Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people report they experience microaggressions, small daily insults and indignities that affect their well-being. For LGBT students, microaggressions have been shown to affect well-being and academic engagement. In order to serve LGBT students and model affirming behaviors, counselor educators must be able to recognize and address LGBT microaggressions when they occur; however, there is currently a paucity of research on LGBT microaggressions in counselor education programs. Most studies on attitudes toward LGBT people in such programs neglect the experiences of LGBT students. Moreover, the few existing studies of the experiences of LGBT people in counseling programs do not examine microaggression experiences specifically.
This qualitative study examined the microaggression experiences of 12 LGBT students in counselor education programs. Each participant was interviewed about their experiences of both LGBT and other types of microaggressions (e.g., racial microaggressions) to provide an intersectional exploration of these experiences. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to examine recall of how participants experienced microaggressions in the moment, and how they made meaning of their microaggression experiences. Themes were identified for each participant to allow examination of differences across cases, and common themes were identified among participants.

Analysis of the data yielded five common themes: (1) there are multiple microaggression experiences, (2) microaggressions prompt evaluation of perpetrators and relationships, (3) microaggression experiences figure into overall evaluation of the program and the profession, (4) costs and benefits are weighed in determining response, and (5) microaggressions have a long-term impact. This data extends previous work on LGBT microaggressions by presenting a more detailed picture of variations of “in the moment” experiences of these events. It suggests contextual factors may influence both immediate and long-term reactions to microaggressions, allowing counselor educators to prepare LGBT students for these experiences and assist them through such experiences. It also provides a summary of microaggressions commonly experienced by LGBT students in counselor education programs, which may enable counselor educators to anticipate and avoid specific microaggressions. Implications for counselor education practice and research are discussed.