

LGBT and SIOP: Critical Issues, Barriers, and Future Directions

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In April 2003, SIOP's Executive Committee established an ad hoc committee on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) research and membership issues. The purpose of this committee was to encourage research on LGBT issues and promote a LGBT voice within SIOP. In response to feedback from a LGBT panel at last year's SIOP conference, the Committee organized a symposium for this year's conference in which approximately 40 attendees were divided into four break-out groups. Each group addressed three primary topics: (1) critical LGBT issues in I/O research related to knowledge, theory, and practice; (2) barriers to conducting research (e.g., methodologies, samples, stigma of conducting GLBT research); and (3) strategies overcoming these barriers.

Critical Issues

In order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the current state of the field, symposium attendees first discussed critical LGBT research and practical issues. Several themes emerged across the various break-out groups. One core issue was the importance of conceptualizing sexuality as a continuum rather than a discrete variable. A subset of this theme was the importance of recognizing differences between lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual individuals. Another important theme involved the successful management of relationships between sexual minority members and heterosexual individuals, including issues such as disclosure of sexual orientation, climate for sexual orientation diversity, and attitudes toward same-sex domestic partner benefits. An additional critical issue identified was the need to understand the antecedents, manifestations, and consequences of discrimination against gay and lesbian individuals in the workplace. Underlying all of these themes was a general sense that LGBT issues are too often ignored in psychological research and in organizational diversity programs.

Barriers

After identifying these critical issues, symposium participants discussed barriers to conducting research and effective practice in this area. Most groups identified common challenges to conducting LGBT research, which included difficulties identifying LGBT participants, gaining representative or large samples, and obtaining research funds to study sexual orientation in the workplace. An additional point emphasized by symposium participants was the overall difficulty publishing research in this area, specifically given limitations relating to publishing outlets and reviewers who are familiar with the unique challenges of conducting research in this area. In addition to these challenges, symposium participants observed that there may be a stigma attached to doing LGBT-related research that can have negative professional repercussions. Participants agreed that these barriers must be overcome in order for our field to substantively address LGBT issues in the workplace.

Strategies to Overcoming Barriers

Symposium attendees spent a large portion of the session brainstorming approaches to overcoming the challenges to conducting and publishing LGBT research. For example, several specific ideas about methodologies were presented, such as using snowball methods to identify participants, replicating previous research with LGBT samples, aggregating findings across studies through meta-analytic techniques, adding sexual orientation as a demographic variable in more I/O research, partnering with advocacy groups for sample access, and using the Internet as a research tool. A key issue identified by participants is the importance of developing theoretical models of sexual orientation in the workplace. Participants agreed that commitment of top-tier editorial boards is central for supporting research on this under-studied population. At a broader level, participants discussed the need to educate the general public about LGBT issues, share research findings with advocacy groups, and reduce negative stereotypes and discrimination.

In summary, this was a highly charged, interactive session that facilitated the development of important new streams of research in this emerging and under-studied field of inquiry. There

was a sense among participants that these issues generally have not been adequately discussed by academicians or practitioners in I/O psychology. Thus, the identification of strategies that overcome potential barriers to conducting research in this sometimes controversial field is critical to fully understanding and fostering GLBT related issues and goals. This session provided a needed sense of community and support for established and new scholars in this area, and provided an outlet for instigating more attention to a research and practical topic that has generally been under-addressed in the SIOP community.

For more information, or to become involved in the work of the committee, please feel free to contact:

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