The Disclosure Dilemma for Gay Men and Lesbians: "Coming Out" at Work

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This study examined disclosing sexual orientation at work for 220 gay men and 159 lesbians. Self-acceptance, the centrality of one's identity, how "out" one is to friends and family, employer policies, and perceived employer gay-supportiveness were associated with disclosure behaviors at work for gay/lesbian employees. Disclosing at work and working for an organization perceived to be more gay supportive was related to higher job satisfaction and lower job anxiety. Reactions of coworkers to gay or lesbian workers mediated the relationship between disclosure and gay/lesbian workers' job attitudes. Implications and solutions for management are discussed.

Building a support system of trusted coworkers who respect you and your sexual identity is an important first step toward fully coming out.
The Lesbian Almanac (1996, p. 152)

Self-disclosure was defined by Collins and Miller (1994) as the "act of revealing personal information about oneself to another" (p. 457), and disclosures often involve surprising, if not stigmatizing, information such as criminal activity, marital infidelity, or sexual orientation (see Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993; Ludwig, Franco, & Malloy, 1986). Although largely unexamined by previous research, the current study attempts to examine one set of self-disclosures in the workplace, those in which individuals reveal to coworkers (superordinates, subordinates, and colleagues) that they are gay or lesbian.

The present investigation is particularly important for several reasons. First, estimates reveal that 10–14% of the U.S. workforce is composed of nonheterosexual workers (Powers, 1996), and there is a recognized need to better understand minorities working in a majority context (e.g., see Waldo, 1999). Second, disclosing one's sexual orientation is one of the toughest issues that gay men and lesbians face because it involves considerable emotional turmoil and a fear of retaliation and rejection (Bohan, 1996; Cain, 1991; Ellis & Riggle, 1996; Franke & Leary, 1991; Goffman, 1963; Kronenberger, 1991; Wells & Kline, 1987). At the same time, those who remain closeted report lower levels of psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Garnets & Kimmel, 1993; Lane & Wegner, 1995; Savin-Williams & Rodriquez, 1993), increased health risks (Cole, Kemeny, Taylor, & Visscher, 1996; Kalichman & Nachimson, 1999), and extensive and energy-draining activities

focused on covering up their stigmatized identity (e.g., see Ellis & Riggle, 1996).

Third, it is unclear how attitudes toward lesbians and gay men translate into workplace behaviors. Most Americans continue to have negative attitudes toward those who are gay/lesbian, although these attitudes may be changing (e.g., Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 1999; Kite & Whitley, 1996). Although a recent study found that 66% of Americans support laws that protect gay and lesbian workers against job discrimination (Yang, 1997), 62% of gay men and 59% of lesbians continue to report that they experience employment discrimination (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Survey, 1991; Waldo, 1999). Further evidence from a laboratory-based resumé study suggests that discrimination in the hiring of gay and lesbian job applicants is still prevalent (Griffith & Quiñones, 2001).

A recent comprehensive analysis, however, suggests that overt, formal displays of discrimination are becoming less frequent (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). A field study by Hebl, Foster, Mannix, and Dovidio (2002), for instance, found no differences in hiring rates but found that employers spoke fewer words, terminated interactions, and engaged in more nonverbal discrimination with gay/lesbian than heterosexual applicants. Thus, discrimination in the workplace may still exist, but may manifest itself in more subtle ways. Such results, coupled with the fact that many organizations (e.g., over half of Fortune 1000 companies) are beginning to include sexual orientation as a protected class and offer diversity training (e.g., see also Baker, Strub, & Henning, 1995; Neely Martinez, 1993; Powers, 1996), establish the need to better understand the changing workplace that gay and lesbian workers are experiencing. At present, it seems that gay/lesbian workers face a double-edged sword when managing their stigmatized sexual identity at work—they face problems if they don't disclose, and they face problems if they do.

