

The importance of allies and allied organizations: Sexual orientation disclosure and concealment
at work

Jennifer L. Wessel

University of Maryland

Accepted Version

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: [Wessel, J. L. (2017) The importance of allies and allied organizations: Sexual orientation disclosure and concealment at work. Journal of Social Issues, 73, 240-254.], which has been published in final form at [https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12214]. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Wiley Terms and Conditions for Use of Self-Archived Versions. This article may not be enhanced, enriched or otherwise transformed into a derivative work, without express permission from Wiley or by statutory rights under applicable legislation. Copyright notices must not be removed, obscured or modified. The article must be linked to Wiley's version of record on Wiley Online Library and any embedding, framing or otherwise making available the article or pages thereof by third parties from platforms, services and websites other than Wiley Online Library must be prohibited.

Author Note

Jennifer L. Wessel, Psychology Department, University of Maryland

The author would like the following individuals for providing helpful suggestions on earlier versions of this manuscript: Ann Marie Ryan, Belle Rose Ragins, Paul Hanges, and Eden King.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jennifer Wessel,
Psychology Department, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. E-mail:
jwessel@umd.edu

Abstract

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals must make decisions regarding the extent to which they disclose their sexual orientation to others each time they encounter a new individual.

Although researchers have acknowledged potential person-to-person variation in sexual orientation disclosure, we know little as to the effects of individual, group, and organizational characteristics on within-person variation in sexual orientation disclosure decision-making. We also know little of how different types of support relatively predict disclosure. The present study takes a multi-level approach and examines the role of different levels of support (at the individual recipient level, the coworker group level, and the organization level) on sexual orientation disclosure, focusing on LGB working adults. A one-with-many multilevel design accounted for coworker relationships ($N = 371$) being nested within LGB employees ($k = 125$). Results showed that disclosure was predicted by the perceived supportiveness of the potential recipient of that information, the most supportive person in the LGB employee's work group, and the organization itself. A relative weight analysis suggests that organizational policies and the most supportive coworker are stronger predictors of disclosure across the coworker group, compared to mean coworker supportiveness.

Keywords: stigma, disclosure, concealment, support

The importance of allies and allied organizations: Sexual orientation disclosure at work

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals make decisions regarding the disclosure of their sexual orientation each time they enter a new situation and/or interact with a new individual (Croteau, Anderson, & VanderWal, 2008). Disclosing a concealable stigma at work has been recognized by diversity researchers as risky (Ragins, 2008), but stigma concealment is also emphasized as a potentially harmful choice linked to low self-efficacy (Baretto, Ellemers, & Banal, 2006), low job satisfaction (Day & Schoenrade, 1997; Ellis & Riggle, 1996), stress-related physical symptoms (Cole, Kemeny, Taylor, & Visscher, 1996) and low organizational commitment (Day & Schoenrade, 1997). Thus, it is important to understand what constrains and enables disclosure options for LGB employees.

The focus of this study is on the link between supportiveness and disclosure for LGB employees, with the prediction that sexual orientation disclosure decision-making involves an assessment of the supportiveness of the potential recipient of the information, other coworkers in one's work group, and the organization itself. This study will examine the independent effects of each of these levels of support on disclosure, as well as explore the predictive strength of different types of support relative to one another.

The contributions of this study are three-fold. First, although other studies have shown a link between certain types of individual and organizational support and disclosure, only one other study (King, Mohr, Peddie, Jones, & Kendra, 2015) has examined within-person variation in stigma disclosure decision making, necessitating further research that accounts for different disclosure decisions made by the same individual. Second, the current study examines how particularly supportive coworkers (i.e., potential allies) could influence disclosure decisions across the individual's entire group of coworkers. The influence of key coworker relationships

outside of the discloser-recipient dyad on disclosure decisions is previously unstudied and will give a more complete picture as to the role of context in disclosure decision-making. Third, this study makes direct comparisons of different types of contextual support as they relate to disclosure, in order to help clarify theory as to the most fundamental support influences in this decision-making process, as well as provide practical information as to where to direct resources aimed at improving LGB employee well-being.

Background

According to Anderson and colleagues (2001), sexual orientation disclosure is a continuum ranging from revealing one's sexual orientation (labeled being *explicitly out*), to not confirming or denying one's sexual orientation to others (labeled being *implicitly out*), to staying away from topics or situations that could reveal one's sexual orientation (labeled *avoiding*), and ending with explicitly lying about one's sexual orientation (labeled *hiding*). Qualitative and quantitative research has suggested that LGB individuals look to specific actions of others as "clues" to help determine how supportively individuals will react to their disclosure and to what extent they should disclose (Brooks & Edwards, 2009; King et al., 2015; McDermott, 2006; Ragins et al., 2007). Only one of these studies (King et al., 2015) examined within-person variation in disclosure, finding that specific signals of support for LGB individuals predicted fewer concealing behaviors.

