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REF. 10. The Dark Side of Org. Behavior

CHAPTER 7

Out of the Closet and Out of a Job? The Nature, Import, and Causes of Sexual Orientation Discrimination in the Workplace

Elizabeth Ann Deitch, Rebecca M. Butz, Arthur P. Brief

Abstract: Despite an increasing focus on diversity in recent decades, organizational researchers have largely ignored the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) employees. This chapter is intended to draw attention to the problem of sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace, and to encourage researchers to turn their efforts toward the study of this neglected employee population. The chapter begins with a discussion of the issues that make LGB employees a unique population for study, including the nonvisible nature of sexual orientation, the lack of federal civil rights legislation banning sexual orientation discrimination, and the general social acceptability of antipathy toward gay men and lesbians. Then, existing research regarding the incidence of sexual orientation discrimination, its antecedents, and its outcomes is reviewed. Following this review, numerous suggestions for directing future research on the issues facing lesbian, gay, and bisexual employees are advanced.

> Douglas Retterer suffered constant harassment at his job, being routinely called "fag" and "queer" by his coworkers, and asked questions like, "How's your AIDS?" Two of his supervisors would frequently call him into their office over the intercom and, with coworkers watching, the supervisors would physically restrain him while prodding him with their fingers, simulating sex. After Retterer became so distraught he began having panic attacks, he filed suit against the firm, but the Ohio appeals court ruled that there is no remedy available for sexual orientation harassment under either state or federal law (Human Rights Campaign [HRC], 2001a).

> When her supervisors found out she was a lesbian, "Jane" was subjected to an hour of interrogation regarding her sexual relationships. She was asked if she had fantasies about her coworkers and was accused of treating her female subordinates like a "harem." A week later, after another three-hour interrogation and two lengthy phone calls to her home, Jane was fired, despite an outstanding performance record (HRC, 2001a).

> Mark Anderson's supervisor at a prestigious securities firm produced a video that was shown and distributed at the firm's biennial sales meeting. The video featured images of Anderson's car, painted by his coworkers with gay references, such as "Rump Ranger" and "1–800-Butt Boy." Although Anderson had never received any criticism regarding his work, he was fired soon after the sales meeting, being told he would "not make a good stockbroker" (HRC, 2001a).

There are approximately twenty million gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons in the United States, and a large proportion of those engage in paid work outside the home (Seck, Finch, Mor-Barak, & Poverny, 1993). Estimates of the proportion of non-heterosexual people in the American workforce put the figure at 10–14 percent (Powers, 1996). Despite an ever-increasing amount of attention to "diversity," lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) workers remain virtually ignored by organizational researchers. In contrast to this lack of scientific attention, there is a growing trend by employers to attend to the issue of inclusion of LGB workers. As of the year 2001, 294 Fortune 500 companies have written nondiscrimination policies that include sexual orientation, and 145 offer domestic partner benefits to their gay and lesbian employees (HRC, 2001b). Public opinion polls also show increasing support for employment rights for gays and lesbians (Yang, 2000). This chapter is intended

to encourage organizational researchers to join and facilitate this trend toward inclusiveness by expanding their definition of diversity and, correspondingly, devoting attention to the workplace experiences of LGB people.

We will begin the chapter by considering the features that make LGB employees a unique population with concerns that are somewhat different from those affecting the "diverse" groups more commonly studied (racial-ethnic minorities and women). We will include discussion of issues raised by the fact that homosexuality is not an immediately visible characteristic, that there is little legal prohibition against sexual orientation discrimination, and that prejudice against LGB people currently is more socially acceptable than overt expressions of racism or sexism. Next, we will examine the scope of the problem of sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace. After discussion of the prevalence and forms of such discrimination, we will present evidence of its impact on targets. Then, we will turn to correlates and possible antecedents of sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace, including organizational policies and climate, characteristics of coworkers and supervisors, and LGB employees' decisions to disclose their sexual orientation on the job. As we progress through this discussion of what is known regarding the antecedents, correlates, and outcomes of sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace, it will become apparent that, at this point, very little is known. Furthermore, one will see that what research does exist often provides findings that are difficult to interpret or that conflict with other findings. The void of research addressing the concerns of LGB workers will become painfully obvious. Thus, we will provide in the latter part of the chapter a coarsely articulated agenda for LGB workplace research.

LGB Employees Are a Unique Population

The majority of research on diversity and discrimination has focused upon women and racial or ethnic minorities. Some of the issues faced by these groups may be the same as those faced by LGB employees, such as confronting stereotypes and difficulties in relationships with majority-group coworkers. But the experiences

of LGB employees may differ from those groups in several important ways. Below, we discuss three ways in which the LGB employee population is unique: the nonvisible nature of sexual orientation, the lack of federal civil rights protection for LGBs, and the acceptability of anti-gay prejudice. These features may alter the character of the discriminatory situations faced by LGBs, as compared to other groups, and can lead to LGBs facing issues that women and racial minorities do not encounter at all (for example, "coming out"). In light of these unique concerns, generalization of research conducted on those more well-studied groups to LGB employees may not be warranted.

Concealability of Stigma

Goffman (1963) defined a *stigma* as an attribute of a person that calls into question that person's full humanity, rendering him or her "in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (p. 3). Homosexuality is an example of a stigma, as are minority race, disability, and gender in some contexts, in that people who possess such attributes are the object of negative stereotypes and are generally devalued in society (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998). However, a very important difference between LGBs and more commonly studied minorities is that homosexuality is a "concealable" stigma, in that an individual's sexual orientation is not inherently visible to others in the environment. One might think that concealable stigmas are less problematic than visible stigmas because it is possible for those who are concealably stigmatized to interact with other people without their devalued social identity being known and always filtering how everything about them is understood (Crocker et al., 1998; Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998). This likely leads to lower levels of some forms of discrimination being directed at individuals who do conceal their orientation. But individuals with concealable stigmas are aware that they could be devalued if their stigma were discovered, and in every new encounter with the nonstigmatized they may try to determine the attitudes of the individuals with whom they are interacting, monitor speech and behavior to avoid revealing their stigma, and worry about whether, when, and how they should reveal their stigmatizing identity (Crocker et al., 1998). Frable (1993) refers to this sort of mindfulness and worry as "social gymnastics"; those who do not possess concealable stigmas are not so burdened.

There is some evidence that LGB people do, in fact, engage in a considerable amount of these "social gymnastics" at work (Chrobot-Mason, Button, & DiClementi, 2001; Kitzinger, 1991). LGB employees report engaging in a number of identity management strategies on the job. Chrobot-Mason et al. (2001) found three common strategies in use: counterfeiting, avoidance, and integration. LGB employees who widely disclose their orientation at work attempt *integration*, that is, seeking to make a gay or lesbian identity a part of their work lives. In contrast, the other two strategies are ways to avoid disclosing one's sexual orientation. *Counterfeiting* refers to actively constructing a false heterosexual identity to present to others, such as the gay man who invented a girlfriend, "Becky," to talk about with his coworkers (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995). *Avoidance* refers to a simple refusal to discuss one's personal life and identity and attempts to steer conversations elsewhere. Friskopp and Silverstein interviewed numerous gay and lesbian Harvard Business School alumni, and many of their interviewees spoke of "keeping their private life private." An LGB employee may use all three of the above strategies, at different times and with different people, nearly always devoting some attention to how to manage his or her stigma in each particular situation (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2001; Driscoll, Kelley, & Fassinger, 1996; Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995; Kitzinger, 1991).

Heterosexuals may underestimate the impact of nondisclosure on the daily work lives of LGB employees. Opponents of legal protection against sexual orientation discrimination commonly allege that such laws are unnecessary, because "private sexual behavior" should have no impact on the "public" workplace (Dyer, 2001; Washington for Traditional Values, 1997). However, such a separation between public and private does not exist for heterosexuals. For example, expressions of heterosexuality are apparent in displays (family photos, wedding rings), conversation, and behavior in nearly every workplace (Kitzinger, 1991). Furthermore, having an LGB identity is not merely about sex. Same-sex relationships also include nonsexual physical affection, shared goals and values, mutual support, ongoing commitment, and mundane daily activities, just as do heterosexual relationships (Herek, 1996). To be

unable to even speak of one's most important relationships and activities imposes an onerous burden on closeted LGB employees. Heterosexual readers might try to imagine how difficult they would find their work lives if they could never mention a husband, wife, girlfriend, boyfriend, date, children, family outing, or any other aspect of their lives that might reveal heterosexuality. A gay man described his frustration: "Straight people say why do you have to bring being gay to work? But you know something? When straight people say 'Mary and I went to the Catskills this weekend,' or 'Our little son, Johnny, is going to MIT,' and all that stuff, they're coming out to you about their sexual orientation. They don't realize gay people aren't asking for anything special. We are just asking for equal time" (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995, p. 87).

Furthermore, heterosexuals in the workplace often breach this supposed separation of "public" and "private" by refusing to allow LGBs to keep their lives outside of work private. For example, a gay sales manager in Illinois waved to a friend on the street; his manager observed this and, perceiving the friend to be "obviously gay," pressed the employee until he finally admitted that he had dated the friend (HRC, 2001a). A lesbian who worked for an Ohio cleaning service faced constant questioning by her supervisors about her private life and whether she had a boyfriend, and a gay male candidate for a Connecticut police department was asked directly about his sexual orientation on a polygraph (HRC, 2001a). These sorts of situations seem to be very common; LGB employees may have a hard time keeping their "private lives private," even when they want to.