The current study empirically examined self-disclosure of sexual orientation in the workplace; there is almost no previous research addressing this. One exception involves a study by Day and Schoenrade (1997) in which they examined how communication about sexual orientation is related to critical work attitudes. They found that "out" workers had higher job satisfaction, were more committed to their organization, perceived top management

to be more supportive of their rights, experienced less conflict between work and home, and had lower role conflict and lower role ambiguity. Day and Schoenrade's (1997) research demonstrated benefits to disclosure in the workplace; however, their research focused primarily on the relationship between disclosure and work attitudes. The current research replicated the examination of the relationship between disclosure and both organizational support and work attitudes but expanded this work by examining the relationship between self-disclosure and individual differences as well as the potential importance of formal organizational policies and coworkers' reactions.

Importance of Organizational Supportiveness

The extent to which an organization supports demographically relevant characteristics is extremely important to minority employees (see Rynes, 1990). Similarly, Button (2001) revealed that organizational efforts to affirm sexual diversity result in increased views of fair and equitable treatment by employees. The present research extends this to examine how the workplace atmosphere impacts the disclosure behaviors of gay/lesbian workers. Driscoll, Kelley, and Fassinger (1996) commented that " . . . it is likely that perceived and actual tolerance in the workplace climate regarding lesbians and gay men will be related to disclosure of homosexual identity in the workplace" (p. 229). As Driscoll et al. noted, organizational support for diversity in sexual orientation may manifest itself in the perceptions of support among coworkers (e.g., subjective estimates) or of actual organizational structures (e.g., nondiscriminatory policies, special interest groups). Thus, we believe that organizational support will lead to increased disclosures because organizational supportiveness may signal to the gay/lesbian worker that the organization is a safe place in which to disclose their sexual orientation. Thus, we predicted the following:

> *Hypothesis 1:* The more that an organization is perceived to be supportive towards gay/lesbian employees (H1a) and has supportive structures (H1b), the more gay/lesbian workers will have disclosed their sexual orientation at work.

Job Attitudes

Consistent with Day and Schoenrade's (1997) study, we examined how disclosure relates to job satisfaction and job anxiety. Research conducted outside the workplace has shown that those individuals who disclose their identity to others tend to have higher psychological adjustment and life satisfaction (e.g., see Savin-Williams & Rodriquez, 1993; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Ellis & Riggle, 1996; Garnets & Kimmel, 1993). We anticipated similar outcomes in the workplace, particularly given that employees who hide their sexual orientation report strategies (e.g., making up lies, switching the gender of their partners in conversation) for dealing with the related psychological distress (e.g., shame, fear) that can consume their time and energy. Likewise, employees who disclose may be able to establish closer and more honest relationships with coworkers and feel accepted for who they are. We anticipated that these outcomes related to workplace disclosure will influence job attitudes, such that:

> *Hypothesis 2:* Gay and lesbian workers who have disclosed their sexual orientation to more coworkers will report in-

creased job satisfaction (H2a) and decreased job anxiety (H2b).

These predictions are partially based on Day and Schoenrade's (1997) findings. Although they found evidence for differential job satisfaction, they found no differences in reported job anxiety. Our research will reexamine both findings.

Organizational Supportiveness and Job Attitudes

In addition to the influence of disclosure, we anticipated that the supportiveness of an organization will also influence job-related attitudes. Specifically, an organization that is gay supportive and recognizes the needs of workers will likely have a positive effect on workers' attitudes and their general well-being (Croteau & Lark, 1995; Hallowell, Schlesinger, & Zornitsky, 1996; Rynes, 1990). Button's (2001) work showed initial evidence for this in that policies affirming and recognizing sexual diversity in the workplace resulted in less workplace discrimination. By extension, we anticipated that more support and less discrimination will also result in more positive job attitudes. Thus, we predicted the following:

> *Hypothesis 3:* The more that an organization is perceived to be supportive towards gay/lesbian employees, the higher the gay/lesbian workers' job satisfaction (H3a) and the lower their job anxiety (H3b).

Not only did we anticipate that perceived gay supportiveness may influence gay/lesbian workers' job attitudes, but we also anticipated the following:

> *Hypothesis 4:* The more gay-supportive structures present in the organization, the higher the gay/lesbian workers' job satisfaction (H4a) and the lower their job anxiety (H4b).

