These headlines pulled from The New York Times evoke feelings of victory, triumph, prejudice, and stigma for LGBTQ individuals and their allies. Indeed, the current global socio-political climate is loaded with contention regarding LGBTQ rights (Kollman and Waites 2009; McCarthy 2019; Worthen, Lingardi, and Caristo 2017). In the United States, there have been obvious improvements for gay men and lesbian women and the vast majority of public opinion research demonstrates a significant attitudinal shift toward support of lesbian women and gay men in recent years (McCarthy 2019; Pew Research Center 2014, 2017). However, amidst these gains, stigma and prejudice remain. Gay men and lesbian women endure legal barriers to adoption and state family leave protections (Goldberg et al. 2014). Bisexual men and women lack recognition and significant cultural presence (Brewster and Moradi 2010; Worthen 2013). Trans people face a variety of unique challenges that situate their daily experiences within a nexus of hostility and misunderstandings (Serano 2007; Stryker 2008). Queer and non-binary/genderqueer people and issues are missing from the vast majority of socio-political legal and cultural discourse (Morandini et al. 2016; Stein and Plummer 1994). Many U.S. states do not have employment and housing non-discrimination laws, leaving non-heterosexual and non-cisgender individuals exceedingly vulnerable (Becker 2014).

While many situate these conversations within the monolithic category of “LGBTQ” rights, much can be learned from a more nuanced investigation. In
particular, I argue that we must build separate but interconnected discussions about the experiences of lesbian women, gay men, bisexual women, bisexual men, trans women, trans men, non-binary/genderqueer people, queer women, and queer men to best understand LGBTQ stigma and negativity (see Worthen 2013). In addition, I suggest that a norm-centered intersectional examination of hetero-cis-normativity is integral to understanding LGBTQ stigma. This approach will be further specified in Part I and explored in depth in Part II.

Outline

This text is divided into two parts. Part I, Foundations in Understanding LGBTQ Stigma, introduces the concepts that are used in this text to build a deeper understanding of LGBTQ stigma and explanations for it. Chapter 2 specifies NCST building from Goffman’s (1963) foundational book and works by modern scholars of stigma (e.g., Link and Phelan 2001; Stafford and Scott 1986) as well as intersectional (e.g., Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1991; Davis 2008) and queer (e.g., Butler 1990, 1993; Sedgwick 1991) theorists in order to expand the current landscape of stigma research. An emphasis on the relationships between norms, social power, and stigma is highlighted in the three tenets of NCST identified in Chapter 2. A theoretical model for NCST and accompanying hypotheses are also provided.

In Chapter 3, the key concepts that are explored throughout the text are further specified. First, hetero-cis-normativity is defined as the overarching norm that secures the cultural devaluation of LGBTQ people. Next, the relationships between hetero-cis-normativity, multiple axes of social power, and LGBTQ stigma are discussed in an intersectional context. Building from these arguments, race, ethnicity, and social class are examined as interlocking systems of oppression and privilege that relate to LGBTQ stigma. Specifically, three norms common in the West that inform these relationships are interrogated: “gay equals White,” “trans equals White,” and “gay equals rich.” Finally, I consider the sexualization processes involved in LGBTQ stigma, objectification, and victimization as they relate to stereotypes about LGBTQ sex, relationships, and bodies.

Chapter 4 overviews the explanations and correlates of LGBT(Q) stigma most commonly found in past work (i.e., LGBT contact, religiosity, political perspectives, and beliefs about gender) and considers both hetero-cis-normativity and intersectionality and their overlapping relationships to common explanations of LGBT stigma. The “Q” is largely missing from this chapter because “common” existing explanations fail to encapsulate attitudes toward queer people and queer-related stigma. This chapter concludes with a discussion of hetero-cis-normativity as the social construct that underlies these common explanations for LGBT stigma.
Chapter 5 examines ways to measure LGBTQ stigma, starting with an overview of the socio-historical contexts of previously published tools (and problems therein) and then provides new ways to measure LGBTQ stigma. Seven LGBTQ Measurement Principles are offered to help guide future inquiry. In addition, hetero-cis-normativity measurement tools are detailed. Finally, these measurement principles and tools are situated into NCST.

Chapter 6 provides the LGBTQ Stigma Scales that speak to the Measurement Principles outlined in Chapter 5. Specifically, six key areas of the LGBTQ Stigma Scales are discussed as they relate to LGBTQ people’s experiences with stigma: (1) social and familial relationships; (2) positions of importance and social significance; (3) basic human rights; (4) sex-related stigma; (5) LGBTQ identity permanency; and (6) the achievement of femininity or masculinity. This chapter concludes with the integration of the LGBTQ Stigma Scales into NCST.

Part II, NCST and Understanding LGBTQ Stigma, provides one of the first-ever empirical investigations of NCST. Specifically, Part II considers how violations of hetero-cis-normativity (as they relate to multiple axes of social power) are key to understanding stigma directed toward LGBTQ people (stigmatizer lens) and LGBTQ people’s experiences with discrimination, harassment, and violence (stigmatized lens). Chapter 7 describes the data, sample, and survey and also provides an overview of the overarching trends and patterns that are found throughout Part II. Each of the following chapters in Part II follows a similar pattern whereby NCST is applied to understand LGBTQ stigma. This includes three interrelated methods: (1) rank-ordering and t-test comparisons of the LGBTQ Stigma Scales and individual scale items; (2) Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models of NCST, social power axes, and the LGBTQ Stigma Scales; and (3) logistic regression models of NCST and LGBTQ gender- and sexuality-based discrimination, harassment, and violence. Chapter 8 focuses on lesbian women, followed by gay men in Chapter 9, bisexual women in Chapter 10, bisexual men in Chapter 11, transgender women in Chapter 12, transgender men in Chapter 13, non-binary/genderqueer people in Chapter 14, queer women in Chapter 15, and queer men in Chapter 16.

Chapter 17 offers additional considerations, suggestions for future research, and concluding remarks. It both summarizes the text and its novel approach of breaking LGBTQ prejudices down into separate but related concepts and then builds these ideas together by acknowledging their significant overlap. Finally, future research areas are offered including the importance of understanding how LGBTQ people resist stigma and oppression as well as the roles of other identities including cultural origin, age, and ability in additional investigations.
Goals

The goals of this text are three-fold: (1) to introduce a theory about stigma that is testable and grounded in previous research (NCST), (2) to highlight the significance of hetero-cis-normativity and intersectionality in understanding LGBTQ stigmatization (stigmatizer lens) and the stigmatizing experiences of LGBTQ people (stigmatized lens), and (3) to continue to stress the importance of separate but interconnected discussions about lesbian women, gay men, bisexual women, bisexual men, trans women, trans men, non-binary/gender-queer people, queer women, and queer men to uncover both similarities and differences across their experiences.

Notes


References