The current study focuses on general supportiveness (not LGB-specific), defined as the perception that another individual provides one with instrumental assistance and emotional comfort (Mcguire, 2007; Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1991). In self-disclosure research, the quality of the relationship (including supportiveness) between two people is viewed as a crucial determinant of the amount of deep and personal information disclosed (e.g., Altman & Taylor,

2973; Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993; Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006; Jourard, 1964), and some initial research supports the idea that certain types of support (e.g., autonomy support, Ryan et al., in press) relate to sexual orientation disclosure. Similar to self-disclosure findings, it is expected that LGB employees will disclose to a great extent to coworkers seen as generally supportive,

In the previous paragraph, the supportiveness *of a specific coworker* was discussed as an antecedent to the extent of disclosure *to that specific coworker*. Supportive workplace relationships, however, do not occur in isolation of the broader context (Ragins, 2008), and key coworker relationships likely influence disclosure to all coworkers. The maximum perspective of supportive relationships (i.e., positive threshold perspective; Laursen & Mooney, 2008) takes the viewpoint that relationships are redundant resources, in which one very supportive relationship has protective properties against other negative relationships and additional positive relationships do not add any significant variation in outcomes (e.g., Kroenke et al., 2006; Varvel et al., 2007).

The relevance of the maximum model of support to the sexual orientation literature can be best seen in research on LGB allies (i.e., individuals who support and advocate for LGB individuals; Brooks & Edwards, 2009; Washington & Evans, 1991). It has been suggested that LGB employees look for signs that employees might be potential allies, whom they can count on to defend them against other employees who may be hostile toward them post-disclosure (Brooks & Edwards, 2009). It is hypothesized that the maximum value of support in an LGB employee's coworker group (i.e., the amount of support from the most supportive coworker) will predict disclosure to all coworkers across their group. Specifically, a high maximum value of support will result in a greater extent of disclosure to all coworkers.

Invisible identity disclosure models (e.g., Chaudoir & Fisher, 2011; Clair et al., 2005; Ragins, 2008) have suggested that broader organizational support can also influence disclosure decisions, by making the individual feel more protected and less fearful of negative consequences following disclosure. Organizational support in this study refers to organizational structures that signal institutional acceptance to LGB employees. The presence of supportive organizational policies (e.g., diversity training programs) has been related to workplace LGB disclosure in general (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001) and is expected to relate to the extent of disclosure at the individual level in this study.

Summary of Hypotheses

Taken together, I predict that perceived support from the potential recipient of disclosure (H1), from the most supportive coworker in one's coworker group (H2), and from the organization (H3) will each uniquely predict disclosure, controlling for the other two levels of support.

Relative Influence of Different Types of Support

Another aim of this study is to examine the relative influence of the contextual predictors of disclosure. Specifically, is having one very supportive coworker more important than the organization being supportive, or having a coworker group that is supportive, on average? Research on self-disclosure (e.g., Altman & Taylor, 1973) emphasizes the dyadic nature of disclosure events, suggesting that the most proximal effects (i.e., characteristics of interaction partners) will be most influential on disclosure decisions. This would suggest that group-level supportiveness (the average supportiveness or most supportive coworker) will be a stronger predictor of disclosure than organizational support. However, an unsupportive organization poses a substantial risk in terms of negative outcomes (e.g., discrimination; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001)

and a supportive organization can help protect against risks posed by others in the organization (e.g., through non-discrimination policies; Griffith & Hebl, 2002). It may be that the organization plays the larger role in promoting or deterring disclosure, compared to one's coworkers. I pose the relative influence of mean coworker supportiveness, the maximally supportive coworker, and the organization on extent of disclosure as a research question (RQ1).

Method

Participants

Due to the relatively small population of LGB individuals and the invisible nature of LGB identity, employed LGB participants were recruited via LGB advocacy, professional, and community organizations. These organizations create a certain sampling bias, but avoid the potentially harmful (Ragins et al., 2007) and ineffective strategy of sampling many organizations to identify LGB individuals within them and their disclosure decisions. Thirty-six local, regional, and national LGB organizations were chosen that a) focused on serving the LGB community and b) had a website that indicated a means for distributing the survey link, such as an email list or message board. Organizations serving LGB ethnic minority populations were purposefully oversampled (72.2% of organizations contacted), with the goal of having an ethnically-diverse sample. Of the 36 organizations contacted, 5 organizations (13.9 %) replied and agreed to send out the survey invitation to their members and/or post it on their website. With a web-based survey, however, it is possible that other organizations sent out the link to their members without responding that they would do so.