Individual Differences

Few studies have previously addressed how individual differences relate to self-disclosure of sexual orientation in the workplace, and we proposed that such differences must be considered to fully understand disclosure behavior at work (see Bohan, 1996). For instance, Button (2001) revealed that attitudes about a stigmatized sexual identity influence work-related behaviors. In this initial investigation, we were particularly interested in three individual differences: the centrality of sexual orientation to one's self-concept, the degree of self-acceptance that one has, and the extent to which one has disclosed to others. Each of these variables provide some measure of the individual's attitude toward their identity as a gay man or lesbian woman, and in general, we predicted the following:

> *Hypothesis 5:* Individual differences will influence the extent to which gay and lesbian workers disclose their sexual identity to others in the workplace.

We will discuss each of these three individual difference variables in more detail.

Centrality of Sexual Orientation to One's Self-Concept

The centrality of sexual orientation concerns the extent to which an individual defines themselves in terms of a gay man or a lesbian woman. In some cases, a gay/lesbian identity may be so central to individuals that they may not feel accepted or at ease with others until they have disclosed (see Bohan, 1996; Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998). Similarly, Crocker and Major (1989) suggested that the centrality of identity was one of the most influential predictors of coping success and well-being (see also Branscombe, Schmitt, & Havery, 1999). Thus, we predicted the following:

Hypothesis 5a: Individuals with a central gay/lesbian identity will be more likely to disclose their sexual identity to others in the workplace (H5a).

Degree of Self-Acceptance

Another individual difference is the extent to which gay men or lesbians accept their identity. Although some people may feel comfortable with and embrace their sexual orientation, other people may reject their sexual orientation and view themselves as inferior to heterosexuals or flawed. Self-acceptance is one of the major dimensions of psychological well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) and may be particularly important for gay/lesbian individuals because it is associated with better mental health and coping skills in dealing with prejudice (Bohan, 1996; Garnets, Herek, & Levy, 1990; Hershberger & D'Augelli, 1995). It is also positively correlated with the length of time one is "out" (Savin-Williams & Rodriquez, 1993), and many believe coming to terms with and accepting their sexual orientation is a precursor to disclosing it to others (e.g., Bohan, 1996; Coleman, 1982). Thus, we predicted the following:

Hypothesis 5b: Gay men or lesbians who are more accepting of their sexual orientation are more likely to disclose their identity to coworkers (H5b).

Extent to Which One Has Disclosed to Others

Finally, this individual difference assesses the extent to which individuals are "out" to others. Although some individuals are "out" to all of their friends and families, other individuals remain fully "closeted." The extent to which individuals are "out" to their families and friends may buffer individuals' fears and anxieties in the workplace and may lead to a heightened integration of one's personal and professional life (e.g., see Lewis, 1984, Savin-Williams, 1989). In addition, prior disclosures may increase social support, decrease fears of rejection, and increase practice and experience with the coming "out" process. Therefore, we predicted the following:

Hypothesis 5c: Disclosure to more family members and friends will predict increased self-disclosures at work (H5c).

Reactions of Coworkers

Feedback from others plays a critical role in determining whether individuals are better off revealing or maintaining their secrets (see Ellis & Riggle, 1996), and we believe this is the case in the reactions that coworkers have toward workers who disclose their sexual orientation. Gay and lesbian workers often report hesitancy in disclosing information about their significant others, their families, or even their weekend plans because they fear retaliation or rejection from coworkers (Vargo, 1998). Supporting this, Franke and Leary (1991) found that lesbians' concerns regarding coworkers' reactions to their disclosures predicted their actual willingness to disclose. In hiding their identities, closeted workers report the need to use extensive and energy-draining strategies to conceal their stigmatized identity (Ellis & Riggle, 1996). These anxiety ridden strategies include: self-editing, divulging fictitious personal details that do not add up, relying on the use of neutral pronouns ("they" rather than "she" or "he") when discussing significant others or more drastic measures such as altogether avoiding certain coworkers (see Rogers & Hebl, 2001).

Given that much of the concealment of disclosure focuses on preventing negative reactions, the benefits of disclosures are predicted to occur only when positive reactions from coworkers occur. Likewise, if coworkers have negative reactions to an "out" gay/lesbian worker (e.g., by showing hostility, treating them unfairly, avoiding them), we predicted that disclosing will not be associated with more positive job attitudes. So, we believe that positive job-related attitudes will only emerge when people disclose to coworkers who have favorable reactions. As a result, we predict, that coworkers' reactions fully mediate the relationship between self-disclosure and job-related attitudes.

