never acceptable. Such remarks perpetuate discrimination and prejudice in contemporary society, and even if they seem harmless, they can cause harm. They also have adverse effects on employees' mental health and well-being (Agarwal, 2019). Microaggressions in the workplace have been linked to burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and emotional distress (King et al., 2022; DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby Jr., 2016, as cited in Friedman, 2021), as well as affecting emotional well-being (DeSouza et al., 2017, as cited in Friedman, 2021). Members of the LGBTQ community are frequently affected by microaggressions, which can cause feelings of fear, anger, sadness, humiliation, or shame.

According to Nickerson (2021), the concept of the looking-glass self was first introduced by Charles Cooley in 1902. It is formed based on how we interpret and evaluate the responses of others. When exposed repeatedly to derogatory labels, jokes, and widespread homophobia, individuals may develop a negative self-image or self-hatred. Despite being subtle, microaggressions should still be recognized as a form of discrimination.



Although microaggressions have been extensively studied, recent researches on microaggressions have focused on racial issues and was done in Western societies (Browne-James, 2018; Lui et al., 2020; M. T. Williams et al., 2020). There are, however, only few research on microaggressions conducted in Asia (Tsai et al., 2021). Past research on microaggressions against Filipinos has mainly involved Filipino Americans living outside of the Philippines and has concentrated on racial microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2012; Viernes, 2014).

Previous studies have highlighted the negative impact of microaggressions on marginalized communities, including the LGBTQ community, in various contexts. For instance, some research have explored gender and disability microaggressions encountered by Filipino women with disabilities in the Philippines (Ancha, 2022). However, no research has yet been conducted to investigate how sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace in the Philippine context shape LGBTQ individuals' communication and self-disclosure.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Patrick Starr, a well-known Filipino American YouTube personality, makeup artist, and entrepreneur once said, "Life opens up when you do." And so, I decided to open up in this research.

As someone who identifies as gay, I have firsthand experience with sexual orientation microaggressions that have caused me to be more guarded and less forthcoming with my former colleagues. However, there has been a lack of studies investigating the influence of workplace sexual microaggressions on self-disclosure through a communication perspective, particularly in the context of Filipino culture.

There is an existing research gap in the study of sexual microaggressions in the workplace specifically in the context of Filipino culture, and it is important to approach this issue from a communication perspective rather than from a psychological one as most studies have done.

To better understand this issue, it is necessary to examine how a Filipino LGBTQ individual experiences, deals with, and responds to sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace.

In my study, I utilized personal narratives to share my experiences as a Filipino LGBTQ individual who has encountered sexual orientation microaggressions at work, using the symbolic interactionism lens to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of this issue.

### **Research Questions**

This study explored the major question: How does my disclosure of my sexual orientation shape my communication experiences and communication behaviors as a Filipino LGBTQ vis-à-vis microaggressions in the workplace?

Specific questions included the following:

1. How did my self-disclosure shape my communication experiences of sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace and vice versa?
2. How did I communicate with my coworkers amidst these microaggressions?
3. How did I communicate to resolve issues on microaggressions with my coworkers?

## **Objectives of the Study**

This study's main objective was to explore how self-disclosure of my sexual orientation shaped my communication experiences and communication behaviors as a Filipino LGBTQ vis-à-vis microaggressions in the workplace.

The specific objectives are the following:

1. To determine how self-disclosure shaped my communication experiences of sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace and vice versa;
2. To describe how I communicated with my coworkers amidst these microaggressions; and
3. To discuss how I communicated to resolve issues on microaggressions with my coworkers.

## **Significance of the Study**

Since there is no national policy, such as the Anti-Discrimination Bill or the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression Equality (SOGIE) Bill, that is in place to protect LGBTQs from all forms of discrimination, knowing and understanding how sexual orientation microaggressions occur among Filipino LGBTQs in the workplace can help human resources managers and policymakers in crafting policies and programs that promote a safe working environment.

This research can contribute to the existing body of knowledge on microaggressions, especially to the few existing literature on microaggression research in the Asian and Filipino contexts. My personal experience can offer a deeper

understanding of the cultural and social implications of this phenomenon among a marginalized group.

A methodological contribution is using autoethnography as a research and symbolic interaction and other models as a lens, which allowed me to give a detailed account of my personal experiences through timelines as a Filipino LGBTQ.

By examining the communicative implications of microaggressions, I hope to shed light on the ways in which communication specialists can better engage and make communication strategies to address this pervasive form of discrimination.

### **Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The findings are based on my personal experiences and viewpoints, so they may not be generalizable to other individuals or represent the broader findings of previous studies on sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace. This limitation is inherent to the autoethnographic method used in this research. However, the reflexivity of the study ensures that it remains a valuable source of data for filling gaps in research and providing a firsthand perspective on sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace in the context of Filipino culture.

Although this research acknowledges the existence of various microaggressions (such as those based on race, religion, ability, and social status), this study primarily focuses on sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace.

### **My Positionality as a Researcher-Subject**

As someone who identifies as gay, I have firsthand experience with sexual orientation microaggressions. I have personally experienced sexual orientation

microaggressions in the workplace. When I revealed to my previous colleagues that I was gay, certain assumptions were made. When I wore pink or exhibited feminine behavior, people immediately drew conclusions and inferred meanings. These conclusions can sometimes lead to subtle but hurtful comments that attack some aspect of my identity.

Based on my experiences, I believe that regularly experiencing sexual orientation microaggressions caused me to build defenses - to be more guarded and less forthcoming with my former colleagues as well as to limit the amount of personal information I shared with my former coworkers. Microaggressions after self-disclosure affected my interactions with them and impacted my work performance. However, I kept these event , along with the associated emotions, to myself.

As I relived those distressing moments, I questioned if there was something flawed about me or if my mere existence and actions as a gay man triggered such comments. However, I have come to realize that my experiences can serve a greater purpose than just being personal stories; they can also provide valuable information. Through my personal narratives, I can offer firsthand information about the experiences of a Filipino LGBTQ individual in the workplace who is subjected to sexual orientation microaggressions. Despite the pain caused by those microaggressions, they have helped shape me into the person I am today. I am now strong and more cognizant of the potential repercussions of those subtle remarks, and it is time for me to be more vulnerable and allow myself to be free.

## **Chapter II**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

This review of related literature is organized into four headings as aligned with the research objectives/ questions: 1) Microaggressions as a form of discrimination, 2) Sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace, and 3) Disclosure of LGBTQ identity, and (4) Being an LGBTQ in the Philippines. Theoretical and methodological approaches to studying microaggressions are also discussed.

These research works on microaggressions are analyzed, with a particular emphasis on microaggressions related to sexual orientation and those that occur in the workplace.

#### **Microaggressions as a Form of Discrimination**

People I used to work with would often call me “beks,” which is a slang term for gay men in Filipino language and culture. They would ask me who played the “man” role in my relationship and suggest that my relationship was only about sex. I believed these were typical remarks, and sometimes I believed they were only teasing or engaging with me by making such personal inquiries and bold statements. However, these seemingly innocuous remarks or queries constitute a type of discrimination directed at a marginalized group or individual, such as those belonging to the LGBTQ community.

#### **Definition and Types of Microaggressions**

Microaggressions are defined as subtle, yet harmful, forms of prejudice that are often unintentional and are usually faced by individuals who belong to marginalized

groups (Sue, 2010). These fleeting, everyday interactions can come in different forms such as verbal, nonverbal, or environmental cues, and can have a substantial impact on the emotional well-being and sense of belonging of those who encounter them. Sue et al. (2007) identified three categories of microaggressions: microassaults (explicit discriminatory actions), microinsults (subtle insults or dismissals), and microinvalidations (denial or invalidation of experiences of marginalized groups).

According to Sue (2010), microassaults are deliberate and obvious acts of discrimination, such as using derogatory slurs or making hate speech directed towards LGBTQ individuals. These are the most obvious and explicit forms of microaggressions, but they can also be the most damaging. An example of a microassault is telling a homophobic joke and then justifying it by saying it was meant to be humorous or just a joke.

On the other hand, microinsults are more subtle and often unconscious forms of disrespect or hostility towards a particular group. They involve subtle insults, put-downs, or dismissals. These can be difficult to identify but can have a significant impact on a person's self-esteem or sense of belonging. For instance, using derogatory jokes or comments towards LGBTQ individuals, even if meant to be humorous, can be hurtful and derogatory. Another example of a microinsult is telling a gay man that he does not sound or look gay (Sue, 2010).

Lastly, Sue (2010) said that microinvalidations are behaviors that exclude or negate the experiences of a particular group. Microinvalidations are comments or behaviors that invalidate a person's identity or experiences, often without intending to do so. These types of microaggressions, Sue explained, can make individuals feel invisible and marginalized. Although these behaviors may stem from good intentions,

they can still be experienced as invalidating or humiliating. An example is telling someone to not be oversensitive with their jokes about your sexual orientation.

According to Williams (2019), microaggressions are often regarded as verbal statements, but they can manifest in various forms. They can involve both positive and negative verbal statements, inactions, being ignored, rejection, and environmental assaults. Although microaggressions usually do not cause physical harm, some situations may result in such harm.

### **Objects of Microaggressions**

Microaggressions are usually directed towards people from marginalized groups and can cause harm or offense. The targets of microaggressions can be individuals or groups, based on their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, and other social identities.

Individuals belonging to non-white racial and ethnic groups are frequently subjected to microaggressions. For example, Forrest-Bank & Jenson (2015) conducted a survey among a group of 409 young adults comprising Asians, Latinos, Blacks, and Whites, and found that young adults from all the non-white groups reported significantly higher levels of microaggressions compared to those from the White group. The survey also revealed that Black participants reported experiencing the highest levels of microaggressions, followed by Latinos/Hispanics and Asians.

In a different study of 10 self-identified Asian-Americans, microaggressions toward these individuals may include comments about their perceived intelligence or exoticization (Sue et al., 2007). The study reveals compelling evidence that microaggressions are not only harmful but also have negative effects on the targets.



Most participants discussed having encountered persistent racial microaggressions from well-meaning friends, neighbors, teachers, coworkers, and colleagues. Invalidation, anger, rage, frustration, and feelings of continuous belittlement were among the emotions they mentioned. The groups frequently expressed their feelings of being imprisoned, silent, and unappreciated.

Gender can also be a target of microaggressions. Nadal (2010) categorizes gendered microaggressions into three distinct types: gender micro-assaults, gender microinsults, and gender microinvalidations. Gender micro-assaults are overtly sexist behaviors or speech, while gender microinsults refer to unintentional statements or behaviors that imply men are superior to women. Gender microinvalidations involve subtle communication that dismisses or devalues women's thoughts or feelings and are considered the most harmful of the three forms of gender-based microaggressions. Conversely, gender micro-assaults are the least subtle and harmful, while gender microinsults fall in between these two extremes (Yang & Carroll, 2018).

The findings in a study conducted by Yang & Carroll (2018) at a large Midwestern research university showed that female instructional and clinical faculty members in various STEM fields experienced multiple types of gendered microaggressions. The participants, which included tenured and non-tenured-track faculty, reported experiencing four different types of gendered microaggressions: sexual objectification, being silenced and marginalized, being labeled as a "strong woman," and workplace microaggressions. These findings align with Nadal's (2010) categorization of gendered microaggressions and highlight the prevalence of these experiences in various contexts or settings.

Sexual orientation and gender identity are also common targets of microaggressions. LGBTQs may experience microaggressions related to their sexual orientation or gender identity, such as assumptions that everyone is heterosexual or cisgender, or being told that their identity is a choice or a sin. Various types of sexual and gender identity-based microaggressions have been proposed, regardless of their form (Nadal et al., 2010; Sue, 2010).

Prior research has identified some of these types of microaggressions and has also identified additional types. Platt & Lenzen (2013) identified two forms of sexual and gender identity-based microaggressions: surface-level acceptance only when individuals are not in a relationship (undersexualization) and hurtful jokes (microaggression as humor). Other types of microaggressions include threatening behaviors that do not involve physical assault (non-physical assaultive experiences), verbal harassment or physical violence being ever-present (physical threat or harassment), the belief of others that they have a right to objectify one's body (denial of body privacy), disapproval by family in a subtle manner (familial microaggressions), the presence of systematic or environmental microaggressions (systematic microaggressions), and the undermining or questioning of one's sexual or gender identity by others (invalidation of LGBTQ identity) (Nadal et al., 2011; Nadal et al., 2012; Munro et al., 2019). These findings emphasize the various ways in which sexual and gender identity-based microaggressions can occur and their detrimental effects on individuals' mental health and well-being.

Microaggressions are commonly experienced in social settings such as schools and workplaces in the Philippines, particularly directed towards women and members of the LGBTQ community. According to Pag-iwayan's (2021) article, some people may

consider these microaggressions as trivial or innocuous, but research suggests otherwise.

Although there is an extensive body of literature on microaggressions, most of the research has been conducted in the United States (Kiekens et al., 2021). The issue of microaggressions experienced by Filipinos in the Philippines, specifically with regards to sexual orientation, remains understudied. While existing research has examined microaggressions experienced by Filipinos, the focus has primarily been on racial microaggressions (Nadal, Escobar, et al., 2012; Viernes, 2014) and gender and disability microaggressions experienced by Filipino women with disabilities in the Philippines (Ancha, 2022). Nonetheless, it is essential to acknowledge that microaggressions can have a profound and enduring impact on individuals who belong to marginalized groups, such as the LGBTQ community.

### **Impacts of Microaggressions**

The presence of microaggressions is not widely acknowledged. Others might wonder if their effects are really that harmful. The fact that the definition contains "often unintentional" makes the term itself potentially problematic. It can be challenging to perceive something as both aggressive and unintended. However, arguing over terminology and definitions trivialize how serious the issue is. These biases are real, as are the slights, insults, and remarks. The people who encounter them are truly affected by them.

Studies indicate that racism and discrimination negatively affect the health of minorities and people of color, leading to increased rates of mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and chronic stress, as well as physical illnesses like heart disease and type-2 diabetes (Hicken et al., 2014; Walls et al., 2015). Researchers have also

explored the impact of microaggressions and racial climate on African American college students, revealing that these experiences caused heightened feelings of depression, self-doubt, frustration, and isolation that adversely impacted their academic performance (Solórzano et al., 2000).

Sue (2010) described the subtle nature of microaggressions in his article:

“Our research suggests that microinsults and microinvalidations are potentially more harmful because of their invisibility, which puts people of color in a psychological bind: While people of color may feel insulted, they are often uncertain why, and perpetrators are unaware that anything has happened and are not aware they have been offensive.”

Sue also mentioned that it is evident from the research on microaggressions that they have "powerful detrimental consequences to people of color," as well as, one might assume, toward anyone who encounters them (2010).

For example, a study found that gender-based and ethnic minority-based stereotype threat targets experience impairments to their working memory and engage in mind-wandering, which in turn reduces their task performance (Schmader & Johns, 2003).

Holland et al. (2013) conducted a study focused on the LGBT community, which found that hearing the pejorative phrase "That's so gay" could lead to heightened feelings of isolation among college students who identify as LGBT.

Subtle forms of workplace abuse, including microaggressions, can infiltrate organizations and become part of the overall work environment. Discrimination and microaggressions can have detrimental effects on the mental and physical health of

minority groups, including the LGBTQ community. In certain instances, subtle or interpersonal discrimination can be more damaging than more obvious forms of discrimination because the recipient may have to devote significant mental energy to questioning whether they are just imagining it or trying to figure out who is responsible.

Research has shown that perceived discrimination can lead to physical withdrawal from work, such as tardiness, absenteeism, and intentions to quit, indirectly through psychological withdrawal, such as burnout and lack of engagement. Volpone & Avery (2013) discovered that perceived discrimination was connected to reduced engagement and increased burnout, which was then associated with increased tardiness, absenteeism, and intentions to quit. The consequences of microaggressions on minority groups, such as negative work factors and mental health symptoms, may not be immediately noticeable. It may take time for victims to comprehend and make sense of the situation.

Even though each of us may experience and react to microaggressions differently, it is important to recognize that they can have a significant negative impact on people, especially those who they are targeted at. These effects may include stress, reduced well-being, and impaired cognitive function. People may feel or think that they are being diminished because of microaggressions. They have cumulative effects on one's sense of self-worth, foster a persistent distrust, amplify the effects of prior traumatic discriminatory events, and increase the risk of mental health issues. These consequences may be amplified for individuals who experience numerous microaggressions based on race, nationality, or other identities.

In the Philippines, LGBTQs are particularly vulnerable to experiencing microaggressions because there are no national laws yet protecting them from all

types of discrimination, including overt and subtle forms. This is in addition to the negative physical and psychological effects of microaggressions. Filipino LGBTQs lack legal safeguards and options when they encounter microaggressions or other types of discrimination. This may encourage those who act in a discriminatory manner toward the LGBTQ community and foster a climate of impunity. The absence of legal protection may also add to a more pervasive climate of prejudice and intolerance toward the LGBTQ community. When there are no legal repercussions for discriminatory behavior, it reinforces unfavorable stereotypes and biases about LGBTQ people and conveys the message that such behavior is acceptable.

### **Role of Microaggressions in Perpetuating Systemic Discrimination**

Microaggressions are frequently considered to be subtle manifestations of discrimination that can be overlooked or disregarded. However, research indicates that these seemingly minor actions can help keep systemic discrimination alive. According to Sue et al. (2007), microaggressions can be seen as an example of subconscious bias and can help to keep oppressive social structures in place. In their research, they discovered that microaggressions directed at people of color at work increased the risk of stress, job dissatisfaction, and plans to quit. Similar findings were made in different research that involved 325 members of sexual minorities (Richard, 2021). This study discovered significant links between workplace microaggressions against sexual minorities and reduced job satisfaction, increased job stress, and symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress.

Furthermore, microaggressions can be seen to maintain the status quo and prevent individuals from challenging dominant power structures. According to Skinner-Dorkenoo et al. (2021), microaggressions can establish the superiority of the dominant

group by "othering" marginalized groups and communicating inferiority. While the focus of the article is on racial microaggressions, the impact of microaggressions is often discussed on an interpersonal level. However, it is important to recognize that microaggressions can also play a significant role in perpetuating systemic discrimination beyond just race.

Furthermore, microaggressions can contribute to systemic discrimination by reinforcing the idea that heterosexuality is the norm and anything outside of that is deviant. When people make these types of comments, they are communicating the message that LGBTQs are not fully accepted or valued members of society. This can lead to larger issues such as discrimination in the workplace and even violence and harassment against LGBTQ individuals.

When microaggressions go unaddressed, they can create a culture of tolerance towards discriminatory behavior and pave the way for more overt forms of discrimination. It is important to understand that microaggressions have far-reaching consequences beyond just the interpersonal level and can contribute to maintaining existing systems of oppression.

### **Resolving Discrimination Through Communication**

Tyler's (2020) study sheds light on the root causes of discrimination and offers solutions to mitigate it in the workplace and in society. He focused on how intergroup communication and contact can shape the perceptions of discrimination and biased attitudes towards others as well as encourage a shift in ideologies and thought processes to foster positive change. The study identified three main approaches to achieve this goal: educating individuals on the issue, promoting clear communication

with others, and promoting recategorization to break down stereotypes and reduce discrimination.