Of the 174 individuals who visited the survey website, 2 individuals (1.2 %) were disqualified for not being employed and 12 (6.9 %) did not fully complete the survey, resulting in a sample size of 160 participants responding to items concerning 406 coworkers. Thirty-five

of these participants only had one coworker, excluding them from multi-level analyses, leaving a sample of 125 participants (32.8 % Female; Age $M = 32.47$, $SD = 7.45$) responding to items concerning 371 coworkers (mean number of coworkers per participant = 2.97). The final sample was diverse in terms of U.S. location (28.80% Midwest, 32.00% Northeast, 18.40% South, 20.00% West) and industry of their organization (fields representing over 10% of the sample: Education, Finance, Health Care, Services-not restaurant or retail, Retail).

Procedure and Measures

Participants were asked to identify (with initials) up to five coworkers with whom they work the most often and most closely. Five was set as a limit in order to address survey length concerns and reduce attrition rates. Participants indicated the disclosure decision made in regard to each coworker listed, as well as other characteristics about each coworker (supportiveness, sex, and race/ethnicity). The survey ended with questions about organizational support and participant demographics. Participants received a \$10 gift card for survey completion.

Disclosure. Disclosure was measured using a one-item forced-choice measure asking the participant to choose one of four disclosure decisions ranging from completely disclosed to completely concealed (*explicitly out as LGB, implicitly out as LGB, avoiding the topic of LGB identity, actively hiding LGB identity/creating a false heterosexual identity*) that best described their LGB identity management decision with each specific coworker (adapted from Anderson et al., 2001). Each disclosure decision was explained to the participant in detail, providing a few examples for each. Decisions were coded in order of their extent of disclosure (*hiding = 1, avoiding = 2, implicitly out = 3, explicitly out = 4*).

Coworker support. Participants responded to four items (for *each* coworker) on a 1-to-4 scale (*not at all to very much*) adapted from Caplan and colleagues (1975), with two items

reflecting *instrumental support* (e.g., *how much does this coworker go out of his/her way to do things to make it easier at work for you?*) and two items reflecting *emotional support* (e.g., *how much is this coworker willing to listen to your personal problems?*). The mean of these items created a *coworker support scale* ($\alpha = .79$).

Coworker group variables. *Mean* and *maximum support* were calculated by taking the mean and maximum of the support scale for the coworkers connected to each participant. For example, if a participant gave three of his/her coworkers *support scale* values of 3.7, 4.2, and 2.4, that participant would have a *mean support* value of 3.43 and a *maximum support* value of 4.2.

Organizational support. Participants completed four checklist items concerning LGB-friendly policies offered by their organization (e.g., *my current workplace has a written nondiscrimination policy that includes sexual orientation*; adapted from Griffith and Hebl, 2002). *Organizational support* was calculated by the number of “yes” responses to those items.

Potential control variables. Participant sex, participant-coworker sex and race dissimilarity (0 = coworker is similar to participant, 1 = dissimilar), and participant tenure at their organization were all included in this study as potential control variables, given research linking these variables to increased self-disclosure (Brockner & Swap, 1976; Cozby, 1973; Dindia & Allen, 1992). Other demographic variables were asked for descriptive purposes (e.g., location, industry).

Results

LGB employees provided perceptions of several coworkers, known as a one-perceiver-many-targets (1PMT) design (Kashy & Hagiwara, 2011; Marcus, Kashy & Baldwin, 2009), in which coworker relationships are nested within LGB participants. Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of all tested variables at level 1 (i.e., coworker level)

and level 2 (i.e., LGB participant level). As expected, disclosure decisions correlated positively with coworker support and negatively with race dissimilarity, although these correlations do not account for clustering of data. Sex dissimilarity did not correlate significantly with disclosure and is not included in further analyses. The level 2 disclosure variable, representing average extent of disclosure across one's coworker group, positively related to mean and maximum support and organizational policies. Level 2 disclosure also significantly related to the two proposed level 2 control variables: participant sex and years at the organization.

Hypothesis Testing

The intraclass correlation for the dependent variable *individual disclosure* ($ICC1 = .47$) meets the suggested criteria of a greater than 10% explanation of variance in the dependent variable (Lee, 2000) and 85 (68%) participants reported making at least two distinct disclosure decisions within their coworker group (e.g., explicitly disclosed to two coworkers, avoided with one coworker), thus warranting the use of HLM in analyses. HLM via the SPSS MIXED procedure (Peugh & Enders, 2005) was used to account for the nesting of coworker relationships (L1) within LGB employees (L2). All analyses included control variables at L1 (race dissimilarity) and L2 (participant sex and time at organization). Control variables are included in tests of hypotheses, but are excluded from L1 and L2 equations presented in this section in the interest of parsimony and clarity. All variables were grand mean centered. Hypotheses 1 – 3 were tested using the following equation:

$$\text{Level 1: } \text{Disclosure}_{ij} = b_{0j} + b_{1j}\text{RecipientSupport} + r_{ij}$$