Hypothesis 6: The relationship between disclosing and job satisfaction (H6a) and between disclosing and job anxiety (H6b) will be mediated by coworkers' reactions to the disclosure.

Method

Participants

To meet inclusionary criteria for the study, participants had to self-identify as gay or lesbian on the questionnaire, were required to be at least 21 years of age, and had to have been currently employed at the time of the study. A total of 220 gay men and 159 lesbians from Houston, Texas, served as participants. There were 309 Caucasians, 34 Hispanics, 9 African Americans, 7 Native Americans, 3 Asian Americans, and 15 self-reported "other ethnicity." The mean age of respondents was 39 years of age (*SD* = 10), and 69% of participants had a college degree or an advanced degree. The average salary for respondents was $49,430 (*SD* = $37,755), and the average number of years that participants worked in their current job was 7.5 years (*SD* = 8 years). The demographics of the gay/lesbian participants matched those of previous studies in that they tended to be more White, more educated, and make higher salaries than generally observed with heterosexual participants (see Rothblum, 1995).

Data Collection

We collected data by using three different strategies. First, we relied on a 350-page publication listing nonprofit clubs, businesses, and establishments that self-identified as gay/lesbian-related or friendly. If the groups and places that we randomly selected from this list agreed to participate, we sent them surveys and instructed them to give the surveys to their gay or lesbian members and patrons, who also were invited to further distribute questionnaires. We included postage-paid, self-addressed envelopes inside each package of questionnaires and paid $5 for each completed survey that was returned. We imposed a cap of $100 to each club, business, or

establishment to ensure that we could minimize bias caused by collecting too many surveys from a single source. Second, we solicited participants through a citywide gay/lesbian monthly publication and a similar e-mail listserver within the metropolitan area. Using these two methods, we received a total of 173 completed surveys from at least 19 different clubs, businesses, and establishments.

Third, we rented a booth at a gay/lesbian business exposition that lasted 2 days and had thousands of area attendees. Research assistants successfully recruited 206 (of a total of approximately 250 approached) gay/lesbian attendees to complete surveys at the booth and afterward enter a raffle to win a $20 gift certificate to a local bookstore.

Survey Instrument

A cover letter attached to a six-page survey informed participants that the study investigated the experiences of both "out" and "closeted" gay and lesbian workers. Participants were told that all responses would be anonymous and confidential and that if they knew others who might want to participate (particularly those not "out"), they should take additional questionnaires. The first page of the survey contained demographic questions and the next five pages contained the study measures.

Measures

The survey was composed of a number of measures, and we briefly describe these and refer readers to Table 1 for details concerning the scales and subscales used, example items, anchors, and reliability coefficients.

Disclosure behavior at work. Disclosure behavior at work was measured by adapting the identity management behaviors scale developed by Croteau (1996). This 12-item measure assesses the extent to which individuals engage in avoidant behaviors (e.g., avoid discussing, lie) and overt behaviors (disclose, directly address) concerning their sexual orientation. Consonant with Croteau, higher scores reflect increased disclosure behaviors.

Job attitudes. Job satisfaction was measured with three items adapted from Ironson, Smith, Brannick, Gibson, and Paul's (1989) Job in General Scale. Job anxiety was measured with the item, "I experience considerable anxiety at work."

Organizational support. Consistent with Driscoll et al. (1996), participants reported the policies in their organizations that specifically support gay and lesbian employees as well as their perceptions of the organization's gay supportiveness. Gay and lesbian workers were asked if any of

seven different gay-supportive policies (e.g., a written nondiscrimination policy, same-sex partner benefits) were present at their place of employment (a more complete list appears later in Table 5). A composite of gay-supportive policies was calculated by summing all of the "yes" responses to the individual policy items. Perceived supportiveness towards gay and lesbian employees was adapted from Waldo's (1999) WHEQ questionnaire.