**Education.** Tyler (2020) suggests that one effective approach to combat discrimination is through education. The study indicates that individuals who pursue education related to stereotypes, prejudice, gender, and ethnic diversity can increase their level of self-awareness and develop greater empathy and understanding towards those who are different from them. By actively engaging in higher learning, individuals can unlock their subconscious mind to be more compassionate towards others.

**Transparent communication.** The second approach to reducing discrimination, according to Tyler (2020), involves engaging in open and honest communication when discrimination occurs. It is important for individuals to speak up and confront discriminatory behavior to create a united front against discrimination. Failing to confront discriminatory behavior can lead to feelings of guilt and shame. By utilizing effective communication strategies, both parties can engage in meaningful discussions and learn from one another, while remaining open to diverse perspectives.

**Recategorization.** In addition, the third method involves the concept of recategorization, which means seeking out connections with individuals who are different from us to foster a sense of inclusivity. Essentially, this involves building bridges between diverse groups. By engaging in intergroup communication with individuals from diverse backgrounds, we can broaden our perspectives and develop more positive relationships. This increased cooperation and interdependence can lead to the formation of a shared group identity, which in turn leads to more favorable attitudes towards others who are different from us (Tyler, 2020).



Tyler suggests that achieving harmony is possible through collective efforts to change social norms. As individuals expand their knowledge on topics related to stereotypes, discrimination, and diversity, such conversations become more commonplace. Additionally, addressing discrimination through open and supportive communication, and standing up for each other, promotes a sense of togetherness and fosters a more inclusive environment.

According to Tyler (2020), each person sees the world from their own perspective. It follows that since every person has a unique perspective on every event and part of life, it is impossible to completely understand what others are thinking and feeling. Humans do, however, have important traits like empathy and effective communication that can help them better understand other people. They can strive to lessen discrimination, bias, and prejudice by using these tools. Recognizing that each of us has specific biases is the first step. The development of empathetic skills is crucial for personal and societal progress. Developing empathetic skills necessitates acquiring knowledge about the emotions, encounters, objectives, aspirations, apprehensions, and viewpoints of others. It is imperative to bear in mind that our individual perspectives, which are molded by our personal encounters and internal responses to them, exert an influence on the educational procedures we participate in daily. Efforts toward comprehending the limitations and acknowledging them can contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and empathetic society (Tyler, 2020).

### **Sexual Orientation Microaggressions in the Workplace**

Microaggressions, which target sexual orientation specifically, are getting more prevalent. These behaviors entail prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination against a person based on that person's gender, sexual orientation, or identity. For instance,

when someone who identifies as a member of the LGBTQIA+ group is involved, using sexist language, making assumptions about gender roles, or thinking that some genders or orientations are inferior to others can all result in microaggressions. They can also take the shape of institutional factors, which are frequently prevalent in the workplace and include pay disparities and barriers to career advancement (Yang & Carroll, 2018).

People who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) are a marginalized group that has traditionally faced overt discrimination (Nadal et al., 2011). The feelings and beliefs of dominant groups—namely, those who identify as White, Christian, masculine, heterosexual, and cisgender—are considered normal by society. As a result, LGBTQ individuals who go against social norms struggle. Currently, what was once overt discrimination against sexual and gender minorities has changed (Resnick & Galupo, 2019). Most people no longer actively participate in biased actions with the intention of harming marginalized communities. Microaggressions, yet another type of covert discrimination, are now widespread (Nadal et al., 2016). While LGBTQ individuals encounter microaggressions in a variety of contexts, they frequently occur at work.

Because of cisnormative and heterosexist work environments, LGBTQ individuals encounter these microaggressions more frequently at work (Galupo & Resnick, 2016; Resnick & Galupo, 2019). The findings of a study by McKinsey, which gathered responses from over 4,000 LGBTQ employees among a sample of over 60,000 employees from a variety of industries, occupations, and locations in the United States, underline the urgent need for businesses to increase their understanding of and support for the populations they employ (Jacobson et al., 2022). The results show

that nearly one-third of the LGBTQ employees surveyed admitted to encountering a microaggression at work, such as being stopped or talked over. However, various segments of the LGBTQ community experienced these events more frequently than others. Gender intersectionality was found to be an especially important factor because, like straight employees, LGBTQ women and transgender employees were more likely to report encountering microaggressions than gay men (Jacobson et al., 2022).

Research has also shown that workplace policies and heteronormative assumptions from coworkers have a significant negative effect on LGBTQ microaggressions (Galupo & Resnick, 2016; Resnick & Galupo, 2019). Misgendering, tokenizing identities, using derogatory language, ignoring gay relationships, and being excluded from social activities are a few examples of LGBTQ workplace microaggressions (Galupo & Resnick, 2016).

Additionally, workplace microaggressions result in lower work satisfaction (DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby Jr., 2016) and emotional wellbeing (Desouza et al., 2017). Members of the LGBTQ community frequently felt unsafe, irate, frustrated, sad, humiliated, or ashamed because of these microaggressions. Such feelings can lead to disparities in mental health, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Nadal et al., 2011).

### **Disclosure of LGBTQ Identity**

In the workplace, it is crucial to consider the implications of self-disclosure. Sharing personal information with coworkers can have negative consequences if not handled properly. Self-disclosure refers to the act of sharing information about oneself

with others, which can include personal beliefs, life events, and other intimate details. While self-disclosure can be a helpful tool for building relationships and exchanging knowledge, it can also be risky. Sharing both positive and negative aspects of oneself can lead to deeper interpersonal connections and encourage collaboration. However, it is important to be mindful that not all information is beneficial to share in the workplace. While exposing vulnerabilities can lead to support from colleagues, it can also lead to negative consequences such as a damaged image or strained working relationships.

Self-disclosure in the workplace can create divisions within the organization, with some valuing honesty while others may seek to take advantage of disclosed flaws (Susan, 2021). While practitioners recognize the importance of self-disclosure in fostering healthy and effective working relationships, only a few have examined its potential as a tool for exposing self-referential behavior in the organizational context (Kim, 2018).

Furthermore, self-disclosure is increasingly prevalent in the workplace, and studies have shown that disclosing personal information can build goodwill among colleagues. Demonstrating vulnerability can foster positive team performance, organizational behaviors, and reduce turnover. However, individuals with higher status may face a self-disclosure dilemma, as admitting weaknesses can harm their professional reputation, even though it may bring them closer to their lower-status coworkers (Smith, 2018; Reynolds, 2019). Conversely, when coworkers with similar status share their weaknesses, the receiver's opinion of that person does not change, and self-disclosure does not affect their influence, conflict likelihood, or relationship quality.

Previous studies have shown that disclosing one's sexual orientation, or "coming out," can have positive effects on one's mental health (Ragins, 2004). However, the fear of stigmatization, judgment, and rejection from society can discourage LGBTQ individuals from revealing their sexual orientation (Legate et al., 2011). Discrimination against gays and lesbians in the workplace has been widely reported in various studies (Fric, 2016; Valfort, 2017). Even if a person's sexual orientation is not known, they may still face indirect discrimination in a hostile environment (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). Gay employees may choose to hide their sexual orientation to avoid discrimination and stigma, as coming out can increase the risk of social rejection, prejudice, and discrimination (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010).

On the other hand, people are more likely to feel at ease being themselves in environments that offer high levels of autonomy support, expressing their views, and depending on others. These environments promote genuine speech and foster a feeling of interpersonal acceptance. As a result, people may become defensive and less open in controlled settings where they feel under pressure to conform to predetermined behaviors or expectations. People may be reluctant to reveal stigmatized aspects of themselves when they feel like they are in a controlling environment out of fear of judgment or rejection. However, fostering environments that support autonomy can help to lessen the perceived risks involved with coming out (Legate et al., 2011).

### **Being an LGBTQ in the Philippines**

A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (2013) titled "The Global Divide on Homosexuality" revealed that 73 percent of adult Filipinos agreed that homosexuality should be accepted by society. The Philippines ranked tenth out of

thirty-nine countries in terms of the level of acceptance of homosexuality among its population.

Nevertheless, despite the high level of acceptance, LGBTQ civil rights are still not protected or recognized in the Philippines. The Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) Equality bill, which aims to give all people equal rights and forbid discrimination based on SOGIE or sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression, has not been passed yet by the Philippine government at the national level. Even though there are local laws against discrimination, there are still ways for offenders to get around them and discriminate against marginalized groups like the LGBTQ community, whether on purpose or unintentionally.

The United Nations Development Programme (2018) conducted a study, which found that a significant percentage of LGBTQ individuals in China, the Philippines, and Thailand experience mistreatment, intimidation, or bias in the workplace due to their sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). Approximately 21% of respondents from China, 30% from the Philippines, and 23% from Thailand reported having negative experiences related to their SOGIESC.

The study also found that many people in these nations think their SOGIESC has prevented them from obtaining employment, with 10% in China, 21% in the Philippines, and 28% in Thailand having reported such experiences (United Nations Development Programme, 2018). Additionally, in these nations, more than two-thirds of respondents claimed to have seen employment postings that specifically disqualified applicants based on their SOGIE.

In these nations, there are no legal safeguards against workplace discrimination, and there are few options for legal redress outside of internal workplace

regulations. Few respondents (only a small proportion) stated that their employers had a formal complaint process in place for LGBTQ discrimination cases (United Nations Development Programme, 2018).

## **Synthesis**

As a member of the LGBTQ community, I have experienced microaggressions in the workplace too. While some may argue that these incidents are trivial or insignificant, they have a cumulative impact on one's mental health and well-being.

Moreover, I have noticed that these microaggressions are often invisible and not openly discussed. The subtle nature of these comments makes it difficult to address them, as they are not deemed serious enough to warrant attention. However, this lack of visibility only perpetuates the problem further, as it creates an environment where microaggressions can go unchecked and unchallenged. It is crucial to acknowledge the existence of microaggressions and to work towards creating an inclusive and safe workplace environment for all employees.

With most Filipinos supporting the acceptance of homosexuality, the Philippines has been consistently ranked as one of the most gay-friendly nations. Despite this, there is still a clear discrimination going on in the country, particularly towards the LGBTQ community. Reports indicate that a significant number of LGBTQ individuals experience harassment, bullying, and discrimination in various settings, including the workplace, schools, and public spaces.

In addition to outright discrimination, microaggressions against LGBTQ individuals are also prevalent in the Philippines. These microaggressions can be difficult to recognize and address because of their subtle nature. Consequently, these

microaggressions are not visible and are not talked about, further exacerbating the issue.

Lack of research in the field of microaggressions in the Philippines is also a contributing factor to the issue's persistence. While there are studies on microaggressions, such as Ancha's research on the microaggression experiences of women with disabilities from a gender lens (2022), there is still a need for further studies on this topic. More research can help us understand the scope and nature of microaggressions in the Philippines better and identify ways to address and prevent them.

### **Theoretical Underpinnings of the Study**

Though the study is qualitative, it is informed by the principles and some concepts of a model and two theories. These include the microaggression process model, the Social Penetration Theory, and Symbolic Interactionism.

#### **The Microaggression Process Model**

The Microaggression Process Model, also known as the microaggression theory, outlines a five-stage process that individuals go through after experiencing a microaggressive event, from the initial occurrence to the event's eventual effects. These stages, identified by Sue (2010), are incident, perception, reaction, interpretation, and consequence.

**Incident.** The initial stage of the microaggression theory involves a person experiencing a microaggressive event, which can occur through different means such as interpersonal interactions, passive events, or environmental cues that suggest a devaluation of certain group identities. These incidents can take the form of verbal,



nonverbal/behavioral, or environmental cues, with the former involving direct or indirect comments directed at targets, and the latter including the use of body language or physical actions (Sue, 2010).

**Perception.** Sue (2010) points out that in this phase, the person decides whether they think the perpetrator of the act was biased in some way. To find out if bias played a role in the incident, this phase may involve probing questions and a thorough review of the incident.

**Reaction.** According to Sue (2010), the participant's immediate response can be thematic: they can acquire a healthy paranoia, see the situation cautiously, and filter it by prior discrimination experiences. Sue found that the thematic responses appear to aid participants in reducing the effort they expended in questioning the nature of the event and in preventing them from merely accepting the perpetrator's account of the events as fact. As a sanity check, the participants in this research described their experiences to other people in their group to verify how they perceived the scenario. Instead of accepting responsibility for the occurrence, the participants responded by validating and confirming their own ideas of themselves. They occasionally also reacted by attempting to console or protect the offenders from distress or by expressing sympathy for the offender's behavior.

**Interpretation.** The participant then converts the specific content of the microaggression into a broader topic, which is interpretation. These can include: "You do not belong", "you are abnormal", "you are intellectually inferior", "you are not trustworthy", and "you are all the same" (Sue, 2010).

**Consequences and impact.** These include the mental, emotional, and behavioral effort that may go into understanding and handling microaggressions.

Some participants said that if they did not speak out against the incident, they would feel helpless, invisible, or lacking in integrity (Sue, 2010).

### **Social Penetration Theory**

Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor proposed the Social Penetration Theory in 1973, which states that intimacy or closeness can be achieved when communication starts at a superficial level and gradually moves towards deeper and more personal topics. Additionally, this theory suggests that as individuals disclose more information about themselves, their relationships become more intimate over time.

The process of social penetration follows a structured sequence and advances through different stages as time passes. This progression can be compared to peeling the layers of an onion, where individuals gradually reveal their deeper selves as communication becomes more personal. The act of self-disclosure also undergoes various phases as a relationship develops, according to Taylor and Altman's (1987) theory of social penetration.

Taylor & Altman (1987) presented four stages in social penetration theory, namely orientation, exploratory affective exchange, affective exchange, and stable exchange. During the orientation stage, individuals disclose only basic information and are cautious about sharing anything else. In the second stage, exploratory affective exchange, people start to share details beyond the basic information and are less guarded when self-disclosing. However, the topics of conversation in this stage still mostly reveal the public self. The third stage, affective exchange, involves sharing information from intermediate layers and having more relaxed interactions. In this stage, individuals are more willing to reveal information about their private selves or intimate details. Carpenter & Greene (2015) agree with this view and suggest that

disclosure becomes more spontaneous and casual at this stage, indicating a higher level of comfort and commitment.

As a relationship progresses, individuals share more aspects of themselves through exchanging information, thoughts, and activities, leading to both breadth and depth of connection. Developing trust is crucial in communication, which takes time. At the beginning of a relationship, misunderstandings can occur when expectations, responsibilities, and communication channels are unclear. Over time, frequency, length, and quality of interaction are crucial in building intimate understanding and trust. Positive interactions tend to lead to more positive interactions, while negative interactions tend to result in fewer overall interactions. Relationships are sustained when they provide significant rewards and ended when they become relatively costly (University of Minnesota, 2015).

Therefore, the social penetration theory delineates how relationships evolve and how communication facilitates this process. It involves interpersonal actions that occur during social interaction as well as the subjective internal process that transpires before, during, and after such interactions, which is called social penetration. Verbal and nonverbal behaviors, as well as environmental cues, can convey social penetration. Verbal communication, such as the exchange of information, and nonverbal communication, such as body language, are examples of social penetration. Personal distance between individuals and the use of physical objects and surroundings are instances of environmental behaviors that contribute to social penetration (Taylor & Altman, 1987).

Social penetration theory emphasizes the importance of both breadth and depth in interpersonal communication. Breadth refers to the range of topics that individuals

discuss with each other, while depth refers to the level of personal significance of the information shared. Burgoon & Hale (1984) explained in *Communication Monographs* that as individuals reveal more superficial information about themselves in a conversation, the breadth of the topics discussed expands.

The range and depth of information shared in a relationship can vary. For instance, some relationships may involve discussions on a wide range of topics, but the shared information is only on the surface. This means that the relationship has a lot of breadth but little depth. Conversely, some relationships may be very deep but lack breadth. The most intimate relationships have both a significant range and depth of information shared between participants. This means that information shared in such relationships progresses from the surface to the core of each participant's personality, like the onion analogy (Turner & West, 2018).

The social penetration theory proposes that relationships develop gradually towards greater closeness by disclosing personal information reciprocally. Conversely, relationships can also experience a decrease in intimacy through a process called de-penetration. The dissolution of a relationship follows a linear pattern that can be like the process of building a relationship in reverse (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

### **Symbolic Interactionism**

Symbolic interactionism by Mead (1934) focuses on micro-level interactions. In this study, symbolic interactionism was used to explore how experiences of sexual orientation microaggressions shaped a Filipino LGBTQ's communication, self-disclosure, and interactions in the workplace.

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective that focuses on how people perceive and describe objects, events, and behaviors within society. This theory suggests that individuals' actions are based on their subjective beliefs and meanings rather than objective facts, leading to behavioral patterns based on these subjective meanings. Society is constructed through individuals' interpretations and meanings of their surroundings, and people form social connections through their interpretations of each other's actions. These interpretations are commonly referred to as situation definitions, as they define how individuals understand particular situations (Franzese & Seigler, 2020).

Symbolic interactionism is a well-known theory that has been developed by many scholars and theorists. Some of the notable contributors to this approach include George Herbert Mead and Charles Cooley. Herbert Blumer, who was heavily influenced by John Dewey, is credited with coining the term and bringing the theory to the public. According to this theory, people behave based on the meaning they have assigned to things.

Blumer (1986) suggests that there are three core principles of this theory: meaning, language, and thought.

**Meaning.** Symbolic interactionism proposes that people's responses to other people and things are shaped by the meanings they assign to them. The meaning is a key element of this theory, as emphasized by Blumer (1986) and Quist-Adade (2018).

**Language.** The second fundamental principle of symbolic interactionism posits that the mind forms assumptions and comprehends symbols and interactions based on language. Language gives meaning to everything by providing names for them. To

name something, one must have some knowledge about it, so the name represents a quality or other kind of information about the object. This information is conveyed through language (Blumer, 1986; Quist-Adade, 2018).

**Thought.** To assign meanings to symbols is what our thinking involves. Language serves as the foundation of thought, a mental process where we scrutinize the meanings of symbols, names, and words. This also encompasses imagination, where we can conjure an idea of an unknown object based on our knowledge of it (Blumer, 1986; Quist-Adade, 2018).

**Philosophical assumptions.** Symbolic interactionism suggests that social definitions are formed in relation to something tangible, and that the physical world does indeed exist based on an individual's social definitions. Thus, people do not directly respond to this reality, but rather to how reality is constructed within society. They do so by employing a filter comprised of the perspectives of others, which serves to indirectly mediate their response to reality. This means that humans do not exist in a physical environment comprising actual realities, but in a "world" of socially constructed "objects" (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2006).

There are the assumptions that frame symbolic interactionism:

1. Individuals create meaning through communication.
2. Self-concept serves as a behavioral motivator.
3. Between an individual and society, a unique relationship exists (Turner & West, 2018).