$$\text{Level 2: } b_{0j} = a_{00} + a_{01}\text{MaximumSupport} + a_{02}\text{OrganizationalSupport} + r_{0j}$$

where Disclosure_{ij} is disclosure for the i th coworker relationship for the j th LGB employee, b_{0j} is modeled by the average extent of disclosure at mean values of maximum and organizational

support, a_{00} , the slope of the maximum support value of the coworker group, a_{01} , the slope of perceived organizational support, a_{02} , and the level-2 error term, r_{0j} . The term b_{1j} represents the slope of recipient coworker support for i th coworker relationship for the j th LGB employee and r_{ij} is the individual-level error term. This as an intercepts-as-outcomes model, examining the main effects of the level-2 support variables (maximum, organizational) and a level-1 support variable (recipient) on individual-level disclosure.

Table 2 displays results for the unconditional means model (with no variables predicting individual disclosure), the controls model (with only control variables entered), and the full model including all hypothesized predictors (described above). Including all control variables improved model fit compared to the unconditional means model, $\chi^2 (3) = 61.68, p < .001$. Participants reported disclosing to lesser extent when they were dissimilar in race to the potential recipient and reported disclosing to a greater extent when they identified as female and when they had been at their organization for a longer time.

Including all predictor variables (recipient support, maximum support, organizational support) improved model fit compared to the controls model, $\chi^2 (3) = 87.41, p < .001$. Each type of support independently predicted extent of disclosure at the individual level, controlling for the other two types of support. Specifically, support from the potential recipient predicted disclosure controlling for maximum and organizational support ($b = .21, p = .002$); the maximum value of support predicted disclosure controlling for recipient and organizational support ($b = .51, p = .003$), and organizational support predicted disclosure controlling for recipient and maximum support ($b = .24, p < .001$). Hypotheses 1 – 3 were supported.

Relative Contribution Analyses

To examine the *relative* proportion of variance in disclosure explained by different types of support (Research Question 1), I conducted a relative weight analysis (RWA). RWA allows researchers to examine each predictor's proportional share of variance in the dependent variable. This technique corrects for collinearity issues by transforming the original, correlated predictors into orthogonal predictors. These orthogonal predictors are then rescaled back to the original predictors and it is the rescaled original predictors that are used to estimate the relative importance of each predictor (for full explanation see: Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2011; Tonidandel, LeBreton, & Johnson, 2009). Unfortunately, RWA currently cannot account for nested data and so it requires all predictors to be operating at the same level of analysis. Therefore, for both the dependent variable (disclosure) and the support variables I used aggregated data at the LGB participant level ($k = 125$) rather than the individual coworker level, in my RWA. I made this choice because analyzing the relationships among individual level variables without accounting for the nested structure of the data will yield a biased impression of the utility of these variables. Thus, for Research Question 1, I examined the relative weights of the following predictors on the average disclosure level within each LGB employee's coworker group: mean support of coworkers in network, maximum support of coworkers, and organizational support.

RWA was conducted using RWA Web, a free online tool that provides R syntax for conducting RWA (see Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2015 for a tutorial). Results from the RWA are depicted in Table 3. Average coworker group disclosure was regressed on mean coworker support, maximum coworker support, and organizational support for all LGB participants with more than one coworker ($N = 125$). The overall model accounted for 43% of the variance in disclosure (i.e., $R^2 = .43$), with organizational policies having the highest relative weight (RW) of .24, 95% CI [.16, .35]; followed by maximum support at .15, 95% CI [.06, .26]; and mean support

at .04, 95% CI[.01, .10]. Examining the confidence interval tests of significance, which compare the raw relative weight to a randomly generated variable in order to examine the significance of that relative weight (Tonidandel & LeBreton, 2015), showed that maximum and organizational support significantly predicted disclosure, but mean support did not predict disclosure. Further, comparison tests of significance revealed that maximum and organizational support had significantly larger relative weights than mean support (i.e., 95% CIs for the comparisons did not include zero). However, maximum and organizational support did not significantly differ from one another in their relative contributions to disclosure.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine support as it relates to variation in sexual orientation disclosure and explore the relative role of different types of support. Results suggest that it is common for LGB employees to make different disclosure decisions within the same work context and that the support of the potential recipient, the most supportive coworker, and the organization all uniquely predicted the extent of disclosure at the individual level. Further, the role of the most supportive coworker and the organization in predicting aggregated disclosure is stronger than that of the average supportiveness of one's coworkers. Findings broaden our past knowledge of the influence of support on disclosure decision-making, pointing to the significant role of several different types of support in predicting disclosure, including the particularly important role of a previously overlooked type of support (i.e., maximum support) and supportive organizational policies.