Individual differences. The centrality of one's sexual orientation was measured by adapting four items from Phinney's (1990) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure and from Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) "importance to identity" subscale. The degree of self-acceptance was measured by adapting five items from Waldo's (1999) study. To assess the extent to which one was "out," individuals reported the extent to which they were out to their family members and heterosexual friends (see Cole et al., 1996).

Coworkers' reactions. Because coworkers' reactions is a novel contribution to the existing body of research, there were no preexisting scales so we developed our own (see Table 1). The 10 items that we developed assessed the extent to which coworkers (superordinates, peers, subordinates) treated gay and lesbian workers fairly and were inclusive, felt comfortable with, and were accepting of gay and lesbian workers. These items allowed employees to evaluate their coworkers reactions even if no disclosure was made.

Results

Correlations

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics and zero-order correlation coefficients for all study variables.

Tests of Hypotheses

Organizational supportiveness, individual differences, and disclosure behaviors. Table 3 presents the results of the regression analyses testing Hypotheses 1 and 5. Working in an organization that is perceived to be more gay supportive was strongly related to being more "out" at work, fully supporting H1a. However, the presence of more gay-supportive policies was not significantly related to disclosure behaviors at work; thus, H1b was not supported. Centrality of a gay/lesbian identity was not related to a gay/lesbian's disclosure behaviors at work. Therefore, H5a was

Table 1
Descriptions and Characteristics of Measures

Scale or subscale	Example item and scale anchors	No. of items	α
Disclosure behaviors	At work, I pretend that I have a partner of the opposite sex[a]	12	.91
Job attitudes			
Job satisfaction	In general, I am satisfied with my job.[a]	3	.95
Job anxiety	I experience considerable anxiety at work.[a]	1	
Organizational supportiveness			
Policies	My company offers diversity training programs. (1 = *true*, 0 = *false*)	7	
Perceived gay supportiveness	My company is committed to the fair treatment of lesbian and gay workers.[a]	3	.86
Individual differences			
"Out" to family	How many immediate family members are you out to? (1 = *not out to anyone*, 7 = *"out" to all of them*.)	1	
"Out" to heterosexual friends	How many heterosexual friends are you out to? (1 = *not out to anyone*, 7 = *"out" to all of them*)	1	
Centrality of sexual orientation	My identity as a gay man or lesbian is extremely central to my self-concept.[a]	4	.67
Self-acceptance	I really wish I could change my sexual orientation (become heterosexual).[a]	5	.68
Coworker reactions	My coworkers are hostile toward me.[a]	10	.89

[a] Unless otherwise indicated, participants responded to all items on 7-point Likert scales: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *neither agree nor disagree*, and 7 = *strongly agree*.

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations Among Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. "Out" to family	5.73	1.99	—									
2. "Out" to heterosexual friends	5.55	1.83	.38**	—								
3. Centrality	5.25	1.16	.25**	.43**	(.67)							
4. Acceptance	5.75	1.08	.24**	.40**	.42**	(.68)						
5. Policies	1.68	1.93	.11*	.18**	.20**	.08	—					
6. Gay supportiveness	5.37	1.48	.12*	.28**	.18**	.23**	.26**	(.86)				
7. Disclosure behaviors	5.68	1.39	.28**	.58**	.32**	.52**	.21**	.54**	(.91)			
8. Coworkers' reactions	6.18	1.05	.04	.21**	.00	.28**	.12*	.60**	.45**	(.89)		
9. Job satisfaction	6.37	1.11	−.04	.16**	−.01	.21**	.07	.53**	.36**	.85**	(.95)	
10. Job anxiety	2.83	2.11	.02	−.13*	.10	−.17**	−.05	−.28**	−.28**	−.45**	−.42**	—

Note. Internal consistency reliability coefficients (alphas) appear in parentheses along the diagonal.
$* p < .05.$ $** p < .01.$

not supported. Increased self-acceptance was significantly related to increased disclosure behaviors, fully in support of H5b. Being more "out" to heterosexual friends was significantly related to exhibiting more disclosure behaviors at work. In addition, a nonsignificant trend in the data showed that being more "out" to family members was also related to being more "out" at work. Thus, H5c was partially supported.

Disclosure and job attitudes. The results revealed that disclosing more at work was related to higher job satisfaction ($r = .36$, $p < .01$) and lower job anxiety ($r = −.28$, $p < .01$), supporting H2a and H2b.

