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Understanding the Work Experiences of Gender and Sexual Minorities: Advances, Issues, and New Directions in Research

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For many, the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots in June of 2019 signified a time to reflect on changes in social and scientific attitudes regarding sexual orientation and gender diversity that have occurred over the past 50 years. The Stonewall riots, among many uprisings of the time, are often credited as the primary catalyst of the gay liberation movement. While not the sole genesis of the gay liberation movement, the Stonewall riots represent the early beginnings of the fight for LGBTQ+ rights in the United States. During the 1950s and 1960s, gender and sexual minorities faced a largely anti-LGBTQ+ legal system, prejudice, and discrimination. The impact of LGBTQ+ movements are reflected in strides towards equality and the advancement of gender and sexual minorities.

Along with advances made by LGBTQ+ activism, psychological science has been used to influence a number of domains including the declassification of homosexuality as a mental disorder, laws and judicial rulings, and attitudes towards social issues such as same-sex marriage and parenting, and transgender rights. While psychological science has impacted progress on such issues, LGBTQ+ people in the United States still face a number of social, legal, and professional challenges. Specifically, there remains a need for research that examines the experiences of gender and sexual minorities across distinct aspects of their working lives. Issues of heterosexism, or anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes, prejudice, and discrimination, have received relatively little attention in the industrial and organizational psychology literature and necessitate further consideration.

The Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) has named “diversity, inclusion, and equity” as the second most critical issue facing organizations in their list of Top 10 Workplace Trends for the past two years (SIOP Administrative Office, 2018; 2019). This identification speaks to the need for research that examines the experiences of underrepresented groups in the modern organization (SIOP Administrative Office, 2018). Specific areas of inquiry include how biases affect interpersonal interactions, the need to be more inclusive, and issues surrounding the globalization of the workforce (SIOP Administrative Office, 2018). The aim of the present paper is to reflect on how psychology has influenced our understanding of gender and sexual minority experiences in the modern organization. The trajectories of LGBTQ+ activism, psychological research, and key legal rulings are reviewed as they relate to the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace. Existing gaps and issues in the literature are identified, with a focus on creating a roadmap for future research to further understand the experiences of gender and sexual minorities in the workplace.

Conceptualizing Gender and Sexual Minorities

Key Concepts and Distinctions

It is estimated that gender and sexual minorities comprise anywhere from 3 to 17% of the American workforce (Day & Greene, 2008; Ragins, 2004). In order to understand the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) individuals in the workplace, a proper conceptualization of sexual orientation, sexual identity, heterosexism, and the constellation of related constructs is necessary. Capturing the complex nature of these constructs has resulted in definitional disagreement and construct proliferation among many researchers. Among research examining sexual orientation, the majority of these studies utilize measures that emphasize comparisons between heterosexual and sexual minority individuals (Galupo, Davis, Gryniewicz, & Mitchell, 2014).

Early conceptualizations of sexual orientation used a simple bipolar perspective in which individuals were viewed as either heterosexual or homosexual based on whether they engaged in sexual relations with someone of the same biological sex (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). Critics of this simple dichotomous approach note that (a) individuals may engage in homosexual behaviors without self-identifying as a sexual minority, (b) individuals may self-identify as a sexual minority, but choose to be celibate, and (c) a simple dichotomy conceptualizes bisexuality as a midpoint on a single continuum between homosexuality and heterosexuality (Garnets & Kimmel, 1993). These simple conceptualizations disregard the complexities of bisexuality and sexual orientation broadly, and also exclude transgender individuals (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). When the sexual minority experience is largely defined and measured in relation to heterosexuality, variations and nuances within the experiences of sexual minorities are lost (Galupo et al., 2014).

With these limitations in mind, three distinction regarding sexual orientation emerged.

First, in direct contrast to the bipolar approach, sexual orientation was viewed upon two continuous scales of homosexuality and heterosexuality (Ragins & Wiethoff, 2005). Such an approach is able to more appropriately assess both bisexual (i.e., those with high scores on both the heterosexual and homosexual dimensions) and asexual individuals (i.e., those with low scores on both dimensions; Ragins & Wiethoff, 2005). Second, further distinctions were made between behavioral preferences (i.e., physical actions) and affectional preferences (i.e., feelings and emotions (Shively & DeCecco, 1977). Such a distinction captures instances in which an individual may be physically attracted to one sex, but emotionally attracted to another. Finally, sexual identity may be conceptualized as including four components parts: (a) biological sex, (b) gender identity (i.e., an individual's sense of being male or female), (c) social sex roles (i.e., culturally stereotyped

characteristics relating to masculinity and femininity), and (d) sexual orientation (Ragins & Wiethoff, 2005).