This research shows quantifiable evidence that LGB individuals make different disclosure decisions across their coworker relationships (e.g., directly disclosed to one coworker, avoided the subject with another coworker, hid their orientation from another coworker), making

it essential to understand the role of relationship effects in the disclosure decision-making process. Only one previous study (King et al., 2015) has accounted for within-person variation in disclosure (looking at disclosure decisions over time instead of disclosure decisions across a coworker group as done here), necessitating further examination of stigma disclosure from a multi-level perspective. Results from this study further our knowledge concerning within-person variation in disclosure by highlighting the independent effects of the recipient, key coworkers (i.e., most supportive), and the organization in predicting disclosure. To fully understand stigma disclosure (and LGB disclosure specifically), this research suggests that a broad examination of proximal and distal contextual characteristics is necessary.

Another contribution of this study to the stigma disclosure literature is the examination of the influence of the most supportive coworker. The most supportive coworker predicted disclosure controlling for the effects of individual coworker and organizational support. Further, the significant effect of maximum support on aggregated disclosure was significantly stronger than that of mean support, indicating that past conceptualizations of support from one's coworker group (e.g., perceptions of the group's mean supportiveness) may be missing key coworker relationships that are more strongly influencing disclosure decisions to others.

One could infer from the maximum support results that having at least one very supportive coworker is more important than having a group of coworkers who, on average, are supportive. Further, having one very supportive coworker could increase the extent of disclosure to less supportive coworkers, as the maximum support value predicted disclosure independent of individual coworker supportiveness. This finding is in line with a positive threshold effect view, in which the presence of one supportive person is viewed as a key driver of positive outcomes (e.g., Kroenke et al., 2006; Varvel et al., 2007). It also could point to the importance of having an

ally (Brooks & Edwards, 2009; Washington & Evans, 1991) in the disclosure process. This is the first stigma disclosure study that has quantitatively examined this type of support.

Another contribution of this study is the comparison of different types of support. This study is the first, to my knowledge, to examine the relative weight of different types of support. Findings supported the importance of both the broader context and specific relationships on disclosure. An exploratory RWA showed that the link between organizational support and disclosure is particularly strong, compared to the average support of one's coworker network. This supports Ragins's (2008) model emphasizing the importance of risk/benefit assessments in disclosure decisions. Specifically, disclosure costs are typically much higher if the organization does not have supportive policies in place, as the LGB employee might fear termination or doubt that the organization would help in cases of harassment or discrimination. Organizational support did not have a significantly stronger relative weight than the most supportive coworker, potentially contradicting this interpretation. However, the pattern of results for the RWA could still be explained using the costs/benefits framework. Having a very supportive coworker or supportive policies could be viewed as clear signals to the LGB individual that disclosure could result in low costs to the individual (and high benefits in terms of being able to be authentic), whereas a group of coworkers that is, on average, supportive might not translate to clear benefits if there is no one that seems like a true potential ally.

The relative predictive strength of different types of support is important to understand in order to further specify theories as to the disclosure decision-making process. Specifically, stigma disclosure research could focus on the role of other types of key individuals in the disclosure process, such as the coworker to whom one first discloses, coworkers who are particularly hostile to the LGB community, or coworkers with a high degree of status/power in

the organization or work group. Stigma disclosure research could also focus more on the role of the organization in stigma disclosure, expanding from policies and perceived organizational supportiveness to how those organizational policies get communicated to employees. Overall, the results of this study suggest that support from all sources and at all levels is important, but organizational support and a highly supportive maximum supportive coworker are the strongest safety nets for LGB employees contemplating disclosure.

Although sexual orientation disclosure may not be the most personally beneficial option for all employees with stigmatizing identities, research has supported negative effects of concealing sexual orientation for employees (Cole et al., 1996; Day & Schoenrade, 1997). It has been suggested that fear of negative outcomes following sexual orientation disclosure has a stronger effect on negative individual and job-related outcomes than actual disclosure decisions (Chaudoir & Quinn, 2010; Ragins et al., 2007). Thus, suggestions for improving workplace climates are not aimed at creating a work environment where every LGB employee discloses, but rather creating an environment where LGB employees feel free to disclose if they would like to do so and do not feel constrained by perceived organizational demands to conceal (Lyons et al., in press). Although there may be little organizations could or would do to foster supportive relationships between specific coworkers, promoting an atmosphere of collegiality, non-competitiveness, and trust could lead to LGB employees feeling more comfortable and able to disclose to others at work. As maximum support was a better predictor of disclosure than mean support, it may also be beneficial to have an LGB ally program within larger organizations, which would highlight the presence of highly supportive individuals within the organization.

