



SUPPORTING A DIVERSE WORKFORCE: WHAT TYPE OF SUPPORT IS MOST MEANINGFUL FOR LESBIAN AND GAY EMPLOYEES?

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We examine differences in type of support (i.e., supervisor, coworker, organizational) received by lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) employees and the relationship between type of support and relevant outcomes (job and life satisfaction, outness of sexual orientation). Surveys were administered to 99 LGB individuals, and results indicate that support is best viewed as a multi-dimensional construct composed of supervisor, coworker, and organizational support for LGB employees. Overall, supervisor support was related to job satisfaction, coworker support was related to life satisfaction, and organizational support for LGB employees was related to outness. Thus, support for LGB employees is related to important outcomes. Practical suggestions for increasing organizational support for LGB employees are offered. © 2008 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Nearly 1.2 million adults across 99.3% of counties in the United States self-identified as being in a same-sex cohabiting relationship in the 2000 census (D. M. Smith & Gates, 2001). Additionally, lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) employees constitute between 4% and 17% of the American workforce (Gonsiorek & Weinrich, 1991), yet few studies have examined issues facing LGB employees (Clark & Serovich, 1997). Research suggests that LGB individuals experience unique stressors associated with their sexual identity (e.g., Waldo, 1999) arising

from the negative attitudes held by the heterosexual population regarding homosexuality. Heterosexism, which can be defined as “an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community” (Herek, 1992, p. 89), results in stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination toward LGB individuals in society as a whole, and in workplaces in particular (N. S. Smith & Ingram, 2004; Waldo, 1999).

Many LGB individuals spend the majority of their lives isolated from fellow minority group members, as they typically live

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and work in predominantly heterosexual environments (Meyer, 1995; Waldo, 1999). Additionally, LGB individuals' minority status is not visually obvious to members of the larger population in the same sense as other minorities' status (e.g., ethnic minorities' physical appearance). Because of their minority status and similarity to other minority groups, LGB individuals experience a unique form of psychological distress, termed *minority stress*, that results from the discordance between their values, culture, and experiences and those of the dominant culture (Meyer, 1995). This stress may be particularly high for LGB individuals due to the lack of an obvious minority status marker. People with whom LGB individuals interact are often unaware of the LGB individual's sexual orientation (i.e., minority status) and thus may express values or ideas that denigrate homosexuality, increasing the LGB individual's stress. Most individuals, regardless of minority status, spend the majority of their days in the workplace. The disconnect felt by minority individuals between their identity and others' expectations at work can lead to additional organizational stressors.

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Research indicates that social support can alleviate the negative outcomes of work-related stress among primarily heterosexual samples (Witt & Carlson, 2006). Social support at work can lessen negative organizational outcomes such as absenteeism (e.g., Godin & Kittel, 2004; Lowe, Schellenberg, & Shannon, 2003) and turnover intentions (e.g., Acker, 2004; Leung & Lee, 2006; Lowe et al., 2003) and lead to positive organizational outcomes such as job performance (e.g., AbuAlRub, 2004; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006), organizational commitment (e.g., Lowe et al., 2003; Redman & Snape, 2006), and job satisfaction (e.g., Acker, 2004; Redman & Snape, 2006). Unfor-

tunately, most research is conducted on the heterosexual population because they constitute the majority. It is important, however, to understand the different experiences of minority members (e.g., LGB employees) and the impact of work stress on them. Receiving individualized social support from a supervisor or colleague may not be enough for LGB employees. They may require a broader type of support from the organization as a whole to decrease the negative outcomes associated with their specific job demands. For example, a gay employee might feel that his boss is fair in work decisions, yet he may be uncomfortable bringing his personal life (e.g., picture of partner) to work. This lack of support for his sexual orientation may lead him to experience the negative organizational outcomes discussed above.

The purpose of this study is to help researchers and human resource managers gain a better understanding of the work environment and employee diversity. We extend previous research by examining how three types of work-related support (i.e., supervisor, coworker, and organizational) are relevant to one understudied but important minority group, LGB employees. Additionally, we examine how these types of support affect organizational and personal outcomes. As such, this research contributes to existing knowledge regarding sources of support in organizations. Moreover, by focusing on sources of support for an important and understudied population (i.e., LGB workers), this article offers empirical evidence guiding the development of HR practices that improve the experiences of diverse employees.