Secrecy also interferes with the development of interpersonal relationships on the job. Mutual self-disclosure is vital to the formation of friendships and supportive relationships (Chelune, Sultan, & Williams, 1980; Worthy, Gary, & Kahn, 1969); thus, when LGB employees cannot engage in reciprocal disclosures, they are unlikely to form meaningful relationships on the job. This can interfere with the career development of LGBs, as they may be cut off from informal networks that can provide career guidance and information about opportunities (Boatwright, Gilbert, Forrest, & Ketzenberger, 1996). In addition, coworkers are a valuable source of social support for many people, a source that may be especially

useful considering how many hours of the day one spends at work (Carlson & Perrewe, 1999; Dormann & Zapf, 1999). If closeted LGB employees fail to develop meaningful relationships with coworkers, they may suffer from the lack of that support. One lesbian Harvard alumnus explained: "Since I'm unable to be open with my coworkers about my personal life, it not only prevents me from being one of the team, but creates some stress for me. My coworkers can let off steam or indicate when they have had problems and get support from others. I don't have that kind of relationship with my colleagues" (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995, p. 187).

Although concealing one's sexual orientation is fraught with difficulties, disclosure is not a cure-all. Even with disclosure, the need for impression management remains; its form merely changes. Individuals who are "out" on the job report being mindful of their words and actions in attempts to "correct" stereotypes about LGBs held by others. For example, a lesbian librarian explained, "There's this stereotype that all lesbians are big tough butch women in trousers and crew cuts, so I make a special effort to do my hair nicely, and wear quite feminine clothing, skirts and make-up, just to sort of say, 'look, we're not all like that'" (Kitzinger, 1991, p. 233). Another woman described attempting to dispel "butch-femme" stereotypes (which suggest that one partner has the "feminine" role, while the other plays the "male" part), saying, "Because I have short hair and a boyish figure and my lover is more conventionally feminine than I am, I feel people at work see us that way, and I hate it. So I keep dropping comments about how she fixed the car [on] the weekend while I was cooking dinner—things like that, designed to undermine their stereotypes" (Kitzinger, 1991, p. 233).

In sum, whether they disclose their sexual orientation or not, the interactions that LGB employees have with others on the job involve identity- and impression-management concerns that are unique to the invisibly stigmatized. Not only does this mean that we must be extremely cautious in generalizing results from research on visibly stigmatized groups, it also complicates research focusing specifically on LGBs. As will be noted throughout this chapter, disclosure of one's sexual orientation is likely to be related to nearly every aspect of the LGB workplace experience in complex and reciprocal ways.

Lack of Federal Civil Rights Protection

Another way in which the experience of LGBs is different from that of racial minorities and women is that in most of the United States discrimination against LGB employees is quite legal. There is currently no federal legislation prohibiting discrimination against LGBs in employment-related matters; federal courts have ruled that sexual orientation does not meet the requirements for being a "suspect class" that would be protected under current federal civil rights legislation (HRC, 2001b). Some LGB employees are protected, however, as twelve states and 122 cities and counties have enacted legislation prohibiting discrimination in employment on the basis of sexual orientation (HRC, 2001b; National Gay and Lesbian Task Force [NGLTF], 2001a).

The potential importance of such official protection from discrimination should not be underestimated in studying the work experiences of LGBs. Clearly, these laws and ordinances may directly reduce the amount of discrimination experienced by explicitly prohibiting differential treatment of gay men and lesbians in matters of hiring, firing, promotion, pay, and scope of duties (HRC, 2001b). Thus, one way in which nondiscrimination policies can prevent discrimination from occurring is by clearly specifying actions that are unacceptable. Official protection also opens an avenue for those who are discriminated against to attempt to seek redress. Without such protection, discriminatory treatment may be unlikely to be challenged for fear of retaliation (Van Den Bergh, 1994). In fact, such retaliation for complaints is not uncommon; the Human Rights Campaign (2001a) has documented numerous occasions when LGB employees were disciplined, suspended, or fired after complaining about sexual orientation discrimination. Moreover, there is some evidence that LGBs are more willing to speak out against discrimination when they enjoy employment protection. For instance, complaints to the New York City Commission of Human Rights went from 139 to 339 in just one year, after passage of a citywide ordinance prohibiting employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (Poverny & Finch, 1988).

But if civil rights legislation addressing sexual orientation functions similarly to existing federal protections covering race and sex, it is unlikely to fully remedy the problem of sexual orientation discrimination. Edelman and Petterson (1999) present arguments suggesting that organizations' compliance with existing civil rights laws sometimes is only symbolic, with little substantive impact. Furthermore, they argue that the courts often are ineffectual in providing adequate redress to victims of discrimination under these laws. Nonetheless, there is evidence that numerical gains have been made in the representation of women and minorities in nontraditional and upper-level jobs (Holzer, 1996; Leonard, 1986). Collection of similar data on the representation of LGBs, however, will never be possible, due to the concealability of sexual orientation. Thus, statistical arguments of evidence of a pattern of discrimination against LGBs will not be available, and it may be difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of nondiscrimination initiatives for LGB employees. Still, the evidence that at least some organizations' responses to existing civil rights laws have achieved substantive benefits in the treatment of currently protected groups (Edelman & Petterson, 1999; Konrad & Linnehan, 1995) suggests that some improvement in the treatment of LGBs might similarly result from legal protection. Understandably, therefore, LGB activists continue to press for clear federal civil rights protection by lobbying for passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (HRC, 2001b). Until such a law is passed, or the Supreme Court makes a clear statement extending current civil rights legislation to cover sexual orientation, the current "patchwork" protection remains. That fact needs to be acknowledged in research with LGB employees, as the presence or absence of workplace protection may be an important environmental influence on those employees' experiences with discrimination.

Acceptability of Heterosexism

Another important way in which the experience of LGB employees is unique is the general social acceptability of antipathy toward gay men and lesbians (Comstock, 1991; Herek, 1989). In contemporary Western society, we place people into "socioerotic categories" based upon what they do sexually (Herek, 1990). Thus, people are defined primarily as "heterosexual" or "homosexual," with occasional allowance for bisexuals or asexual individuals. Furthermore, the category "heterosexual" is clearly positively valued, whereas "homosexual" is negatively valued; and this is reflected in nearly

every aspect of our culture. Indeed, due to sodomy laws, gay men and lesbians were until recently criminals in several states (NGLTF, 2001b). Heterosexual marriage is a revered institution; gay relationships cannot be officially sanctioned. Heterosexual people may hold hands in public or place pictures of their families on their desks; gay people who do the same are accused of "flaunting it" and risk rejection, denigration, and attack. Nearly all the major religions in Western society preach against homosexuality (Herek, 1990). Clearly, heterosexism pervades our culture.

A note regarding the distinction between *heterosexism* and *homophobia* may be in order at this point. We prefer the term *heterosexism* to describe prejudice against those with a homosexual orientation, entailing the belief that LGB people are inferior to heterosexual people in some way. This term is analogous to *racism* (non-white races seen as inferior) and *sexism* (women viewed as inferior). *Homophobia* implies a fearful reaction to homosexuals and is not interchangeable with the term *heterosexism,* which may or may not have a fear component (see, for example, Haaga, 1991; O'Donohue & Caselles, 1993). A distinction also needs to be made between *heterosexism,* which is an attitude, and *discrimination,* which refers to some behavior or event. In this chapter, our use of the term *discrimination* refers to negative policies, acts, or events directed toward or affecting an LGB person, or LGB people in general, that presumably result from heterosexism. Although some researchers have done so (for example, Waldo, 1999), we wish to discourage the use of the term *heterosexism* alone to refer to that discrimination, preferring instead *heterosexist discrimination* to indicate discrimination stemming from the prejudicial attitude of heterosexism.

Overt expressions of racism and sexism have become far less acceptable in recent years (Glick & Fiske, 1996; McConahay, 1986), but blatant heterosexism does not appear to have had a similar decline (Herek, 1989; Nardi & Bolton, 1991). Religious leaders and politicians frequently deliver anti-gay rhetoric in public addresses (Comstock, 1991; Herek, 1989). Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, for instance, stated in a television interview that "he believes homosexuality is a sin," and that "you should try to show them a way to deal with that problem, just like alcohol" (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation [GLAAD], 1998), and two Republican representatives in Oregon were asked by party leaders

to leave the GOP because they had expressed support for gay rights (Mapes, 1999). Stereotypes about gay people persist in the media, regardless of their offensiveness to LGB people (Nardi & Bolton, 1991). "Dr. Laura" continues as a radio show even after the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation began protesting Laura Schlessinger's use of terms such as "deviant," "disordered," and "biological error" to describe gays and lesbians (GLAAD, 2001). Even in children's cartoons, characters whose homosexuality is implied through their violation of gender norms typically are presented as objects of contempt and ridicule (Russo, 1989). Not only are negative media portrayals of LGB people common, positive portrayals may be protested or censored. Several local television stations refused to air an episode of the television show *Friends* featuring a lesbian commitment ceremony, and the episode of the show *Ellen* in which two women kiss was labeled with a "parental advisory" warning, normally used for explicit sex or extreme violence. Such acceptability of heterosexism also is evident in the corporate world; for example, General Motors once released a sales video that derided other auto companies for their "little faggot trucks" (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995).