Ultimately, to fully capture the diversity of LGBTQ+ experiences, measurement should focus on patterns of responses across sexual orientation identity (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, fluid, queer, asexual) and a range of gender identities (e.g., cisgender, transgender, trans woman, trans man, genderqueer, gender nonconforming, gender fluid; Galupo et al., 2014). For the purposes of this paper, transgender is used as an umbrella term to describe individuals whose gender identity and expressions are generally not aligned with gender norms socially prescribed by their biological sex (Brewster, Velez, DeBlaere, & Moradi, 2012). Cisgender is currently preferred to other terms used to describe individuals who are not transgender (Brewster et al., 2014). While conceptualizations of sexual orientation and gender identity have progressed since their inception, and some agreement has been achieved, a number of definitional issues remain (for a full review, see Sell 1997; 2007).

Heterosexism, Homophobia, and Heteronormativity

Research supports the notion that our thoughts, feelings, and actions are influenced by social categorizations (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, race, or nationality), and that these social categorizations influence perceptions and interactions with others (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Though sexual orientation can be considered an “invisible” identity, following self-disclosure or perceived group status, these individuals may be subsequently relegated to an out-group or devalued status. It should be noted that LGBTQ+ employees may differ in the extent to which they engage in “passing” strategies, or attempts to censor or omit information that would reveal their sexual orientation (Brewster et al., 2012). Further, transgender individuals with greater “passing privilege” (as cisgender) may have different experiences compared to those with less passing privilege (Brewster et al., 2014). Despite these caveats, gender and sexual minorities tend to have markedly different work experiences compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts. Specifically, LGBTQ+ individuals are likely to encounter different work experiences, namely mistreatment or discrimination, as a result of heterosexism in the workplace.

While heterosexism is considered the most appropriate term to describe negative attitudes towards sexual minorities, other terms such as homophobia have been used to describe these attitudes as well. Weinberg (1972) originally coined the term homophobia to express the dread of being in close proximity of gay men. It is true that some heterosexuals feel personal discomfort and fear, at phobic levels, when associating with sexual minorities (Herek, 1984). However, conceptualizations of phobic reactions include an affective component of anger and anxiety that do not characterize all negative attitudes towards sexual minorities

(Berkman & Zinberg, 1997). As such, research suggests that prejudiced reactions to sexual minorities are best depicted as prejudices rather than phobias (Logan, 1996). The literature widely supports the use of heterosexism, as opposed to homophobia, to describe such prejudices and negative attitudes towards sexual minorities (Deitch, Butz, & Brief, 2004; Herek, 2009; Ragins & Wiethoff, 2005).

The term heterosexism reflects the belief that heterosexuality is the only legitimate sexual orientation, and that alternative gender and sexual identities should not be acknowledged (Simoni & Walters, 2001). Heterosexism can be defined as "an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community" (Herek, 1993, p. 89). Gender and sexual minorities may experience heterosexist oppression on a societal level, at the organizational level in the workplace, and at the individual level within interpersonal relationships (Szymanski & Heinrichs-Beck, 2014). Furthermore, LGBTQ+ individuals may internalize heterosexism in the form of negative attitudes and beliefs about themselves and other LGBTQ+ people (Szymanski & Heinrichs-Beck, 2014).

Heterosexism in the modern organization is a result of, and maintained by, heteronormative beliefs. The concept of heteronormativity centers heterosexuality and repeatedly asserts that the heterosexual life is the right life to live (Reingardé, 2010). Messages regarding heterosexuality as the norm are disseminated in a wide array of domains including politics, media, popular culture, and the arts (Reingardé, 2010). Heteronormativity, as a dominant force, suppresses the disclosure and performance of the minority sexual identity at work (Reingardé, 2010). As a result, sexual minorities may live a "double life" in which they spend a disproportionate amount of resources in developing and maintaining coping strategies to manage or suppress their identities (Reingardé, 2010). Both organizations and individuals may suffer from the time spent employing strategies to manage or suppress minority identities. Armed with an understanding of the terms and constructs central to understanding LGBTQ+ experiences, the proceeding section examines the historical trajectory of societal, psychological, and legal advances relating the LGBTQ+ individuals.