Support and the Work Environment

Schneider (1987) argued that "attributes of people, not the nature of the external environment" (p. 437) are key determinants of employee behavior. Social support is a "meta-construct" (Vaux, 1988) rooted in interpersonal interactions at work that includes emotional (e.g., listening to distressed workers), instrumental (e.g., helping employees achieve promotion), and structural

assistance (e.g., providing flextime for personal days) provided by individuals (e.g., supervisor support) or organizations (e.g., organizational support). Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) explains that organizational support affects the employee-organization relationship (e.g., Casper, Martin, Buffardi, & Erdwins, 2002) such that employees who support their supervisor or organization may expect that gesture to be reciprocated (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986).

Support may be shown in many ways across different levels. Supervisors may provide support via tangible benefits (e.g., a year-end bonus) or organizations could be supportive through intangible efforts (e.g., culture, Thomas & Ganster, 1995; family-friendly work environment, Allen, 2001). Overall, studies on the general population have shown that both instrumental and psychosocial forms of support, provided by individuals and organizations, are negatively related to work stress (Abdel-Halim, 1982; AbuAlRub, 2004; Ganster, Fusilier, & Mayes, 1986; Hagihara, Tarumi, & Miller, 1998; Luszczynska & Cieslak, 2005; Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999).

Types of Support

Supervisor support is one of the most direct types of support. Research on the general (i.e., primarily heterosexual) population has consistently shown that supervisor support is related to important job attitudes such as job satisfaction (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). While supervisor support has been associated with important outcomes, to our knowledge no studies have examined the effect of supervisor support on LGB employees specifically. Researchers have examined broader conceptualizations of support for LGB employees that encompass multiple sources of support (e.g., supervisors, peers, subordinates, Griffith & Hebl, 2002; organizational support, King, Reilly, Hebl, & Griffith, in press), but have not examined each source of support independently. LGB employees may experience supervisor support differently than their heterosexual coworkers

and may require different types of support (e.g., support for their sexual identity). This article will examine supervisor support of LGB employees, thus filling an important gap in the extant literature.

Another type of support that has received less attention is coworker support (Thompson & Prottas, 2005). Research on the general population suggests that coworker support is negatively related to work distress (Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997; Loscocco & Spitze, 1990). Ragins, Singh, and Cornwell (2007) recently found that coworker support was associated with job satisfaction, commitment, and turnover intentions for LGB employees. To our knowledge, no empirical studies have assessed the unique effect of coworker support for LGB employees independent of organizational and supervisor support. This is another important understudied area that will be addressed in the current article.

Surprisingly, very little research on the general population (or the LGB population) has compared supervisor and coworker support. Most research examines organizational support, which represents a more global form of support, or supervisor support alone. We propose that the origin of the support leads to differences in types of support. Supervisors, but not coworkers, hold power over the recipient of the support (Frone, 2000) and "represent an organization," so their support might be construed as being directed or supported by the organization and organizational policy (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). In contrast, coworkers' support may be assumed to be more personal. While the same specific behaviors can represent either type of support (e.g., attentive listening, providing advice, or helping with a job), the message and its reception might vary. For example, because supervisors

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may be viewed as an extension of the organization, employees may view attentive behavior by a supervisor as organizationally driven, which might increase their job satisfaction. In contrast, it is unlikely that a coworker's attentive behavior would be viewed as an organizationally driven act. As such, it might increase employees' overall satisfaction (e.g., life satisfaction), but not the more specific component of job satisfaction. In summary, due to the source of each type of support, we suggest that supervisor support and coworker support are two unique constructs.

Companies described as LGB-supportive organizations have rejected heterosexist policies and instituted "gay-supportive" policies that show support for and acceptance of sexual orientation diversity.

Researchers also have suggested that different groups may need different types of support (Wortman & Dunkel-Schetter, 1987). Wayment and Peplau (1995) propose that lesbians might value social support related to their personal identity more so than heterosexual women because it supports their feelings of self-worth. With this in mind, we contend that organizational support for LGB employees (i.e., the extent to which the organization as a whole provides instrumental and psychosocial support for LGB employees) captures a unique and important component of the work environment. Organizational support for LGB employees describes issues such as whether LGB employees need to be secretive about their sexual identity, whether they can display pictures

of partners, and their comfort level with talking about their personal lives. Examples of organizational support for LGB employees include organizational-level nondiscrimination policies, diversity training, and support for LGB activities or groups.