According to Blumer (1969), there are three premises that can be derived from the assumption frames of symbolic interactionism:

1. The initial premise of symbolic interactionism encompasses all the elements that an individual can perceive in their surroundings, such as physical objects, actions, and concepts. Essentially, how people interact with objects or individuals is determined by the subjective meanings they have attributed to them. Blumer (1969) aimed to underscore the importance of actions, particularly the psychological and sociological explanations for them.
2. The second principle asserts that objects and behaviors obtain meaning from social interaction. Blumer, drawing on Mead's ideas, argued that people interpret each other's actions rather than simply react to them. These interpretations are based on the meanings assigned to the behaviors. Symbols, meanings, and interpretations mediate human interaction. Meaning can either be disregarded as unimportant or viewed as a link in a causal chain that connects the factors responsible for human behavior and the resulting behavior (Blumer, 1969).
3. Symbolic interactionism characterizes thinking as a form of inner dialogue, according to Griffin (2006). Mead named this inner dialogue as "minding," which is the time delay in one's thought process when planning future steps. People handle and modify these meanings through an interpretive process, according to Kuwabara & Yamaguchi (2013). To comprehend challenging situations, we talk to ourselves. Symbolic interactionism is essential for thinking, with language being the first requirement. Symbols, negotiated meaning, and social construction of society all emphasize the roles people play. Role-taking enables people to see an action from another person's viewpoint. Early role-taking activities include playing house and pretending to be someone else. Roles are improvisational, but actors follow a script.

Social roles are uncertain, and the person in the situation must create them proactively, as we interact with our surroundings (Garfinkel & Rawls, 2015).

Symbolic interactionism is a social behaviorist theory that is micro-sociological in nature. Interpersonal communication and how one uses it to generate meaning are commonly emphasized by symbolic interactionism (Carter & Fuller, 2015). According to this theory, this newly formed meaning has an impact on both personal and societal growth. Symbolic interactionism is often referred to as a bottom-up method since it concentrates on small-scale interactions and social structures, and then employs them to interpret broader social structures (Carter & Fuller, 2015).

### **Proposed Analytical Framework of the Study**

I used the principles of the Microaggression Process Model, autoethnography, Social Penetration Theory, and Symbolic Interactionism to propose a framework for studying microaggression experiences in the workplace (Figure 1).

I used the **microaggression process model** to structure the storytelling process as I related my experiences with microaggression, namely: before I disclosed my sexual orientation to my co-workers and after my disclosure. I went through the stages of incident (encountering the experience); perception (how I thought about the incident); reaction (my mental and emotional response to the incident); interpretation (my decision on how to treat the incident); and consequences (or the effect of my interpretation of the incident).

The microaggression model has corresponding concepts with **Symbolic Interaction Theory**, namely: self, language, meaning, and thought. Symbolic interactionism posits that we create an intricate system of symbols that provides



meaning to our world based on our subjective perception. The meanings of things are transformed through our social interactions, and we interpret these interactions in a manner that conforms with the pre-existing symbols. To comprehend the patterns of societal behavior, we must initially comprehend the current symbols. The social structure is created due to the interactions that created these symbols. Our interactions with society enable us to construct our sense of self-identity (Franzese & Seigler, 2020).

The meanings and symbols associated with one's sexual orientation vary. In the context of Filipino society, being gay or acting effeminately is frowned upon and stereotyped. Being heterosexual has also come to signify normalcy, just as being masculine has become a symbolic benchmark. Homosexuals, particularly men, may be viewed as hypersexual and, in some circumstances, deviant, discussions about LGBTQ persons frequently center almost exclusively on their sexual lives. A person's self-perception can be impacted, which may then have an impact on how one communicates, self-discloses, and interacts with other people in his or her environment. Gay males are frequently denigrated with labels like *bading* (faggot) or *bottom*, as well as comments like "that's so gay" or "you're so gay."

The assumption that everyone is heterosexual in casual conversation invalidates the complexity of human relationships, especially for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. Microaggressions are symbolic representations of social norms that reflect specific oppressions. For example, the use of generic masculine referents in all hypothetical situations designates women as irrelevant, second-class human beings.

SI, which holds that social phenomena are expressed through social encounters that are reflective of expectations or mores in society, is consistent with the idea of microaggressions.

I used symbolic interactionism to frame the experiences on how meanings can change through communication and interaction with others.

The process of my self-disclosure and the stages I went through after disclosing my sexual orientation and the process of re-negotiating meanings are related to the stages in the **Social Penetration Theory**. It is juxtaposed with symbolic interactionism to frame the experiences on how meanings can change through communication and interaction with others. I went through the processes of orientation where I only provided the basic information about myself to my co-workers. Then, we went through exploratory emotional exchange more details to affective exchange stage where I shared more about my intimate self (that I am gay).

The social penetration theory proposes that the development of relationships with co-workers follows a gradual and sequential pattern of becoming more intimate by sharing personal information reciprocally (Altman & Taylor, 1973). According to Ho et al. (2018), disclosing personal details about oneself or one's life at work can have advantages. Sharing intimate information such as personal secrets, home life, or relationships can foster deeper connections and strengthen relationships.

However, relationships can also experience a decrease in intimacy, which is referred to as de-penetration. According to Altman & Taylor (1973), the process of de-penetration or relationship dissolution follows a linear pattern that may resemble the process of building a relationship in reverse.

Suppose that coworkers consider themselves to be good friends because they have shared a lot of personal information with each other. If one of them violates the friendship by sharing confidential information with someone else or saying something hurtful, the offended person may start to share less information with their friend. Eventually, they will only engage in small talk, and the relationship will become less intimate. Over time, they will share less and less information until they are merely acquaintances. When there is less openness and more closedness, the relationship undergoes de-penetration.

If a relationship between coworkers has been damaged, such as through subtle discrimination like microaggressions, one or both parties may choose to withdraw and reduce the amount and frequency of personal information they share with each other, leading to de-penetration of the relationship.

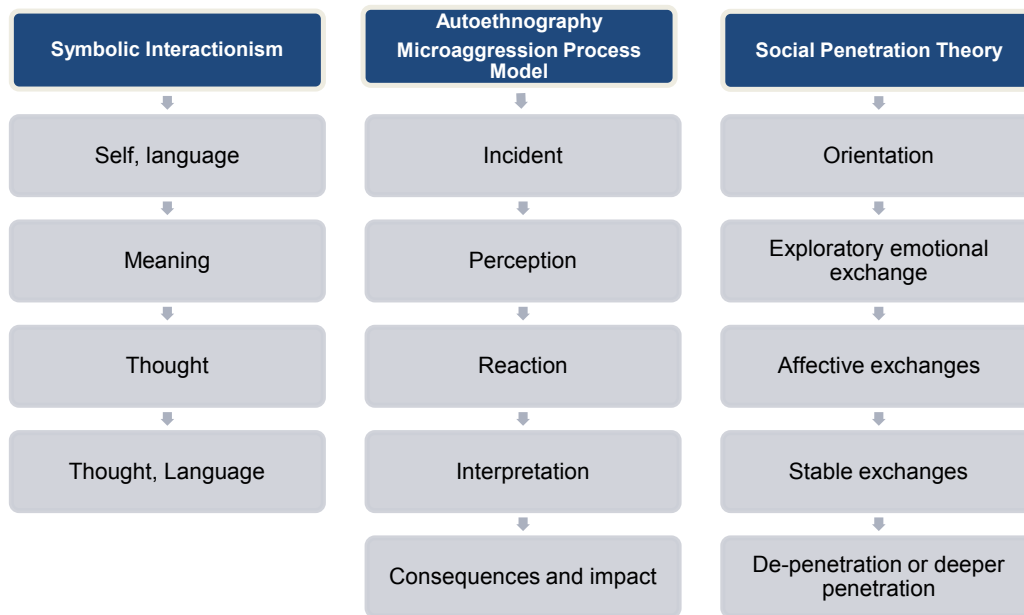


Figure 1 Proposed framework for analyzing microaggressions in the workplace.

## **Chapter III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

This study is autoethnography, which is a type of ethnography that centers on the researcher's personal experiences to understand cultural communication (Allen, 2017). It involves telling one's own story to analyze their social context and relationships with others (Spry, 2001). Bochner & Ellis (2002) explored the evolution of autoethnography and stressed the significance of the three elements: self, culture, and study. Autoethnographic research can vary in the extent to which it incorporates personal, cultural, and research aspects (Ellis et al., 2011; Ngunjiri et al., 2010; Wall, 2006).

#### **Locale and Period of the Study**

The study was conducted in the Philippines, where I, the researcher and the participant, am based. The personal narratives or autoethnographic data, and social media postings that were collected for this study were from 2013 to 2019 to account for my experiences on workplace sexual orientation microaggressions.

The timeline of storytelling has been divided into three phases for the purpose of this study. These phases are as follows: 1) the period prior to my disclosure of my sexual orientation; 2) the period immediately following my disclosure of my sexual orientation; and 3) the period that has elapsed since my disclosure. These phases have been aligned with the research objectives of this study and have been used as the primary headings for the results and discussion presented in Chapter 4.

## Research Participants and Sampling

As the researcher, I served as the participant in this study which utilized the autoethnographic approach. Through discussing my own personal experiences, the aim was to investigate how the experience of sexual orientation microaggressions can shape communication, self-disclosure, and interactions among Filipino LGBTQ individuals in the workplace.

Although personal experience approaches can offer a unique perspective to social science, autoethnography has been faulted for being self-absorbed, egotistic, introspective, and individualistic. This has resulted in polarized debates regarding the method's methodology (Wall, 2016).

According to Denzin & Lincoln (2017), research cannot be fully objective because researchers, like all people, have inherent biases. Additionally, every piece of writing is produced from a specific standpoint, at a specific moment, and for a specific purpose. Therefore, some argue that acknowledging the fact that impartiality is unattainable has undermined traditional notions of objectivity in the social sciences (Wall, 2008).

However, in autoethnography, the individual's unique perspective is the focal point. Autoethnographers are intrigued by the differences in experiences between individuals. As a result, sharing our personal experiences and perspectives can lead to mutual learning.

Autoethnographers may include references or allusions to other individuals in their personal accounts to provide a more vivid depiction of their experiences. However, ethical concerns have been raised regarding the practice of

autoethnography. Unless there is consent, any information about other individuals must remain confidential. Alternatively, researchers or autoethnographers should anonymize information about others before publishing (Ellis et al., 2011; Ngunjiri et al., 2010; Wall, 2008). To protect the privacy of those involved, I refrained from explicitly identifying my previous employer or colleagues in this study.

### **Research Method**

This study employed autoethnography to depict and analyze personal experiences within their cultural context. One of the most significant aspects of autoethnography is its ability to contextualize personal experiences in a cultural framework (Ellis et al., 2011). A comprehensive comprehension of culture is required to understand how microaggressions emerge and affect both the sender and receiver. Microaggressions occur within the context of individual and group cultures. The subculture to which the sender and receiver belong, such as LGBTQ versus heteronormative and cisgender individuals, is reflected in individual experiences and workplace aggressions. Each group's values, beliefs, and actions are represented in these experiences.

When culture is only seen as a characteristic of the group, people are defined by the perceived characteristics of the whole, and individual differences are downplayed (Chang, 2016). This is precisely the issue with microaggressions. It blurs the line between an individual and the collective, resulting in stereotyping and microaggressions against minority groups. Autoethnography, as a methodology, enables the cultural link between an individual and others to emerge (Chang, 2016). It serves as a crossroad of self-writing and prior experiences, as well as culture and cultural experiences (Adams et al., 2015).

Autoethnography allows for reflexivity because, as an insider, it enables me to incorporate my perspectives and reflect on how they are influenced by broader behaviors, habits, and processes (Adams et al., 2015; Anderson, 2006; Ellis et al., 2011).

In this study, personal narratives were utilized to explore my experiences with workplace sexual orientation microaggressions from 2013 to 2019. Personal narratives involve authors who view themselves as phenomena and write vivid stories about life. The goal is to comprehend oneself or a portion of oneself in connection with a cultural context and to connect with other participants as part of the research. Through personal narratives, readers are also encouraged to step into the author's world and apply what they learn to reflect on, understand, and carry on with their own lives (Ellis, 2004).

Autoethnography is a research method that involves exploring personal experiences and cultural background through self-narrative. For my autoethnographic study, I chose to use a personal narrative approach. This method requires a great deal of openness, reflection, honesty, and self-acceptance, all of which were integral to my study.

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## **Research Instrument and Data Gathering**

Because autoethnography was employed in this study, I considered myself as the primary instrument for data collection. The researcher's own life and experiences are viewed as the most potent way to acquire knowledge about their social and cultural worlds (Lave & Kvale, 1995 as cited in Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2015).

Some argue that gaining a better understanding of a researcher is possible by employing subjectivity and drawing on one's inner experiences in each study (Rennie, 1994 as cited in Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2015; Schneider, 1999 as cited in Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2015). The process of self-reflection can help in this regard by bringing our own subjectivity to our attention and acknowledging that it inevitably shapes the narrative we create, as well as recognizing our own power of interpretation (Bettie, 2003 as cited in Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2015).

I would not be solely writing about my personal experiences with sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace as this may seem self-centered and egotistical. However, using my own experiences as a proxy, I aim to explore the impact of microaggressions on communication and self-disclosure, and how one's identity and existence are influenced by culture, and vice-versa. By doing so, I hope to provide valuable firsthand information on the topic.

To aid me in writing reflectively, I maintained a journal where I documented and wrote about my personal encounters. Many scholars propose that researchers utilize reflective journals (Ortlipp, 2008 as cited in Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2015; Watt, 2007) or engage in reflective writing while conducting their research (Jasper, 2005 as cited



in Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2015) as a means of separating their subjectivity from observable phenomena.

According to Ortlipp (2008, as cited in Peredaryenko & Krauss, 2015), incorporating reflective journals in research can bring about concrete changes in the study's design. By documenting the gradual transformation of methodologies and analysis, as well as the evolution of the researcher's role as an instrument, reflective journals provide visible evidence of these changes. Additionally, reflective journaling offers a space for the researcher to critically examine their methods, frameworks, and assumptions throughout the research process. Consequently, self-reflective writing can make emotions, experiences, and thoughts an integral part of the research process for both the researcher and the reader.

Alongside self-reflective writing, I also included social media and blog posts relevant to my experiences with sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace from 2013 to 2019.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

The main data source used in this study was self-reflection, which involved writing down my thoughts and perceptions on the topic, as well as answering the guide questions provided in this section.

Most of my experiences with sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace that are profound and that have a significant impact on my well-being occurred from 2013 to 2019. So, I gathered personal narratives and available artifacts from that period—such as social media posts, a handwritten note, and blog posts—starting in November 2022. It may occasionally be necessary to refer to experiences I

had with sexual orientation microaggressions before I entered the workforce, such as those I had in my adolescence and early adulthood. However, the primary source of data for this study were personal experiences with sexual orientation microaggressions as a working adult.

To obtain a comprehensive understanding of how my communication and self-disclosure were shaped by my workplace experiences, I selected and reflected on significant events that had a significant impact. This research included a consideration of factual, social, and emotional elements to add depth and context to my personal narratives.

### **Data Analysis**

The aim of autoethnography writing is to create expressive and detailed accounts of personal and social experiences that are both aesthetically pleasing and moving (Ellis et al., 2011). These accounts, known as "thick descriptions," are designed to help both insiders and outsiders gain insight into a culture. Researchers produce these thick descriptions by identifying patterns of cultural experience, such as recurring emotions, stories, and events, through methods such as field notes, interviews, and artifacts (Jorgenson, 2002).

This study employed inductive coding as the method for data analysis. Inductive coding is a qualitative data analysis technique that involves identifying patterns and themes in data by moving from specific observations to more general concepts. This approach allows research findings to emerge from the raw data by identifying frequent, dominant, or significant themes without being restricted by structured methodologies.

This bottom-up method is useful for uncovering insights and understanding from the data (Thomas, 2006).

This study followed the general inductive approach for qualitative data analysis by Thomas (2006). The steps in inductive coding are as follows:

1. Familiarize yourself with the data: Before beginning the coding process, it is important to read through the data and become familiar with its content. This will help you understand the context and identify key themes and patterns.
2. Identify initial codes: As you read through the data, start identifying and labeling specific words, phrases, or sentences that capture the key ideas or themes. These initial codes will be used to organize and categorize the data.
3. Apply codes to the data: Start applying the codes to the data by highlighting or marking the relevant sections of text. This process is called “open coding,” and it helps identify patterns and themes in the data.
4. Review and refine codes: After open coding, review the codes to look for patterns and connections between them. Refine or combine codes as needed to ensure that they accurately capture the key themes in the data.
5. Develop themes: As you refine the codes, start grouping them into broader themes. Themes are general concepts that capture the key ideas or patterns in the data.
6. Interpret and report the findings: After the themes have been developed, interpret the data to understand what it means and how it relates to the research question. Report the findings clearly and concisely.

## Generated Codes

For the first round of coding, I employed a combination of open coding and in vivo coding. I used open coding to break down the data into smaller, more manageable chunks, and then assigned initial codes to these chunks. This helped me to gain a broad overview of the data and identify potential patterns and themes that might not have been immediately apparent.

To make this process more efficient, I used Microsoft Excel to organize and analyze the data. With Excel, I could quickly sort and filter the data, making it easier to identify common themes and patterns. Using both open coding and Excel allowed me to develop an initial structure for my analysis and identify key themes that emerged from the data.

Simultaneous coding, also known as double coding, is a technique in data analysis that involves applying multiples codes to the same data. Simultaneous or double coding codes occur when the data can be categorized in numerous ways, when a passage of data has layers and nuance, and one code is insufficient to depict it, and if the data excerpt is connected to several distinct categories (Saldana, 2012).

As an instance, in this passage, I mentioned about my behavior at work:

“Of course, my coworkers would notice my ‘weird’ and disengaged behavior.”

Codes: [Detach] [Act distant] [Withdraw from the team] [Become reclusive]

The above excerpt has been simultaneously coded with [Detach] [Act distant] [Withdraw from the team] [Become reclusive].

In the second round of coding, I reviewed the initial codes that I had assigned and refined them further. This involved grouping similar codes together and creating sub-themes to capture more specific aspects of the data. Through this process, I was able to arrive at more nuanced and detailed themes that reflected the complexity of the data.

In general, conducting two rounds of coding enabled me to attain a thorough grasp of the data and establish a sturdy framework for my analysis. The integration of open coding, in vivo coding, and Excel facilitated the efficient examination of the data and the identification of significant themes that emerged from it.

Appendix A contains a sample of the list of codes and categories following the two rounds of coding.

## Chapter IV

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I discuss the results in a form of storytelling and divide them into three timelines: 1) before social disclosure; 2) immediately after disclosure; and 3) post disclosure. In the process of storytelling, I hope to answer research questions raised, namely: (1) How did self-disclosure shape my experiences of sexual orientation microaggression in the workplace and vice-versa?; (2) How did I interact with my coworkers amidst these microaggressions?; and (3) How did I communicate to resolve issues on microaggressions with my coworkers? In so doing, I can answer the major research question, which was to explore how self-disclosure of my sexual orientation shaped my experiences and communication behaviors as a Filipino LGBTQ vis-à-vis microaggressions in the workplace through the lens of symbolic interactionism.

I used symbolic interactionism as a lens to examine how language and other symbols or non-verbal language are used to perpetuate subtle forms of bias and discrimination after self-disclosure. Specifically, it was used to investigate how communication cues were used to convey microaggressions and how I interpreted and reacted to these cues and symbols. as well as how these experiences affected the way I interacted with others.