Societal, Psychological, and Legal Advances: A Historical Retrospective

LGBTQ+ Activism and Social Movements

The mutual contributions of LGBTQ+ activism, social movements, and psychological research in understanding the experiences of sexual minorities are inextricably linked. As with other psychological disciplines, industrial and organizational psychology must be examined within the overall social, cultural, and political contexts of the times (Furumoto, 1987). Exploring the history of a discipline such as psychology involves describing major discoveries and advances,

specifying key questions, and identifying changing attitudes as part of the national or international zeitgeist. It is crucial to reflect on the influences that have contributed to changing attitudes and the advancement of the LGBTQ+ community. It should be noted that the periodization of any political movement may be considered arbitrary and these dates should not be considered “fixed”. However, these delineations based on a review by Bernstein (2002) provide a helpful heuristic for understanding shifting sentiments and discourse as they relate to LGBTQ+ activism and social movements.

Early beginnings: The Homophile Movement (1945 – 1965). Historical accounts widely describe the years between 1940 and 1964 as the “Homophile Movement” (Bernstein, 2002). During this time, sexual minorities faced prejudicial state policies, a hostile political climate, prejudice, and discrimination. Despite these apparent challenges, public protests were not yet part of the gay and lesbian political movement (Bernstein, 2002). Compared to later political movements, Homophile activism was typified by an emphasis on assimilation and quiescence rather than direct action (Bernstein, 2002). With the intention of gaining tolerance for sexual minorities, a focus was placed on convincing psychological and religious bodies that homosexuality was neither a sickness nor a sin (Bernstein, 2002; D’Emilio, 1983). The primary method for such tactics were largely non-confrontational and focused on education for both heterosexuals and homosexuals (Bernstein, 2002). Demands for change at the state level were minimal leading up to the mid-1960s when such political challenges became more commonplace (Bernstein, 2002). Growing political unrest mounted as other social movements (i.e., the civil rights, anti-Vietnam War, and 1960s countercultural movements) became active in the mid to late 1960s (Bernstein, 2002).

The gay liberation movement— paths to visibility (1965 – 1977). As other political movements of the time gained traction, grassroots organizations increased rapidly and were emboldened to engage in daring tactics to gain visibility (Bernstein, 2002; D’Emilio, 1983). Such tactics were evidenced by the first public protests that took place in Washington, D.C. and Philadelphia in 1965 (Murray, 1996). The Stonewall riots of 1969, among many uprisings of the time, are largely credited as the catalyst of the gay liberation movement and mark the advent of the fight for gay rights in the United States. Gay and lesbian “liberationists” initially renounced fixed identity perspectives on homosexuality and sought alliances with other oppressed peoples (i.e., people of color, white women) that were largely rebuked (Bernstein, 2002). Along with this, lesbian and gay liberation groups disputed the homosexuality as sickness paradigm that was prevalent in the 1970s (Marcus, 1992). Mounting pressure, as well as contradictions evident in psychiatric and psychological research, led to the American Psychiatric Association’s (APA) landmark decision to remove homosexuality from its list of psychological disorders in 1973 (Bayer, 1987).

The landmark victory with the APA's decision helped solidify a politics based on a fixed lesbian and gay identity (Bernstein, 2002). Further, lesbian and gay activists advocated for the inclusion of "sexual orientation" in state protections from discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations, based on characteristics such as race, sex, national origin, and religion (Bernstein, 2002). Mounting visibility throughout the early 1970s paved the way for lesbians and gay men to become a nationally recognized political constituency (Bernstein, 2002). The election of Jimmy Carter in 1976 ushered in a period of unprecedented political access for lesbians and gay men (Bernstein, 2002). Ultimately, challenges to cultural norms and increased political visibility mobilized a constituency and increased the ability of sexual minorities to gain political power (Bernstein, 2002).

LGBT rights movement— from liberation to equal opportunity (1978 – 1986). The aforementioned successes of lesbian and gay activism, along with successes of the women's movements, brought opposition from a previously dormant Religious Right (Bernstein, 2002). Opposition movements centered the debate for lesbian and gay rights around myths such as gay men as pedophiles, disease spreaders, and as threats to the traditional, nuclear family (Herek, 1991; Herman 1994). With the debasement of the gay liberation movement, coupled with the emergence of the Religious Right, professional lesbian and gay organizations emerged with a focus on influence at the national level (Bernstein, 2002). Along with the emergence of professional organizations, specialized professional associations centered on race, class, and physical disability emerged (Bernstein, 2002).

