A Conceptual Review of Enacted Stigmatization, Stigma Consciousness, and Job Satisfaction of LGB Workers with Recommendations for Organizational Leaders

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Despite the monumental legal gains made in recent years, the workplace can still be a stigmatizing and unsafe place for LGB individuals. LGB individuals spend a large amount of their adult lives at work, which often means they spend a lot of their time being in the minority. This conceptual article discusses the ways in which enacted stigmatization and stigma consciousness have an adverse impact on job satisfaction of LGB employees. Recommendations for human resources professionals and organizational leaders are provided.

INTRODUCTION

While presenting on behalf of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) resource group at a company diversity conference in 2001, Louise Young issued the following challenge to all of her colleagues, including the company's president and executive leadership in the front row:

> I want you to go back to your offices after this conference and shut the door. Then I want you to remove all vestiges of your family, particularly your spouse. Put the pictures in the drawer and take off your wedding band. You cannot talk about your family and where you went on vacation. And if your spouse or partner is seriously ill, you are afraid to acknowledge your relationships because you are afraid you might lose your job. Do all that and see how productive you are. (Browne, 2014, p.103)

Unfortunately, for many members of the LGB community, this is a day-to-day reality at work.

LGB individuals are considered a sexual minority; however, unlike members of other minority groups who may differ in outward appearance, such as gender or skin color, LGB individuals may intentionally conceal their minority status. While there is no universally accepted estimate of the prevalence of LGB people, a recent Gallup poll (Newport, 2015) estimates the number to be around 3.8 percent of the adult population. According to Badgett, Lau, Sears, and Ho (2007), up to 68 percent of LGB people report experiencing some form of employment discrimination.

Disclosure of sexual orientation in the workplace could result in hostility and harassment without being entitled to any protection under some current state laws. These experiences are referred to as enacted stigmatization, which goes beyond what people *think* about a stigmatized population and entails

what people *do* to stigmatized persons (Herek, 2007). In addition to enacted stigmatization, LGB individuals also fall victim to stigma consciousness. Pinel (1999) defined stigma consciousness as the extent to which LGB individuals perceive, internalize, and accept their stigmatized status and how that status influences their behavior and interpersonal actions in stereotype relevant situations.

Research on the impact of sexual orientation stigma in the workplace is important because it can inform and educate managers, career counselors, human resources professionals, and other professionals who work with sexual minorities. Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002) found that job/work satisfaction have a positive relationship with productivity and a negative relationship with turnover and absenteeism. Job Satisfaction is defined as a positive emotional state relating to one's employment environment and experiences (Abraham, 2012). Research shows that employee well-being is related job satisfaction (Abraham, 2012; Judge, Hulin, & Dalal, 2009), and that is also linked to job performance. Additionally, employees who feel that they work for ethical and safe organizations demonstrate higher overall performance, engagement, and job satisfaction (Bockerman & Ilmakunnas 2012; DeTienne, Agle, Phillips, & Ingerson, 2012). Organizations that foster a culture of acceptance for all types of diversity, particularly LGB employees, will create a more inclusive employment environment for employees. Employees working for inclusive organizations will not feel the need to hide their minority status. It is also possible that instances of enacted stigmatization and stigma consciousness will decrease and job satisfaction will increase.

OVERVIEW OF STIGMA

Stigma is a social construct that is based on negative stereotyping or prejudice (Corrigan & Penn, 2015). The concept of stigma implies that a social identity is devalued in some way and that it is permissible to treat members of that identity group differently or negatively. According to Hatzenbuehler, Phelan, and Link (2013), experiences of stigma can have a number of negative effects on the stigmatized population. Fear of rejection could lead to poor coping behaviors, such as smoking or drinking, as well as social isolation in an effort to keep others from discovering one's stigmatized status. Early research on stigma by Goffman (1963) pointed out that individuals who see others as a member of a stigmatized group often view them as not quite human, resulting in a binary separation of "the normals" and the "others" (p.5). The "normals" will often construct an internal theory that allows them to stigmatize others, often rationalizing their animosity based on their differences.

Research by Wang & Hsieh (2012) supports that "the job attitudes and behaviors of the employees of an organization are not only affected by their own unique perceptions of their work environment but also by their shared perceptions of their environment" (Wang, Hsieh, 2012, p. 542). From an organizational effectiveness perspective, this is important evidence that if the work environment allows for experiences of stigma, this will permeate throughout the organization's culture related to employee perceptions of psychosocial and behavioral norms.