The significant portion of variance in disclosure accounted for by supportive organizational policies has implications for policies at the societal level. Specifically, this finding

suggests a beneficial impact of macro-level support on LGB individuals' daily lives. If having an organization that protects against sexual orientation discrimination is a particularly important predictor of disclosure, than it is likely that the protective ordinances/legislation of cities, states, and nations (or lack thereof) will also explain a large amount of the variance in workplace disclosure. For example, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act in the United States, which would have prohibited employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity had it passed, could have affected the workplace disclosure decisions of many LGB individuals. Future studies should examine regional or national support as predictors of individual disclosure as well as organizational policies. Past research on the effects of community racial diversity climate on workplace outcomes for employees of color (Ragins, Gonzalez, Erhardt, & Singh, 2012) suggests that perceptions that a community accepts individuals from a particular social identity group will positively affect workplace outcomes for those individuals. Recognizing the important caveat that causality cannot be established from this data, the patterns of results suggests that lacking support at a regional or national level (e.g., sexual orientation is criminalized; LGB individuals are not protected from employment discrimination) will have an even stronger relationship to disclosure decision-making than organizational-, group-, and individual-level variables.

Potential Limitations

Although this study contributes to the disclosure literature as outlined above, there are several potential limitations to be addressed. First, although this sample was diverse in terms of age (from 20 to 70 years old), the sample was not as diverse in terms of race/ethnicity, with an over 70 percent White sample. Further, most non-White race/ethnicity groups were too small (e.g., $k < 10$) for meaningful comparisons. Also, only a small number of the organizations we

attempted to sample agreed to participate. It is impossible with a concealable population such as LGB individuals to know the exact representativeness of one's sample; however, there is the potential that these results cannot be generalized to certain LGB populations with low numbers in this sample, such as African Americans. Future research specifically targeting these groups (and potential intersections between racial/ethnic identity and sexual orientation identity) will be needed to understand the extent to which these results generalize across racial/ethnic groups. Another limitation of this sample is the size of the networks. Sixty-six participants only reported two coworkers in their group, which makes the maximum and mean support highly correlated. The relative weight analysis helped parse apart these effects on average disclosure; however, future research with larger networks will be able to test the replicability and generalizability of these results and will also enable researchers to look at more complex components of the coworker group (e.g., faultlines, distribution). Lastly, this study examined antecedents of sexual orientation disclosure, which is arguably the most frequently-studied type of concealable stigma disclosure. Thus, this area of research needs to examine relationships using other invisible identities (i.e., religious identity; past criminal record) in order to substantiate these relationships across other invisible stigmas.

Conclusion

Support has been discussed previously as an important coping source for stigmatized individuals (Miller & Kaiser, 2001) and based on this study's results, plays an important and multi-faceted role in the disclosure process as well. The primary goal of this study was to further the understanding of support as it relates to specific sexual orientation disclosure decisions at work and the relative influence of different types of support on disclosure. Overall, results indicate that sexual orientation disclosure is a multi-determinant decision-making process

involving the potential recipient of the information, the most supportive coworker in one's group, and the policies of the organization.

Author Bio: Dr. Jennifer L. Wessel (Ph.D., Michigan State University) is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of Maryland in College Park. Her research examines the experiences of and reactions to individuals with stigmatized identities in the workplace, with a focus on identity management strategies.

REFERENCES

- Altman, I., & Taylor, D. A. (1973). *Social penetration: The development of interpersonal relationships*. Oxford, England: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Brockner, J. & Swap, W. C. (1976). Effects of repeated exposure and attitudinal similarity on self-disclosure and interpersonal attraction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 33*, 531-540.
- Brooks, A. K. & Edwards, K. (2009). Allies in the workplace: Including LGBT in HRD. *Advances in Developing Human Resources, 11*, 136-149.
- Caplan, R. D., Cobb, S., French, J. R. P., Harrison, R. V., & Pinneau, S. R. (1975). *Job demands and worker health: Main effects and occupational differences* (HEW Publication No. NIOSH 75-160). Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Chaudoir, S. R., & Fisher, J. D. (2010). The disclosure processes model: Understanding disclosure decision making and postdisclosure outcomes among people living with a concealable stigmatized identity. *Psychological Bulletin, 136*, 236-256. doi: 10.1037/a0018193