I also used the principles of Social Penetration Theory and the Microaggression Process Model to make a holistic story.

## **Before Self-Disclosure of Sexual Orientation**

Individuals are naturally curious about you when you meet new people, and vice-versa. Common questions include where you live, where you attended school, whether you have a boyfriend or a girlfriend, and other similar questions. Some people will ask personal questions in a frank or straightforward manner, while others are more slow-burning and will take their time before doing so. The same is true for you; you can reveal personal information to someone right away or it will take some time for you to feel at ease around them.

Before I started working, and prior to entering one of the most difficult phases of my life, I was already aware of my sexual orientation. Although I was struggling on some aspects of my identity, my sexual orientation was certain - I am gay. Moreover, I did not need to "come out" to my parents because they already knew and sensed that I was "different" due to my attraction to male celebrities I see on TV.

Even though I never "formally" or "verbally" disclosed my sexual orientation to my parents, brother, or extended family, earlier research indicates that sexual minority youth commonly disclose their orientation to family members. For example, a study showed that 79% of sexual minority youth had disclosed their orientation to at least one parent, and two-thirds had disclosed to at least one sibling and one extended family member (Rosario et al., 2009). Another study found that almost half of sexual minority emerging adults had disclosed their sexual orientation to their parents (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003).

However, my decision not to disclose my sexual orientation may be related to my identity issues, such as a strong desire for freedom and independence. As a child, I was very sheltered and pressured to be a "good son" who always excelled

academically and never made mistakes. These negative identity issues may have contributed to my non-disclosure of my sexual orientation to my parents.

This is supported by a study, which found that individuals with higher levels of negative self-identity tend to have lower levels of disclosure of their sexual orientation to their parents (Rances & Hechanova, 2014). This suggests that negative self-identity can impact how comfortable individuals feel about sharing their sexual orientation with their parents.

Even though this contradicts my parents' religious beliefs (we are Roman Catholic, by the way), I did not experience any physical or emotional abuse or confrontation regarding my sexual orientation growing up. However, we never discussed my sexual orientation, and my parents were somewhat quiet or passive-aggressive about it. They frequently reminded me to "get a girlfriend" and "get married and have kids someday," even though they already have an idea about my sexual orientation.

After college, I moved out of our family home in Laguna and lived and worked independently in Metro Manila and never looked back. Even though I never had my parents' approval regarding my sexual orientation, one of the things that I told myself was to never be afraid of telling other people who I am and what I am. What do I got to lose anyway? Because of that, I had no problem telling other people I am gay. However, I am not the type to bluntly say it. I would prefer that they ask before I reveal anything. I do not want to immediately provide "too much information" or TMI. From my experience, directly or bluntly asking someone about their sexual orientation is frowned upon in Filipino culture.



While I do not mind someone asking about my sexual orientation, I am aware of the risks and dangers that LGBTQ individuals face in the Philippines. Despite living in a modern society and the LGBTQ being visible in media, those who identify as LGBTQIA often encounter difficulties in the job market due to prejudice and mistreatment. The low social standing of LGBTQ individuals may further worsen their situation (UNDP & USAID, 2014). However, even though there is a risk, I would just rip the bandage off and be honest if someone asked me about my sexual orientation.

As I began my career, I saw it as a chance for a new beginning. This meant that I could be authentic and open about my sexual orientation when I felt comfortable doing so. Joining this engineering and technology company and staying with them for over 6 years was my chance to start anew. Navigating the corporate world, which is mostly dominated by straight men and women, while also being true to myself has sometimes been challenging. My authenticity sometimes shows in the way I talk or dress. I know that my voice is not very masculine or deep, and I have a fondness for wearing purple or pink. I have liked these colors since my teenage years, and I often wear them on Fridays at work, along with black.

While some may view these color preferences as indicative of being gay, I do not believe that one's liking certain colors should automatically be associated with their sexual orientation or gender. A study conducted by Davis et al. (2021) supports my belief. The study investigated whether children from various small-scale societies had preferences for the colors pink and blue. The results showed that in societies not impacted by global culture, there were no differences between boys and girls in their preference for pink. This indicates that the idea of associating a particular gender with a certain color is a cultural phenomenon and not because of a natural preference for the color.

People may make assumptions about us based on our appearance, speech, or mannerisms. Although my previous company had non-discrimination policies, these policies mainly focused on the hiring process and did not extend as much to day-to-day interactions. While I did not face outright discrimination during the hiring process, my former manager once asked me if I had a girlfriend. I answered truthfully that I did not, but his question was based on a heteronormative assumption that all men are straight and have or have had a girlfriend.

A few months into my job at my former workplace, I frequently overheard one of my colleagues make the comment, "Bi now, gay later," whenever they saw this male colleague from another department. This phrase insinuated that the person was only bisexual temporarily and would eventually come out as gay. The comment made me feel uncomfortable, as it revealed my former colleague's sense of entitlement to pry into the private lives and romantic relationships of those who identify as LGBTQ. This behavior is an example of a microinsult, which reinforces the perception of LGBTQ individuals as abnormal, immoral, or weak (Sue, 2010).

While I am not able to assume or verify whether the colleague in question is bisexual or not, this incident made me wonder how my colleagues would react if they found out about my sexual orientation. Would they treat me differently? Would they be accepting or hostile towards me? This experience made me more cautious about revealing my true self in the workplace, and it highlights the need for greater awareness and sensitivity around issues of diversity and inclusion.

This hesitation is validated by a study by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (2018), which found that almost half of LGBT respondents were still in the closet at work. Those who chose not to reveal their identities cited concerns about

being stereotyped and damaging their relationships with colleagues. In addition, Ragins et al. (2007) found that for individuals who had not fully revealed their stigmatized identity, their fear of disclosure was a predictor of their job attitudes, psychological stress, work environment, and career outcomes. However, the actual act of disclosure did not have a significant correlation with these variables.

While the results of a study suggest that disclosing one's sexual orientation or gender identity at work can lead to positive experiences (Salter & Sasso, 2021), it can be challenging for individuals who fear stigma and discrimination to reveal their identity.

For instance, when I heard the comment "Bi now, gay later" from my colleagues at work, I became increasingly self-conscious about the way I talked, moved, and dressed. I worried that wearing my favorite colors, purple and pink, on certain days of the week would give them reason to question my sexuality. Despite being in a relationship at the time, I kept my sexual orientation hidden, telling myself that I would only come out if asked directly. However, circumstances eventually changed, and things took an unexpected turn.

While strolling at a mall with my then boyfriend, we ran into one of my former colleagues from work. I was stunned and unsure of how to introduce my boyfriend, so I simply gave his name and avoided any mention of our relationship. However, the news of my encounter quickly spread among my team when we returned to work the next week, and some of my colleagues asked me who I was with at the mall. With nothing left to lose, I decided to come out to them and confess that the person I was with at the mall was, in fact, my boyfriend.

## **Microaggressions Experienced After Self Disclosure**

Initially apparent traits of an individual include their gender, age, and race. However, other significant attributes, such as sexual orientation may not be apparent upon first interaction. When these invisible characteristics are commonly devalued or stigmatized in the workplace, individuals face the challenge of deciding when, how, and to whom they should reveal their identities while evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of such decisions.

Although revealing such characteristics can result in discrimination and bias, it can also lead to positive experiences, including support from colleagues and affirming encounters. A study involving lesbian, gay, and bisexual workers using experience sampling found that disclosing their identity at work was associated with positive emotions (King et al., 2016). This indicates that employees with identities that are often stigmatized can benefit from being open and true to themselves.

However, this is not always the case. Based on personal experience, revealing one's identity may spark curiosity in coworkers, rather than support or acceptance. This curiosity may result in colleagues asking probing questions about one's personal life and sexuality, leading to feelings of awkwardness and discomfort instead of positive emotions.

When I decided to come out to my colleagues, I did not expect it to be a big deal. After I revealed my sexual orientation to my colleagues, they started asking more questions about me and my relationship, even delving into my past romantic experiences.

In fact, I wanted to focus on my work and avoid any unnecessary attention. I was hopeful that after saying "Yes, I am gay," we could all return to our seats and continue working as usual, as if nothing had changed. To me, it seemed reasonable that revealing my sexual orientation should not be a big issue. It should be treated as a natural and straightforward aspect of who I am, just like any other trait or characteristic. Unfortunately, this was not the case. I never anticipated that, after coming out to them, I would also be subjected to these insults and subtle snubs.

Upon disclosing my sexual orientation to my former colleagues, I did not immediately experience any microaggressive behavior or comments. At first, they would ask me seemingly harmless questions during breaks, and I would answer them candidly.

However, despite having shared personal information with them, my former colleagues persisted in asking about my romantic preferences. It was also apparent that there was an awkward tension between me and some of my straight male colleagues after they found out that I was gay. Their behavior started to shift, and I noticed microaggressions in their comments and actions towards me. After reflecting on these incidents and analyzing the data, two categories were identified: verbal and non-verbal microaggressions.

The constant probing and questioning made me feel uncomfortable, as if I was being put under a microscope and my personal life was being dissected for their entertainment. I felt uncomfortable with their prying, but I thought their curiosity would eventually stop. What was even more concerning to me was that they would make negative assumptions and generalizations about LGBTQs, as if these negative stereotypes applied to all members of the community. It was hurtful and frustrating to

hear these kinds of comments from people I worked with every day. Despite this, I decided to focus on my work and my personal life, and I did my best to ignore their behavior.

### **Verbal Microaggressions**

When my coworkers learned about my sexual orientation, I noticed a pattern of unwelcome remarks and intrusive questions about my sexuality, romantic relationships, and even my ability to detect other people's sexual orientations (referred to as "gaydar"). I recall an instance where my straight male coworkers warned me not to develop feelings for them:

*“Once I told them I’m into men, they worry that I’m going to flirt with them. Just because I’m attracted to my own gender doesn’t mean that I will be automatically attracted to them”* (Limpiada, personal communication, July 7, 2013).

When my straight male coworkers warned me not to develop feelings for them, it was an example of a microinsult, which is a type of microaggression that belittles or dismisses an individual's identity or experiences due to their membership in a marginalized group (Sue et al., 2007). This type of comment reinforces harmful stereotypes about LGBTQs and implies that I was making inappropriate advances toward them.

Additionally, my coworkers would often comment that I do not “look gay” and I am “not a typical gay guy.”



*Figure 2 Screenshot of my Facebook post on August 8, 2013.*



*Figure 3 Screenshot of my Facebook post on October 30, 2014.*

Essentially, they are assuming that looking, sounding, or being perceived as “gay” fits into a specific physical context, which it does not. While some people may interpret this as a compliment, in my experience, this type of remark is a form of microaggression. It reinforces harmful stereotypes about what it means to “look gay” and implies that there is a certain way that LGBTQ individuals should present themselves. The comment made by my coworkers that I do not “look gay” is an example of the “assumption of LGBTQ experience” identified by Nadal et al. (2010). This microaggression occurs when heterosexual individuals assume that all LGBTQs have the same experiences and characteristics.

My former colleagues would sometimes ask about my sexuality and the dynamics of my relationship, including how I came to identify as gay and who takes on a more traditional masculine or feminine role. Additionally, I occasionally hear the

phrase “Bi now, gay later,” which makes a crude reference to the common slogan “buy now, pay later,” although it was not directed specifically at me.



Figure 4 Screenshot of my blog post on April 6, 2014.

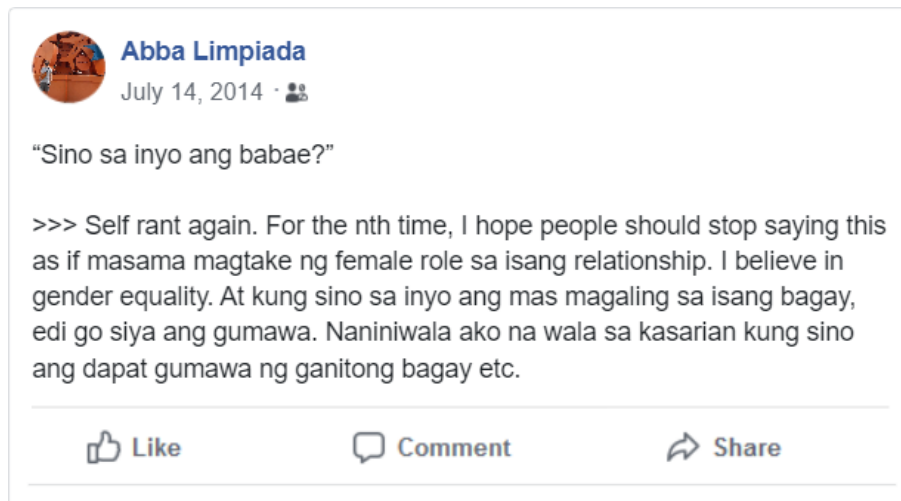
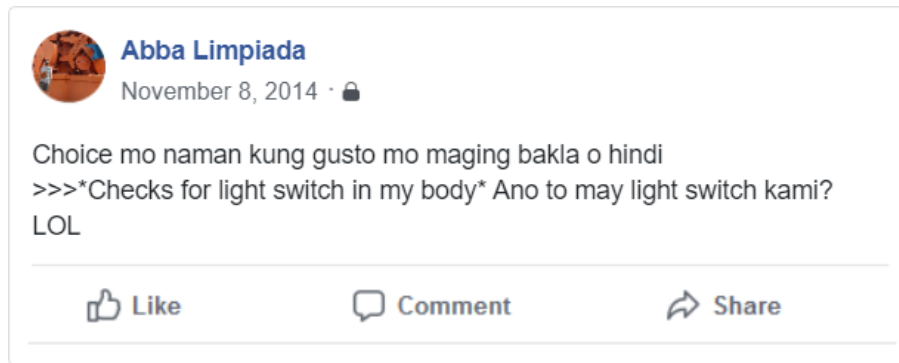


Figure 5 Screenshot of my Facebook post on July 14, 2014.

At some point, I received a comment from one of my former coworkers that being gay is a choice.





*Figure 6 Screenshot of my Facebook post on November 8, 2014.*

The phrase "it is your choice to be gay" can be considered a microaggression towards members of the LGBTQ community. Specifically, it can be classified as a microinvalidation, which is a subtle communication that denies the experiences or feelings of a marginalized group (Nadal et al., 2010). I believe that the statement implying that being gay is a choice is incorrect and sexual orientation is not a matter of personal choice, but rather an inherent aspect of my identity.

Despite having responded to their questions several times and despite having known them for a considerable amount of time, the verbal microaggressions persisted. Even though they were aware of the breadth and depth of my personal information, these microaggressions continued.

What stood out during my analysis was that most of the microaggressions I encountered after disclosing my sexual orientation were communicated verbally, indicating a pattern of verbal microaggressions. Through the analysis, I identified several codes that revealed how these microaggressions were communicated verbally, which created the overarching theme or category of "Verbal Microaggressions". The following codes were generated:

- Comments - inappropriate or unwanted

- Questions - intimate, unwanted, inappropriate, and persistent
- Insults (some masked as jokes or endearments)
- Invalidating feelings and emotions
- Jokes
- Warning from men - not to fall in love with them or not to flirt with them

The overarching category or theme of “Verbal Microaggressions” falls under Sue's definition of microaggressions, which describes them as "everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults" (2010).

When I have experienced verbal microaggressions in the past, I have often felt uncertain about how to react. At the time, I may not have been aware of what microaggressions were and their impact. Additionally, the comments or questions may have seemed harmless on the surface, which made me hesitant to respond. As a result, I sometimes chose to ignore their remarks and answered their questions, even if I had already provided answers before.

Research has shown that people who experience microaggressions often feel uncertain about how to respond (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008; Czopp et al., 2012; Nadal, 2013). Microaggressions pose even more barriers than overt forms of discrimination because they are subtle and difficult to recognize immediately.

Byrd (2018) suggests that those targeted by microaggressions may believe that such incidents are not significant enough to warrant interrupting a discussion because they are often expressed in a lighthearted or unintentional manner. Moreover, if others have previously told them to "let it go" or that they are overly sensitive, they may downplay the harmful long-term effects of microaggressions. Consequently, targets

may minimize the harm they experience and avoid conflict. In my case, I would ignore any comments about my sexual orientation but remain receptive to personal questions.

In addition to experiencing verbal microaggressions, such as my straight male colleagues making jokes and telling me not to fall in love with them, I also noticed a shift in the behavior of some male colleagues after disclosing my sexual orientation. Some became touchy, while others started to ignore me, creating an atmosphere of tension or discomfort.

### **Non-Verbal Microaggressions**

Although non-verbal microaggressions are actions, they can still be harmful to those who experience them, as they can be difficult to identify and address. Examples of non-verbal microaggressions include body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice. Non-verbal microaggressions can also take the form of deliberate acts of exclusion or isolation, such as declining an invitation to an event because of someone's ethnicity, gender, or another identifying trait (Sue, 2010). In addition to verbal microaggressions, I also experienced non-verbal manifestations of microaggressions after coming out to my coworkers.

For instance, there was an incident when I was standing next to a male coworker using the urinal in the men's restroom, and he immediately left as soon as I approached. He appeared startled, as if I would harass him in the restroom. I was confused and wondered if I had done something wrong or if I had given off a creepy vibe. However, I chose not to ask him why he behaved in such a manner since I did

not want to make a fuss. This deliberate act of moving away (Sue, 2010) can be categorized as a microassault.

Apart from subtle snubs or avoidant behavior, there were times when one of my male coworkers would put his arm around my shoulder as we walked, and my other coworkers would giggle, assuming I was enjoying the situation. I felt uncomfortable and strange as I was unsure why that person had suddenly done that. Furthermore, I felt offended by their actions, especially when the people around would just laugh and do nothing, even though I was clearly showing my discomfort.

From my perspective, this physical contact can be considered a form of microaggression because it was unsolicited and assumed that LGBTQs would appreciate the gesture. For example, when a straight man put his arm around a gay man's shoulder. Additionally, my coworkers teased me, which further reinforces the idea that all gay men enjoy these actions from straight men, which is not always the case.