Organizational supportiveness and job attitudes. We conducted two regressions (see Table 4) examining whether job satisfaction and job anxiety were predicted by the two measures of organizational support (Hypotheses 3 and 4). Indeed, gay-supportive policies and perceived gay supportiveness accounted for a significant proportion of variance in job satisfaction and job anxiety. Perceived gay supportiveness was positively related to job satisfaction, in support of H3a, but negatively related to job anxiety, in support of H3b. The presence of gay-supportive policies was not related to job satisfaction or job anxiety after accounting for the effects of perceived gay supportiveness. Thus, H4a and H4b were not supported.

Reactions of coworkers. We used the criteria outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) to test for mediation effects (Hypothesis 6): (a) disclosure behaviors must be significantly correlated with coworkers' reactions; (b) there should be a significant increase in R^2 when coworkers' reactions are added hierarchically after controlling for disclosure behaviors to the regression equation that

predicts job attitudes; and (c) there should not be an increase in R^2 when disclosure behaviors are added hierarchically after controlling for coworkers' reactions when predicting job attitudes.

The first analysis (H6a) revealed that coworkers' reactions fully mediated the relationship between disclosure behaviors and job satisfaction. Specifically, disclosure behaviors were significantly correlated with coworkers' reactions ($r = .45$, $p < .01$), the change in R^2 when coworkers' reactions were added after controlling for disclosure behaviors was .56 ($p < .01$), and the change in R^2 when disclosure behaviors were added after controlling for coworkers' reactions was .00 (*ns*). Similarly, the second analysis (H6b) also revealed that coworkers' reactions fully mediated the relationship between disclosure behaviors and job anxiety. That is, disclosure behaviors were significantly correlated with coworkers' reactions ($r = .45$, $p < .01$), the change in R^2 when coworkers' reactions were added after controlling for disclosure behaviors was .14 ($p < .001$), and the change in R^2 when disclosure behaviors were added after controlling for coworkers' reactions was .00 (*ns*). Thus, Hypothesis 6 was supported.

Additional Exploratory Analyses

To examine in more detail how specific, supportive organizational structures potentially benefit gay/lesbian workers, we conducted t-tests on six specific company policies (see Table 5 for the policies and statistical results). Of the six policies, the presence of diversity training (that did not include gay/lesbian issues) was the only variable not related to increased disclosure behaviors. In addition, having a written nondiscrimination policy, diversity

Table 3
Results of Regression Analyses Testing Hypotheses 1 and 5

Dependent variable			β for:					
	"Out" to family	"Out" to heterosexual friends	Centrality	Acceptance	Policies	Perceived gay supportiveness	R^2	F
Disclosure behaviors	.08†	.32**	.00	.28**	.02	.36**	.54	58.09**

$† p < .10.$ $* p < .05.$ $** p < .01.$

Table 4
Results of Regression Analyses Testing Hypotheses 3 and 4

	β for:			
Dependent variable	Policies	Perceived gay supportiveness	R^2	F
Job satisfaction	−.07	.54**	.27	62.21**
Job anxiety	.02	−.26**	.07	9.82**

* $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$.

training that specifically includes gay/lesbian issues, and showing support for gay/lesbian activities was related to more disclosure behaviors, more positive coworker reactions, less perceived job discrimination, and less unfair treatment from a boss or supervisor.

Discussion

The current results add to an almost nonexistent body of research examining gay men and lesbians' experiences in the workforce, and particularly clarifies the work of Day and Schoenrade (1997). Our findings are consistent with Day and Schoenrade to the extent that we also found that disclosure was related to job satisfaction, but our findings are not consistent to the extent that in our study, disclosure was also related to job anxiety. Our results are congruent with other research (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998), which has shown

that one of the most fundamental motivations that people possess is a need to belong and have social support, and this same motivation has profound implications in the workplace. Those who acknowledge and receive favorable and supportive reactions from others feel happier and less stressed in the workplace.