- Chaudoir, S. R., & Quinn, D. M. (2010). Revealing concealable stigmatized identities: The impact of disclosure motivations and positive first-disclosure experiences on fear of disclosure and well-being. *Journal of Social Issues*, 66: 570-584. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-4560.2010.01663.x
- Clair, J. A., Beatty, J. E., & MacLean, T. L. (2005). Out of sight but not out of mind: Managing invisible social identities in the workplace. *Academy of Management Review*, 30, 78-95.
- Cole, S. W., Kemeny, M. E., Taylor, S. E., & Visscher, B. R. (1996). Elevated physical health risk among gay men who conceal their homosexual identity. *Health Psychology*, 15, 243-251.
- Cozby, P. C. (1973). Self-disclosure: A literature review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 79, 73-91.
- Croteau, J. M., Anderson, M. Z., & VanderWal, B. L. (2008). Models of workplace sexual identity disclosure and management: Reviewing and extending concepts. *Group & Organization Management Special Issue: Offering New Insights into GLBT Workplace Experiences*, 33, 532-565.
- Day, N. E., & Schoenrade, P. (1997). Staying in the closet versus coming out: Relationships between communication about sexual orientation and work attitudes. *Personnel Psychology*, 50, 147-163.
- Derlega, V. J., Metts, S., Petronio, S., & Margulis, S. T. (1993). *Self-disclosure*. Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Dindia, K., & Allen, M. (1992). Sex differences in self-disclosure: a meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112, 106-124.

- Ellis, A. L., & Riggle, E. D. B. (1996). The relation of job satisfaction and degree of openness about one's sexual orientation for lesbians and gay men. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 30, 75-85.
- Ferris, G. R., & Mitchell, T. R. (1987). The components of social influence and their importance for human resources research. In K. M. Rowland & G. R. Ferris (Eds.), *Research in personnel and human resources management* (Vol. 5), pp. 103–128. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Greene, K., Derlega, V. J., & Mathews, A. (2006). Self-disclosure in personal relationships. In A. L. Vangelisti & D. Perlman (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of personal relationships*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 409-427.
- Griffith, K. H., & Hebl, M. R. (2002). The disclosure dilemma for gay men and lesbians: 'Coming out' at work. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87, 1191–1199.
- Jourard, S. M. (1964). *The transparent self*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Kashy, D. A., & Hagiwara, N. (2011). Analyzing group data. In *Research methods for studying groups: A behind-the-scenes guide*, A. Hollingshead and S. Poole, (Eds.). Taylor & Francis/Routledge.
- King, E. B., Mohr, J. J., Peddie, C. I., Jones, K. P., & Kendra, M. (2014). Predictors of identity management an exploratory experience-sampling study of lesbian, gay, and bisexual workers. *Journal of Management*, Advance online publication. doi: 10.1177/0149206314539350.
- Kroenke, C. H., Kubzansky, L. D., Schernhammer, E. S., Holmes, M. D., Kawachi, I. (2006). Social networks, social support, and survival after breast cancer diagnosis. *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, 24, 1105-1111.

- Laursen, B., & Mooney, K. S. (2008). Relationship network quality: Adolescent adjustment and perceptions of relationships with parents and friends. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 78, 47-53.
- Lee, V. E. (2000). Using Hierarchical linear modeling to study social contexts: The case of school effects. *Educational Psychologist*, 35, 125-141.
- Lyons, B. J., Zatzick, C. D., Thompson, T., & Bushe, G. R. (in press). Stigma identity management in hybrid organizational cultures. *Journal of Social Issues*.
- Marcus, D. K., Kashy, D. A., & Baldwin, S. A. (2009). Studying psychotherapy using the one-with-many design: The therapeutic alliance as an exemplar. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56, 537-548.
- McDermott, E. (2006). Surviving in dangerous places: Lesbian identity performances in the workplace, social class and psychological health. *Feminism & Psychology*, 16, 193-211.
- McGuire, G. M. (2007). Intimate work: A typology of the social support that workers provide to their network members. *Work and Occupations*, 34, 125-147.
- Miller, C. T., & Kaiser, C. R. (2001). A theoretical perspective on coping with stigma. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57, 73-92.
- Peugh, J. L., & Enders, C. K. (2005). Using the SPSS mixed procedure to fit cross-sectional and longitudinal multilevel models. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 65, 717-741.
- Pierce, G. R., Sarason, I. G., & Sarason, B. R. (1991). General and relationship-based perceptions of social support: Are two constructs better than one? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61, 1028-1039.

- Ragins, B. R. (2008). Disclosure disconnects: Antecedents and consequences of disclosing invisible stigmas across life domains. *Academy of Management Review Special Topic: Forum on Stigma and Stigmatization*, 33, 194-215.
- Ragins, B. R., & Cornwell, J. M. (2001). Pink triangles: Antecedents and consequences of perceived workplace discrimination against gay and lesbian employees. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86, 1244-1261.
- Ragins, B. R., Gonzalez, J. A., Ehrhardt, K., & Singh, R. (2012). Crossing the threshold: The spillover of community racial diversity and diversity climate to the workplace. *Personnel Psychology*, 65, 755-787. doi: 10.1111/peps.12001
- Ragins, B. R., Singh, R., & Cornwell, J. M. (2007). Making the invisible visible: Fear and disclosure of sexual orientation at work. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92, 1103-1118.
- Ryan, W. S., Legate, N., Weinstein, N., & Rahman, Q. (in press). Autonomy support fosters lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity disclosure and wellness, especially for those with internalized homophobia. *Journal of Social Issues*.
- Tonidandel, S., & LeBreton, J. M. (2015). RWA Web: A free, comprehensive, web-based, and user-friendly tool for relative weight analyses. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 30, 207-216. doi: 10.1007/s10869-014-9351-z
- Tonidandel, S., & LeBreton, J. M. (2011). Relative importance analysis: A useful supplement to regression analysis. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 26, 1-9. doi: 10.1007/s10869-010-9204-3
- Tonidandel, S., LeBreton, J. M., & Johnson, J. W. (2009). Determining the statistical significance of relative weight. *Psychological Methods*, 14, 387-399.

