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FOCAL ARTICLE

The Social and Economic Imperative of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Supportive Organizational Policies

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Abstract
The central premise of this article is that organizations have social and economic interests in building policies and practices that support lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) workers. This argument is based on empirical evidence that (a) LGBT workers continue to face discrimination at work from which they are not protected under federal law, and (b) discrimination has negative consequences for individual's mental and physical health, and on reasoning that (c) organizations share responsibility for the social good of the communities in which they operate. We offer practical suggestions for creating LGBT-supportive organizations and propose that industrial–organizational psychologists have an ethical obligation to support such efforts.

The United States has enacted federal legislation prohibiting discrimination in the workplace on the basis of a variety of demographic factors. The United States has been slow, however, to enact legislation prohibiting discrimination against those who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT). A substantial body of evidence has accumulated demonstrating that LGBT individuals face unequal treatment on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity in employment practices, and that the experience of such discrimination has consequences for well-being and organizational outcomes. Our contention is that, even in the absence of federal legislation protecting LGBT workers, organizations should institute LGBT-supportive policies. We begin by summarizing scientific evidence regarding negative attitudes and behaviors toward LGBT workers and then provide social and economic justifications for our position. We conclude by offering specific recommendations to organizations and to the field of industrial and organizational psychology.

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The Problem: Evidence of Heterosexism

Unequal treatment on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity (i.e., discrimination) is rooted in beliefs about LGBT people (i.e., stereotypes) as well as negative attitudes toward LGBT people (i.e., prejudice). ''Heterosexism'' encompasses both of these components and is defined as ''an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship or community'' (Herek, 1990, p. 316).[1] Evidence provided below from population surveys and statistics, experimental studies, and self-report questionnaires converges on the persistence of heterosexism in American society.

Population Statistics and Surveys

An important set of findings regarding the status of LGBT workers in contemporary American society can be derived from nationally representative attitude surveys. Such studies typically use a random-digit dialing approach and inquire about attitudes toward LGBT individuals in a variety of contexts. Research by Gallup suggests that although the overwhelming majority of Americans (89%) do not oppose employment rights for gay workers (Gallup, 2006), responses also suggest that beliefs about homosexuality continue to be negative. When respondents were asked whether sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are ''always wrong,'' ''almost always wrong,'' ''wrong only sometimes,'' or ''not wrong at all,'' more than 50% of Americans chose ''always wrong.'' This belief system may be the reason why 43% of respondents do not feel that gay people should be hired as elementary school teachers (Bowman, 2006) and why feelings toward bisexual men and women may be more negative than feelings toward all other religious, racial, ethnic, and political groups except injection drug users (Herek, 2002).

Another indicator of discrimination toward socially disadvantaged groups is a ''wage gap.'' Like women and members of ethnic minority groups, LGBT individuals earn substantially lower wages than their heterosexual counterparts. The largest of these differences is for gay men. Elmslie and Tebaldi (2007) found that gay men earn up to 23% less than heterosexual men in the same occupation and rank. In a review of nine studies and samples, Badgett, Lau, Sears, and Ho (2007) concluded that gay men earn between 10% and 32% less than similarly qualified heterosexual men. Wage discrepancies are less clear cut for lesbians; in many cases, lesbians earn more than straight women. This may be because of different rates of participation in male-dominated fields or career interruptions involving children (Blandford, 2003).

Experimental Studies

A growing body of experimental research demonstrates that portraying individuals as having a gay or a lesbian identity correlates with differential treatment. For example, a lab study revealed that fictitious heterosexual male job applicants were rated more positively than gay and lesbian applicants with the same qualifications (Horvath & Ryan, 2003). Similarly, an experimental field study found that ostensibly lesbian and gay job applicants encountered greater hostility than did job applicants who were presumed to be heterosexual (Hebl, Foster, Mannix, & Dovidio, 2002).

More recent studies suggest that heterosexism is a complex phenomenon and that the degree of discrimination toward LGBT individuals depends on several factors that are specific to the LGBT individual. In one study (Lehavot & Lambert, 2007), participants were randomly assigned to view a male or female heterosexual or homosexual target behaving in masculine or feminine ways. Ratings of the target's morality were worst when targets confirmed gender role stereotypes associated with their sexual identity; gay men who behaved in feminine ways and lesbians who behaved in masculine ways received the lowest ratings from participants who were high in prejudice. Thus, discrimination toward LGBT workers may be greatest when gender role stereotypes are enacted. Discrimination toward LGBT individuals also seems to depend on whether or not they are

1. Heterosexism includes stigmatization of individuals who do not identify themselves as LGBT but question their sexual identity, individuals who identify themselves as ''queer,'' and supporters or allies of these individuals. Thus, a more inclusive acronym is LGBTQQA. Here we use the label of LGBT to be consistent with public debate and the majority of existing research, which focuses on individuals who identify themselves as LGBT.

perceived to be ''concealing'' their sexual orientation. A vignette study (Oswald, 2007) suggests that targets who conceal their sexual orientation are rated more negatively with regard to their personal characteristics than those who did not conceal their sexual orientation. Like Jean Valjean (Les Miserables), if LGBT workers speak, they are condemned; if they stay silent, they are damned.