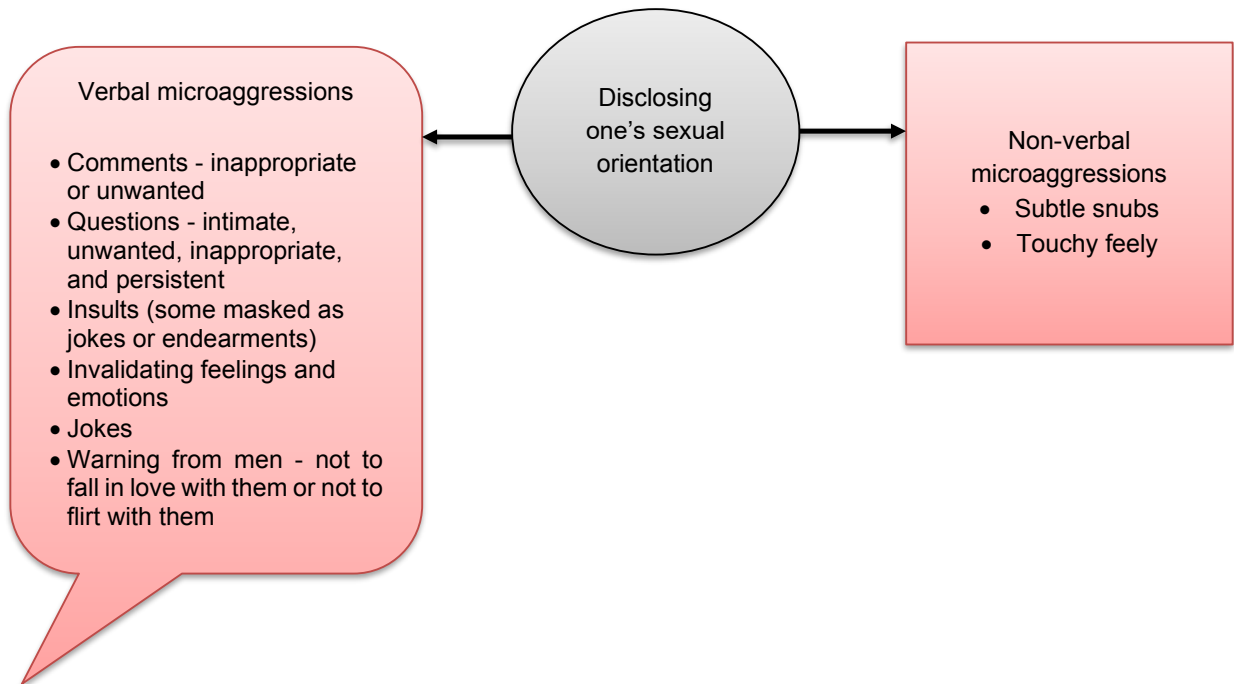
During my personal reflections and analysis of the data, I observed instances of touchy-feely behavior and subtle snubs that conveyed negative assumptions about LGBTQs. Although these actions were not frequent, they generated a theme called "Non-Verbal Microaggressions", which is consistent with Sue's definition of microaggressions that encompasses nonverbal and environmental slights, snubs, or insults (2010). The analysis resulted in the generation of the following codes:

- Subtle snubs
- Touchy-feely

Based on these results, it is evident that microaggressions can be communicated nonverbally through actions (touchy-feely) and behavior (subtle snubs) after an individual discloses their sexual orientation. From my personal experience, these nonverbal microaggressions can convey negative assumptions about LGBTQ individuals and cause discomfort and personal offense to victims.

Although I did not retaliate immediately, I took personal offense to the actions and behaviors of my coworkers. There is currently limited research on how individuals respond to nonverbal microaggressions. However, my personal reaction of feeling offended can be related to the findings of a study that explored how dance/movement therapists experience nonverbal microaggressions in clinical relationships. Schultz (2018) identified personal offense as one of the key themes that emerged from the data analysis. While my experience of discomfort as a victim was not specifically included in that study, the findings from it may offer insights into how individuals in other contexts respond to nonverbal microaggressions.

To summarize, my disclosure of my sexual orientation to my former coworkers resulted in both verbal and nonverbal microaggressions. Verbal microaggressions included inappropriate and unwanted comments and questions, insults, invalidation of my feelings, persistent questioning, and warnings from men not to fall in love with them or flirt with them. Nonverbal microaggressions included touchy-feely behavior and subtle snubs. The figure below depicts the microaggressions I have experienced after disclosing my sexual orientation:



*Figure 7 Microaggressions experienced after disclosing my sexual orientation.*

Microaggressions can have unwanted consequences and negative impact, especially if left unchecked, unnoticed, and unresolved. Victims may start doubting themselves and feel uncertain about whether their experiences qualify as microaggressions. Additionally, failing to address microaggressions can perpetuate their occurrence, leading others to believe that unwelcome questions and insults about someone's sexual orientation are acceptable. This reinforces negative and inaccurate assumptions and stereotypes against the LGBTQ community and can perpetuate systemic and overt discrimination against them. Being aware that microaggressions can be communicated both verbally and nonverbally can enable potential victims to recognize them and respond appropriately and professionally, especially in the workplace setting where they are likely to occur.

In summary, after disclosing my sexual orientation in the workplace, I experienced both verbal and non-verbal forms of microaggression. Verbal

microaggressions included insults, unwanted comments, intimate questions, jokes, invalidating feelings and emotions, and warnings not to fall in love or flirt with them.

I also encountered non-verbal microaggressions, such as subtle snubs and touchy-feely behavior. Despite the harmful messages conveyed by these microaggressions, such as stereotypes about the LGBTQ community, I often perceived them as harmless and was unable to address them immediately.

### **Interactions After Self-Disclosure**

After coming out about one's sexual orientation to others, interacting with people can become a trying and emotionally taxing experience. Microaggressions can negatively impact individuals and groups that are targeted. Identifying and addressing microaggressions can be challenging, but they can still harm those who experience them. Some individuals may react favorably and acceptingly, while others may react negatively.

In my case, after disclosing my sexual orientation to my former coworkers, I experienced repeated microaggressions that eventually caused me to change the way I interacted with them.

To cope with these microaggressions after I disclosed my sexual orientation, I responded with three behaviors: I adjusted my behavior, I showed resistance, and third, I made some action (Figure 8). The details and summary codes of each behavior are explained in the next sections.

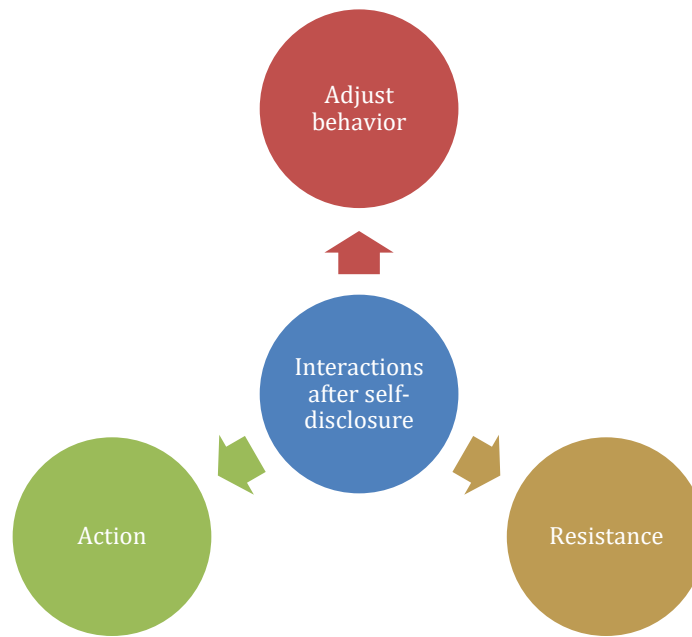


Figure 8 My interactions after self-disclosure.

### **Adjust Behavior**

At the time, I was unsure whether the behavior and comments directed towards me were examples of microaggressions or simply normal workplace behavior. Due to this uncertainty, I developed coping mechanisms to manage the remarks I make and the actions I do to avoid potential conflict or office drama. Unfortunately, it is common for the targeted individual to adjust or cope with the situation, particularly if they are unaware of the impact these microaggressions can have.

#### *Minimize harm and avoid conflict*

Initially, when faced with microaggressions, whether verbal or nonverbal, my response was to ignore them and just laugh along with their jokes about my sexual orientation. At that time, I was aware of overt discrimination, but not of microaggressions. I would keep quiet about the negative emotions they stirred up, like discomfort and uncertainty about how to respond to their words or behavior.



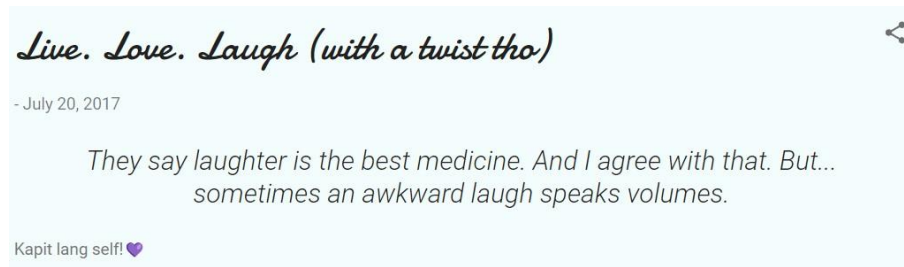


Figure 9 Screenshot of my blog post on July 20, 2017.

There were rare instances when I would say, "That's not funny anymore," or "Is that a joke?" In response, my coworkers would be taken off guard and reply, "I'm just kidding," or "You're being oversensitive," or "You're overreacting."



Figure 10 Screenshot of my Facebook post on September 26, 2015.

Unfortunately, their responses invalidated my feelings and emotions, suggesting that it was acceptable for me to receive subtle negative messages and that I should not feel bad about it.

While analyzing my interactions with my former coworkers after disclosing my sexual orientation, it became evident that my primary objective was to minimize harm, avoid conflict, and prevent office drama, particularly since I was new to the team and the youngest member at the time. The narratives generated several codes, which were used to create a subcategory called "Minimizing Harm and Avoiding Conflict".

- Acknowledge their humor

- Ignore remarks
- Laugh awkwardly
- Make excuses for issues
- Not be sensitive or not take things seriously

As a result, I felt that I was being discriminated against and that my sexual orientation was being made fun of. I felt isolated and developed a negative perception of my former coworkers due to their insensitivity to my feelings, even after I expressed that their behavior was unacceptable. This made me more conscious of my words and actions, as I wanted to avoid any potential office drama at my own expense. These emotions and shifts in my perception and thought process are validated by a study (Molero et al., 2017) that found that subtle discrimination has a greater negative impact on the well-being of lesbians and gays than blatant discrimination. The feeling that I was being discriminated against and isolated because of my sexual orientation was also supported by another study (Jackson et al., 2019), which found that 47.4% of participants reported experiencing perceived discrimination in their daily lives, and this was associated with increased odds of depressive symptoms, loneliness, and lower quality of life. Additionally, those who attributed their experiences of discrimination to their sexual orientation had larger negative effects on their well-being.

### *Ignore*

In relation to the earlier subcategory 'Minimize Harm and Avoid Conflict', since it was already part of my subconscious, I would pretend that nothing had happened and not complain about their insensitive remarks and actions, even though I was already feeling uncomfortable about it.

For example, when one of my straight male coworkers put his hand over my shoulders and my other coworkers would giggle, I would pretend the next day that it never happened so that I could focus on my work. At that time, since I was relatively new and the youngest member of the team, I felt that complaining was not the best or safest course of action. I was still learning the ropes of my job and needed the work experience as well.

The codes "Pretending like nothing happened" and "Not complaining" were generated and served as one of my coping mechanisms towards the microaggressions I experienced at work. This also served as the basis for the subcategory "Ignore."

While our company does have policies in place to prohibit discrimination, harassment, and retaliation, I found myself in a situation where I felt it was best to simply ignore comments and actions directed towards me. Unfortunately, research indicates that discrimination and the fear of retaliation are still prevalent factors that significantly impact the experiences of lesbian and gay individuals at work (Moore, 2017). It is worth noting that despite this, there is a lack of national laws in the Philippines to protect LGBTQ individuals from all forms of discrimination, which can exacerbate these negative experiences.

Unfortunately, ignoring the microaggressions I have experienced made me feel worse. While policies against discrimination are necessary, it is also crucial to go beyond these policies and create a culture that supports diversity and inclusivity. This means making sure everyone feels welcome and respected, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

## *Tolerance*

I was once a career shifter who found a company where I spent more than six years. While some may advise others to simply find a new job if the current environment or pay is unsatisfactory, I personally did not have the privilege to switch careers or companies on a whim.

However, I enjoyed my role as a technical writer. It was not exactly my dream job, but it combined two things that I genuinely loved: technical work and writing. Although it could be challenging at times, I found solace in the fact that I was doing something I enjoyed, and I am grateful for having found that job.

Nonetheless, there was always a desire to explore other opportunities, particularly in companies that were more accepting of LGBTQs. But I could not afford to take that risk at the time because I needed the training and work experience to become a more competitive job candidate in the future. Furthermore, there was the fear that if I did change companies, I would have to come out all over again and potentially face the same microaggressions that I had experienced before.

Despite this, I persisted and learned to tolerate the microaggressions that were unfortunately present in my workplace. I did this with the hope that things would eventually change for the better. My goal was to gain the necessary experience and knowledge that would enable me to eventually find another company with a better work environment.

My decision to tolerate the microaggressions I experienced in my workplace, despite my inclination towards resignation, reflects a significant coping strategy that is aligned with the attentional deployment strategy used by gay and bisexual young men

to cope with heterosexism. In McDavitt et al.'s (2008) study, respondents who faced prejudicial statements often chose to ignore them, which is like the "Ignore and put up with it" strategy that I adopted in my workplace. As a result, my experience was classified under the coded narrative of "Ignore and put up with it," generating the subcategory of "Tolerance."

The fact that I considered resigning highlights the severity of the microaggressions I encountered in my workplace. However, rather than immediately leaving the company, I chose to tolerate them, indicating a significant level of self-restraint and patience. This decision to tolerate the microaggressions, rather than confronting them head-on, is indicative of the complex nature of coping strategies that individuals employ when facing challenging situations.

### *Silence*

Silence can convey various meanings. It could indicate that I'm not bothered by something, or that I'm troubled but unsure how to express it or whether to do so. In my case, remaining quiet despite wanting to speak up was a strategy I used to handle microaggressions at work. It felt like the safest option for me at the time, as I worked to find the best way to address these situations.



*Figure 11 Screenshot of my Facebook post on September 19, 2018.*

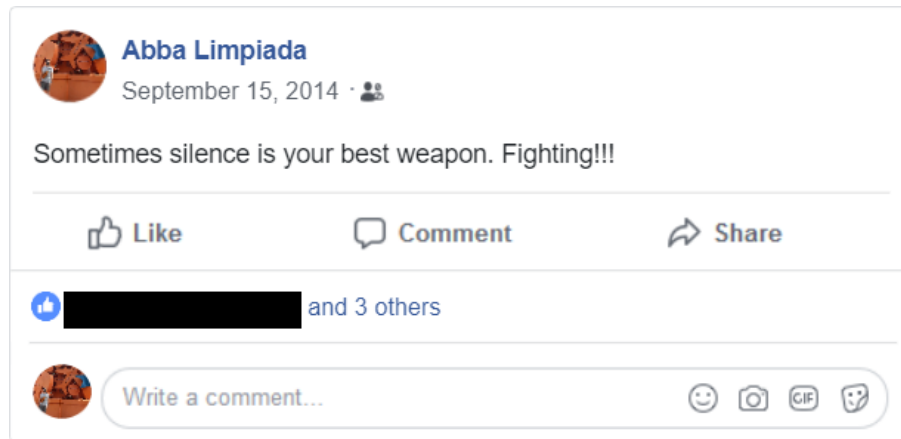


Figure 12 Screenshot of my Facebook post on September 15, 2014.

In my experience, I have found that navigating conversations in the workplace can be a bit tricky, especially when it comes to disclosing personal information. I have been in situations where coworkers have made comments or asked questions that were subtly offensive or insensitive. These microaggressions made me more hesitant to share personal information with others. As a result, I have become more guarded and reserved in conversations with certain people at work. I have learned to be careful about what I say and how I say it.

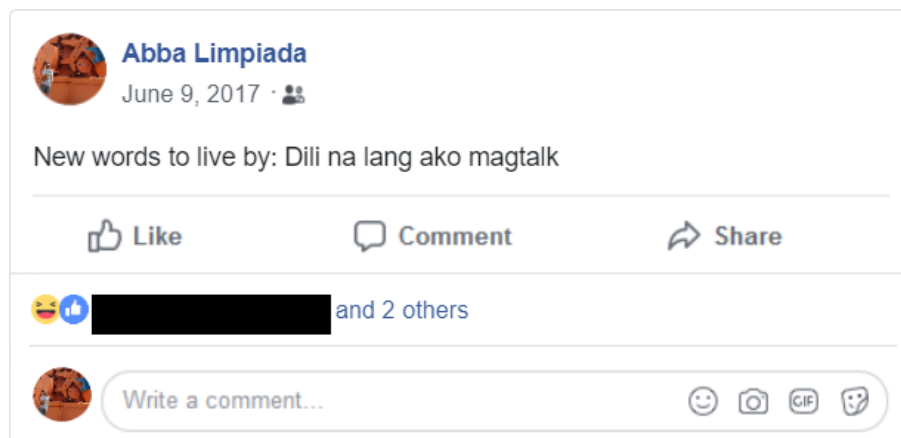


Figure 13 Screenshot of my Facebook post on June 9, 2017.

(Translation: “Hindi na lang ako magsasalita” / I will not talk anymore.)

Sometimes, I find it difficult to open to others, even if I want to. The fear of being judged or discriminated against can be overwhelming at times. I have realized that maintaining my silence is often the safest option in the workplace, especially when it comes to personal information. I have become used to being quiet and withdrawn around certain people, as I am not sure how they will react to what I have to say.

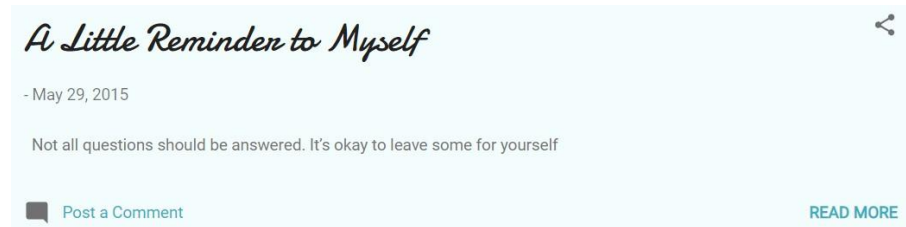


Figure 14 Screenshot of my blog post on May 29, 2015.

At times, I have found myself struggling with difficult emotions that I did not know how to express in a healthy way. Instead of bottling them, I have sometimes turned to social media as an outlet. I have posted about my feelings, frustrations, and struggles, often using it to vent or release some of the tension I am feeling.

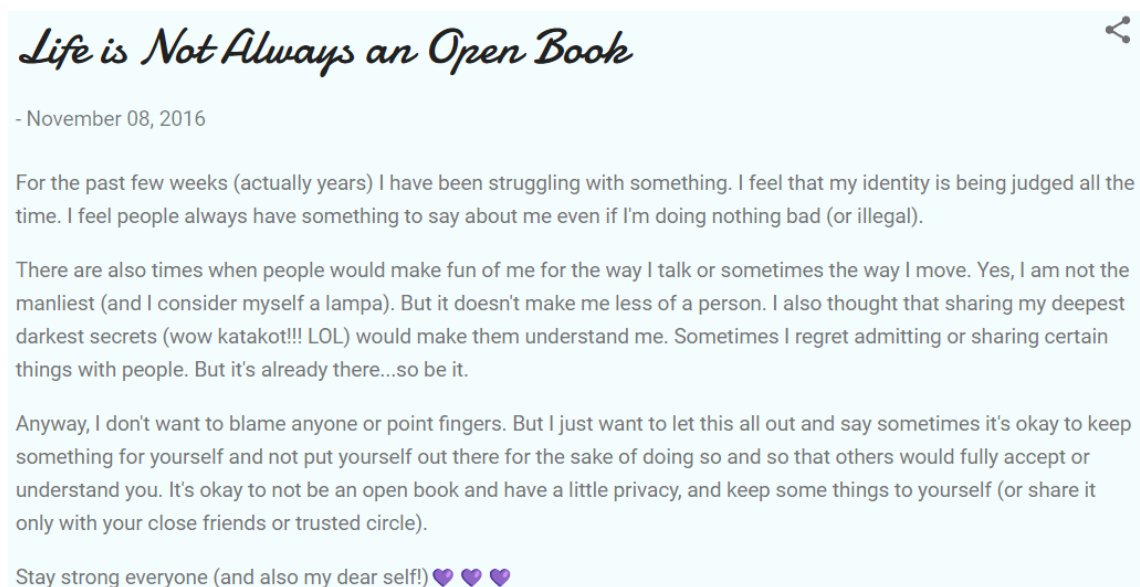


Figure 15 Screenshot of my blog post on November 8, 2016.