Companies described as LGB-supportive organizations have rejected heterosexist policies and instituted "gay-supportive" policies that show support for and acceptance of sexual orientation diversity. Recent research indicates that the experience of heterosexist behavior might be mitigated by the policies,

and practices of organizations (King et al., in press). The existence of such support (which also has been labeled "LGB-supportive climate") is associated with decreased perceptions of discrimination (Button, 2001; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). In contrast, organizations that do not take instances of heterosexism seriously report more heterosexism (Waldo, 1999). As mentioned previously, LGB employees differ from majority group members due to the occurrence of minority stress (Meyer, 1995). Although employees may experience minority stress in a work environment, we suggest that an LGB-supportive organization will lessen the negative experiences of LGB employees.

Support is very important for LGB employees due to the unique stressors they experience. Yet surprisingly, we found only four studies that examined LGB support in the workplace. Results of these studies indicate that top management support (Day & Schoenrade, 2000) and an LGB-supportive climate (Griffith & Hebl, 2002) relate to LGB employees' job satisfaction and that the presence of LGB-supportive policies relate to fewer discrimination reports by LGB employees (Button, 2001; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). One additional study (Wayment & Peplau, 1995) examined non-work-related social support among lesbian women and found that reassurance of worth was a more important type of support for lesbians than heterosexual women. These findings suggest that LGB-specific support at work might be an important variable for gay and lesbian employees. However, the extant literature is lacking with reference to LGB employees' experience of workplace support. The current article will attempt to fill that gap.

We have described three interpersonal factors in the workplace: supervisor, coworker, and organizational support for LGB employees. We suggest that each offers a different type of encouragement or buffering for the employee but that they also differ. First, they differ in their levels. Organizational support is a high-level, inclusive construct focusing on organizational functions and environments that are needed for

success while supervisor and coworker support are more proximal measures involving emotional, instrumental, and structural assistance for employees. Further, whereas positive organizational support includes both *formal and informal* practices and procedures, supervisor and coworker support focus primarily on the informal practices that assist and support employees. Second, the three constructs differ in the loci of support. While supervisor and coworker support originate from a specific individual, organizational support for LGB employees is more diffuse, as it is related to the organization as a whole. The final difference between these three constructs regards the receiver of the support. Supervisor and coworker support are directed at an individual employee, whereas organizational support is directed at an entire identity group. Thus, while supervisor and coworker support may alleviate personal stressors, organizational support may be necessary for mitigating more global stressors tied to an LGB identity at work.

Support and General Outcomes: Job and Life Satisfaction

We argue that the three types of support are distinct and relate differentially to satisfaction. Specifically, we posit that the strength of the relationship depends on the type of support involved (i.e., supervisor, coworker, and organizational support for LGB employees). The differences between the constructs are anticipated to affect the strength of the relationship between perceptions of the work environment and job and life satisfaction.

Job satisfaction describes an affective response to one's job. Much research has been conducted on this construct (see Spector, 1997). Life satisfaction, a less studied variable, is a general affective evaluation of one's life, detailing feelings about one's life, including one's job.

We draw on two psychological models to make predictions about the interrelations between type of support and type of satisfaction. First, the compatibility principle suggests that attitudes should match behavioral (and, by extension, attitudinal) criteria in

level of abstraction (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). Two elements of attitudes specified by Ajzen and Fishbein are important in explaining the relationships between job and life satisfaction and our support variables: (1) target (i.e., focus of behavior) and (2) context (i.e., environment in which the behavior occurs). Further, predictive efficiency between constructs improves when these elements are similar. In terms of "target," attitudes toward the supervisor are more likely to relate to work outcomes (i.e., job satisfaction) than nonwork outcomes (i.e., life satisfaction). With this in mind, we posit that the most proximal type of support (i.e., supervisor support) would be most related to job satisfaction. Conversely, the more distal types of support (i.e., coworker and LGB support) would be more related to general satisfaction (i.e., life satisfaction).

Second, we use Frone's (2000) framework of interpersonal conflict and psychological outcomes to describe how different types of support affect job satisfaction. Drawing from Fiske's (1992) general theory of social relations, Frone suggested that coworkers' relationships can be described as communal sharing; coworkers focus on similarities and want to be liked by one another. In contrast, supervisor-subordinate relationships are based on authority ranking. The supervisor is seen as directly tied to the job, thus any negative interactions affect employees' feelings toward the job and organization. Frone's research supports his contention that interpersonal conflict with a supervisor negatively affects perceptions of the job, while conflict with coworkers negatively impacts perceptions of the self. Extending this logic, we expect that supervisor support will affect job attitudes (i.e., increase job satisfaction) to a greater extent than coworker support. Similarly, since organizational support is organization- rather than job-specific, we suggest that it would have less effect on job satisfaction than supervisor support.