So, as prejudice against LGB people is more socially acceptable than racism or sexism, we logically may expect that discrimination against LGBs is more acceptable as well. And with such a backdrop, it is hardly surprising that many perpetrators of sexual orientation discrimination might have no qualms about publicly stating their prejudiced reasons for their actions. CPA Dan Miller's boss testified in court that he fired Miller based solely on the fact that Miller was gay (which was quite legal in that locale) (HRC, 2001a). A health care facility administrator in Iowa, who fired six employees because of their sexual orientation, told the local newspaper in an interview that when he first arrived at the company there were "at least three faggots working here and at least three dykes. That isn't the kind of atmosphere that I want to project. . . . [Gay people] are not part of society as far as I'm concerned" (HRC, 2001a).

Furthermore, due to the concealability of the stigma, many people may think they do not know any LGB people. Intergroup contact situations may pass unknown and unnoticed, thus inhibiting the formation of individualized perceptions of LGB people and allowing stereotypes to persist. Contact with gay men or lesbians

has been found to be associated with more positive attitudes on the part of heterosexuals toward homosexuality and LGB people in general, but only if the heterosexual person knows of the other's orientation (Herek & Capitano, 1996; Yang, 2000). Thus, many heterosexuals still think of LGB people primarily in terms of stereotypes (Haddock, Zanna, & Esses, 1993).

Although American society still has a long way to go before LGB people enjoy full acceptance, there are certainly signs of progress. National opinion polls over the past few decades have shown steadily increasing support for equal rights for LGB people in housing, employment, and adoption, as well as less censure of same-sex relationships (Yang, 2000). A few television shows are providing more complex and individualized portrayals of LGB people (for example, *Will and Grace* and *Queer as Folk*). With each passing year, more companies adopt gay-friendly policies and more cities enact protective legislation. And we, as organizational researchers, should consider that these broader societal features and trends toward change may be stronger influences on the workplace experiences of LGB people than anything else that happens in the microcosm of a particular organization. The perpetrators of discriminatory acts are people—coworkers, supervisors, top management—not organizations or policies (although people may structure organizations and policies to discriminate or not), and these people live and function within the larger society. They bring knowledge of the prejudices and stereotypes that prevail in that society into the workplace, and, whether they consciously endorse those stereotypes or not, such ideas can still influence their actions (Chen & Bargh, 1997; Devine, 1989). Thus, a consideration of the general societal climate for LGB people, and the changes taking place in that climate, needs to be included in our research if we are to fully understand all the factors impinging upon sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace.

To recap, LGB employees differ from the groups to which much diversity research has been devoted. Perhaps the most important difference is the concealability of sexual orientation. The attendant concerns of disclosure and self-presentation affect the character of many of the interactions and experiences of LGBs in the workplace (Herek, 1989). LGB employees also differ from racial minorities and women in that federal civil rights laws do not cover

sexual orientation. Thus, discrimination against LGB employees is fully legal in most parts of the United States. Finally, we have argued that overt heterosexism is more socially acceptable than blatant racism or sexism, and this relative acceptability may create a similar acceptability of discrimination against LGB employees. The forms and prevalence of such discrimination are discussed in the next section, followed by a review of the research regarding its impact on LGBs.

The Problem of Sexual Orientation Discrimination in the Workplace

Despite increasing attempts to recognize and value diversity in organizations, gay and lesbian employees are still far from enjoying full integration and acceptance in the workplace. Discrimination against workers based upon sexual orientation is unfortunately rather common. In several studies that asked gay men and lesbians whether they had experienced some form of workplace discrimination due to their sexual orientation, between 20 and 66 percent responded affirmatively (Croteau & Lark, 1995; Croteau & von Destinon, 1994; Levine & Leonard, 1984; Stoddard, 1986). The legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union, speaking before the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, testified that, "The ACLU receives a flood of calls from men and women who have lost or been denied jobs, or failed to receive promotions, because of discrimination based on sexual orientation" (ACLU, 1997). Badgett (1995) demonstrated that such discrimination has economic impact, in that gay men and lesbians tend to earn less than heterosexuals. And Rubenstein (2001) found that in eight of ten states that had a law prohibiting workplace discrimination against LGBs, population-adjusted complaint rates from LGBs were at least as high as those from women or ethnic minorities. One-third of a sample drawn from the membership of three national organizations of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals reported experiencing employment discrimination (Cahill, 2000). In a survey of over one thousand lawyers in Washington, D.C., 61 percent reported having witnessed or heard reports of anti-gay discrimination within their firms (van der Meide, 2000). Sexual orientation discrimination appears to be

widespread, occurring in all types of industries, large firms and small businesses, major metropolitan areas, and tiny rural towns (HRC, 2001a). In this section, we intend to demonstrate that these findings and claims of discrimination are valid, and that such discrimination is damaging.

Gay, lesbian, and bisexual workers report many forms of workplace discrimination, which have been roughly classified as either formal or informal (Croteau, 1996; Levine & Leonard, 1984). *Formal discrimination* is defined as involving institutionalized procedures or official managerial decisions (Levine & Leonard, 1984). Thus, formal discriminatory actions against LGBs can include refusing to hire an applicant, terminating an employee, restricting job duties, passing an employee over for promotions, or failing to equitably reward an employee due to his or her sexual orientation. The examples of firings that opened this chapter are clear instances of formal discrimination, as are incidents such as one manager's statement that he was "not hiring any gays because there are too many problems" (HRC, 2001a, p. 20). Organizational policies that exclude same-sex partners from benefits, such as insurance and family leave, may also be classified as formal discrimination. One of Friskopp and Silverstein's (1995) gay male interviewees who was self-employed remarked, "Health insurance is really expensive as a self-insured person. If we were married, I'd be insured under [my partner's] policy" (p. 144). Any official policy or action that treats LGB people differently from heterosexual people can be viewed as formal discrimination.

Informal sexual orientation discrimination refers to negative actions directed toward LGBs because of their sexual orientation that do not directly involve organizational policies or decisions. Informal discrimination includes interpersonal animosity from coworkers or supervisors, derogatory jokes and comments regarding gays, verbal and sexual harassment, and even physical violence (Croteau, 1996; Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995; Kivel & Wells, 1998). The Human Rights Campaign's (2001a) publication documenting incidents of discrimination across the country is rife with examples of informal discrimination, such as the man who received pager messages saying, "God hates faggots and so do we," and "Death to all fags—die, queer, die," or the worker who found condoms in his locker and urine in his helmet after his coworkers learned he was

gay. It appears that informal sexual orientation discrimination is not uncommon in the workplace (Croteau, 1996; Herek, 1996).

Some researchers (Waldo, 1999) have included in their conception of discrimination a construct termed "indirect heterosexism." Indirect heterosexism stems from the "heterosexual assumption" that prevails in most workplaces (and in most of American society), where all are assumed to be heterosexual unless explicitly proven otherwise (Kitzinger, 1991). Thus, closeted LGB employees may feel invisible or uncomfortable, perceiving a need to appear "sufficiently straight" in order to fit into their workplace. This discomfort is certainly real, and is likely to be an important consideration in understanding the workplace experiences of LGB employees. However, we do not believe that indirect heterosexism, which is assessed solely in terms of an employee's *perception* of a need to appear heterosexual, necessarily constitutes a form of *discrimination*. It is unclear to what extent these perceptions are a function of any feature of the workplace; such perceptions may stem from other sources, such as the attitudes of the employee's family, his or her stage of identity development and personal comfort with being gay, or perceptions of the climate for LGBs in larger society. If perceptions of indirect heterosexism are, in fact, a result of some actions or policies in the workplace, then those aspects of the workplace may certainly be considered discrimination, and it is those features that should be assessed in measures of discrimination. But we do believe that the term *discrimination* should be restricted to identifiable behaviors or procedures, and that an employee's perceptions of the need to present a heterosexual image constitute a separate construct.

Both the formal and informal discriminatory behaviors described above are specifically directed at LGB employees, or express clear antipathy toward LGB people in general. These behaviors that appear to stem from prejudice against gays and lesbians are many of the same discriminatory events faced by other stigmatized groups (for example, derogatory jokes about black people, refusing to hire a woman). However, the unique features of the LGB population may lead to these experiences having a somewhat different character. For example, due to the concealability of sexual orientation, closeted employees may hear disparaging remarks about gay people without anyone else knowing

those remarks have personal relevance for the employee. Or due to the lack of legal protection in most areas, an LGB employee may experience major direct personal discrimination on the job, yet have absolutely no recourse. Thus, even when the discriminatory events are similar to those experienced by other minorities, those events might have somewhat different effects for LGB employees.