STIGMATIZATION OF LGB WORKERS

Like many individuals in the United States, LGB adults spend a large amount of their adult lives at work. Therefore, they should feel comfortable, supported, and most of all, safe in those environments. One of the key components to the stigmatization of LGB workers is the concept of heterosexism, which "focuses on the normalizing and privileging of heterosexuality (rather than merely a fear of homosexuality) and calls attention to the prejudice and social stigma, both institutional and interpersonal, faced by GLB people" (Waldo, 1999, p.218). Waldo argued that the workplace was the perfect environment to study heterosexism due to the fact that LGB adults spend a large portion of their lives at work and often are not afforded the opportunity to choose those with whom they work. Therefore, LGB workers often spend a great deal of their time being in the minority.

Enacted Stigmatization

Enacted stigmatization "refers to the overt behavioral expression of sexual stigma through actions such as the use of antigay epithets, shunning and ostracism of sexual minority individuals, and overt discrimination and violence" (Herek, 2007, p. 908). In essence, enacted stigmatization is the extent to which LGB individuals are the victims of demeaning or negative actions solely based on their sexual orientation. Enacted stigmatization further perpetuates the intrapsychic manifestation of what is normal and what is abnormal into an extrapsychic conflict due to workplace environmental factors. The two most common forms of enacted stigmatization that typically manifest in the workplace are harassment and discrimination.

Harassment can be a very common workplace experience for LGB workers because it includes a wide range of threatening or intimidating behaviors that can be of a physical or verbal nature. Badgett et al. (2007) found that up to 41 percent of LGB workers had been verbally or physically abused at work, or had their workspaces vandalized. McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackstone (2012) found that gender non-conformity was most likely to lead to harassing behaviors for males, particularly gay males, by other male employees. The authors also found that levels of harassment seemed to increase in male-dominated occupations.

Organizations will differ in the extent to which they protect LGB workers from harassment. As public perception of the LGB community has improved over time, more organizations have adopted supportive anti-harassment policies to protect LGB workers. Preventing the harassment of LGB employees goes beyond simply having a formal anti-harassment policy in place. The formal protections are definitely a step in the right direction. However, as Waldo (1999) pointed out, unless the organizations take measures to enforce and uphold these policies, they will have little to no impact on the treatment of LGB employees.

Discrimination is also a form of enacted stigmatization and refers to unwarranted or negative treatment of an individual or group of individuals based on their sexual orientation status. Workplace discrimination can take the form of formal discrimination, such as being denied promotions or resources, or informal discrimination, such as gossip or crude jokes. Despite the large number of organizations that have become increasingly more tolerant and inclusive, the research shows that discriminatory behaviors are still a prevalent and systemic workplace issue (Zurbrugg & Miner, 2016).

Stigma Consciousness of LGB Workers

Stigma consciousness is understood to be the extent to which LGB individuals perceive, internalize, and accept their stigmatized status and how that status influences their behavior and interpersonal interactions (Pinel, 1999). Pinel and Paulin (2005) indicated that members of a stigmatized group often recognize how their membership in that particular group influences the way others interact with them. Verbal harassment, being the subject of jokes, and general bullying tactics are all means in which a stigmatized group may be overtly targeted and these actions "serve to remind targets of this lack of respect from society at large" (Pinel & Paulin, 2005, p.345). It is important to note that subtle tactics, such as poor communication, lack of inclusion, or vacating shared social spaces may also send stigmatizing messages to LGB individuals. In many instances, LGB individuals naturally expect stigmatization in their work environments because they have experienced that stigmatization in so many other facets of life.

Even if LGB individuals choose to reject the stigma that is placed upon their group by society, they remain aware that stigmatization is a possibility in almost every social interaction. The workplace is an interesting environment to study, as it tends to mimic the broader makeup of society at large (Gates, 2012). Most work environments are made up of people from all walks of life, with different genders, races, and cultural experiences. While some workplace policies may prevent individuals from expressing their views against a stigmatized population, individuals with stigmatizing views outside of work are not likely to alter their views during their working hours. In the same way, even if LGB workers have some protection in the workplace, their experiences and stigma consciousness continue to remain with them at work.