In terms of "target," attitudes toward the supervisor are more likely to relate to work outcomes (i.e., job satisfaction) than nonwork outcomes (i.e., life satisfaction).

H1a: Supervisor support is more strongly related to job satisfaction than coworker support or organizational support for LGB employees.

Regarding life satisfaction, we propose that since coworker support is more communal and not based exclusively on the job, it is more closely related to life satisfaction than supervisor support is. Organizational support for LGB employees offers a global affirmation of one's sexual identity so it likely extends beyond the specific job, meaning it also should demonstrate a stronger relationship with life satisfaction than supervisor support.

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H1b: Coworker support and organizational support for LGB employees are more strongly related to life satisfaction than supervisor support.

Support and LGB-Specific Outcomes: Outness

Organizational research has focused on outness, one's willingness to disclose his or her sexual identity, due to the costs and benefits to the employee of disclosure (Ragins et al., 2007). Costs of disclosure include negative outcomes such as discrimination (e.g., Croteau & Lark, 1995), threats (Herek, 1995), and negative verbal exchanges (Bradford, Ryan, & Rothblum, 1994). Benefits include worker satisfaction (Day & Schoenrade, 1997; Griffith

& Hebl, 2002) and organizational commitment (Day & Schoenrade, 1997, 2000; Ellis & Riggle, 1995). Research (e.g., Van Den Bergh, 1999; Wells & Button, 2004) indicates that outness also positively affects general well-being (e.g., mental, physical, and spiritual health), which can only serve to benefit the organization. Van Den Bergh (1999) stressed that "for lesbians and gay men to be the most productive at the workplace and the most involved within organizational cultures, it is critical that they feel safe in not hiding their sexual orientation" (1999, p. 23). Similarly,

Wells and Button (2004) stated that being out at work "may combat isolation, bolster efficacy, engender social support for occupational goals, and allow the individual to contribute more fully to the organization's success" (2004, p. 151). While specific figures are difficult to calculate, Van Den Bergh (2003) reported that only 33% of lesbians and 62% of gay men were out. As such, we must ask, what can organizations do to allow employees to feel free to be "out"?

We believe the answer lies in support. In line with the extant literature, we propose that a supportive environment encourages sexual identity disclosure, thus enabling positive organizational attitudes (i.e., job satisfaction, organizational commitment) to occur. Indeed, research indicates that perceived workplace discrimination is related to sexual identity disclosure (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001); that LGB employees are more likely to disclose their sexual identity when nondiscrimination policies are in place (Rostosky & Riggle, 2002); and that employees in gay-supportive organizations are more likely to be out than those who are not (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Waldo, 1999). It is important to note that these studies only examined organizational-level support for LGB employees; they did not examine different *types* of support. The present study will examine whether an overall supportive environment is required for LGB employees to be out or whether informal coworker and supervisor support is sufficient.

We propose that type of support should influence outness. Specifically, we argue that organizational support for LGB employees should have a stronger influence on outness than coworker support (e.g., workgroups in which coworkers cover for each other when one of them is absent) or supervisor support. LGB individuals employed in LGB-supportive organizations are protected by nondiscrimination policies and supported by gay-friendly policies. As such, they are more likely to feel comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation to fellow employees.

H2: Organizational support for LGB employees is more closely related to LGB outcomes (i.e.,

outness) than is supervisor support or coworker support.

Method

Participants

Participants ($N = 99$) who were employed and identified themselves as either gay or lesbian (95.7%) or bisexual (4.3%) were recruited for the present study. The average age was 36.5 ($SD = 8.78$) and 61.7% were male. Regarding race, 84.0% of participants identified themselves as white, 13.8% as Hispanic, 1.1% as African-American or black, and 2.1% as Asian.

Of our sample, 47.9% reported being involved in a long-term committed relationship and 14.9% had children. Concerning education, 2.1% of our sample reported having a high school degree or equivalent, 19.1% reported having completed some college, 40.4% reported having a college degree, and 38.3% reported completing some post-graduate coursework and/or a degree.

Procedure

Participants were recruited via two methods. First, researchers requested participation from patrons at gay-supportive establishments (e.g., restaurants, coffeehouses). Second, researchers solicited participants at a gay-pride event. Participants recruited at the gay-pride event were offered a chance to participate in a drawing for a gift certificate to a local restaurant in which two (out of 100 total) would win. Both data collections occurred in a large city in the southwestern United States. Of the individuals approached, the response rate was approximately 90%.