Heterosexism also seems to depend on aspects of the individuals with whom LGBT workers interact. For example, according to an implicit associations test, participants from a community sample expressed more automatic prejudice toward homosexual targets than toward heterosexual targets (Dasgupta & Rivera, 2006). Moreover, individuals who were not motivated to control their behavior enacted more negative nonverbal behaviors toward a homosexual target than did those individuals who were motivated to control their behavior. This suggests that motivations may enhance or ameliorate discrimination toward LGBT individuals. The results of another experiment (Goodman, Schell, Alexander, & Eidelman 2008) suggest that individuals are most likely to enact discrimination (i.e., denigrate and act negatively) toward an ostensibly gay leader when a teammate first makes a negative remark. Thus, individuals may engage in heterosexism when they are not motivated to suppress their prejudice by personal motivations or by the norms of the groups in which they work. In this way, aspects of heterosexism in the workplace function in a way similar to racism in the workplace (Brief, Dietz, Cohen, Pugh, & Vaslow, 2000). Cultural norms may also account for cross-cultural variability in prejudice and discrimination toward LGBT workers that have been demonstrated in experimental studies (e.g., Gabriel & Banse, 2006; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2003) as well as through self-report methods.

Self-Report Studies

One way to assess the discrimination encountered by LGBT individuals is to directly ask both LGBT and non-LGBT about such experiences. Data from both sources indicate that heterosexism persists. Heterosexual individuals report that their nonheterosexual counterparts are likely to experience discrimination. For example, a survey of police officers suggested that many officers observed other members of the force treating homosexual members of the public more negatively than heterosexual individuals and that officers do not always take complaints from LGBT victims as seriously as those made by heterosexual victims (Berstein & Kostelac, 2002). As another example, an in-depth interview and ethnographic observational study in a baked goods company reported that overtly negative attitudes and behaviors toward LGBT workers are common. Interview quotes include statements such as ''It's a sickness. . . . Those people need help. They need to check their head cause there's a screw loose'' and ''Two lesbians raising a son? That's insane!'' (Embrick, Walther, & Wickens, 2007).

Arguably, even more compelling are reports of discrimination by LGBT workers themselves. A review of published studies on LGBT workplace experiences indicated that between 25% and 66% of LGBT employees reported that they had experienced discrimination, with higher rates being reported by individuals who had disclosed their sexual orientation (Croteau, 1996; see also Ragins, 2004). LGB employees also report challenges developing positive relationships with their coworkers (Rumens, 2008). Responses to the National Survey of Midlife Development in 1995 suggest that the 8% of LGB individuals are approximately twice as likely as non-LGB individuals to report discrimination in the form of firing, denial of employment, or denial of a promotion (Mays & Cochran, 2001). Similarly, more than one third of the respondents in a national survey of 534 gay and lesbian professionals reported experiencing physical or verbal harassment on the basis of their sexual identity at work (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001).

It is critical to note here that although research has documented heterosexism in organizations, much remains unknown about the experiences of LGBT workers (see Ragins, 2004). More research is needed to build understanding about the intra- and interpersonal aspects of sexual identity management at work so that organizational psychologists can design programs and policies that meet the needs of LGBT workers. In line with this, more work is needed to identify the most effective strategies for improving the workplace environment for LGBT workers. Practitioners interested in evidence-based diversity management have little evidence to draw from with regard to effective LGBT-supportive policies. Clearly, more research is needed to understand and improve a wide range of aspects of LGBT workplace issues.

Nevertheless, taken together, the results of population surveys, experimental studies, and self-report questionnaires are consistent in indicating that LGBT workers face discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation. In the following sections, we argue that social and economic responsibilities compel organizations and organizational psychologists to create LGBT-supportive workplaces.