Individual differences (e.g., acceptance, degree of being "out") and perceived organizational supportiveness also relate significantly to disclosure behaviors. In terms of supportive organizational policies, gay/lesbian workers are more likely to be "out," report less job discrimination, more favorable coworker reactions, and more fair treatment from their boss or supervisor when their organizations have written nondiscrimination policies, actively show support for gay/lesbian activities, and offer diversity training that specifically includes gay/lesbian issues. It is unclear why our predictions involving some measures of organizational policies (Hypotheses 1b, 4a, and 4b) did not emerge. Perhaps the construct of perceived gay-supportiveness is an overarching measure of climate that is composed of many different cues (e.g., policies, how supportive coworkers and bosses are, and the number of other diverse workers) and policies alone are less predictive than the whole. Or perhaps, gay/lesbian workers are not entirely accurate about the extent to which their companies have policies. However, the fact that organizational policies were significantly correlated with disclosure behaviors ($r = .21$, $p < .01$), and some individual policies were significantly correlated with disclosure behaviors (e.g., five of the six tested), did provide some indication that organizational policies are related to increased disclosures behaviors.

Table 5
The Impact of Specific Company Policies

	Written nondiscrimination policy			Diversity training only			Diversity training with gay/lesbian issues		
	No	Yes		No	Yes		No	Yes	
Experiences of gay/lesbian employees	M		t	M		t	M		t
Disclosure behaviors	5.50	5.99	3.05**	5.62	5.76	.85	5.58	6.06	2.74**
Coworker reactions	6.05	6.32	2.15*	6.19	6.22	.24	6.14	6.45	2.20*
Job satisfaction	6.32	6.46	1.09	6.47	6.33	1.01	6.40	6.52	.85
Job anxiety	3.08	2.56	1.96	2.85	2.87	.05	2.92	2.59	1.03
Coworkers ridicule me	1.65	1.56	.65	1.49	1.68	1.31	1.52	1.55	.18
Experienced job discrimination	2.33	1.85	2.32*	2.20	1.88	1.55	2.24	1.53	3.36**
Boss/supervisor treats me unfairly	1.67	1.34	2.38*	1.58	1.43	1.11	1.62	1.21	3.03**

	Support for gay/lesbian activities			Same-sex partner benefits			Recognized gay/lesbian employee organization		
	No	Yes		No	Yes		No	Yes	
Experiences of gay/lesbian employees	M		t	M		t	M		t
Disclosure behaviors	5.35	6.24	6.03**	5.62	6.02	2.25*	5.55	6.21	4.22**
Coworker reactions	6.00	6.53	4.23**	6.20	6.17	.20	6.18	6.26	.55
Job satisfaction	6.20	6.65	3.68**	6.38	6.39	.06	6.36	6.41	.31
Job anxiety	3.06	2.65	1.48	2.85	2.78	.23	2.81	2.82	.04
Coworkers ridicule me	1.75	1.52	1.42	1.61	1.71	.58	1.64	1.66	.09
Experienced job discrimination	2.36	1.54	4.33**	2.05	2.08	.11	2.13	1.86	1.04
Boss/supervisor treats me unfairly	1.69	1.32	2.59*	1.57	1.39	1.03	1.60	1.40	1.06

* $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$.

Gender Differences

Although past research has revealed some gender differences between gay and lesbian workers (e.g., see Kimmel & Sang, 1995; Sang, 1993), the only difference the current study found was that lesbians were more accepting of their sexual identity than gay men. Rather, the process of coming out seemed to affect men and women similarly in this study.

Limitations

One of the study's limitations is that participants may have been more "out" than the general population of gay and lesbian workers because "closeted" gay and lesbian workers are more difficult to identify and may be more reluctant to participate, a problem that research using gay and lesbian participants generally faces. However, the extent to which our participants were "out" closely corresponds to those reported "out" in national samples (see Badgett, 1996). In addition, Rothblum (1995) defends the generalizability of such results on the basis of a potentially constrained sample by citing that although "participants of such studies are sometimes considered to be nonrepresentative or nonrandom . . . they are representative of lesbians and gay men who are active in the communities" (p. 2). Rothblum further states that those who are "out" may be most important because they are the group that is most visible to the public and most affect how heterosexual women and men view gay men and lesbians (see also Day & Schoenrade, 1997). Furthermore, it is important to consider that we did attempt to achieve some representation by recruiting participants from multiple sources (see Rothblum, 1995) and by stressing in the recruitment stage that we were seeking less "out" participants as well. Indeed, 11% of participants reported not being "out" to anyone at work, and there was substantial variation in the percentage of coworkers to whom they were "out" ($M = 59\%$; $SD = 39.20$; range = 0–100%) and disclosure behaviors they displayed ($M = 5.68$; SD = 1.39; range = 1.17–7.00).