Measures

Sexual Identity

Participants were asked to identify their sexual orientation with the question, "What is your sexual identity?" with response choices of gay/lesbian, transgendered, bisexual, transsexual, and heterosexual.

Supervisor Support

Supervisor support was assessed with a revised Perceived Organizational Support Scale (Eisenberger et al., 1986; $\alpha = .93$), which examines employees' perceptions of the extent to which their supervisor values the contribution of and cares about the well-being of his or her employees. The eight-item scale was accompanied by a five-point response scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The full list of items is available from the first author upon request.

Coworker Support

Coworker support was assessed with the seven-item Coworker Support Scale ($\alpha = .90$; Baruch-Feldman, Brondolo, Ben-Dayan, & Schwartz, 2002). Response items ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The entire scale is available from the first author upon request.

Organizational Support for LGB Employees

A revised version of Liddle, Luzzo, Hauenstein, and Schuck's (2004) Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Climate Inventory (LGBT-CI) was used to assess participants' perceptions of the level of support for LGB employees in their workplaces ($\alpha = .96$). The LGBT-CI is a 20-item scale with a response scale that ranges from (1) "does not describe at all" to (4) "describes extremely well." We conducted an exploratory factor analysis to ascertain whether the scale consisted of multiple factors and found that approximately 60% of the variance was accounted for with one factor (the second component was 7%). Further, we examined the factor loadings and found that all were over .57 for the first factor (.40 is the usual required cutoff; Hatcher, 1994), suggesting a unidimensional scale. Contact the first author for the full scale.

The present study will examine whether an overall supportive environment is required for LGB employees to be out or whether informal coworker and supervisor support is sufficient.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction was measured with Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, and Klesh's (1983) three-item measure of global job satisfaction. An example item is "In general, I like working here" ($\alpha = .90$). The scale uses a five-point response format ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Life Satisfaction

Satisfaction with life was assessed using Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin's (1985) five-item measure. An example item is "The conditions of my life are excellent" ($\alpha = .88$). The scale is accompanied by a five-point response format, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Outness

Openness of sexual orientation was measured using a five-item scale that asked respondents to rate the degree to which they are open about their sexual orientation with coworkers, management, friends, family, and in life in general (Waldo, 1999). Response choices range from not at all (1) to completely open (5). We included the only two items from the scale that were specific to work (i.e., with coworkers and management in the workplace).

Discriminant Validity of the Three Support Variables

Since the support variables were similar, we wanted to determine if they were three distinct factors. We compared two theoretical models of the latent support construct

using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). A three-factor model (Model 1) conceptualized support as having three dimensions: supervisor, coworker, and organizational support for LGB employees. A simple one-factor model (Model 2) conceptualized support as one general construct. A CFA (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1979) was conducted to assess the difference in fit between the hypothesized three-factor model and the one-factor model. The chi-square value obtained from the three-factor model was contrasted with the chi-square value obtained from the one-factor model, and the results indicated that support is best measured as a multidimensional construct with three separate but related factors: supervisor, coworker, and organizational support for LGB employees (see Table I). Additionally, the correlations between the organizational support factor and the other support factors suggested discriminant validity. Specifically, supervisor support and organizational support were moderately related ($r = .36$) and coworker support and organizational support were moderately related ($r = .45$), suggesting some discrimination between the constructs. We also examined correlation matrices to inspect differences between within-item and between-item relationships. Results showed that within-item coefficients were higher (coworker support ranged from .24 to .69; supervisor support ranged from .35 to .87; and organizational support ranged from .28 to .80) than between-item coefficients (supervisor-organizational ranged from .03 to .40; coworker-organizational ranged from .00 to .47; and coworker-supervisor ranged from .19 to .57).

TABLE I Chi-Square Test for Support Models

Model	Observed χ^2	Df	$\Delta \chi^2$	Δ Df	Expected χ^2
3-Factor Model	1494.85	591			
1-Factor Model	2308.30	594	867.35*	3	7.82

* $p < .05$.

Results

The means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations for all key variables are included in Table II.

Hypothesis 1a proposed that supervisor support would be more strongly related to job satisfaction than coworker support or organizational support for LGB employees. We regressed the coworker support, supervisor support, and organizational support for LGB employees variables on job satisfaction and found that only supervisor support was significantly related to job satisfaction ($\beta = .43$, $p < .01$), thus supporting Hypothesis 1a (see Table III).