A substantial body of literature exists demonstrating that encounters with workplace discrimination are damaging to the well-being of racial and ethnic minorities (for example, Deitch et al., 2002; Jackson et al., 1996; Kessler, Mickelson, & Williams, 1999; Schneider, Hitlan, & Radhakrishnan, 2000; Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson, 1997). In contrast, the literature on outcomes of sexual orientation discrimination is very sparse. The limited research that does exist suggests that such discrimination results in similar negative outcomes for LGB employees. Driscoll et al. (1996) found that gay men and lesbians who reported a "hostile work environment," characterized by heterosexism and discrimination against gays, exhibited higher stress levels than those in less hostile settings. Waldo (1999) found that experiences of heterosexist discrimination at work were associated with increased psychological distress (comprising indicators of anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and life satisfaction) and more negative health conditions on the part of LGB employees. There are accounts of discrimination leading to acute health and psychological well-being problems, such as the panic attacks suffered by Douglas Retterer, whose story opened this chapter, or the posttraumatic stress disorder that an airline employee in Denver was diagnosed with after suffering several verbal and physical attacks at work due to his sexual orientation (HRC, 2001a).

Sexual orientation discrimination also has been found to be associated with organizationally relevant attitudes and intentions. For instance, perceptions of heterosexist discrimination have been found to be related to lowered organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Button, 2001; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001a; Waldo, 1999). Moreover, discrimination has been found to be related positively to withdrawal behaviors and intentions to quit (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001a; Waldo, 1999).

In addition, a discriminatory workplace environment is likely to discourage LGB employees from disclosing their sexual orientation. Attempts to remain closeted on the job are associated with impaired well-being and negative job attitudes, associations that potentially compound the more direct negative effects of encounters with discrimination (Croteau, 1996; Herek, 1996; Kitzinger, 1991). For instance, Day and Schoenrade (1997) reported that individuals who attempted to remain closeted on the job experienced role ambiguity and conflict. Waldo (1999) found that those closeted at work exhibited lower satisfaction with life. These negative effects are not surprising, considering that concealing one's orientation on the job requires a great deal of psychological effort and perpetual vigilance (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2001). A lesbian lawyer described it as "constant monitoring" and said, "You're always on the edge when you're not being who you are. You're always being careful" (Boatwright et al., 1996, p. 219). Even outside of work, caution is required. One of Friskopp and Silverstein's (1995) interviewees related that when groups of lesbian friends stopped by her home, she always made sure the curtains were shut and the doors locked for fear her straight coworkers would pass by. Another interviewee told of a closeted friend at work who refused to go out to any gay clubs with him, saying, "How do you deal with this . . . I mean, what if somebody sees you?" (p. 161).

The alternative of disclosing one's sexual orientation on the job does appear to be associated with higher well-being, however. Studies have found that disclosure behaviors at work were associated with lower job anxiety and stress (Driscoll et al., 1996; Griffith & Hebl, 2002). In addition, a positive relationship between disclosure and global job satisfaction on the part of LGB workers has been found in some studies (Driscoll et al., 1996; Griffith & Hebl, 2002). In terms of specific facets, Ellis and Riggle (1995) found that disclosure was associated with more satisfaction with coworkers but less satisfaction with pay (possibly reflecting lower wages due to discrimination [see Badgett, 1995]), and was not significantly related to satisfaction with the job itself or with promotion opportunities. There is some indication that the responses of others in the environment to an LGB employee's disclosure matter; in the Griffith and Hebl study, the relationship between disclosure and job satisfaction was fully mediated by the tenor of coworkers' reaction to the disclosure. Such reactions are an important feature of the environment for the LGB worker who chooses to disclose,

but such coworker reactions largely have been ignored in the research literature.

Personal characteristics of LGB employees also may influence the extent to which discrimination results in detriments to their well-being. Two studies have investigated associations between discrimination outcomes and the extent to which LGB employees have developed a positive personal identity as an LGB. Unlike members of many other stigmatized groups, such as racial minorities, LGBs do not usually have parental examples and guidance in developing their gay identity early in life. Thus, LGB employees may be at a variety of stages in terms of acknowledging and accepting such an identity, and even older individuals may be newly wrestling with identity concerns. Button (2001) described how, in developing a gay identity, many gay men and lesbians pass through an "immersion-emersion" phase, during which they endorse extreme positive views of their ingroup while strongly denigrating the outgroup (heterosexuals), before moving on to a stage of "internalization" where identity is more secure and more balanced and realistic views are endorsed. He found that the relationship between discrimination and satisfaction was highest for gay and lesbian employees who endorsed high immersion-emersion attitudes, thereby suggesting that individuals at that stage of identity development are more reactive to discrimination. Griffith and Hebl (2002) found that those for whom a gay identity was more central, and who were more accepting of that identity, were more likely to engage in disclosure behaviors at work and exhibited higher job satisfaction and less job anxiety. Thus, LGB employees' stage of identity development, and their comfort with a gay identity, may be important considerations in understanding their disclosure decisions, perceptions of discrimination in the workplace, and the outcomes of that discrimination.

In sum, LGB employees appear to face a substantial amount of discrimination and prejudice on the job, and their well-being, job attitudes, and workplace behaviors may be negatively affected as a result. These conclusions, however, are based on very few studies, which address a limited set of questions. As already noted, most of the research regarding workplace discrimination has focused on racial or ethnic minorities and women, and one must be cautious in attempting to generalize such research to LGB people. Research

specifically directed toward exploring the experiences that LGB employees have with discrimination on the job is required to determine how such experiences are similar to those of women and racial minorities and how they differ. Specific research attention to the antecedents of sexual orientation discrimination also is sorely needed. The next section discusses a few possible antecedents that have been examined.

Potential Antecedents of Sexual Orientation Discrimination

Given that sexual orientation discrimination occurs in the workplace and has negative outcomes, what can be done about it? In order to provide suggestions and guidance for reducing such discrimination, we must understand what causes it. This section presents features of organizations, others in the workplace, and LGB employees that appear to be related to sexual orientation discrimination. However, this section refers to "potential" antecedents not only because there is very little research for firmly establishing relationships, but also because the direction of influence between these factors and discrimination is often unclear. As the existing research is primarily cross-sectional, it often is not clear whether these correlates (for example, organizational policies) are determinants or results of the prevalence of sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace. Nonetheless, the research to be presented here can provide a starting point for developing an understanding of the causes of workplace discrimination against LGBs.

Organizational Features

A few organizational features have been studied in relation to the amount and sort of sexual orientation discrimination encountered by LGB workers. These features include explicit policies and procedures, such as the provision of domestic partner benefits, as well as less overt features such as organizational climate and culture.

Even in the absence of any legal requirements, many organizations are taking steps to attempt to create a more gay-friendly workplace. They may wish to do so in order to improve recruitment and employee retention in a tight labor market, reduce productivity

losses that may be associated with the stress of discrimination, or appeal to LGB consumers and investors, or they may wish to do so simply because management feels it is the right thing to do (Alpern 2002; Gardyn, 2001; Kohn, 1999; Loomis & Kass, 2002; Securities Institute of America, 1999). The most common gay-friendly policy initiative is the establishment of a specific, written company policy of nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. As of 2001, 294 of the Fortune 500 companies included sexual orientation in their official nondiscrimination policy (HRC, 2001b). Several other types of policies may be adopted by organizations who wish to be gay-friendly, including the extension of benefits (for example, insurance, family leave) to same-sex domestic partners, diversity training that includes sexual orientation concerns, support for LGB issues and activities in the larger community, and the formation of LGB employee groups (such as GALAX [Gays and Lesbians at Xerox], DuPont's BGLAD network, or the LEAGUE at AT&T).

The effect of each of these policies is difficult to determine at this point, as there is little research on their impact. A few studies have found that more gay-friendly policies are associated with less reported sexual orientation discrimination (Button, 2001; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001a). But Waldo (1999) found no significant relationship between organizational policies and reports of heterosexist discrimination. It may be that some policies are more effective than others—two studies have attempted to tease apart the relative value of different company policies, with conflicting results. Ragins and Cornwell (2001a) found that a written nondiscrimination policy and the provision of domestic partner benefits were negatively related to reported discrimination (experienced by oneself or observed), but the relationship of discrimination with the existence of LGB employee groups was only marginally significant, and no association was found between diversity training including LGB concerns and workplace discrimination. However, Griffith and Hebl (2002) found that reports of sexual orientation discrimination were significantly negatively related to inclusive diversity training and domestic partner benefits, as well as to written nondiscrimination policies. As did Ragins and Cornwell, the Griffith and Hebl study failed to find LGB employee groups to be associated with reported discrimination. Clearly, at this time we can draw no firm conclusions about the value of specific policies. Our stories at this point are too simple; merely correlating the existence of a policy with reports of discrimination fails to take account of features of the organization or of policy application that may affect discrimination outcomes. We need to examine additional factors that could influence when and whether policies are effective or not in reducing discrimination.