Another limitation involves some of the measures. Because of time and length limitations, all study variables could not be measured with multiple-item or full-length scales. In addition, well-established and previously validated scales for some measures simply do not exist (see Day & Schoenrade, 1997). However, we did rely heavily on measures and constructs used in past research on issues related to gay men and lesbians, albeit some of this research was not necessarily focused on workplace implications (e.g., see Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeier, 1997). As a result, the reliabilities of some of the scales (e.g., centrality) may have attenuated the results, and we hope that future research will improve in this area. Future research might also improve on the potential single source bias present in the current research. For instance, it is possible that individual difference variables (e.g., degree of self-acceptance) might influence perceptions of constructs (e.g., perceptions of coworkers' reactions). Disentangling such biases is important to fully understanding the experiences of gay/lesbian employees.

A final limitation involves interpreting the direction of causality. For instance, self-acceptance may lead to disclosure behaviors, and disclosing more often may lead to greater self-acceptance. Likely this is a bidirectional process. The current results also suggest that employees who are "out" are more likely to be satisfied, have supportive coworkers, and have supportive organizational policies. Although it is possible that employees self-select into organizations that are tolerant and gay friendly, it is also possible that employees who "come out" may pave the way for organizational changes. Past research reveals that few corporations adopted domestic partnership benefits, antigay discrimination policies, and other supportive organizational structures without first receiving pressure from some informal social group (Baker et al., 1995). That is, active and vocal gay/lesbian employees were often a key factor in affecting change within an organization. However, such forces within an organization often result in shifts in the type of people who are attracted, selected, and retained (see Schneider, 1983). Future research might clarify the process of change and the direction of causality.

Implications

The present results have implications for the recruitment of qualified gay and lesbian candidates. Recruitment efforts might apply Schneider's (1987) attraction–selection–attrition theory, which suggests that organizations who want to attract, select, and retain gay and lesbian workers should have formal, visible cues and structures reflecting that they already have such representation in their workforce or that there is organizational support and policies in place (see also Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995). Such organizations should consider what the candidates value and reinforce such values by creating and maintaining a culture that reflects this. Furthermore, recent research suggests that organizations that promote diversity do not do so at the risk of decreasing majority members' positivity toward the organization (see Avery, Hernandez, & Hebl, in press; Perkins, Thomas, & Taylor, 2000; Thomas & Wise, 1999).

Certainly our results showing that corporate supportiveness of diversity has a very favorable impact on gay/lesbian employees provides substantiation that such initiatives are worthwhile. In addition, gay/lesbian workers actually do take into account the extent to which companies are gay supportive when seeking employment (see Badgett, 1996). In fact, books and other listings even publish the most gay-supportive employers (e.g., Baker et al., 1995; Mickens, 1994). As a result, the institution of organizational policies and a supportive atmosphere may provide employers with a competitive advantage in the recruitment process.

Finally, Powers (1996) suggested that "people in organizations lack the skills, knowledge, tools, and resources to effectively address gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender workplace issues" (p. 79). To compensate for this, diversity training may need to specifically address issues of sexual orientation. For instance, management might consider greater attempts to educate workers specifically about gay/lesbian issues, foster a climate of acceptance, and articulate policies that clearly indicate that discrimination will not be tolerated, particularly because coworker reactions are so important to gay/lesbian employees' job satisfaction and job anxiety.

Issues concerning disclosures of sexual orientation in the workplace are complex but can be understood with an increased focus on the workplace experiences of gay and lesbian employees. Given that attitudes about gay and lesbian individuals, laws, and organizational policies are continually changing, it is important to empirically examine critical issues that gay/lesbian workers face. We

can't rely on outdated research— or the entire absence of it—to understand organizational implications in an evolving workplace.

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