Hypothesis 1b predicted that coworker support and organizational support for LGB employees would be more strongly related to life satisfaction than supervisor support. We regressed the coworker support, supervisor support, and organizational support for LGB employees variables on life satisfaction and found that only coworker support was significantly related to life satisfaction ($\beta = .39$, $p < .01$), offering partial support for Hypothesis 1b.

Hypothesis 2 stated that organizational support for LGB employees should be more closely related to LGB outcomes (i.e., outness) than supervisor support or coworker support. We regressed the coworker support, supervisor support, and organizational support for LGB employees variables on outness at work and found that only organizational

support for LGB employees was significantly related to outness at work ($\beta = .63$, $p < .01$), in support of Hypothesis 2.

Discussion

Gay and lesbian employees are an integral part of the U.S. workforce (Van Den Bergh, 2003). It is both a responsibility and a strategic advantage for human resource managers to understand LGB workplace diversity. Results from the current study indicate that human resource practitioners should work to ensure that LGB employees feel supported by their supervisors, coworkers, and overall organization.

Our results provide clear evidence that supervisor, coworker, and organizational support for LGB employees are similar yet unique constructs. We proposed these types of support would differ due to the level of the constructs, the loci of support, and the target of the support. Our results add empirical evidence to prior research that conceptualizes organizational support as a complex, multidimensional construct (e.g., Thompson & Prottas, 2005).

Moreover, we found that different types of support are differentially related to individual attitudes. Specifically, supervisor support was more strongly related to job satisfaction than either coworker or organizational support for LGB employees, and coworker support was more strongly related to life satisfaction than supervisor or

TABLE II Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities (When Applicable), and Correlations

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Supervisor Support	3.88	0.82	(.93)					
2. Coworker Support	4.02	0.69	.58**	(.90)				
3. LGB-Supportive Climate	3.01	0.75	.36**	.45**	(.96)			
4. Job Satisfaction	3.81	0.86	.52**	.38**	.25*	(.90)		
5. Life Satisfaction	4.65	1.38	.27**	.42**	.21*	.34**	(.88)	
6. Outness at Work	3.85	1.29	.18	.29**	.63**	.10	.20	(.84)

Notes: $N = 98$. Reliabilities (coefficient alphas) are along the diagonal in parentheses.

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

TABLE III Support Variables in Relationship to Job Satisfaction, Life Satisfaction, and Outness at Work

	Job Satisfaction			Life Satisfaction			Outness at Work		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²
Supervisor Support	.45**	.12		.06	.20		-.12	.16	
Coworker Support	.16	.15		.77**	.25		.10	.20	
LGB Support	.05	.12		.04	.20		1.09**	.16	
Model			.26			.15			.38

N = 93. ** *p* < .01. * *p* < .05.

organizational support. Our findings are consistent with Ajzen and Fishbein's (1977) compatibility principle. We found that job-specific attitudes (i.e., supervisor support) are more closely related to other job-specific attitudes (i.e., job satisfaction) than to general attitudes (i.e., life satisfaction). Conversely, general, non-job-specific attitudes (i.e., coworker support) are more strongly related to other general attitudes (i.e., life satisfaction) than specific attitudes (i.e., supervisor support).

Our results are also in line with Frone's (2000) framework of interpersonal conflict, as we found that supervisor support did affect job satisfaction. We should note, however, that our results failed to support the hypothesis that organizational support for LGB employees would be strongly related to life satisfaction. We propose two reasons for this nonsignificant finding. First, it could be a statistical power issue. Our small *N* size could have affected whether the relationship was statistically significant; however, the biserial correlation between these variables was .20, which represents a small to medium effect size ($d = .41$; Cohen, 1988). Second, organizational support may be just one aspect of LGB individuals' daily life. Following the level of abstraction argument (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977), it may be that life satisfaction is determined to a large extent by nonwork factors such as support from one's family of origin.

Finally, we found that organizational support for LGB employees had a stronger relationship with outness than supervisor and

coworker support. This is in line with previous research showing that nondiscrimination polices (Rostosky & Riggle, 2002) and gay-supportive organizations (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Waldo, 1999) are related to sexual identity disclosure.

Implications

Our results provide evidence that support encountered at work is positively related to work and personal outcomes. We examined the contribution that the support variables provide in explaining job and life satisfaction and found that supervisor, coworker, and organizational support for LGB employees explained 26% of the variability in job satisfaction, 15% in life satisfaction, and 38% in outness at work. It is obvious that all three types of support are important and, therefore, organizations should attempt to create an atmosphere in which each form of support is available to LGB employees.