According to Pinel and Paulin (2005), targets of stigma tend to disengage and remove themselves from those environments if possible. If LGB workers are stigmatized in the workplace, this could result in these employees leaving their jobs in favor of friendlier work environments. When LGB employees quit their jobs to avoid stigmatic experiences, organizations are potentially losing valuable contributors. Conversely, if LGB workers choose to continue working in stigmatizing environments, job satisfaction, burnout, and subsequently poor productivity and performance may occur as a "result of prolonged exposure to chronic, acute, and/or excessive stressors at the workplace" (Toker & Biron, 2012, p. 700).

The psychological distress of stigma consciousness can ultimately have a negative impact on an LGB worker's experiences in the workplace. "Work environments often demand conformity to traditional notions of masculinity and femininity" (Rabelo & Cortina, 2014, p. 380), which LGB workers are perceived as violating. Even though LGB workers experience stigma as a group, their individual experiences and expectations of stigma consciousness can vary drastically. According to Pinel (1999), gay men usually have higher experiences of stigma consciousness as opposed to lesbians. Traditionally, there are socially accepted gender roles that are not to be transgressed without grave consequences. This is especially true in the south.

Intrapsychic Consequences of Stigma Consciousness

One of the many negative consequences of stigma consciousness is that it can lead to internalized homophobia, which means having negative feelings about one's sexual orientation. Internalized homophobia occurs when a gay person directs the negative attitudes of society toward the self (Frost & Meyer, 2009). "Because most antigay attitudes are learned through normal socialization in our society, internalized homophobia can be a particularly insidious stressor" (Barnes & Meyer, 2012, p. 506). Frost and Meyer found that internalized homophobia could lead to greater instances of relationship problems and symptoms of depression.

Identity management involves a psychological process in which one displays emotions, behaviors, or appearances in alignment with what may be perceived as gender norms and is a common form of stigma consciousness. Woods (1993) found that gay men often engaged in three different identity management strategies, including counterfeiting, avoidance, and integration. Counterfeiting involves pretending to be heterosexual, integration is being open and honest about who one truly is, while avoidance is avoiding others altogether. Button (1996, 2004) extended upon Woods' (1993) research to include gays and lesbians in an attempt to determine whether or not there were any differences in gender utilization of the identity management strategies, and whether or not gay men and lesbian women used a combination of these strategies, as opposed to only adopting one. Button determined that gay men and lesbian women utilized all three strategies in combination. For example, a gay man or lesbian woman may use counterfeiting strategies with a worker they fear may react negatively to their sexual minority status, but may also use integration strategies with a trusted colleague who is accepting.

Sexual Orientation Disclosure in the Workplace

If sexual orientation is concealable, how does it become a workplace issue? Gedro (2009) said, "Sexual orientation manifests any time a worker places a picture of his or her spouse or children on a desk, wears a wedding ring, or brings a spouse to a company function" (p.55). LGB workers do not always have this luxury, and therefore must come up with different methods and ways of navigating the heterosexism in their organizational settings. Part of the problem for LGB workers is that even if they choose to conceal their stigmatized minority status, it is often apparent by the lack of a wedding band, pictures of a family, or dates to a company function.

JOB SATISFACTION

Employees are the most valuable assets that companies possess, and therefore, their job satisfaction and job performance are critical to the organization's effectiveness and success (Olcer, 2015). Job satisfaction can be defined as the degree to which employees are happy and satisfied with their jobs

(Hackman & Oldham, 1975). Hackman and Oldham developed the Job Diagnostic Survey to measure the five core job characteristics that impact job satisfaction, which include skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. If employees possess these characteristics, they will be more satisfied with their jobs. There are also *specific satisfactions* that Hackman and Oldham discussed, including job security, opportunity for growth, pay and compensation, and peers and co-workers (social satisfaction). Each of these can have an additional impact on an employee's overall job satisfaction. Experiences of stigma would be classified as social satisfaction.

Olcer (2015) looked at how job satisfaction affected job performance and found that employee attitudes toward their jobs and work experiences have significant effects on their performance. According to Spector (1997), the performance of an organization depends on the effective and efficient performance of individual employees; therefore, job satisfaction can be an important influence and motivator on organizational effectiveness and employee behavior. Olcer found that if an employee is satisfied with his job, he is motivated to put forth more effort in his job performance. Satisfied employees also have lower turnover, less absenteeism, higher levels of loyalty and commitment, more concern about their jobs, higher rates of punctuality.

