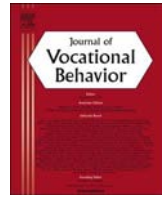


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Guest editorial

Understanding the experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of sexual orientation and gender identity minority employees

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ABSTRACT

This special issue advances the current, relatively lacking, empirical knowledge related to the experiences of employees who are sexual orientation and/or gender identity minorities. In this introduction to the special issue, we provide a brief but comprehensive review of the current literature focused on sexual orientation or gender identity published in 14 of the top organizational science, industrial-organizational psychology, and management journals. In so doing, we highlight what has been done and what opportunities remain in the current literature. We then provide a brief overview of the articles included in this special issue, highlighting the unique and collective contributions to the existing literature. We conclude by providing opportunities for further research in this field and a call to action for organizational scholars to continue to expand this important area of research.

The organizational science literature to date has provided a wealth of knowledge concerning the best practices for optimizing the overall health of organizations and the employees who work there. Although this research is invaluable, there has been a relative lack of work that acknowledges the influence of one's sexual orientation or gender identity in workplace settings. These considerations are particularly important at the time of this special issue, as there is still no federal protection from workplace discrimination (e.g., hiring, promotion, termination) based on an employee's sexual orientation or gender identity in the US. Although many contemporary legal cases have been interpreted such that discrimination based on gender identity (and in some instances sexual orientation) can be interpreted as discrimination based on sex (which is covered by the Civil Rights Act of 1964), these decisions are not consistent and are dependent upon individual rulings. Relatedly, the current Department of Justice recently filed an amicus brief challenging these precedents in the case of sexual orientation. In addition, the current presidential administration is in the process of implementing a ban on transgender service members in the US military (reversing inclusion efforts based on gender identity instituted by President Barack Obama). Further, while many nations have more progressive policies protecting sexual orientation and gender identity minorities (e.g., Belgium, Argentina, Canada), there are still many nations in which homosexuality is considered a crime and breaking with gender norms is viewed with disgust (e.g., Iran, many African countries). Clearly, it is within the purview of organizational scholars to provide theoretically- and empirically-based evidence related to sexual orientation and gender identity in workplace contexts. This is the imperative for this special issue. In particular, we focused on research that examines the working experiences of sexual orientation and gender identity minority employees explicitly, rather than perceptions of or attitudes toward these employees by others. In so doing, we highlight and give voice to the employees themselves through the data they have

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provided. We begin by providing a brief historical analysis of organizational research related to sexual orientation and gender identity. We then provide an overview of the common themes that are highlighted by the articles included in this issue and suggest future research directions.

1. History of Organizational Research on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

To provide an understanding of the current state of the literature focused on sexual orientation and gender identity, we first collected the abstracts and citation information from all articles published in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Management*, *Journal of Business and Psychology*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *Personnel Psychology*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Organization Science*, *Group & Organization Management*, *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, and *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*. We then searched each indexed abstract for any words related to (a) sexual orientation (e.g., “sexual orientation,” “homosexuality,” “LGB,” “gay,” “lesbian”) or (b) gender identity (e.g., “gender identity,” “transgender,” “MTF,” “FTM”) and generated frequency reports for each of these two searches for each journal over time. We then aggregated across journals to create an overall assessment that captures a large proportion of the articles published on sexual orientation and gender identity minorities within the mainstream organizational science literature. Finally, we refined our list by qualitatively examining each entry to ensure that our keyword search captured articles appropriately². We also excluded reviews of books, notices of errata, and introductions to special issues (such as this one) included in the search results to ensure inclusion of only unique empirical or theoretical contributions.

Of the 30,386 total articles examined, our search returned 37 articles related to sexual orientation and 3 articles related to gender identity (five articles that mentioned gender identity along with sexual orientation are not counted again in this total). The entire list of articles generated by our search is provided in Table 1. The first article focused on sexual orientation was published in 1959 in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* (*Berdie, 1959) and developed a scale of adjectives to describe femininity. In this study, the scores of gay male participants on the femininity checklist were compared to those of heterosexual male participants. The gay participants scored higher than their heterosexual counterparts, which was interpreted as evidence of discriminant validity. Thirty-five years later, the first workplace-related research that focused on sexual orientation was published in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (*Chung & Harmon, 1994). This study compared the vocational and career aspirations of gay and heterosexual individuals and found that gay men’s responses were more stereotypically feminine than their heterosexual counterparts. In 1996 and in 2008, the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* and *Group and Organization Management* published special issues focused on lesbian women, gay men and GLBT employees, respectively. Some of the most highly cited and influential articles include research focused on experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation, and management of gay and lesbian identities at work (e.g., disclosure vs. concealment, identity work; *Creed et al., 2010; *Creed et al., 2002; *Croteau, 1996; *Griffith and Hebl, 2002; Ragins, 2008; *Ragins and Cornwell, 2001; *Ragins et al., 2007).

The first article focused on gender identity examined the antecedents and consequences of disclosing a transgender identity and was published in 2011 in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (in a special issue focused on under-represented populations; Law et al., 2011). Two more articles focused on gender identity have been published in 2017 in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* (*Martinez et al., 2017) and the *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (*Drydakakis, 2017); both focused on the impact of transitioning genders on job attitudes.

This brief overview of the current research focused on sexual orientation and gender identity minority employees highlights some of the main themes that have been examined in the past, provides an impetus for increasing these veins of research in the coming years, and suggests some exciting opportunities for future research, to which the articles in this special issue contribute. We now briefly highlight the contributions of the articles in this special issue by discussing their common themes.

2. Common Themes Within Our Special Issue Articles

First, our special issue contains a few articles which focus on work-family issues experienced by LGB employees. This is particularly noteworthy, given that the work-family literature overall lacks understanding of how stigma might affect LGB employees’ (and employees from other stigmatized family groups) abilities to successfully balance work and life demands (Sawyer, Thoroughgood, & Cleveland 2015). Thus, this special issue provides a very useful and much-needed set of studies that highlight the unique work-family concerns and challenges faced by same-sex couples. Williamson, Beiler-May, Locklear, and Clark, provide evidence that LGB employees’ disclosures to coworkers and supervisors may have important implications for their partners’ family satisfaction and perceptions of family interference with work. Demonstrating that work-family crossover effects between partners can be driven by disclosure decisions at work, this study highlights additional potential stressors that may exist at work for LGB employees, which may result in heightened negative work-family outcomes for those in same-sex couples. Better understanding the range of outcomes associated with facing additional stressors at work related to stigma and disclosure decisions will allow employers

² For instance, the first article identified as being related to sexual orientation was published in a 1920 article of JAP, but referred to “queer” (i.e., non-normal) mental examinations, not “queer” as the term is currently used by queer studies scholars to refer to sexual orientation or gender identity in particular. Similarly, one of our search terms to capture lesbian and gay individuals (“LG”) also returned any articles that contained “LG” including LGD (leaderless group discussions), LGCM (latent growth curve modeling), and LGO (learning goal orientation) and several articles referred to cisgender (non-transgender) gender identities.

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