After analyzing my personal narratives, I discovered that several codes emerged from my descriptions of how I dealt with challenging situations. These included:

- Disclose less personal information
- Keep mouth shut
- Not answer personal questions
- Not say anything offensive in return
- Not share anything

These codes were classified under a subcategory named "Silence," underscoring the significance of this approach in my coping strategies.

A study (McDavitt et al., 2008) found that individuals used a variety of response modulation strategies to manage their emotions. Some respondents found that venting their feelings through creative expression, such as drawing pictures or writing letters, stories, or poems, helped them deal with strong emotions. Other respondents reported coping with negative emotions by regulating or suppressing their expression. These are all examples of response modulation, which involves attempting to alter the qualities of an emotion after it has already been generated.

In my case, I found that suppressing my emotions was not a healthy approach to dealing with negative experiences. However, I did not feel comfortable expressing them directly to others. Instead, I turned to social media as a means of making sense of what was happening to me and finding a venue to express these emotions. While this strategy provided some relief, it also had its drawbacks. For instance, it did not allow for direct communication with the people involved and could sometimes



exacerbate negative feelings if others responded in a way that was unsupportive or critical. In retrospect, I realized that finding healthy ways to express my emotions and communicate my needs directly to others would have been a more effective strategy.

Overall, I think it is important to find a balance between being open and honest with coworkers and protecting oneself from microaggressions. While it is good to build relationships with colleagues, it is also important to be mindful of the potential consequences of sharing personal information in the workplace.

In summary, after experiencing microaggressions due to disclosing my sexual orientation, I utilized a range of coping strategies that shaped the way I interacted with others. These strategies, including minimizing harm, avoiding conflict, ignoring, and tolerating their behavior, and keeping silent, were adopted to avoid worsening the situation. These multiple strategies were found to be affirmed by a study (McDavitt et al., 2008), which showed that respondents experimented with different coping approaches or adopted multiple approaches simultaneously based on various factors such as the setting, the source, or the consequences of using a particular strategy. However, instead of both parties adjusting to the situation, I was the only one adapting, while the perpetrators continued their microaggressions. These codes were grouped under the main category called "Adjust Behavior," which highlights the need for me to change my actions to cope with the situation. Though these coping strategies were not ideal and shaped the way I interacted with my former coworkers, it led me to identify better approaches to resolving microaggressions at work.

This diagram presents the codes and subcategories under the theme "Adjust Behavior":

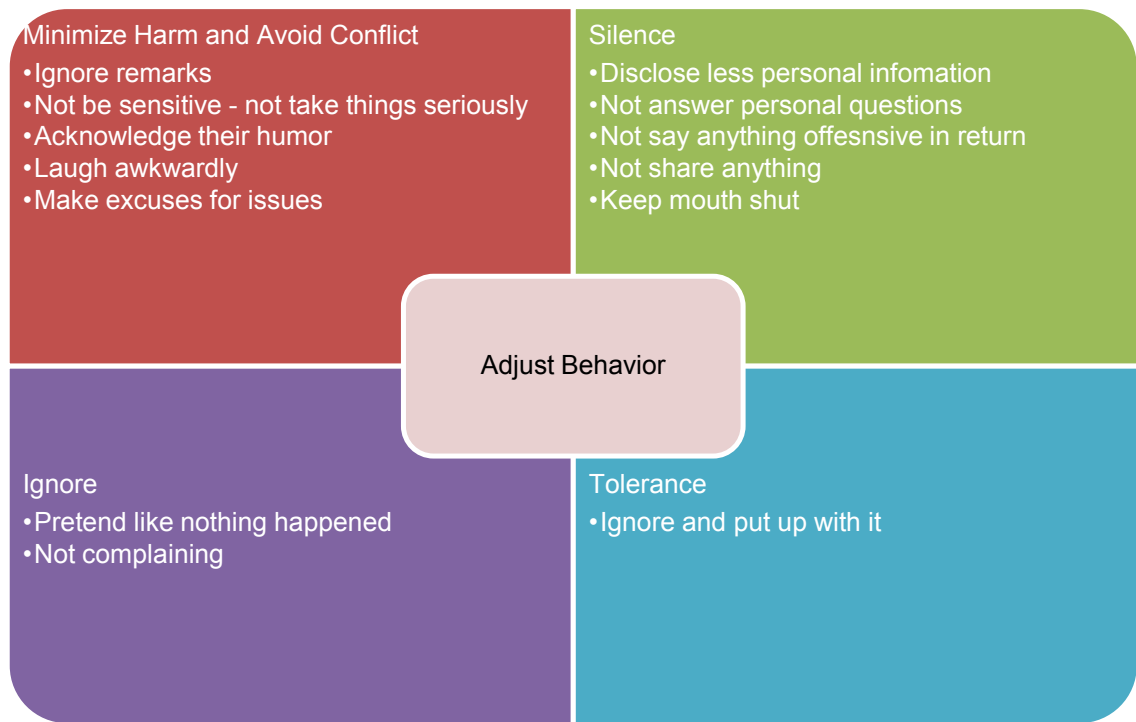


Figure 16 How I adjusted my behavior after disclosing my sexual orientation.

## Resistance

At first, everything seemed fine, but then I started to notice some microaggressions from my coworkers. They were small comments and gestures that made me feel uncomfortable and unwelcome. I tried to ignore these microaggressions, but as they continued, I found it increasingly difficult to stay engaged with the team. Eventually, I decided to withdraw from the team gradually, to protect myself from further discomfort.

Over time, this pattern of withdrawal led to a gradual isolation from my colleagues. I found myself becoming more and more detached from the team, and even de-penetrating from my social circle outside of work. My coworkers noticed my weird and disengaged behavior, but I could not bring myself to explain why I was acting

that way. Instead, I acted distant and reclusive, hoping to avoid any further conflict or discomfort.

As I became more reclusive, my coworkers noticed even more changes in my behavior. They would comment on how distant I seemed, and how I was acting differently from before. But I could not bring myself to open to them, to explain what was really going on. Despite the growing distance between myself and my team, I found that I was still able to perform my job responsibilities properly. However, I knew that this pattern of withdrawal and isolation will not be healthy for me in the long run.

Upon analysis of the provided narratives and the following codes, the theme of "Resistance" was generated.

- Act distant
- Become reclusive
- Detach
- Gradual isolation
- Withdraw from the team

The theme suggests that withdrawing, isolating oneself, and becoming distant from others were forms of resistance against microaggressions experienced upon disclosing one's sexual orientation.

The way that I interacted with others and the coping mechanisms I employed in response to verbal microaggressions align with the findings of a study on coping strategies for microaggressions. Nair & Good (2021) found that withdrawing, ignoring, or disassociating from the context, situation, or individual directing the microaggression is a common coping mechanism. This mechanism is borne out of the

need for self-preservation and protection from further harm or exposure, which aligns with my experience of gradually withdrawing and de-penetrating from my social circle and team.

Similarly, the study found that marginalized individuals may cope by separating or disassociating from people perceived as racist, sexist, or homophobic (Nair & Good, 2021). In my case, I became more distant and disengaged with my coworkers, which is an example of the coping mechanism of acting distant. This is a form of retreating or changing the subject in uncomfortable conversations mentioned in the study.

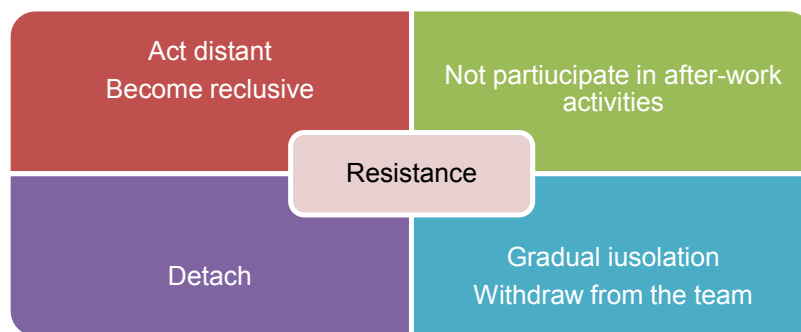
Furthermore, Nair & Good (2021) observed that individuals may cope by holding in their resentment and reactions and attempting to deescalate the situation where a microaggression plays out, which is the coping mechanism of rejecting or stonewalling. This aligns with my experience of holding in my resentment and becoming more reclusive over time. Thus, the theme of "Resistance" in the provided narratives suggests that withdrawing and isolating oneself were not only mechanisms of self-protection but also ways of resisting further discrimination in response to microaggressions.

Looking back, I realize that withdrawing and isolating myself was not the best way to deal with the situation. Instead, I should have found a way to confront the microaggressions and deal with the uncomfortable circumstances in a more productive way. But at the time, withdrawing from the team and becoming increasingly reclusive was the only way I knew how to protect myself.

After analyzing my narratives and the generated theme of "Resistance," it became apparent that using actions such as withdrawal or disengagement was a form

of interaction with others upon experiencing microaggressions and disclosing my sexual orientation. However, this resistance was also emotionally and mentally draining. While these actions communicated my resistance to microaggressions, it is not necessarily an effective way to challenge and resist them as it may be misunderstood or ignored by others and can even be perceived as acceptance of the situation. Therefore, it is essential to find more proactive ways to resist microaggressions that can bring about lasting change and promote inclusivity.

The figure below summarizes how I displayed resistance against microaggressions after disclosing my sexual orientation.



*Figure 17 Resistance to microaggressions after disclosure.*

## Action

Experiencing microaggressions at work can be challenging, and taking action to protect oneself from further harm is important. In this study and context, action meant physically distancing or staying away from the source of conflict. Physical distancing was one of the coping mechanisms that I used to deal with microaggressions at work. I often left the room physically if I was feeling uncomfortable and rarely participated in after-work activities. By taking this action, I felt safe and in control by physically separating myself from the source of conflict. It allowed me to

remove myself from the immediate situation, avoid further harm, or even causing harm to others.

However, the way that I interacted with others or my coping mechanism of physically distancing myself from my coworkers may have been perceived as throwing a fit or having a diva attitude, as they were unaware of the microaggressions directed towards me. This highlights the importance of perception in shaping an individual's understanding of their social world and the meanings they attribute to their interactions with others.

During the analysis of my narratives, several codes were generated related to the actions I took in response to experiencing microaggressions in the workplace. These codes ultimately led to the overarching theme of "Actions". Some of the specific codes related to leaving physically or finding a new place or company included:

- Finding another place or company
- Leaving the office immediately
- Leaving the room physically

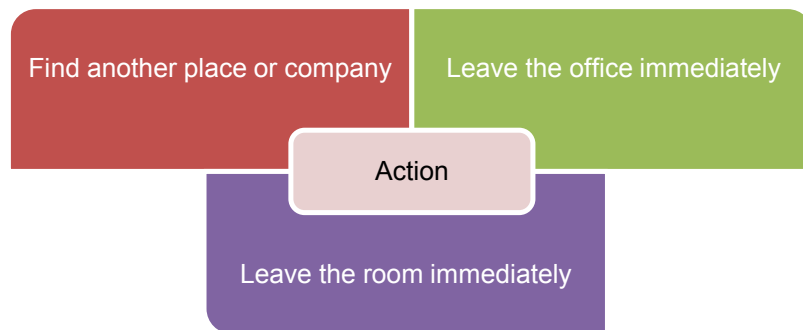
The codes presented here reflect the interactions, actions, or coping mechanisms that I used in response to the microaggressions I experienced. These findings are consistent with the study by Nair & Good (2021), which highlighted the coping mechanisms individuals use in response to microaggressions. The study found that withdrawing or disassociating from the situation or individual directing the microaggression is a common coping mechanism, often arising from a sense of discomfort engendered in the recipient. This mechanism can be a way for individuals

to seek self-preservation or protection from further harm or exposure to the microaggressions.

My decision to quit my job in September 2019 was not solely due to the microaggressions I experienced, but they did play a role in my decision to seek a more inclusive and supportive work environment. When the opportunity arose, I knew I could not pass it up. While the study by Nair & Good (2021) did not explicitly mention resigning from work as an action for dealing with microaggressions, my personal experience of eventually leaving the company may offer insights into the impact of such experiences. The actions or strategies used by individuals who experience microaggressions can vary greatly, but in some cases, the cumulative effect of these experiences can become unbearable, leading to a decision to resign.

Although the study by Lee (2009) specifically focused on racial microaggressions, the results still provide relevant insights into the impact of microaggressions on employees' well-being in general. The study found that microaggressions, regardless of their form, are negatively related to psychological well-being for all individuals and correlated with various negative work outcomes such as job burnout, job withdrawal, and decreased job commitment.

Figure 18 summarizes how I acted on microaggressions after disclosing my sexual orientation.



*Figure 18 Actions towards microaggressions after disclosure.*

These findings are relevant to my experiences of coping with microaggressions based on my sexual orientation. Although the specific form of microaggressions that I experienced may differ from those examined in the study, the negative impact on my psychological well-being and work outcomes aligns with the study's overall results. This further highlights the pervasiveness of subtle discrimination in the workplace and its detrimental effects on employees' well-being.

Overall, my experiences and actions illustrate how microaggressions can shape individuals' actions and interactions in the workplace. These findings emphasize the need for individuals to prioritize their well-being and safety in the workplace by acting in response to microaggressions. Additionally, the importance of creating a more inclusive and supportive work environment is highlighted to prevent microaggressions from occurring in the first place.

In summary, after disclosing my sexual orientation to my former coworkers, I experienced microaggressions that shaped the way I interacted with them. I adopted several strategies, such as minimizing harm and avoiding conflict, resisting, and taking action, which are also the overarching themes. Although the coping mechanisms I used in my interactions with others were not ideal, they helped me avoid worsening the situation. A study by McDavitt et al. (2008) confirmed that people experiment with



different coping approaches and adopt multiple strategies based on various factors such as the setting, the source, or the consequences of using a particular strategy.

Even though I attempted to push back and resist these microaggressions in the way I interacted with others, it was not always successful. Others could misunderstand or ignore them, or even perceive them as acceptance of the situation.

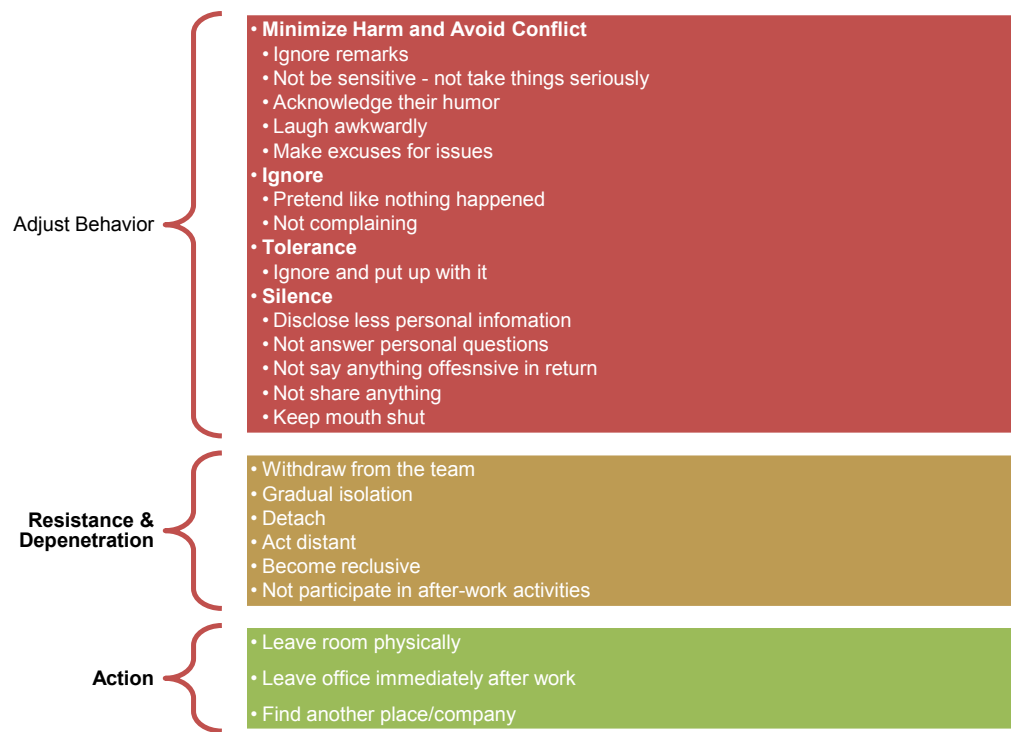


Figure 19 Interactions after self-disclosure.

My experience with sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace emphasized the need to prioritize my well-being. While the coping mechanisms I employed during my interactions helped me avoid worsening the situation, they did not always effectively resolve microaggressions. It is vital to identify proactive ways to resist microaggressions that can promote lasting change and raise awareness of these issues through our interactions with others.

## **Communication to Resolve Microaggressions**

Previous research has shown that marginalized individuals who experience microaggressions often develop coping mechanisms to address these harmful experiences. However, these studies may not have fully explored the nuanced process that individuals go through in response to microaggressions. This process may involve initial shock and uncertainty about whether the words or actions they experienced constitute microaggressions. In some cases, individuals may not even be aware that they are experiencing microaggressions.

Reflecting on my own experience, I initially did not recognize that I was being subjected to microaggressions. However, I felt discomfort and unease when faced with intimate questions and comments about my sexual orientation. I coped by withdrawing and isolating myself from others, and I did not communicate my feelings or confront the microaggressions directly. With time, I realized that this approach was not effective in resolving microaggressions at work. This realization prompted me to reconsider my coping mechanisms and find more constructive ways to address microaggressions.

In this section, in addition to discussing the codes and themes generated, I also presented the process of coping with microaggressions that I went through to reimagine and provide a different perspective or insights on what individuals, such as LGBTQs, might experience and undergo when experiencing microaggressions, and how they may come to resolve them through communication.



*Figure 20 Screenshot of my Facebook post on February 6, 2019.*

## **Stupor and Immobilization**

I often found myself being absent-minded at work, physically present but mentally elsewhere. It felt like I was going through the motions, like a clockwork robot or a zombie, just completing my tasks without real engagement. Over time, I gradually withdrew from my team, disclosing less personal information and becoming more reserved in my interactions. This conduct or behavior did not happen suddenly; it was a slow and painful process. I realized that I was usually quiet and withdrawn around my coworkers, and looking back, I wish I had addressed the issue right away.