Organizational policies may be ineffective in some cases if they are only "lip service," undermined by informal organizational conditions. As noted earlier, organizational policies purportedly intended to improve the treatment of women and minorities have often been found to be only symbolic, lacking real substance (Edelman & Petterson, 1999). Furthermore, the literature on these more well-studied groups suggests that without clear accountability for actions and decisions that affect women and minorities, little progress is made (Bielby, 2000; Reskin, 2000). Although there is a lack of research assessing the extent to which gay-friendly organizational policies are enforced and the degree to which people in the organization are held accountable for their actions vis-à-vis LGB employees, anecdotal reports suggest that such enforcement and accountability may often be lacking. "Believe it or not," said one gay man, "I hear more homophobic jokes and comments from corporate counsel than from anyone else—the guy who's in charge of enforcing our nondiscrimination policy!" (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995, p. 128). A gay man in training for the Nassau County police force reported how supervisors at the police academy snickered when discussing homosexuality during a sensitivity training workshop (HRC, 2001a). At a bank in New Mexico that had a written nondiscrimination policy, a gay man was still forced to sign an "absolute prohibition" on discussing anything about the "gay lifestyle" with any other bank employee, on or off the job, in order to hold on to a promotion (HRC, 2001a). Clearly, not all "gay-friendly" policies have substance in practice.

Indeed, there is some research evidence that assessments of informal climate may be better predictors of discrimination than official policies. Ragins and Cornwell (2001a) found that no official company policy was as strongly related to reports of sexual orientation discrimination as was respondents' perceptions of whether their same-sex partners were welcome at company events. Driscoll et al. (1996) reported a negative relationship between assessments

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of workplace climate (in terms of being friendly and fair to LGB workers) and reported discrimination, and Waldo (1999) found that reports of sexual orientation discrimination were related to a climate of "tolerance for heterosexism."

Another difficulty in evaluating organizational policies is that, as with much of the research this chapter covers, the direction of influence is unclear. Because the adoption of gay-friendly policies is voluntary (with the exception of a nondiscrimination policy in a locale where such is the law), those organizations that choose to enact such policies probably do so because they are more gay-friendly organizations to begin with. Therefore, these policies might be better considered as reflections of the organizational environment rather than determinants of it.

Coworkers and Supervisors

There has been some attention paid to the composition of LGB employees' immediate workplace environment and characteristics of coworkers and supervisors. One important feature of the immediate environment is the presence or absence of other LGB people. Individuals who are sole representatives of their social group tend to be viewed stereotypically and subjected to greater scrutiny than those who are not so isolated (Cohen & Swim, 1995; Kanter, 1977; Meyer, 1995; Niemann & Dovidio, 1998). Thus, the presence of more than one LGB person in a workgroup may reduce such stereotyping and scrutiny and improve the treatment of LGB employees. Three studies by Ragins and Cornwell (2000, 2001a, 2001b) have found that a higher proportion of LGB coworkers is associated with less reported sexual orientation discrimination, suggesting that departments with more openly LGB people may be less heterosexist.

As supervisors have direct influence over LGB employees and some of their coworkers, one would expect that having an LGB supervisor might reduce the amount of discrimination experienced by LGB employees. Ragins and Cornwell (2000) did find a negative relationship between having an LGB supervisor and reported discrimination. But in a later study (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001a), they found that although the simple bivariate relationship between supervisor's sexual orientation and perceived discrimination was significant, that association dropped to nonsignificance when other antecedents (coworkers' orientation, policies, and protective legislation) were included in a full path model. They point out that gay supervisors, like their employees, are vulnerable to discrimination. Thus, gay supervisors may be able to positively affect the environment for their LGB subordinates only if their own position is secure. Neither of these studies examined supervisors' experiences with discrimination. Nor does the fact that an LGB subordinate knows his or her supervisor is gay or lesbian necessarily imply that the supervisor is fully "out" on the job. If the supervisor is out only to the other LGB persons in the workplace, he or she may be unwilling to be of visible help to those subordinates. Indeed, it is possible that an LGB supervisor who is attempting to remain closeted to most others in the workplace might be even less likely to speak out against prejudice and discrimination than a sympathetic heterosexual supervisor, out of fear that a vocal stand could lead to his or her sexual orientation being discovered or suspected.

Few characteristics of those in the immediate workplace environment other than sexual orientation have been examined. One study (Ragins & Cornwell, 2000) examined the gender composition of the workgroup and found that LGB persons who were in workgroups that were mostly men reported more discrimination than those in balanced or female-dominated workgroups. There is ample evidence in the social psychology literature that men tend to hold more negative attitudes toward homosexuals (especially toward gay men) than do females (Johnson, Brems & Alford-Keating, 1997; Kite & Whitley, 1996; Whitley & Kite, 1995; Young & Whertvine, 1982). Kite and Whitley (1996) argue that cultural norms for masculinity are more rigid than those for femininity, and that males, being the ones who hold power in our patriarchal society, are the most invested in maintaining traditional gender roles and are therefore the most virulent in attacking those who are seen to threaten the social structure of gender. Therefore, males tend to be more negative toward those who deviate from traditional gender roles (which LGBs certainly do). These attitudes may translate into speech and action in the workplace, so that the more men there are in an LGB employee's workgroup, the more discrimination she or he is likely to encounter.

An LGB employee's workgroup is the most proximal environmental influence on his or her experiences. Thus, researchers need to spend more effort examining workgroup features and their relationships with sexual orientation discrimination. Considering that much sexual orientation discrimination on the job is of a direct interpersonal nature (for example, slurs and jokes, snubbing [Waldo, 1999]), more attention directed toward those with whom LGB employees have their daily interpersonal interactions seems warranted.

Targets' Disclosure Decisions

Several studies have examined associations between LGB employees' disclosure decisions and actions and the experience of sexual orientation discrimination. On the one hand, individuals who remain completely closeted on the job have been found to suffer less discrimination that is personally directed at them specifically because they are gay (Waldo, 1999). However, even when an employee attempts to conceal his or her orientation at work, such concealment may not be entirely successful, and others may still discriminate based upon suspicions or rumors (Herek, 1996). And when attempts at concealment are successful, closeted employees may experience more indirect discrimination, such as hearing more derogatory comments, jokes, and slurs about gay men and lesbians than do those who are more out, as others do not feel bound by the norms of politeness that often inhibit making such jokes or comments around a member of the targeted group (Frable, 1993).

Employees who choose to be more open on the job, on the other hand, might be expected to experience more personally directed discrimination than those who remain closeted, as, once their orientation is known, they become clearly identifiable targets for discrimination and prejudice (Frable, Wortman, & Joseph, 1997). However, workplace research has found that greater openness regarding one's sexual orientation is associated with less discrimination overall (Button, 2001; Ragins & Cornwell, 2000). The causal direction of this negative association between disclosure and discrimination is not clear, as the research to date is cross-sectional. As a possible antecedent, disclosure certainly is likely to lessen discrimination that is committed due to unthinking assumptions of heterosexuality rather than intentional antipathy on the part of others in the environment (Frable, 1993). Disclosure may also lead to a more "gay-friendly" workplace environment by helping coworkers overcome stereotypes about LGB people in favor of more individualized perceptions. One gay man described how he confronted a coworker who was joking about his sexuality, and tried to explain to the coworker how such things felt. He said, "It was interesting because he responded to that by saying, 'you know, I have to say I have never considered the idea of what it would be like if I were gay . . . but what you're saying does make some sense.'" The gay employee said that the colleague had become much more sensitive after that conversation (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995). Thus, disclosure may serve to reduce discrimination in some instances. However, an effect in the opposite direction is also very plausible: that environments that are less heterosexist encourage disclosure. The best way to conceive of the association between disclosure and discrimination likely is as a bi-directional, iterative relationship: disclosure can reduce heterosexism in the environment, which can encourage more disclosure, which can further alter the environment, and so on. As yet, we are lacking studies that examine this process over time, studies that are definitely needed if we are to understand the ways in which personal disclosure decisions interact with the workplace environment.

Overall, research on possible antecedents of sexual orientation discrimination has focused on only a few variables, and firm conclusions are difficult to draw. Organizational policies may or may not reduce discrimination, or they may be merely a reflection of a preexisting nondiscriminatory climate. A higher proportion of female coworkers and the presence of LGB coworkers appears to be associated with less discrimination, but the value of an LGB supervisor is unclear. And the nature and direction of the relationship between disclosure and discrimination is uncertain and likely to be quite complex. Clearly, there is a need for more attention to LGB employee experiences and issues, and countless opportunities for extending our knowledge exist. Therefore, we now turn to issues and suggestions for furthering research on LGB employees and sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace.

So Where Do We Go from Here?

Organizational researchers, as we have shown, are just beginning to turn their attention to sexual orientation discrimination, so, as yet the literature is sparse. The permissible generalizable conclusions at this point appear to be limited to an acknowledgment that sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace does happen, and that it has negative outcomes for its targets in terms of job attitudes and well-being. The ways in which such discrimination and its outcomes may be related to organizational, group, or individual workplace characteristics are obviously complex, and we do not yet have enough of a body of literature to determine boundary conditions and qualifiers of the current, often conflicting, research findings (for example, those regarding the effect of various organizational policies or of having an LGB supervisor). Therefore, in the space remaining, we would like to raise some issues and make some suggestions for future research in this area.