Button (2004) said that the identity management strategies that LGB workers use in order to disclose or conceal their minority status can cause social isolation, which can lead to lower productivity and job satisfaction for the individual and the team. At the same time, the integration of LGB identities at work could result in enacted stigmatization by other employees or coworkers. It is important for managers to consider the experiences of LGB employees, as their experiences can influence job satisfaction, which has been shown to be negatively related to turnover and absenteeism and positively related to productivity (Harter et al., 2002).

Waldo (1999) also found that there was a decrease in job satisfaction and an increase in job withdrawal among sexual minorities who experienced heterosexism in the workplace. Experiences of perceived discrimination (enacted stigmatization) based on sex and sexual orientation have also been linked to lateness, absenteeism, withdrawal, and intentions to quit (Volpone & Avery, 2013). Jin and Park (2016) found that sexual stigma, heterosexism, and sexual prejudice have a large impact on LGB workers, indicating that the characteristics of LGB workers are "less valued and regarded as less useful than heterosexuals" (p.6). This results in an organizational culture that perpetuates the myth that all workers should emulate heterosexual characteristics. On the other hand, Velez and Moradi (2012) found that LGB-supportive climates had positive relationships with job satisfaction and negative relationships with turnover intentions.

HUMAN RESOURCES AND MANAGERIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Research on the impact of sexual orientation stigma in the workplace and its impact on job satisfaction is necessary because it can inform human resources professionals, career counselors, managers, and other professionals who work with individuals that are considered sexual minorities. Human Resources (HR) and management professionals (hereafter referred to as organizational management) have a duty to mitigate the adversities endured by the LGB population in the workplace as both a social responsibility, as well as an organizational effectiveness initiative.

To effectively address these adversities, organizational management must extend beyond the typical formalities of simply having discrimination and harassment policies. To do this, the following measures are recommended.

- Utilize discrimination and harassment policies as the foundation for addressing discrimination, harassment, and enacted stigmatization. Support policies with organizational and management training. In a study of LGB workers in Tennessee, 32.7 percent of participants indicated their organizations did not have a formal LGB non-discrimination policy, and 12.5 percent indicated they were unsure (Pickern, 2017).
- Analyze the current environment relative to training needs. Conduct a training needs assessment for the organization at large and separately for the management team.

- Select diversity and sensitivity training that is relevant to your organization. Most individuals have little to no formal training on dealing with LGB issues in the workplace. Additionally, those that do have training usually identify as a member of the LGB community (Murphy, Rawlins, & Howe, 2002).
- Immediately address issues as they arise. If negative behavior is discovered, discipline staff, but also re-train. If issues continue, terminate employees who engage in this conduct.
- Reinforce the positives of diversity in day-to-day operations. Encourage diverse thinking with positive reinforcement publically, in meetings, etc. Communicate the role diversity plays for organizational effectiveness.
- Include diversity as part of the organization mission statement and guiding principles, and create plans for hiring a more diverse workforce. A workplace with visible, prominent LGB individuals can alleviate the stigma consciousness that other LGB individuals throughout the organization might feel.
- As an organization, publicly advocate and lobby elected officials on behalf of LGB employees. In 2015, Aetna CEO, Mark Bertolini, sent an open letter to then Arizona Governor Jan Brewer on behalf of Aetna employees in that state. Bertolini urged Governor Brewer to veto an anti-LGBT religious freedom bill that had passed the state legislature, saying that Aetna was committed to all types of diversity (Hudson, 2015).
- Utilize employee resource groups as a way for LGB employees to interact with one another in a safe and positive environment.
- Engage in LGB events in the community. Have representatives from the organization on the local LGB Chamber of Commerce. Set up a booth at annual Pride celebrations. Select and sponsor LGB employees to attend annual Human Rights Campaign galas and other notable LGB events.
- Refuse to do business with other organizations that do not protect LGB workers, or have publicly espoused anti-LGB values. Today's economy affords consumers several viable options when it comes to purchasing goods and services. If organizations want to affirm and support their LGB employees, they can make a stand and refuse to do business with organizations that do not share those same ideals.

SUMMARY

Experiences of enacted stigmatization and stigma consciousness can have a number of adverse effects on LGB employees, including poor coping behaviors, isolation, and fear of rejection (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2013). Additionally, the coping mechanisms used by LGB individuals to navigate stigmatic environments can lead to lower productivity and satisfaction, not only for the LGB individual, but the entire team. By actively promoting equal and diverse workspaces for LGB individuals, organizations are sending a message that LGB employees are welcome and valued.

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