In addition, organizations can focus efforts on particular outcomes by targeting particular types of support. For example, managers experiencing a decrease in job satisfaction can focus their energies on adequately supporting LGB employees, thereby increasing levels of the outcome of interest. Strategies to increase support such as leader modeling of supportive behaviors (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997) and allowing individuals to participate in decision making (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) are discussed in the literature.

Very little research has focused on organizational support for LGB employees. Our results suggest that it is important for organizations to develop an LGB-supportive workplace so that employees can be open regarding their sexual orientation. An LGB-supportive workplace likely maintains formal policies supporting LGB workers, such as same-sex partner benefits, nondiscrimination policies, and zero tolerance for heterosexual acts. In addition, LGB-supportive organizations would support employees with informal norms such as including same-sex partners in social events and using non-heterosexist language in company communication (see Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). This type of environment may be implemented through training programs, the institution of formal equity policies, or the creation of LGB networks.

The results of the present study could guide these efforts in several ways. First, the results suggest that LGB-supportive training programs might take a theoretical integrative approach to include support-based training. Specifically, training might focus on ways to be a fair and supportive employee, colleague, and/or supervisor. Additionally, such training could include a diversity element to educate employees about different perspectives and ways to be supportive of diverse individuals. Training and education should be implemented at all levels, including top management since their support affects employee job satisfaction (Day & Schoenrade, 2000).

Second, managers might create an atmosphere of acceptance by writing a statement affirming the organization's support for LGB employees (Button, 2001) that could be included in organizational information (e.g., website, pamphlets), increasing LGB applicants and employees in the organization. This statement also may increase openness among current LGB employees, which could increase worker satisfaction (Day & Schoenrade, 1997; Griffith & Hebl, 2002) and affective commitment (Day & Schoenrade, 1997). Finally, this act may increase acceptance of the organization and/or its products among the LGB population.

Third, organizations also could support informal or formal LGB networks (Button, 2001), offering employees a social network among the minority group. The provision of opportunities to network with similar others enables LGB employees to identify and socialize with individuals who share their experiences, which may lessen minority stress and alleviate their psychological distress (Meyer, 1995; Waldo, 1999). These networks could increase awareness of LGB employees and the organization's support for them, which could decrease heterosexism. Organizations would benefit from reduced heterosexism via the positive effects on psychological health (N. S. Smith & Ingram, 2004; Waldo, 1999), job anxiety (Griffith & Hebl, 2002), job satisfaction (Button, 2001; Griffith & Hebl, 2002), and organizational commitment (Button, 2001).

Fourth, organizations could conduct a survey to determine how supportive the organization's culture is by assessing whether the environment is hostile to LGB employees, whether people feel comfortable being openly gay, and whether there are openly gay individuals in management. This would provide a gauge of the current conditions and indicate what the organization needs to change or maintain.

In general, there are several ways that managers can influence the level of general and LGB support in their workgroup. We have suggested several in-depth ideas above and we also provide a list of suggested strategies in Table IV. These behaviors are actions that managers have the power to enact (versus higher-level interventions such as same-sex benefits). Additionally, these behaviors can be directed toward any minority employee, not only LGB employees.

As mentioned previously, LGB employees lack an obvious minority status marker.

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TABLE IV Managers' Actions to Promote a Supportive Environment

Supervisor Action	Supervisor Support	Coworker Support	LGB Support
Provide mentoring opportunities (Triandis, Kurowski, & Gelfand, 1994; Van Den Bergh, 1999)	X		X
Plan social networking events (Button, 2001; Van Den Bergh, 2003)	X	X	X
Self-evaluate own actions concerning employees (Triandis et al., 1994)	X	X	X
Interact with employees from diverse group (Triandis et al., 1994)			X
Initiate Intercultural Training and Workshops for employees and managers (Button, 2001; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Van Den Bergh, 1999, 2003)			X
Let job applicants know in interview process that organization is all-inclusive (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Powers, 1996; Van Den Bergh, 2003)			X
Ask minority employees to point out current practices that are not supportive (Powers, 1996)			X
Welcome same sex partners to social events (Powers, 1996; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; Van Den Bergh, 2003; Wells & Button, 2004)			X
Do not assume "majority/minority" status of any employee (Powers, 1996; Van Den Bergh, 2003)	X	X	X
Assess the climate for minority employees (e.g., surveys; Human Rights Campaign WorkNet)			X
Ask HR to include specific minorities (e.g., LGB) in content of current diversity training (Human Rights Campaign WorkNet, n.d.)			X
Schedule meetings with leadership/members of current LGB support group or list serve (Human Rights Campaign WorkNet, n.d.)			X
Become familiar with LGB organizations that monitor workplace discrimination and harassment (Van Den Bergh, 2003)			X
Allow employees time off for whoever the employee deems to be "family" (Van Den Bergh, 2003)	X		X
Use all inclusive language (e.g., partner versus spouse; Van Den Bergh, 1999) and respond negatively to homophobic statements (Powers, 1996)			X