Why Organizations Should Respond: The Social Imperative

There is no federal legislation protecting LGBT individuals from employment discrimination in the United States. This can be contrasted with results from a recent review of the legal environment across 22 countries; 13 of these countries include sexual orientation as a protected class for employment decisions (e.g., Germany, Israel, Belgium, Canada; Myors et al., 2008). The Employment Nondiscrimination Act (H.R. 3685), which would have prohibited employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (*but not gender identity*), was passed by the House of Representatives in 2007 by a vote of 235 to 184. However, because the Senate did not vote on this bill during the 110th Congress, it must be reintroduced in both the House and the Senate, and ultimately considered by the president before it can be signed into law. The first step of this process began on June 19, 2009, when a bill (H.R. 2981) that bans workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity was referred to a House committee for consideration by the 111th Congress.

An analysis of congressional testimony dealing with legislation on employment discrimination toward LGBT workers highlights the justifications that are used to legitimize discrimination toward this social identity group (Creed, Scully, & Austin, 2002) and thus may create barriers to its passage. For example, arguments that Creed and colleagues uncovered include the notion that ''no one *has* to be gay,'' that homosexuality imposes on religious freedom, and that protection of LGBT rights in employment will increase bureaucracy and ''red tape.'' The lack of support for LGBT workers extends beyond the federal level; only 16 states and 173 counties and cities (in which only 47% of Americans live) have enacted laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual identity (Beatty & Kirby, 2006). The insufficient legal protections for LGBT workers in the United States, taken with the persistence of heterosexism, create a social responsibility for organizations to respond.

The vast and growing area of research and practice concerning corporate social responsibility (CSR) includes ongoing debate about the role of the organization in society (for a discussion, see Margolis & Walsh, 2003). Although it is worth noting that CSR actions have been linked with positive financial outcomes (e.g., Orlitzky, Schmidt, & Rynes, 2003), we focus for the moment on the notion that organizations share responsibility for the social good of the communities in which they operate. Historically, traditional theories of the organization were concerned with the manner in which companies affect patterns of privilege and disadvantage in society (see Hinings & Greenwood, 2002; Weber, 1964). From this perspective, the organization plays an active role in shaping social hierarchies and may represent ''the entities of last resort for achieving social objectives of all stripes'' (Margolis & Walsh, 2003).

Consistent with this, the notion of CSR can be traced back to the philosophers of the 17th and 18th centuries (e.g., Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau) who proposed that there is a social contract between a nation and its citizens involving a shared covenant of mutual obligations. Businesses emerged as a partner in social contracts as they grew in size, were afforded many of the same protections and privileges as citizens in a series of judicial decisions, and were held accountable for compliance with rules that were not necessarily directly related to their financial earnings (White, 2007). Indeed, incorporation is a privilege granted by the government. Incorporated entities are bestowed with benefits such as liability protection, mechanisms for raising capital, and organizational perpetuity. The taxpayer pays the costs of these benefits. In return for the privilege of incorporation, corporations have an obligation to attend to and meet the needs of the society in which they are incorporated. Integrating the notion of social contracts with stakeholder theory, Freeman (1984) argued that organizations have a responsibility to more than just their *share*holders; they also have a responsibility to a range of *stake*holders who are affected by the actions of the organization.

We contend that the stakeholders with whom organizations have a social contract include LGBT workers. A recent definition of CSR relies upon a minimum behavioral standard that includes the idea that organizations ''must not knowingly do anything that could harm their stakeholders,'' and second, that ''if corporations do cause harm to their stakeholders they must then rectify it whenever the harm is discovered'' (Campbell, 2007, p. 951). To meet this minimum standard of social responsibility, organizations must enact policies, practices, and procedures that prevent discrimination toward LGBT people and rectify remaining instances of heterosexism.

Reasons for Organizations to Respond: The Economic Imperative

The experience of inequitable treatment, or in the case of LGBT workers unfair treatment on the basis of sexual identity (i.e., heterosexism), has negative consequences for individuals and their organizations. One of the most consistent findings across studies on LGBT discrimination is that the experience of workplace heterosexism is correlated with attitudes about the job and the organization. For example, perceived heterosexism is negatively associated with job satisfaction (Button, 2001; Driscoll, Kelley, & Fassinger, 1996; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Waldo, 1999), organizational commitment (Button, 2001), and job anxiety (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). Heterosexism has also been found to be associated with turnover intentions and organizational self-esteem (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). There is also evidence that the experience of prejudice in general, and heterosexism in particular, has mental and physical health consequences. Results of a recent meta-analysis of nearly 150 studies show that perceptions of discrimination are negatively correlated with both mental and physical health (Pacoe & Richman, 2009). Similarly, perceptions of heterosexism at work have been associated with depression and psychological distress (Smith & Ingram, 2004; Szymanski, 2009; Waldo, 1999).