We begin with a discussion of the difficulties and opportunities associated with studying disclosure of sexual orientation as it relates to workplace discrimination. Then we consider several features of the other people in an LGB employee's environment that may provide fruitful avenues for research. Next, we advance suggestions for examining how discrimination may affect the career development of LGBs, and then discuss the need for establishing boundary conditions and directions of influence. We consider distinctions *between* gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals, as well as how other stigmatizing conditions (for example, minority race) may interact with those identities. Finally, we raise some methodological issues, including concerns with measurement and sampling. We hope that these numerous suggestions will emphasize the opportunities available for meaningfully advancing the knowledge regarding sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace, and inspire researchers to turn their efforts toward a consideration of LGB employees.

The Issue of Disclosure

As noted earlier, the fact that homosexuality is not a visible characteristic is one major factor that makes LGB employees different from more researched minority groups; it is also a factor that

makes LGB research complicated. First of all, disclosure is a complicated concept to define and measure. Disclosure is not a one-time event, and one should not view LGB employees as simply "out" or "not out" on the job. Rather, the *degree* to which an employee is out at work should be considered. Such considerations may include addressing the number of others in the workplace to whom an LGB employee has disclosed, the relationships of those individuals to the employee, and the nature of the disclosure (for example, direct verbal disclosure versus some sort of "display" through clothing or jewelry). Furthermore, the reactions of those to whom an LGB employee discloses are likely to be important determinants of the employee's subsequent experiences on the job and future disclosure decisions (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). Merely asking whether one's coworkers know of one's sexual orientation does not assess how comfortable those coworkers are about it. The situation may be one in which, as one gay man put it, "it was okay to be gay as long as I never talked about it" (Kitzinger, 1991, p. 232). As Hodges and Hutter (1974) pointed out, "To share the knowledge of one's homosexuality with non-gay people, but never to speak of it, is to tacitly agree that, like bad breath, homosexuality is something embarrassing, best left unmentioned." This situation seems to be fairly common; several of Friskopp and Silverstein's (1995) interviewees described a similar environment in which, "I know they know, and they know I know they know, but we never acknowledge they know in words." Thus, we might expand our understanding of disclosure issues by asking not just whether coworkers know of one's sexual orientation, but whether speaking of it is permissible or discouraged.

Furthermore, organizational research tends to examine outness at only one point in time. Coming out at work is a process, and the way that process unfolds is likely to be an extremely important determinant (and result) of the workplace experiences of an LGB employee. Consider a gay employee who decides to disclose his sexual orientation to a coworker. If that coworker reacts positively, the employee may feel less stress on the job now that he has an "ally," and he may then decide to disclose to some others. But if that coworker reacts negatively, the employee may well refrain from engaging in any further disclosure. Perhaps the issue then "goes away." But perhaps the coworker, who now knows but is not

accepting, begins to engage in discriminatory behaviors toward the gay employee. Perhaps that coworker tells others in the workplace, and the environment becomes more unfriendly—or more supportive, depending on the reactions of those others. Our failure to examine this process of coming out and its results may account for conflicting findings regarding the relationship of disclosure to experienced discrimination, with supportive reactions possibly leading to less discrimination and hostile reactions leading to more discrimination and more negative outcomes. Clearly reactions are important; recall that the one study that did ask about coworker reactions found that such reactions completely mediated the relationship between disclosure and job satisfaction (Griffith & Hebl, 2002)—and that study only asked about "my coworkers" as a whole, not reactions to each step in the disclosure process. Examining that entire process, and reactions along the way, could be very helpful in clarifying how disclosure is related to sexual orientation discrimination and its outcomes.

The reactions to and results of one LGB employee's disclosure also are likely to have a strong influence on any other closeted LGBs in the workplace. LGB workers commonly use others' observed experiences to gauge probable outcomes if they themselves were to disclose, as is exemplified by one lesbian's comment that, "I would never come out to my supervisor because there was a woman who did and she went through hell! My supervisor mocked her and abused her and eventually fired her. I know I would be too" (Kitzinger, 1991, p. 226). Thus, when closeted LGB employees view more open LGBs being treated poorly, their own fear of disclosure and discrimination is likely to increase. Indeed, the fear of disclosure may be an important variable for study in the examination of LGBs' workplace experiences. Ragins and Cornwell (2001) assessed such fear, in addition to actual disclosure, and found that the fear of disclosure (but not actual disclosure!) was significantly related to psychological strain, work and career attitudes, and career outcomes.

Not only is "fear of disclosure" a construct worthy of study on its own, the fact that such fear can exist highlights another important issue: not all workplace disclosure of sexual orientation is voluntary. Certainly, being "outed" against one's will is likely to have different results than self-determined disclosure that is the result of a thoughtful personal decision. "Outing" may be more likely to happen in organizations that are less gay-friendly, as there may be a higher proportion of LGBs who are closeted (and thus able to be outed), and outing in hostile organizations may be used as a sort of "weapon" against an LGB employee. As one (closeted) lesbian was told by her boss: "I love to get a bunch of people together and go down to one of those gay piano bars after doing a big deal. . . . You never know who you're going to see from your competition. All you gotta do is see 'em there and you've got 'em beat for the next job. You never know who might be a hidden faggot. It's so easy to start a whispering campaign" (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995, p. 189).

Even if the outing is not malicious, the reactions of others to learning about an employees' orientation secondhand may be less positive than with direct personal disclosure. Herek and Capitano (1996) found that, of heterosexual people who had a gay or lesbian friend, those who had been personally told by their friend held more positive attitudes toward LGBs in general than did those who found out indirectly. Current measures that merely ask whether coworkers and supervisors "know" do not capture whether an LGB employee discloses personally and willingly, or is outed involuntarily. How others came by that knowledge may be very important in determining the results of the disclosure for the LGB employee.

Concealment of one's sexual orientation at work also may result in "spillover" into other life domains. Certainly, the anxiety and strain associated with remaining closeted is likely to have a negative impact on the LGB person away from work. Remaining closeted on the job can also create strains within an LGB employee's romantic relationships. Partners may feel they are a source of shame, or may exert pressure for the employee to come out. One gay man said, "It's like wearing armor at work, and it's difficult to shed that armor when I get home—not to feel tense, alert for danger, defensive, when I want to be open and trusting with Mike" (Kitzinger, 1991, p. 228). A lesbian explained how her partner "resents it that I have to keep her existence a secret; she feels as though I must be ashamed of her," and another woman stated that she felt her partner was "pressuring me to be more public . . . in a sense, she's taken away my right to make my own decision" (Kitzinger, pp. 229, 233). Another gay man stated that his relationship was suffering, with him feeling he was

implicitly saying to his partner, "Okay, prove to me you're worth all this hassle I'm going through at work" (Kitzinger, p. 232). Research examining the specific ways in which workplace concealment of sexual orientation may affect relationships outside of work could be useful in understanding associations between LGB workplace experiences and general well-being.

Finally, as noted throughout the earlier parts of this chapter, disclosure appears to be related to everything—to discrimination (Waldo, 1999), organizational policies and climate (Button, 2001), well-being (Driscoll et al., 1996), and job attitudes (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001a). And these relationships are likely bi-directional and interrelated, thereby making attempts to tease apart cause-and-effect relationships impossible, based only upon logic and cross-sectional research. Again, we must begin to examine the disclosure process, its antecedents, and its outcomes over time if we are to meaningfully further our knowledge in this area. The complications to research posed by considerations of disclosure will be likely to appear daunting to those considering studying LGB employees. Nonetheless, it seems that disclosure must be dealt with if attempts to understand LGB workplace experiences are to be fruitful.

Characteristics of Other People in the Workplace

As noted earlier, few features of the people in the LGB employee's immediate environment have been studied. The previous section mentioned issues of coworkers' reactions to disclosure; characteristics that might influence those reactions, as well as the propensity to discriminate, are worthy of study. In terms of demographic features, little beyond gender has been examined. Several other possible coworker traits that could be explored are suggested by the social psychology literature regarding attitudes toward homosexuality and LGB people, even though that research does not specifically address sexual orientation *discrimination* or workplace issues.

One feature that has been found to relate to heterosexist attitudes is belief in and endorsement of traditional norms regarding acceptable gender roles. Ideas of "appropriate" traits, appearance, and behavior for men and women are socially shared and prescribed (Lindsey, 1997). Children are socialized early about "normal" gender roles and learn to ostracize those who do not conform (Lindsey,

1997; Pharr, 1997). Thus, some of the antipathy toward LGB people may stem from their violation of "acceptable" gender roles. Considerable research does attest to the fact that those who most strongly believe in traditional gender roles hold the most negative attitudes toward homosexuals (Krulewitz & Nash, 1980; Kurdek, 1988; Newman, 1989; Whitley, 1987). Sexual orientation discrimination often includes allegations of being "gender-inappropriate," such as the male headwaiter who was fired for being "too feminine" and "too flamboyant," or the staffing services supervisor who was criticized because her voice was too "heavy and masculine" (HRC, 2001a). Therefore, the coworkers who most strongly endorse traditional gender roles also may be those who are most likely to engage in sexual orientation discrimination.

Religiosity also has been found to relate to attitudes about homosexuality; those who score higher on measures of religiosity generally hold more heterosexist attitudes (Johnson et al., 1997; Vanderstoep & Green, 1988). Gentry (1986) found that those who participated in religious functions more frequently reported more discomfort around homosexual people, and Maret (1984) reported that those who held fundamentalist religious beliefs held more heterosexist attitudes. Thus, features of individuals' religious beliefs and activities may influence their propensity to discriminate against their LGB coworkers.