Note: The X shows what type of the support is most strongly related to the supervisor behavior. We should note that all of the listed supervisor's behaviors are somehow directly or indirectly related to all three types of support.

Many other individuals experience invisible stigmas such as illness (e.g., mental illness, cancer), religious beliefs, being a sexual assault victim, or socioeconomic class (Ragins, in press). Our findings could be relevant to these groups. There may be some support-related factors that are common to these groups. Organizations may be able to develop an "umbrella of tolerance" that provides protection, support, and equality to individuals in all minority groups.

Finally, our findings are similar to those of other studies on minorities in the workplace. For example, Burke (1991) found that racial minorities employed in organizations that support and affirm racial diversity are more likely to be satisfied with their job.

Limitations and Future Studies

Although this study makes several important contributions, we also must acknowledge its

limitations. First, the data were based on self-report measures that may be influenced by a tendency to respond in a socially desirable manner. Similarly, common method bias may be a concern since the study employed a cross-sectional design with all the variables coming from one single source (i.e., the survey). Second, our participants were surveyed at “gay-friendly” locations, most at a gay pride event, which is frequented by a very “out” population. These individuals may differ from less “out” LGB individuals in work attitudes and the processes related to them. Third, the sample consisted predominantly of white, educated males; thus, for the majority of our sample, the only minority status they experience is their sexual orientation. In contrast, many LGB individuals are members of racial or gender minority groups or are less educated than our sample, thus adding to their minority status. We cannot generalize our findings to less educated or more racially diverse LGB employees. Finally, we did not collect information concerning the organizations of our sample (e.g., diversity programs, size of company, location). Future studies must find ways to include a more representative sample of LGB employees.

We included standardized support measures used in past research but we could have included additional measures and questions that would allow further explication of the context of the employee. For example, we did not include a general organizational support scale. Assessing perceptions of general organizational support would have allowed us to ascertain whether LGB-specific support is unique in predicting satisfaction. It also would have been helpful to know whether the participants’ supervisor or coworkers were aware of the participant’s sexual identity.

Although we found evidence of differences between types of support, we did not test *why* these types of support are different. We provided a framework to explain why we believe they are different (i.e., uniqueness in support is due to differences in the level of the constructs, the loci of support, and the target of support). It would be interesting to empirically test this framework

to understand more about the processes involved in the different types of support. Future research should examine the experiences of other minority groups (e.g., racial or gender minorities) and determine the impact of support type on their workplace experiences and personal outcomes. In addition, future research should empirically test the relative efficacy of each of the strategies suggested for creating organizational support for LGB workers.

Conclusion

In the ideal workplace, there would be one organizational support construct that considers tolerance, respect, and support for *all* people from *all* groups. We would not have to designate a “family-friendly,” “LGB-friendly,” “race-friendly,” or “age-friendly” culture, for it would be an “employee-friendly” or “people-friendly” culture. Unfortunately, the workforce is far from reaching such a lofty goal. We will have to continue to educate and train employees about specific minority populations, and continue to conduct research to assess how well we are faring in trying to achieve a bias-free, “people-friendly” workplace.

The reality is that in today’s workforce a large number of employees are likely to come from disadvantaged social identity groups and, in most cases, their unique needs and experiences require understanding and respect. Results from the present study highlight the importance of acknowledging and understanding diverse employees and the issues they face in the workplace. For one minority group, LGB employees, support from coworkers, supervisors, and the overall organization differentially influences important outcomes such as job and life

The reality is that in today’s workforce a large number of employees are likely to come from disadvantaged social identity groups and, in most cases, their unique needs and experiences require understanding and respect. Results from the present study highlight the importance of acknowledging and understanding diverse employees and the issues they face in the workplace.

satisfaction and outness. Future research and practice must continue to be aware of sexual orientation diversity and its impact on organizational and personal outcomes.

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