It is important to note that a related and critical predictor of these outcomes is ''outness,'' or the degree to which LGBT individuals fear disclosing their sexual identities. Surveys of LGBT employees (e.g., Day & Schoenrade, 1997; 2000) suggest that openness about their sexual orientation was correlated with a range of job attitudes including affective commitment, job satisfaction, role conflict, work–family conflict, role ambiguity, and belief in the support of top management. Similarly, a national survey of LGB employees suggests that the fears associated with disclosure are correlated with job attitudes, and experienced discrimination was correlated with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intentions, opportunities for promotion, role ambiguity, role conflict, somatic complaints, depression, anxiety, and irritation (Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007). Concealing one's identity has been associated with reduced task efficacy (Barreto, Ellemers, & Banal, 2006). In addition, a survey of LGBT individuals indicated that utilization of avoidance strategies (i.e., continuous self-editing and half-truths to reveal nothing about one's sexual identity) was negatively associated with their ratings of work group functioning, whereas integrating strategies (i.e., explicit statement of one's sexual identity) were positively associated with group process ratings (Chrobot-Mason, Button, & DiClementi, 2002). Thus, LGBT employees (and their organizations) may suffer negative consequences when they fear heterosexism as well as when they actually experience heterosexism (see Croteau, 1996; Ragins, 2008).

In addition to the outcomes of heterosexism detailed above, we also highlight the argument that employment decisions are effective only to the extent that they rely on valid predictors of performance. There is no evidence that LGBT workers perform any less well than their straight counterparts (see American Psychological Association [APA], 1997; Hiatt & Hargrave, 1994) or that LGBT workers differ meaningfully from non-LGBT workers on other job-related criteria. In fact, according to some estimates, LGBT individuals gain higher levels of education (a common predictor in selection decisions) than non-LGBT individuals (Black, Gates, Sanders, & Taylor, 2000). In addition, neuropsychological research has emerged that suggests that the long-debated relationship between gender and some dimensions of cognitive test performance may be moderated by sexual orientation. For example, score profiles of gay men were similar to those of heterosexual women on tests of verbal fluency (Rahman, Abrahams, & Wilson, 2003) and visual learning (Rahman, Wilson, & Abrahams, 2004); like heterosexual women (and comparable to lesbians), gay men tended to outperform heterosexual men on these tasks. Although the patterns of findings in these studies suggest that sexual orientation may be related to neuropsychological test scores, the implications of such differences should be interpreted in light of gender differences and the lack of data tying such scores to job performance.

Given the lack of evidence linking an LGBT identity to differences in typical predictors or criteria in human resource management, we conclude that personnel decisions made on the basis of sexual orientation will be faulty, ineffective, and ultimately, costly. Indeed, it is possible to extrapolate to the current topic from the experiences of organizations that have been quicker than their competitors to embrace other minority groups. Prior to placing Jackie Robinson in the starting lineup in 1947, the Brooklyn Dodgers had won one pennant in the previous 27 years. Starting with Robinson, the Dodgers added several stars from the Negro Leagues including Roy Campanella, Jim Gilliam, Don Newcombe, and Joe Black. The Dodgers' reward for being the first team to recognize the value of African-American players was six pennants in 10 years. Similar positive outcomes emerged for companies that embraced women's workforce participation (which increased over 50%) during World War II; production (and ultimately success or failure) in war industries depended heavily on the work of women. Importantly, such organizational decisions may ultimately lead to legal recognition of the rights of stigmatized group members; the first congressional consideration of the Equal Pay Act emerged following women's workforce involvement during World War II.

Recommendations for Organizations

Given the prevalence of heterosexism and its potential consequences, it is critical to enact strategies for its reduction. Employer-based practices and polices have been related to heterosexism and to ''outness'' of LGBT workers (e.g., Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; Ragins et al., 2007). For example, a survey of 537 LGB individuals from over 38 organizations indicated that the presence of policies supporting LGB workers was negatively correlated with the discrimination encountered by LGB individuals, accounting for over 60% of the variance in perceived discrimination (Button, 2001). Nearly 90% of the *Fortune* 500 (and 9 of the *Fortune* Top 10) companies have acted in line with these findings by establishing nondiscrimination policies for LGB workers, and 57% provide benefits to employees' same-sex partners (Human Rights Campaign, 2007). However, it is important to note that only 30% of these organizations supported the rights of transgendered and questioning workers.

It follows that the first step that organizations should take is to include LGBT employees as protected from discrimination in employment practices. Supporting this course of action, research has suggested that simply including sexual orientation in antidiscrimination statements and policies was positively related to job satisfaction and commitment among LGBT workers (Day & Schoenrade, 2000).