- Varvel, S. J., He, Y., Shannon, J. K., Tager, D., Bledman, R. A., Chaichanasakul, A., Mendoza, M. M., & Mallinckrodt, B. (2007). Multidimensional, threshold effects of social support in firefighters: Is more support invariably better? *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 54, 458-465.
- Washington, J., & Evans, N. J. 1991. Becoming an ally. In N. J. Evans & V. A. Wall (Eds.) *Beyond tolerance: Gays, lesbians and bisexuals on campus* (pp. 195-204). Alexandria, VA: American College Personnel Association.

*Table 1*Means, Standard Deviations, and Inter-correlations of Level-1 ($N = 371$) and Level-2 ($k = 125$)

Variables

| Variable | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---------------------------|----------|-----------|--------|-------|--------|-------|-----|
| Level 1 Variables | | | | | | | |
| 1. Individual Disclosure | 3.18 | .92 | | | | | |
| 2. Recipient Support | 3.25 | .61 | .23** | (.79) | | | |
| 3. Sex Dissimilarity | .40 | .49 | -.07 | .08 | | | |
| 4. Race Dissimilarity | .43 | .50 | -.24** | .04 | -.13** | | |
| Level 2 Variables | | | | | | | |
| 1. Aggregated Disclosure | 3.06 | .75 | | | | | |
| 2. Mean Support | 3.27 | .37 | .29** | | | | |
| 3. Maximum Support | 3.62 | .34 | .50** | .62** | | | |
| 4. Organizational Support | 1.04 | 1.37 | .56** | .11 | .31** | | |
| 5. Participant Sex | .33 | .47 | -.21* | -.05 | -.15 | -.03 | |
| 6. Years at Organization | 3.62 | 3.13 | .20* | .05 | .20* | .27** | .02 |

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, Level 1 = individual coworker relationship level; Level 2 = LGB employee level; Sex/Race Dissimilarity (0 = similar, 1 = dissimilar) Aggregated Disclosure = aggregated value for each participant, Participant sex (0 = Female, 1 = Male/ not Female)

*Table 2*HLM for Hypotheses 1 – 3 ($N = 371$, $k = 125$), Predicting Individual Disclosure

| | Unconditional Means Model | Controls Model | Full Model |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Fixed Effects | Coefficient (s.e.) | Coefficient (s.e.) | Coefficient (s.e.) |
| Intercept | 3.09** (.07) | 3.43** (.11) | 3.40** (.09) |
| Controls | | | |
| L1RaceDissimilarity | | -.25** (.09) | -.20* (.08) |
| L2ParticipantSex | | -.32* (.13) | -.23* (.11) |
| L2YearsatOrganization | | .05* (.02) | .01 (.02) |
| Predictors | | | |
| L1RecipientSupport | | | .21** (.07) |
| L2MaximumSupport | | | .51** (.17) |
| L2OrganizationalSupport | | | .24** (.04) |
| Random Effects | | variance | variance |
| Intercept | .46 | .44 | .15 |
| Residual | .39 | .32 | .42 |
| Model Fit | | | |
| Deviance | 918.29 | 856.61** | 769.20** |
| Parameters | 3 | 6 | 9 |

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, Level 1 = individual coworker relationship level; Level 2 = LGB employee level; Sex/Race Dissimilarity (0 = similar, 1 = dissimilar) Aggregated disclosure = aggregated value for each participant, Participant sex (0 = Female, 1 = Male/ not Female)

*Table 3*Relative Contribution of Mean, Maximum, and Organizational Support on Aggregated Disclosure to Coworker Group ($k = 125$)

| Predictor Variables | Raw Relative Weight | 95% Confidence Interval | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| | | Lower bound | Upper bound |
| L2MeanSupport | .04 ^a | .01 | .10 |
| L2MaximumSupport | .15* ^b | .06 | .26 |
| L2OrganizationalSupport | .24* ^b | .16 | .35 |

Note. * indicates that the relative weight differs from zero at $p < .05$ level. Superscripts that differ in letter indicate that the relative weights differ from one another at $p < .05$ level.