These microaggressions I experienced made it difficult for me to express my true feelings and thoughts to others. I doubted myself and questioned whether I was being overly sensitive or misinterpreting their words and actions. This uncertainty further reinforced my reluctance to speak up.

The findings of a study by Smart Richman & Leary (2009) on withdrawal and avoidance behavior in response to rejection can be related to the experiences of LGBTQs facing microaggressions at work. Even if not explicitly rejected, LGBTQs may still withdraw and display avoidance behavior due to microaggressions, such as discriminatory comments or actions.

As an LGBTQ employee, I may have felt vulnerable and feared further harm due to these microaggressions, which led me to distance myself from those who inflicted them. This behavior resulted in disengagement from work and changed the way I interacted and communicated with others.

These codes derived from my narratives illustrate the range of experiences that I had when facing microaggressions at work due to my sexual orientation:

- Absent-mindedness
- Hard to express emotions
- Robot or zombie-like
- Social withdrawal

These codes were all related to an overarching theme of "Stupor and Immobilization," which I experienced as an LGBTQ employee facing microaggressions at work. These experiences left me feeling disconnected and distant from my coworkers, as if I was simply going through the motions of my job without any real engagement. It was difficult for me to express my emotions or communicate with others, which only reinforced my sense of isolation and detachment.

Looking back, I now realize the importance of directly addressing issues that affect me at work. I should have spoken up and expressed how I truly felt instead of silently suffering and letting the situation negatively impact my well-being. While the theme of "Stupor and Immobilization" resonates with my experience, I realized that I needed to go through a process of understanding and realization first in terms of how these microaggressions were affecting my interactions and communication with others. I needed to distance myself for a while to gain clarity and understand what was

really going on. I learned that difficult experiences in life require a process of reflection and understanding before arriving at the best solution. Taking the time to reflect is the first step towards resolving issues like microaggressions in the workplace.

### **Self-Justification**

During my stay at my former company, I noticed subtle biases they held against LGBTQs. It was disheartening to hear and experience firsthand, particularly since they seemed oblivious to the impact of their words. I cannot say for sure whether they were aware of the harm they were causing, but it was apparent that they were uninformed about the consequences of their words and actions. It was not their intention to hurt anyone; they simply did not comprehend the impact of their words and actions. This is a common issue that many people face, and it is essential to educate ourselves to prevent harm from happening.

In a study by Vasquez et al. (2019), they said that people have different opinions about behaviors that might be seen as prejudiced or harmful to a particular group of people. This can lead to confusion, making it easier for someone to justify their actions by telling themselves that they did not mean to harm anyone. While some behaviors are wrong, other actions that can be explained away may allow people to justify their behavior to maintain their own positive self-image. This could be why some of my former coworkers might not have realized the harm they were causing with their subtle biases against LGBTQs, even though their language and messages contained negative implications.

Vasquez et al. (2019) in their study mentioned that individuals have different opinions about behaviors that are seen as prejudiced or harmful to a particular group, which can lead to confusion and self-justification. In my case, I believe that my former

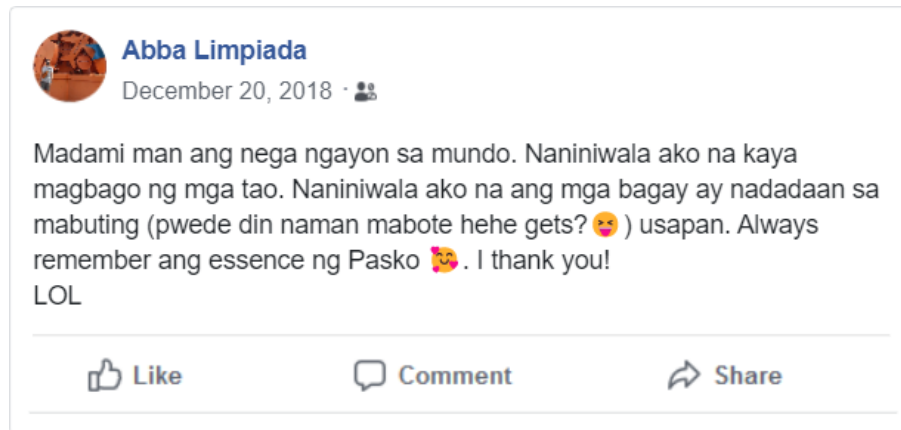
coworkers were not aware of their biases against LGBTQ individuals, and instead, were simply ignorant of the impact of their words and actions. However, their justifications for their behavior, such as framing it as a joke or endearment, indicate a lack of accountability for the harm they caused.

After analyzing my personal narratives, I identified the following codes:

- They are not aware of their biases
- They are unaware of the impact of their messages
- They are uninformed of the consequences of their actions and words
- They do not mean any harm

These codes suggest that my former coworkers held biases against the LGBTQ community, but they were unaware of them. They did not comprehend the negative impact of their messages and actions, and therefore, they justified their behavior as being harmless, or even as jokes or endearments. The theme of “Self-Justification” emerged from these codes, revealing how people rationalize their behavior due to ignorance or a lack of understanding.

The theme of self-justification does not only pertain to the actions of my perpetrators. I, too, found myself trying to rationalize or justify their behavior, believing that they were simply unaware. However, this also placed pressure on me as the victim to continually think about their words and actions instead of focusing on how to properly communicate my thoughts and feelings.



*Figure 21 Screenshot of my Facebook post on December 20, 2018.*

The constant pressure to rationalize my coworkers' behavior had a significantly shaped the way that I communicated with others, making it harder for me to speak out about my experiences. It was difficult to acknowledge and address the microaggressions I faced when my perpetrators justified their behavior as harmless or unintentional.

As someone who has experienced microaggressions, I believe that educating ourselves about the impact of our words and actions is crucial in preventing harm. Through my own experiences, I have come to understand the challenges of speaking out about microaggressions, which are perpetuated by self-justification and victim-blaming. Unfortunately, this can lead to questioning the authenticity of our experiences and emotions, creating a culture of silence that allows microaggressions to persist. It is important to recognize that this culture of silence creates barriers to speaking out and addressing these issues.

## **Communication**

Being able to discuss how microaggressions influenced my self-disclosure, interactions, and communication in the workplace and receiving support was a crucial

step in addressing these microaggressions. At the time, I felt the need to at least try to improve things and take responsibility for myself, even though I had negative perceptions of my coworkers and their stereotypes about LGBTQs. To some extent, I got to know some of them despite their unwelcoming comments, questions, and attitudes towards me. I did not get too close, but I was able to assess whether they were receptive to feedback based on my observations and whether they seemed bothered by their offensive jokes and insults.

Nair & Good (2021) highlights the importance of seeking and receiving support from allies, such as friends, peers, mentors, or support groups, as a coping mechanism for dealing with microaggressions. This approach involves talking about the experience with others who can serve as sounding boards or offer support, or even chronicling the experience in journals to help process the feelings. The act of seeking and receiving support from others aligns with the idea of addressing microaggressions in the workplace through communication.

However, it is important to recognize that even if we have had negative experiences with someone in the past, we may still act differently towards them in the future. In my personal experience, the distance and silence between myself and my coworkers allowed me to reframe my thoughts. Instead of dwelling on negative interactions, I chose to focus on the positive aspects of our interactions or of the individual. This approach helped me reduce feelings of resentment and anger, ultimately leading to a resolution of the issue without hostility. Nair & Good (2021) explore various coping mechanisms for dealing with microaggressions, including the approach of withdrawing or disassociating from the context, situation, or individual responsible for the microaggression. This mechanism arises from discomfort and the need for self-protection. Reframing, which involves changing the subject of the



conversation, is a subtle form of retreat during uncomfortable conversations (Nair & Good, 2021).

The study by Nair and & (2021) highlighted the concept of cognitive change as particularly relevant in coping with microaggressions. Specifically, respondents in the study engaged in cognitive change by reframing heterosexist attitudes expressed by their parents and other close members of their support networks. In my experience and reflection, I have found that reframing the sexual orientation microaggressions I experience at work can help me limit their emotional impact. By focusing on positive aspects of the situation or person, I can reinterpret the meaning of the microaggression, such as assuming they were unaware of the impact of their words and actions or that they did not mean it, and this helps me decrease feelings of resentment or anger towards my colleagues. This allows me to open to them and not isolate myself anymore.



*Figure 22 Screenshot of my Facebook post on August 27, 2019.*

I felt great about myself for finally reaching out after that conversation, and my perception of them and the circumstances changed. This conversation with one of my former coworkers gave me the motivation I needed to approach my other coworkers in a respectful and professional manner.

*“Note to self: Feels great that I finally told some of my teammates that being called names, assuming certain stuff and asking very personal questions are not okay with me all the time. And told them the reason. I feel better now.”* (Limpiada, personal communication, February 7, 2019).

Although I opened a discussion with my coworkers about the negative comments, questions, and attitude I had been experiencing, the reactions were mixed. Some were hesitant to engage in the open forum, while others were very responsive and understanding. They could see how their actions might have unintentionally hurt me.

The main theme of “Communication” emerges from the coding of the narratives, with a focus on the importance of communication in resolving microaggressions. This is exemplified by these codes, which represent my actions:

- Communication seen to educate others about microaggressions
- Meanings and emotions changed
- Trial with a coworker who seemed open to feedback
- Tried to open discussion

This change in approach, instead of isolating or withdrawing, is reflected in multiple instances throughout my narratives. It reinforces the idea that communication can shift perspectives and lessen the emotional impact of microaggressions. I also reimagined and highlighted the potential of communication as a tool to educate others about microaggressions. This emphasizes the importance of open and honest communication in navigating microaggressions in the workplace.

## **'Pagpapaunawa' or Educational Confrontation**

After experiencing repeated microaggressions from my former coworkers, my former supervisor's reminders to improve my interactions with my coworkers and my perception of them led me to approach them to express my concerns and feelings regarding their subtly offensive comments. I realized that I needed to speak up and let them know how I truly felt.

To express my concerns in a respectful and professional manner, I approached them and actively listened to their responses. I did not want any confrontation or yelling in the office as it would appear and sound very unprofessional. In my experience, the victim or target of microaggressions should also take part in confronting or resolving these communications. I took personal responsibility for any change I desired because relying on others to resolve the issue may not be effective since they do not fully understand the extent of how these microaggressions affect others other than the victims themselves.

By engaging in a dialogue with them, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of my coworkers' views. I found that educating my coworkers about the impact of their words and actions towards LGBTQs was a more effective approach than reacting with anger or isolating myself.

After analyzing my narratives, the most common theme that emerged is confronting perpetrators while also educating them during the dialogue. Therefore, the main theme is "Educational Confrontation." This theme is supported by the following codes generated from the analysis:

- Reach out to others and explained emotions about microaggression

- Non-confrontational but educational and done in a respectful and professional manner

This approach fostered an open and productive conversation about the difference between intent and impact in communication, which helped to improve my relationship with my coworkers through communication and positive interaction. It also highlighted that one's perception and interactions with a group can vary in different settings and should not be assumed to be universal.

My personal experience and approach align with Sue et al. (2019), which suggests the strategy of educating offenders through one-on-one dialogue. This approach allows the target, allies, and bystanders to express their experiences while maintaining a relationship with the offender. The study emphasizes the importance of differentiating between intent and impact and facilitating a conversation to explore the perpetrator's biases. It also suggests appealing to the offender's values and principles and encouraging them to explore the origins of their beliefs and attitudes towards targets. This approach can promote empathy, lower the defense of the perpetrator, and point out the commonality while highlighting how everyone can benefit from addressing microaggressions.

Another study by Nair & Good (2021) found that youth educating their support network on attitudes towards sexual minorities reduced the intensity of heterosexist comments and discrimination experienced by respondents. The study also found that education changed formerly heterosexist antagonists into supportive allies. While my experience of sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace may not be directly related to the study, educating others on the impact of their actions is crucial for creating positive change and reducing discrimination in any context.

Through my personal experience, I realized that while we may belong to a particular group, we are still unique individuals with diverse personalities, experiences, and viewpoints. By confronting the situation and educating my coworkers, I was able to share my perspective, comprehend their viewpoints better, and rebuild our relationship through communication and interaction.

### **Reintegration**

As someone who has experienced microaggressions in the workplace, I understand the importance of addressing and resolving these issues through communication and interaction. Reintegration, the final step in the process, involves the victim of microaggression reentering the social circle, community, or environment where the microaggressions took place after addressing and resolving the issues with the microaggression.

In my own experience, I discussed the impact of unwanted questions, comments, and behavior with my coworkers and came to an understanding of their intentions. However, reintegration was not immediate as a rift had formed between us during the process. Despite not being perfect, I consider the outcome a success as my work environment improved, and my perception of my coworkers changed positively after finally confronting them and educating them about the impact of their words and actions to me.

*“Leave everything you do, every place you go, everything you touch a little better for your having been there.” - Julie Andrews (Limpiada, personal communication, September 9, 2019)*

Furthermore, I have learned how to cope with occasional microaggressive remarks and feel more comfortable expressing my feelings while educating my coworkers on the impact of their words and actions, rather than just their intent. Reflecting on my experiences, I gained an understanding of symbolic interactionism, which emphasizes that we often have preconceived notions (attached meanings) about individuals or groups that can stem from our own experiences or those shared by others. These preconceptions can contribute to negative behaviors, such as microaggression.

However, through interaction and communication, these attached meanings or perceptions can also change. For example, a person's perception (attached meaning) about a member of the LGBTQ community may change positively if they have a positive interaction with someone from that community, such as through a casual conversation, regular interaction, or experiences shared by others. In my case, after discussing my feelings regarding these microaggressions with my coworkers and having them express their perspective as well, the perception and associated meanings from both sides improved.

Upon analyzing the data, the following codes emerged:

- Gradual improved relationship
- Reintegration in the social circle
- Can now cope with occasional attacks without drama or fanfare

The codes generated during the analysis are indicative of the overarching theme of "Reintegration." This theme involves repairing damaged or strained relationships and being able to reintegrate oneself into the social circle.

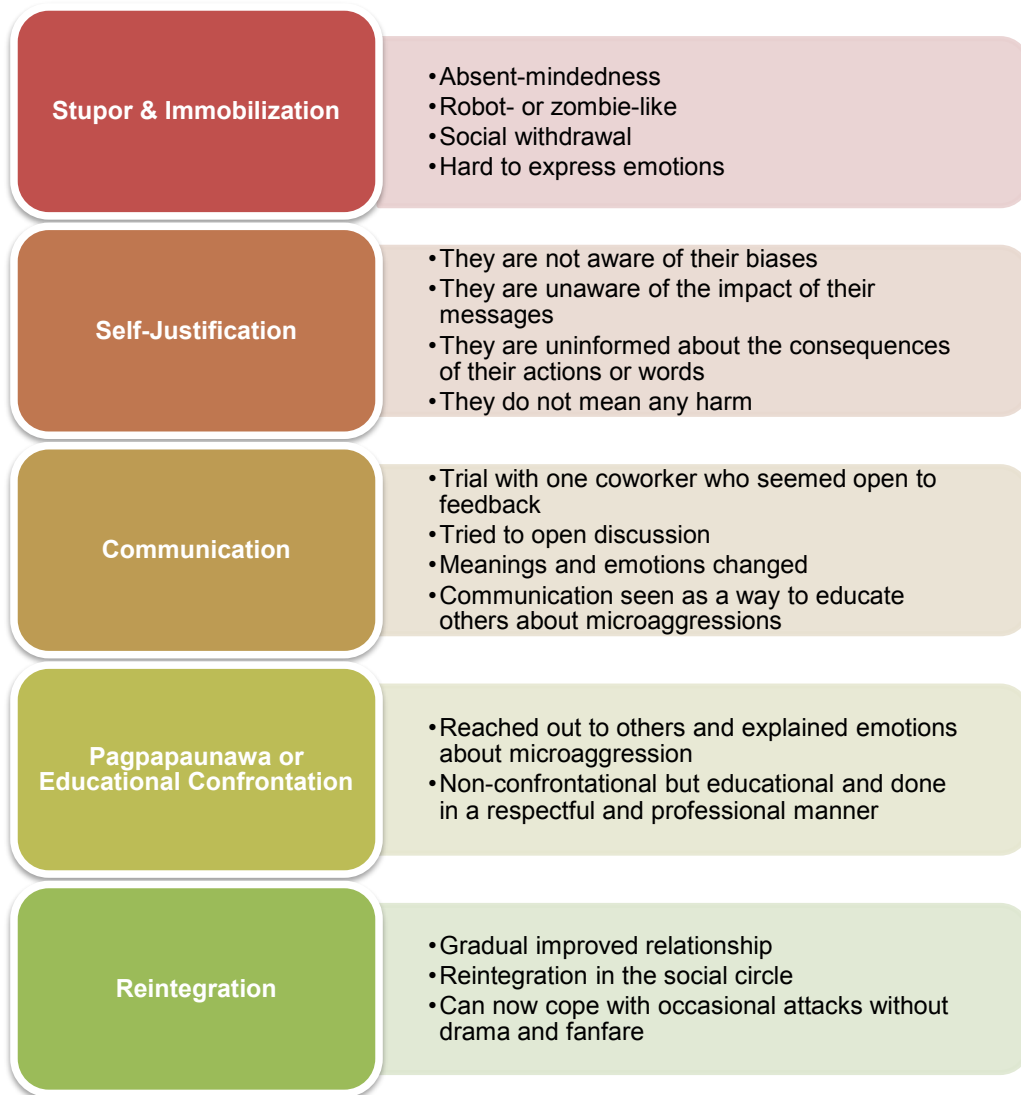
While the Social Penetration Theory does not specifically refer to the concept of "repenetration," it does recognize that relationships are dynamic and subject to change over time (Altman & Taylor, 1973). The process of "reintegration" can be considered a form of repenetration since it entails making efforts to overcome past issues or negative experiences and to rebuild trust and connection with others. This process requires individuals to be open and vulnerable, to communicate openly, and to acknowledge past social missteps or behaviors that may have led to exclusion or breakdowns in communication. Reimagining the Social Penetration Theory to include Reintegration or Repenetration means that we can explore the idea of repairing damaged relationships through communication and disclosure of feelings and emotions to resolve issues and, hopefully, generating a positive outcome that allows us to reintegrate into the social circle.

This figure summarizes the steps involved in my reintegration and penetration through communication and illustrates how communication helped resolve the microaggressions that I faced in my former workplace.



*Figure 23 Process of reintegration and penetration through communication.*

Figure 24 outlines the elements of each step in addressing sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace through communication.



*Figure 24 Elements in the process of re-integration and penetration through communication.*

## Synthesis

In this study, the use of reflexivity, as a tool of symbolic interactionism, allowed me to identify and analyze instances of microaggressions and how I perceived and reacted to them.



After disclosing my sexual orientation to my coworkers, I experienced microaggressions, both verbal and nonverbal, and led to a shift in my perceptions and meanings with certain individuals and their actions. These included insults, unwanted comments, and subtle snubs. These persisted until I withdrew from them, causing negative perceptions on both sides.

Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the crucial concept of meaning. We assign meaning to symbols, ideas, and everything else based on our experiences and those of others and the culture in which we were raised. Each person's interpretation of symbols is unique, and the meanings we associate with symbols and ideas can shape our language and thoughts.

In my case, my coworkers had already assigned meaning to LGBTQ individuals based on their experiences and interactions with members of that group. However, those meanings may not apply to everyone, and in my case, their comments, questions, and attitudes were unwelcome.

Previous research has identified various coping mechanisms or strategies that individuals use to deal with microaggressions (Nair & Good, 2021) or heterosexism (McDavitt et al., 2008). A study by McDavitt et al. (2008) confirmed that people experiment with different coping approaches and adopt multiple strategies based on various factors such as the setting, the source, or the consequences of using a particular strategy.

However, I realized that the fundamental or core approach to resolving microaggressions is through communication.

In my experience, when I face microaggressions, my initial response is to communicate with myself internally. I try to process the comments or actions from others and assess whether they are indeed microaggressions. Although my initial approach or reaction was to isolate or withdraw myself from others, it gave me an opportunity to reflect on my actions and evaluate whether my initial approach of depenetrating or withdrawing myself was appropriate.

During the period of withdrawal, I was able to reflect on my previous interactions with my coworkers and identify any positive interactions. This gave me motivation and an opportunity to address the microaggressions by interacting with my coworkers and educating them about the impact of their words and actions on me. This is what I call 'pagpapaunawa' or educational confrontation.

The outcome of these interactions was positive. Although our working relationship did not fully return to the way it was before, I was able to reintegrate myself back into the social circle.

The coping mechanism I employed to address microaggressions I experienced from my former coworkers after disclosing my sexual orientation was characterized by depenetration and withdrawal. During this initial phase, I removed myself from situations where microaggressions occurred and assessed the effectiveness of my detachment from the situation. Upon reflection of earlier interactions with my coworkers, I recognized that there were positive experiences that encouraged me to engage with them further. Consequently, I adopted the approach of educational confrontation or "pagpapaunawa" to express my sentiments about their microaggressive remarks and behavior while also attempting to empathize with their perspective.

'Pagpapaunawa' or educational confrontation was pivotal in addressing and resolving the microaggressions I encountered in the workplace. Pagpapaunawa involves an empathetic and compassionate dialogue aimed at achieving a mutual understanding of individuals' various perspectives. By engaging in this approach, I was able to establish a platform for a constructive dialogue with my former coworkers, where I conveyed my thoughts while also listening to their perspectives. Unlike a direct confrontation or an outburst of emotions that could have been unprofessional and potentially aggravated the situation, pagpapaunawa facilitated a rational and professional exchange of thoughts and sentiments. As such, I could provide an explanation of my reaction to their microaggressions while also seeking to understand the source of their behavior.

In the workplace, it is important that we maintain a professional behavior, and pagpapaunawa enabled me to uphold these standards while facilitating a two-way communication process that facilitated reintegration into the social circle. Pagpapaunawa or educational confrontation is a helpful strategy in resolving conflicts, specifically microaggressions, and facilitating a positive work environment. By employing this approach, individuals can maintain their professional demeanor while promoting an inclusive workplace culture that respects diversity.

The figure below summarizes my process of coping with microaggressions in the workplace.



*Figure 25 Process of coping with microaggressions.*

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Microaggressions have been widely studied in Western societies, primarily in the context of race (Browne-James, 2018; Lui et al., 2020; M. T. Williams et al., 2020), but there is a lack of research examining the impact of microaggressions related to sexual orientation on individuals' self-disclosure, interaction, and communication in the workplace within Filipino culture.

In this study, I used symbolic interactionism with the principles of the Social Penetration Theory and the Microaggression Process Model as theoretical underpinnings to analyze my personal experiences of sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace.

This study is focused on my personal experiences with sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace from 2013 to 2019. Using autoethnography as a method, I collected and analyzed my experiences of sexual orientation microaggressions, which constituted the primary source of data. This included my self-reflections on my experiences and perceptions related to the topic and research question, as well as social media posts, a handwritten note, and blog posts from the same period. I reflected on how I dealt with sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace and how they shaped my communication and self-disclosure. These resources were analyzed inductively through the process of coding to identify patterns, themes, and categories in relation to microaggression.

## **Summary**

The highlights of the findings are the following:

### **Before Self-Disclosure**

As a gay man who was on a predominantly straight team, I have personally experienced microaggressions based on my sexual orientation. One common example is when people ask who plays the "man" role in my relationship or make jokes about being gay and expect me to laugh along with them. These incidents may seem minor or irrelevant, but they had a profound impact on my sense of belonging and identity. By constantly being reminded that my sexual orientation is viewed as abnormal or wrong, I felt singled out and that I did not fit with my team.

### **Microaggressions Experienced after Disclosing Sexual Orientation**

After disclosing my sexual orientation in the workplace, I experienced both verbal and non-verbal forms of microaggression. Verbal microaggressions included insults, unwanted comments, intimate questions, jokes, invalidating feelings and emotions, and warnings not to fall in love or flirt with them.

I also encountered non-verbal microaggressions, such as subtle snubs and touchy-feely behavior. Despite the harmful messages conveyed by these microaggressions, such as stereotypes about the LGBTQ community, I often perceived them as harmless and was unable to address them immediately.

## Communication After Self-Disclosure

Having experienced microaggressions because of my sexual orientation, it had a significant effect on my well-being. I frequently questioned if I was simply overreacting to these comments and questions. Although these repetitive microaggressions did not cause me to become depressed, they did cause me to withdraw from my coworkers and become anxious. I was always concerned about whether my words or actions were appropriate. Though it did not become crippling, it started to affect my work interactions with others.

After disclosing my sexual orientation and experiencing microaggressions related to it, I dealt with these repeated experiences in various ways. Initially, I tried to **first, adjust my behavior** by doing the following: ignore them, minimize harm, and avoid conflict, keep silent, or tolerate them. But later, I also **resisted**, and eventually **acted**.

By **ignoring** their remarks and going along with their jokes, I tried to minimize any harm and avoid conflict or office drama. At that time, I thought it was their way of getting to know me and that it was just normal banter. However, these microaggressions persisted. Nevertheless, I continued to *ignore them, pretending like nothing happened*, and did not complain even though I felt uncomfortable with their remarks and behavior towards me. As much as I wanted to leave that job immediately, I realized that I had to tolerate and put up with these microaggressions until I had gained necessary work experience and skills.

Hence, to **minimize harm and avoid conflict**, I acknowledged their humor, ignored their remarks, laughed awkwardly, made excuses for issues, and tried not to be sensitive or not to take things seriously.

However, as these microaggressions persisted, I noticed that I became more aware of their comments and questions about my sexual orientation, including my romantic relationships. Feeling uncomfortable, I became deliberately **silent** about it by disclosing less personal information and not sharing any personal information with them anymore. I also **'tolerated'** any microaggression and put up with it. This was the start of me withdrawing or depenetrating from them.

My second course of action was **active resistance**. I became more detached and distant from my team, did not participate in after-work activities, and became more reclusive.

My third line of **action** was more proactive. I physically left the room or left the office immediately. I even considered finding a new job to get myself out of the situation and prevent further harm to my well-being.

### **Communication with Co-workers to Resolve Microaggressions**

My experience with sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace emphasized the need to prioritize my well-being. While the coping mechanisms I employed during my interactions helped me avoid worsening the situation, they did not always effectively resolve microaggressions. It is vital to identify proactive ways to resist microaggressions that can promote lasting change and raise awareness of these issues through our interactions with others.



I communicated with my coworkers to address the microaggressions, highlighting the significance of perception and interaction in communication. The repeated instances had shaped how I communicated and interacted with my coworkers. I was in stupor and immobilized, such as being absent-minded at work, withdrawing socially, and struggled to process my emotions related to these experiences. When I called out their remarks and behavior, my co-workers often dismissed their actions by claiming they were simply trying to get to know me or joking. Their attempts to justify their actions made me feel as if I was overreacting and I should not take offense at their words and actions.

Despite these microaggressions, I got to know some of my coworkers and assessed their willingness to receive feedback. I initiated a discussion with a colleague who seemed open to feedback, which was positive and encouraged me to continue the conversation with the rest of the team. Although some coworkers were hesitant to engage, others were understanding and responsive. Our interaction was overall positive, and we were able to understand each other's perspectives and the impact of their words and actions.

I saw communication to educate others about microaggressions in a non-confrontational manner by approaching my coworkers professionally, and explaining how I interpreted their words and behavior. In Filipino terminology, this may be called 'pagpapaunawa' or explaining in a non-aggressive, cordial, and enlightening manner that is 'educational' but not speaking down on their own realities and meanings. This approach enabled us to have an open and honest conversation that led to resolving the microaggressions through communication.

By engaging in an open and respectful communication with my coworkers, I was able to reintegrate into the social circle and improve our work relationship. Although there were still occasional instances of microaggressions, I coped with them professionally, without any drama or fanfare. This experience highlighted the role that communication plays in resolving microaggressions and maintaining positive relationships with others in the workplace.

### **Conclusion**

The study explored the major question: How does self-disclosure of my sexual orientation shape my communication experiences and communication behaviors as a Filipino LGBTQ vis-à-vis microaggressions in the workplace? Let me summarize using the analogy of me being a unicorn amongst a field of horses.

Even as a child, I already knew I was different from the other horses – I was gay, a unicorn. It was a feeling that I could not quite put my finger on at first, but as I grew older, and my horn grew, it became clearer to me. I was a unicorn, a rare and magical creature that did not quite fit in with the rest of the herd.

This sense of being a unicorn was part of my identity as a gay man, and it was a sign that I was unique and special. However, it also meant I had to navigate a different path traversed by many of my peers in the herd.

As a unicorn, I understand what it is like to stand out from the crowd and be different from those around me. Being a unicorn can be empowering and a source of pride, it can also come with consequences, such as experiencing of microaggressions related to one's sexual orientation. I have learned to embrace this difference and use it as a source of strength, not everyone sees it that way. Some people may feel

uncomfortable around those who do not conform to traditional norms and expectations and may resort to microaggressions to express their thoughts or opinions about members of the LGBTQ community.

As a unicorn, I experienced microaggressions from the other horses in various forms. Revealing my horn or disclosing my sexual orientation to my former coworkers resulted to microaggressions related to my sexual orientation. Microaggressions are symbolic representations of societal norms that reflect specific forms of oppression. For example, assuming that everyone is heterosexual in informal conversation diminishes the complexity of human relationships, especially for LGBTQs. Microaggressions serve in certain ways as symbolic ways to express gendered expectations and adhere to their continuous iterative reproduction. Discursive violence undermines the sense of space and belonging that is self-defined and asserted and through which agency, membership, and involvement are created.

My initial approach was to tolerate their behavior and ignore their remarks. I also used a range of coping strategies including minimizing harm, avoiding conflict, ignoring, and tolerating their behavior, and keeping silent to avoid worsening the situation. However, these approaches just created a communication gap between me and my coworkers and resulted in a negative perception on both sides. Further, I was the only one adjusting to the situation. These reactions from my fellow 'horses' only led to my isolation, withdrawal, and depenetration from them.

Upon reflecting on my past actions, I realized that withdrawing myself from the field or depenetrating did not resolve these microaggressions. I reflected on my actions and their actions and tried to find another approach to properly address these microaggressions based on my past interactions with them.

I realized that I needed to communicate with them and ‘educate’ them about the impact of their words and actions. Using communication and educational confrontation or ‘pagpapaunawa’, I was able to open a dialogue. I explained to them how their words and actions impacted me and how they can negatively affect how LGBTQs are perceived. I explained that our only difference was my horn, but that we are of the same species. We breath the same air, run in the same green field, and drink from the same brook.

Through this approach, I was able to reintegrate back into the social circle and cope with the occasional microaggressive comments. Communication is vital in resolving microaggressions and ‘pagpapaunawa’ or educational confrontation is a cultural strategy that can help resolve sexual orientation microaggressions in the Philippine urban workplace. I realized that it is possible to resolve sexual orientation microaggressions in the workplace and achieve repenetration or reintegration through ‘pagpapaunawa’ or educational communication.

Upon reflection, self-disclosure of my sexuality made me realize that coming out is not always a smooth and easy process. Even in supposedly accepting environments, there can be discomfort and pushback from the other horses in the herd. Despite the discomfort, however, I knew that I had made the right decision in being honest about who I am. It is a part of me that I cannot change, and I should not have to hide or pretend to be someone I am not just to fit in the herd.

Through ‘pagpapaunawa,’ I, a unicorn, was able to run again with the horses in the field – same in form and feature, in sleekness, strength, and swiftness – but with a horn. By constant communication or dialogue with other horses, I have realized that we are of the same species. We can learn to live in harmony. I blend in and flow with

the herd; I am the same but different; similar yet unique. I am a unicorn in a field of horses, and I stand proud.

## **Implications and Recommendations**

### **On Communication Policies**

- Despite the acknowledgement of LGBTQ existence and contributions in Filipino culture and society, discrimination and harassment towards the community remain prevalent in public spaces and employment. While the Philippines has made significant strides in promoting equality and protecting the rights of the LGBTQ community, such as enacting the Safe Spaces Act and implementing anti-discrimination ordinances in some local government units, these measures alone are not enough to fully eliminate discrimination.
- Hence, it is essential for us to understand the manifestation of microaggressions and gain the ability to identify how it shapes communication and interaction. By speaking out against microaggressions, we can highlight this covert form of discrimination and strive towards establishing a more open and accepting environment. These are the first steps into crafting and pushing for policies and reforms in the workplace and in other areas of society where microaggressions may penetrate.

### **On Communication Management**

- Microaggressions are frequently ambiguous and challenging to prove, in contrast to other forms of discrimination that can be seen for what they are. However, it is important for people to understand how detrimental sexual orientation microaggressions can be in the workplace. Even though these incidents may

seem insignificant, they can cause a toxic workplace and can have a negative impact on individuals' mental health, ability to accomplish their jobs, and their general well-being.

- Regardless of their sexual orientation, employers should make a concerted effort to foster a warm and inclusive workplace atmosphere where all employees feel respected and valued. Even though eradicating these pervasive instances of microaggression in the workplace may be difficult, being aware of and responding to them is an essential first step in creating a more equitable and encouraging work atmosphere for everyone.
  
- To address these microaggressions in the workplace, it is recommended to use 'pagpapaunawa' or educational confrontation, with support from a supervisor, manager, or human resources (HR) representative. This process should include both the victim explaining their perception and interpretation of the perpetrator's words and actions, and the perpetrator being given the opportunity to understand their own biases and stereotypes. Though this process may be uncomfortable for the perpetrators, it is meant to be educational and non-punitive (Sue, 2015).
  
- From a practical viewpoint, I recommend organizations to develop policies and programs that educate employees on how to properly and professionally handle microaggressions. Communication is essential in resolving workplace microaggressions related to sexual orientation. It helps individuals understand the impact of their words and actions and examine their biases. People's experiences, personalities, and work positions can shape their reaction to microaggressions, which can vary from confrontation to toleration.

## **On Communication Strategy**

- Discrimination, including microaggressions, remains prevalent in various contexts, including the workplace. People can experience discrimination based on factors such as race, gender, religion, and sexual orientation. Microaggressions can be difficult to recognize and may be dismissed as jokes or attempts at getting to know someone. However, they are still a form of discrimination and highlights the power dynamics between the victim and the perpetrators which can lead to communication breakdowns between employees if not addressed. Hence, there may be a need to better explain the concepts of microaggression in different multi-media platforms to increase the awareness and understanding of others to this subtle form of discrimination.
- From a communications research perspective, exploring power dynamics and their impact on microaggressions is recommended. Power dynamics refer to the distribution of power in relationships between individuals or groups (Looman et al., 2021).

## **On Communication Research**

- More qualitative research methods, including ethnography, could be done for all forms of microaggressions in different settings such as in Filipino schools and government agencies. Autoethnography has become more widely accepted and understood as a scientific inquiry tool. Autoethnography, while having both benefits and drawbacks, allows researchers to examine themselves and the contextual factors that have influenced them. It is not a personal account of a single event or experience, but an opportunity for researchers to use their personal experiences, such as those related to sexual orientation

microaggressions in the workplace, to help others understand culture and context and learn from their experiences.

- Future researchers can examine the role of power dynamics in perpetuating microaggressions, including the potential for those with more power to engage in microaggressions and for those with less power to experience them more frequently. They can also investigate how the power dynamics in a social context can shape the type of microaggressions that occur and the chance of them being addressed.
- The limited sample size of one participant in this study raises the need for future research to include a broader and more diverse group to gain a better understanding of microaggressions among Filipinos. This can be accomplished by studying individuals who have encountered microaggressions in various contexts and forms, not just in the workplace. Such research will contribute to the current body of knowledge on microaggressions, which is often dominated by Western perspectives. Furthermore, it will provide a deeper insight into the communication of microaggressions and how it shapes self-disclosure, interaction, and communication.
- A larger sample size will also enhance the generalizability of the findings, making them more representational of the wider population.
- For baseline data, quantitative studies can be done on the forms of microaggressions experienced and how often these are experienced in different sectors.



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## APPENDIX A

### Codes and Categories Generated on the Timelines

Code	Sub-Category	Main Category
<b><i>Microaggressions Experienced After Self-Disclosure</i></b>		
Inappropriate or unwanted comments and questions		Verbal Microaggressions
Intimate questions		
Insults		
Invalidating feelings and emotions		
Jokes		
Persistent questioning despite knowledge		
Repeated insults and masked as jokes or endearment		
Warning from men - not to fall in love with them or not to flirt with them		
Subtle snubs		Non-verbal microaggressions
Touchy feely		
<b><i>Interactions After Self-Disclosure</i></b>		
Pretend like nothing happened	Ignore	Adjust behavior
Not complaining		
Ignore remarks	Minimize harm and avoid conflict	
Not be sensitive or not take things seriously		
Acknowledge their humor		
Laugh awkwardly		
Make excuses for issues		
Disclose less personal information	Silence	
Not answer personal questions		
Not say anything offensive in return		
Not share anything		

Keep mouth shut		
Ignore and put up with it	Tolerance	
Withdraw from the team		Resistance
Gradual isolation		
Detach		
Act distant		
Become reclusive		
Not participate in after-work activities		
Leave the room physically		Action
Leave the office immediately		
Find another place or company		
<b><i>Communication to Resolve Microaggressions</i></b>		
Absent-mindedness		Stupor and Immobilization
Robot/Zombie-like		
Social withdrawal		
Hard to express emotions		
They are not aware of their biases		Self-Justification
They are unaware of the impact of their messages		
They are uninformed of the consequences of their actions and words		
They do not mean any harm		
Trial with a coworker who seemed open to feedback		Communication
Tried to open discussion		
Meanings and emotions changed		
Communication seen to educate others about microaggressions		
Reach out to others and explained emotions about microaggression		Educational Confrontation

Non-confrontational but educational and done in a respectful and professional manner		
Gradual improved relationship		Reintegration
Reintegration in the social circle		
Can now cope with occasional attacks without drama or fanfare		

*Table 1 List of codes and categories generated on the timelines.*