Some personality traits have been found to relate to heterosexist attitudes; empathy is negatively related to heterosexism (Johnson et al., 1997) and authoritarianism is positively related to negative attitudes toward homosexuality (Haddock et al., 1993; Herek, 1984). More negative attitudes are expressed by Republicans than by Democrats (Bierly, 1985). Age is also correlated with attitudes; older individuals tend to be more heterosexist (Kurdek, 1988). Beliefs about the nature of homosexuality may also be determinants of people's attitudes toward LGB people. Several studies have found that those who believe homosexuality is "chosen" or "learned" endorse more heterosexist attitudes than do those who believe a homosexual orientation is genetically or physiologically determined (Aguero, Block, & Byrne, 1984; Ernulf, Innala, & Whitam, 1989; Whitley, 1990). Thus, many coworker characteristics might be investigated as possible causes or correlates of discrimination against LGBs on the job.

Supervisors certainly deserve more attention. Because they have power over LGB employees, whether a supervisor is supportive, indifferent, or hostile can be very important. Many LGBs have reported supervisors who did nothing in response to interpersonal discrimination, such as a supervisor of a gay Detroit postal worker, who did nothing to intervene when the employee complained of coworkers leaving AIDS brochures and lewd graffiti at his workstation and calling him a "fag" who "sucks dick" (HRC, 2001a). There are numerous instances of LGB employees who were told by their supervisors that they themselves were the problem, such as the manufacturing plant worker in Maine who complained of constant harassment by coworkers and was told by his supervisor that he was failing to work effectively as a team member (HRC, 2001a). Sometimes supervisors are the worst source of antipathy and abuse, as in the case of Douglas Retterer that opened this chapter. However, supportive managers may be very valuable, as was the case for one of Friskopp and Silverstein's (1995) interviewees who described how much he was helped in being honest with his clients by support from above: "What helped me . . . was speaking to my boss and saying, 'Look, we all know that personal conversations are a part of doing business and all these situations come up. My preference is to act honestly and nondeceptively. Is the company willing to abide by its standards and support me in doing that?' He had to stop and think and [said] yes. . . . if they're willing to lose business rather than sacrifice their principles, that really empowers me" (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995, p. 127).

Supervisors' perceptions of the general social climate for LGBs also may influence the extent to which they discriminate against LGB employees. Perpetrators of discrimination sometimes deny personal prejudice, instead citing the prejudice of others as a reason for their own actions. For example, a police officer in Los Angeles was told to conceal her sexual orientation because the department was "not yet ready to accept gays," and the CFO of an aircraft parts manufacturer was terminated because the board felt that customers would be reluctant to do business with the company if they knew he was gay (HRC, 2001a). The general social acceptance of heterosexism described earlier can make it seem "appropriate" for businesses to accommodate the prejudices of their employees and clients. However, supervisors are likely to differ in how widespread they believe blatant heterosexism to be, and the extent to which they feel that accommodating such heterosexism is acceptable; these variables may be relevant in determining a supervisor's likelihood to discriminate.

Finally, there has been no attention devoted to subordinates of LGBs. Hostile subordinates can threaten an LGB supervisor's effectiveness and provide a rationale for discrimination from those further up the ladder. For example, stockbroker Michael Armentrout was denied a promotion after the regional vice president was told by a broker that the people in the branch Armentrout was to manage would not work for a gay man (HRC, 2001a). Clients or customers, as well, can cause difficulties, by being openly hostile, withdrawing business, or complaining to superiors. For example, a customer of a funeral home in Idaho, upon finding out that the manager of the home was gay, called his superiors in the main office and threatened to withdraw her future-services contract, as she would never use a funeral home that employed a gay person. The manager was subsequently fired (HRC, 2001a). Thus, all those with whom LGBs interact on a daily basis at work—coworkers, supervisors, subordinates, and clients—are likely to be important influences on the LGB employee's encounters with discrimination and the results of those experiences.

Career Development

Heterosexism and discrimination are likely to affect the career paths of many LGBs. Certainly, direct, formal discrimination, such as being fired or passed over for promotion, is detrimental to career development. But LGBs also may curtail their own career options and choices based on experienced or expected heterosexism and discrimination. A gay consultant related how he "was on the partnership track for many years, but it's harder to be closeted the longer you are there and the older you get. It seemed my career prospects would be better if I left, which is what I did" (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995, p. 104). They may reject the possibility of employment in organizations that seem hostile, or may be clearly "out" in the hiring process to allow such companies to "self-select" out of the LGB person's consideration. As one lesbian who is out on her résumé succinctly stated, "If they don't want to hire

me because I'm gay, I don't want to work there anyway" (Friskopp & Silverstein, p. 223). (One can "come out" on a résumé by listing things like involvement in gay rights organizations.) Finally, some LGB people may completely change the industry in which they work in an attempt to achieve a more amenable environment. For example, one gay man described how he left his job as a builder, where it was necessary to constantly "prove you're a he-man" and where the men he worked with seemed "to be driven by a pathological need to prove they're not gay." He became a hairdresser instead, saying, "I wanted to work somewhere where I could be free to be who I am" (Kitzinger, 1991, p. 230). It appears that heterosexism and discrimination may have a profound effect on the career paths of LGB people.

Boundary Conditions

There has been little research on sexual orientation discrimination that has examined anything as a potential moderator of relationships of interest. For example, disclosure may have interactive effects with other variables under study. As such, an examination of disclosure as a possible moderator of relationships being studied may help establish boundary conditions for those effects. Nearly all the studies to date are either simple correlational research, or tests of multivariable path models that assess mediation but not moderation. We must look for moderation if we are ever to make sense of conflicting findings. For example, we earlier alluded to the possibility that the relationship between having an LGB supervisor and having experienced discrimination may be moderated by the extent to which that supervisor is out in the workplace, in that supervisors who are themselves closeted may be of little help to their LGB subordinates. Many other such possibilities exist: perhaps the relationships between organizational policies (for example, inclusive diversity training) and discrimination vary depending on coworker attitudes or gender, or whether the policies are backed up by actions or are just "lip service." Maybe the strength of associations between discrimination and well-being indicators depend upon the supportiveness of one's supervisor, or the type of industry, or the source of the sample, or features external to the workplace such as having a supportive family. The point

is that antecedent-discrimination-outcome relationships are highly unlikely to be precisely the same for all LGB employees in all workplaces; we must look for qualifiers and boundary conditions.

Antecedents, Outcomes, or Both?

Difficulties with determining the direction of influence in relationships of variables with sexual orientation discrimination have been alluded to throughout this chapter. For example, we are unable to determine the extent to which policies influence discrimination versus a discriminatory environment's influence on the likelihood of the adoption of gay-friendly policies. Or it is unclear whether workgroups with more LGB people create a more gay-friendly environment, or whether gay-friendly environments simply attract more LGB workers. Once again, to assess these complex relationships, researchers will have to conduct longitudinal research. Long-term studies are admittedly difficult, but the question of effect direction is of vital importance if organizational researchers are to provide any guidance for facilitating change in organizations.

Lesbians and Gay Men Versus Bisexuals (and Transgenders)

We have used the acronym "LGB" throughout, combining bisexuals with lesbians and gay men. Some studies regarding sexual orientation discrimination have explicitly included bisexuals (Waldo, 1999) whereas others appear to have included only those who self-identified as gay or lesbian (Button, 2001; Ellis & Riggle, 1995). But there has yet to be any examination of the ways in which bisexuals may be different from those who are exclusively homosexual. Bisexuals may have unique concerns with developing an identity, feeling well-identified with neither heterosexual nor homosexual people (or with both). Furthermore, some antipathy toward bisexuals may be found in the gay and lesbian community, with bisexuals referred to as "fence-sitters," viewed as questionable allies unwilling to fully relinquish "heterosexual privilege" (Duberman, 1999). In addition, the treatment of bisexuals by others in their workplace is likely to vary greatly depending upon whether they

are in a relationship with a same- or opposite-gender person at a given time. Thus, combining bisexuals and homosexuals in research may not be warranted. Certainly, researchers should look for differences between bisexual and homosexual respondents, and research specifically devoted to examining the experiences of bisexuals is needed.

Occasionally, one will see the acronym LGBT, referring to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and *transgender* individuals. Transgenders do share some of the same concerns as LGB people, as prejudice and discrimination against transgenders likely have similar roots in rigid stereotypical ideas about gender roles as does heterosexism (Pharr, 1997). But gender-identification and sexual orientation are two very different constructs—most gay men are gender-identified as male, and most lesbians are gender-identified as female (Earnshaw, 1991). Transgender individuals, however, have a gender identity inconsistent with their physiology at birth. They may choose to surgically alter their physical gender or not, and their sexual orientation vis-à-vis their "chosen" gender may be heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual. Even where LGBs are covered by a nondiscrimination law, transgender people usually are not. Only one of the eleven states with a nondiscrimination law, Minnesota, includes gender identity as an impermissible basis for discrimination (HRC, 2001b). There is no research of which we are aware that specifically examines the workplace experiences of transgenders; such research could be a fascinating undertaking. But we do wish to emphasize the distinction between gender identity and sexual orientation, a distinction that can be lost when everyone who does not conform to their traditional assigned gender role is lumped together as "LGBT."