As a next step, organizations should look beyond employment decisions and ensure equal treatment of heterosexual and nonheterosexual employees across organizational life. This might be accomplished by providing optional opportunities for LGBT individuals to indicate their sexual identity on anonymous engagement surveys, establishing benefits for LGBT employees and their families (e.g., domestic partner and dependent benefits), and launching diversity initiatives such as LGBT employee resource groups, diversity councils, or mentorship programs. The Human Rights Campaign recently recognized two companies as innovators in workplace equality for their establishment of programs that serve as examples of such efforts: Boeing received this award for its institution of an initiative that helps transgendered employees transition, and Kirkland & Ellis, LLP received the award for its efforts to improve the workplace climate by pairing LGBT law students with partner- and associate-level mentors. Research on the effectiveness of diversity programs with regard to gender and race suggests that diversity management may be most successful to the extent that they include "structures of responsibility" (such as diversity committees or equal employment staff members) wherein oversight and advocacy efforts can be centralized and groups and individuals held accountable (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006). Formal policies, procedures, and practices that address heterosexism throughout an organization may ultimately help to create an LGBT-supportive organizational climate (see Huffman, Watrous, & King, 2008), which in turn is a critical determinant of the experience of LGBT employees (e.g., King, Reilly, & Hebl, 2008; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001).

In addition to these steps, organizations should advocate on behalf of LGBT interests. LGBT employees may benefit from the advocacy efforts of allies for two primary reasons. First, because an LGBT identity is generally not visible, it may be difficult for LGBT workers to identify others who are also LGBT; concealability of sexual identity and orientation may be a barrier to the creation of informal social support networks and formal action committees. Second, the lack of legal protection may make it more challenging for LGBT individuals to bear the burden of advocacy compared to women, ethnic and religious minorities, and disabled and older workers. LGBT workers may be vulnerable to legally defensible retaliation and persecution should they speak out on behalf of sexual minorities. It follows that advocacy should be instigated not only by LGBT individuals but also by their allies (within their own workplaces or through external organizations) or by organizations as a whole (through charitable donations and lobbying efforts).

What Is the Role of I–O Psychology?

The APA standards of ethics state that, "Psychologists respect the dignity and worth of all people" and "do not knowingly participate in or condone the activities of others based on [prejudice]'' (APA, 2002). This notion is based on the principle of justice, which entitles all people to equal treatment. Just as it is our ethical responsibility to ensure that women, older workers, ethnic, and religious minorities have the same workplace opportunities as do men, younger workers, and members of the majority ethnic and religious groups, it is also our responsibility to ensure that heterosexual and nonheterosexual individuals are selected, promoted, compensated, and terminated on the basis of measurable differences in their ability or performance rather than their sexual identities. Extending this idea, Fassinger (2008, p. 252) pointed to improving the workplace experiences of diverse individuals (including LGBT workers) as an ethical matter facing psychologists, suggesting that, ''In recognition of the need for continued advocacy, as well as the unique skills and perspectives that psychologists can bring to bear on public policy issues, the APA Code of Ethics calls for psychologists to become active agents of social change.'' Our code of ethics obligates us as psychologists to eliminate our own biases and to work toward social change in collaboration with LGBT workers. However, this is not the only reason that we should advocate for LGBT-supportive policies. Fassinger also argued that, ''Psychologists, both researchers and practitioners. . . have a stake in understanding the knowledge base regarding the role of work in people's lives as well as workplace issues that arise for diverse workers in the United States today.'' Indeed, this ''stake'' involves genuine consequences for the economic health of organizations.

The mission of SIOP is to ''enhance human well-being and performance in organizational and work settings'' (SIOP, 2009). Industrial–organizational (I–O) psychologists have the opportunity and responsibility to fulfill this mission as it pertains to the often overlooked, yet vulnerable, group of workers who identify themselves as LGBT. As we have documented, a substantial body of evidence has accumulated demonstrating that LGBT individuals face unequal treatment on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in employment practices, and that the experience of such discrimination has consequences for well-being and organizational outcomes. If we truly wish to enhance human well-being and performance, that is, if we are serious about our mission, then we must do more than not obstruct LGBT-supportive practices and policies. We hold a social and ethical obligation to work toward equality, and a professional and scientific duty to promote the selection and rewarding of the most qualified employees. We must encourage more scientific research on this topic, disseminate our collective wisdom about heterosexism and its consequences, and we must take a public position on the issue of federal protections for LGBT workers.

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