Lesbians Versus Gay Men

Even when research examines only those with an exclusively homosexual orientation, there is a tendency to combine gay men and lesbians. Few studies have looked to see whether gay male participants differed from lesbians in any way. In two studies that did, neither Ragins and Cornwell (2000) nor Griffith and Hebl (2002) found any differences in the reported incidence of discrimination, although Griffith and Hebl did report that the lesbians in their study were more accepting of their identity than were the gay men.

Chrobot-Mason et al. (2001) found that lesbians used identity management strategies in a somewhat different way than did gay men. Conceptually, there is reason to expect that the experiences of gay men may differ from those of lesbians. The social psychology literature provides ample evidence that people tend to hold considerably more negative attitudes toward gay men than toward lesbians (Whitley & Kite, 1995). However, in the workplace, lesbians may face a "double stigma" of being both female and homosexual. Some have argued that homosexuality is not the same stigma for males as for females (Kite & Whitley, 1996). Furthermore, some concerns are not shared by gay men and lesbians, such as concern for the "gender gap" in wages and job opportunities, which hits lesbian couples doubly hard but may actually be a benefit to gay male couples. Friskopp and Silverstein (1995) found that as gay men moved up the corporate ladder and gained seniority and power, they usually felt less vulnerable to sexual orientation discrimination. Lesbians, however, were very aware of their rarity, simply as *women*, at top organizational levels, and felt their positions more precarious as they rose in the hierarchy. Researchers need to consider the experiences of gay men and lesbians separately to determine points of commonality and difference.

Additional Stigmatizing Conditions

Just as lesbian women might be additionally stigmatized by their female gender in some employment contexts, other stigmatizing characteristics may complicate the work experiences of LGBs. The combination of minority race and minority sexual orientation may be especially difficult. Crow, Fok, and Hartman (1995) conducted a laboratory study that indicated that black homosexuals were more likely than white gay men and lesbians to be discriminated against in hiring (although heterosexuals of any race or gender were preferred over all homosexual applicants, even the white, male ones). However, Ragins and Cornwell (2000) found that LGBs of color were no less likely to come out at work than white LGBs and were more likely to come out when their supervisor was of the same race, suggesting that minority race may provide a common ground even for those who do not share a similar sexual orientation. But their sample was derived from national gay organizations, whose membership may be more

likely to be out at work than are LGBs who do not join such groups. In contrast, Friskopp and Silverstein (1995) reported that their interviewees were less likely to disclose their sexual orientation if they possessed another stigmatizing condition: "They said they were already unusual enough at their companies and didn't want to spend any more difference capital on the gay issue" (p. 167). More study is required to understand how other stigmas, not just race but also disability, obesity, advancing age, or minority religion, for example, may interact with homosexuality in determining the workplace experiences of LGBs.

Measurement Issues

The facts that there is no legal protection against sexual orientation discrimination in most states and that many LGB people are not "out" to all others in their workplaces mean that researchers must be especially careful to protect confidentiality. In order to not inadvertently "out" someone, researchers usually do not want to reveal that someone is taking part in a study at all. These concerns have led to research based almost entirely on self-report measures. Self-report data on discrimination can be problematic, as actual discriminatory incidents cannot be dissociated from people's attributions for those incidents (Gomez & Trierweiler, 2001). There is also the potential for method bias when all measures are self-reports (Schmitt, 1994; Spector, 1987). Researchers should attempt to be creative in obtaining other data, for example, by asking everyone in a workplace (heterosexuals and homosexuals) for information regarding climate and attitudes, perhaps vis-à-vis "diversity" in general (including race, gender, disability, age, and so forth) to avoid an obvious focus on sexual orientation. In addition, some data on specific organizations are publicly available; for example, the Human Rights Campaign publishes a report called the *State of the Workplace for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Americans* every year, which tracks gay-relevant policies of all Fortune 500 companies. Researchers should try to make use of such resources to supplement self-report data.

Another concern is the lack of measures specifically developed upon, or validated with, LGB samples. We must continue to devote efforts to developing appropriate measures for the study of sexual orientation discrimination. Furthermore, we must be cautious in using measures developed for other populations. In a study by one of the authors of this chapter, an established measure of social support functions (Davis, Morris, & Kraus [1998], Social Provisions Checklist) exhibited a factor structure in the LGB sample different from what has been reported for other types of samples, in that the supposedly separate support functions of emotional and informational support were not differentiated in the LGB sample (Deitch, 2002). These sorts of differences should be attended to, not just because they suggest existing measures may be inadequate, but also because they may indicate true, unique features of the operation of constructs and processes in LGB populations.

Sampling

Finally, a major difficulty with studying members of a concealably stigmatized group is obtaining a sample, as such individuals need to explicitly identify themselves to be included in research. Every sampling strategy is likely to produce a sample that is skewed in some direction. Several studies have obtained samples from the mailing lists of activist organizations (Day & Schoenrade, 1997); these samples probably include more gay-identified and politically aware individuals than the larger LGB population. Also, because membership in those organizations typically requires the payment of dues, such samples are likely to exclude LGB persons of lower socioeconomic status. Unless one specifically targets minority LGB organizations (such as Ragins & Cornwell, 2000, who recruited from an African American LGB group and a Latina-Latino group), samples gleaned from activist organizations are also likely to be disproportionately white. Other studies have recruited at community events such as gay pride rallies (Waldo, 1999), which will be likely to draw primarily those who are "out" and self-accepting of their gay identity.

Certainly, gaining access to closeted individuals for study is extremely difficult. A snowball sampling technique (as employed by Button [2001] and Driscoll et al. [1996], for example), whereby respondents are asked to recruit other LGB people they know, may gain some closeted individuals. As the Internet appears to be a resource of growing importance for individuals who are not yet out to explore aspects of gay life and gay identity (McKenna & Bargh, 1998), in the aforementioned study by one of the authors of this

chapter, a strategy of recruiting on the Internet for a Web survey was employed, including a snowball sampling component (Deitch, 2002). This strategy did gain some closeted individuals, but also resulted in a sample that was far too educated to possibly be representative in that respect (40 percent of the respondents held postgraduate degrees).

Furthermore, once a sample has been obtained there is no way even to accurately identify the population to be sampled so that representativeness can be assessed. For example, is a sample that is 15 percent closeted representative? How could we ever know? We just must accept that no single study, whether based on an Internet sample, a sample from activist organizations, or a sample gleaned at community events, will ever achieve a truly representative sample of gay men and lesbians. The best way to deal with this problem is for many similar studies to be conducted on different subsets of the gay and lesbian population acquired via different sampling strategies so that the consistency of results in varied subpopulations can be evaluated. Findings that hold across different types of samples then may be generalized with more confidence to the larger population of gay men and lesbians, and findings that do not generalize may help establish boundary conditions.

This rough agenda for research is just a beginning. We have attempted to highlight some of the substantive issues requiring attention, including possible antecedents of sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace, outcomes of that discrimination, and the role of disclosure of sexual orientation. We also have raised some difficulties with pursuing research on sexual orientation, such as measurement concerns and challenges in obtaining samples. Even acknowledging these difficulties, we have attempted to demonstrate the tremendous potential for interesting and meaningful research regarding LGB employees. We hope that organizational researchers will tap this potential by pursuing some of the research issues we have raised here, as well as developing further directions for studying workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Conclusions

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are a sizable minority in America, and most LGB people, like everyone else, work for a living. There is evidence that these employees experience substantial discrimination in the workplace. Many LGB individuals are fired or denied promotions and rewards for reasons that have no relation to their job performance. LGB employees may be subjected to harassment and verbal abuse or even physically assaulted on the job due to their minority sexual orientation. This discrimination clearly has a negative impact on those who are its targets, causing stress and anxiety and damaging physical health and psychological well-being. Such discrimination may be organizationally costly as well, leading to negative job attitudes, the potential loss of talented workers, and the possible alienation of LGBs as customers and consumers.

But despite the growing focus on "diversity" in recent years, the concerns of LGB employees have been virtually ignored by organizational researchers. There has been very little study of the workplace experiences of LGB employees and their encounters with discrimination on the job. The causes of such discrimination and the processes by which it affects employees are poorly understood. Without an understanding of the factors that underlie sexual orientation discrimination, useful suggestions for ways to counter it cannot be developed, and thus LGB employees continue to suffer mistreatment on the job.

We hope that by pointing out just a few of the potentially interesting research questions in this area, we have encouraged researchers to help rectify this lack of knowledge. Studies show slow but consistent trends toward greater integration and acceptance of LGBs in society (Yang, 1999) and many organizations would welcome clear guidance regarding how to reduce sexual orientation discrimination and become more gay-friendly companies (HRC, 2001b). Providing such guidance is our responsibility as organizational researchers, and we hope this chapter spurs researchers' interest and increases the attention devoted to lesbian, gay, and bisexual employees.

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PART 3

The Dark Side of Interpersonal Influence