The burgeoning Religious Right presented additional challenges to lesbian and gay organizations and ultimately helped elect Ronald Reagan in 1980 (Bernstein, 2002). The election of Ronald Reagan was accompanied by a conservative political climate that advanced homophobic rhetoric by Religious Right organizations (Bernstein, 2002). Despite decreased fear of state violence in the 1980s, the hostile rhetoric of the time was also associated with increases in violence against sexual minorities (Jenness & Grattet, 1996). In the early 1980s, the AIDS epidemic perennially changed the face and direction of LGBTQ+ politics. The gay and lesbian communities were largely devastated by the HIV/AIDS crisis. This crisis came at a time when lesbian and gay men lacked the national political access that had been previously secured (Bernstein, 2002). During this time, AIDS policies were the primary focus and overshadowed much of the policy work of lesbian and gay organizations (Bernstein, 2002). Along with this, a new psychological focus on the effects and stigma of AIDS emerged (Herek, 1990; Herek, 1999; Herek & Capitanio, 1993; Parker & Aggleton, 2003).

Culture, politics, and the meaning of identity (1987 – Present). As a severe setback to the lesbian and gay communities, *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1986) ruled that there was no constitutional right to privacy for homosexual sodomy

(Bernstein, 2002). This ruling along with the government's failure to effectively respond to the AIDS epidemic prompted a reexamination of the cultural and political meanings of sexual orientation (Bernstein, 2002). People of color and transgender individuals were largely excluded from previous lesbian and gay movements. In contrast to this, self-proclaimed "queer" activists sought to ally themselves with people of color, bisexual and transgender people, and other groups defying dominant cultural norms (Bernstein, 2002). Even less fervent national organizations turned their attention to challenging cultural meanings purported and established by lesbians and gay men (Bernstein, 2002).

A paradoxical challenge existed between calls to deconstruct categories of identity based on gender and sexual orientation, and the push to win political victories by reifying identity categories (Bernstein, 2002). While ostensibly at odds, methods to achieve both became central to the politics and discourse of sexual minorities. Activists sought a variety of goals including the repeal of sodomy laws, anti-discrimination and anti-hate crime legislation, the termination of anti-LGBTQ+ initiatives, an end to the ban for military personnel, and the right to marry (Bernstein, 2002). Over the years, divisions among LGBTQ+ activists have centered on the implications of sexually-based identities and debates of fixed or fluid identity conceptualizations (Bull & Gallagher, 1996). In addition to this, leaders often attempted to craft a non-inclusive image that tried to hide "butch" lesbians, feminine gay men, transgender people, and bisexuals from the public eye (Bull & Gallagher, 1996).

Western LGBTQ+ activism has placed an overwhelming emphasis on gaining access to the most conservative institutions, marriage and the military (Hutchinson, 2011). Such a preoccupation can ultimately divert attention away from securing protection and full equality in the workplace. The modern fight for LGBTQ+ rights has been marked by victories such as the expansion of hate crime laws, the repeal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy in the military, the legalization of same-sex marriage in all fifty states (Obergefell v. Hodges, 2015), and increased workplace protections for gender and sexual minorities (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2019). With these victories in mind, a number of challenges still face the LGBTQ+ community domestically and across the globe. What remains clear from examining the history of LGBTQ+ activism is that challenging dominant cultural patterns and attaining concrete policy reforms are inextricably linked. A full understanding of the modern fight for LGBTQ+ rights is achieved when acknowledging the reciprocal contribution of culture, politics, and social science.

Understanding the Contribution of Psychological Research

The past 50 years have witnessed a revolution in psychology's scientific approach and understanding of LGBTQ+ issues broadly, and in the workplace. A

number of scholars have presented distinct phases or waves of empirical work relating to research on LGBTQ+ individuals. Maher et al. (2009) present three stages of empirical research that represent transitions resulting from the mutual contributions of research and institutional policies. With few exceptions, organizational research focusing on sexual minorities did not appear until the 1970s (Elliot, 1993), and began to represent a substantial body of work in the 1980s and 1990s (Croteau, 1996). For the purpose of this review, the stages are designated as follows: (a) Early work (1800s – 1972)—homosexuality as a disease, (b) Second wave (1972 – 1990)—changing attitudes, and (c) The third wave (1990 – Present)—fostering inclusive workplaces. Akin to the periodization of political movements, the “ends” of a period do not constitute the discontinuation of the types of research that marked the period (see Maher et al. 2009 for an extensive review).

Early work (1800s – 1972)—homosexuality as a disease. This wave was characterized by a focus on the categorization of homosexuality as a disease, treatments for homosexuality, and research in opposition to the disease model (Maher et al., 2009). As previously mentioned, mounting pressure and growing evidence led to the American Psychiatric Association’s (APA) decision to remove homosexuality from its list of psychological disorders in 1973 (Bayer, 1987). This declassification represented a significant change and marked a shift away from a pathology paradigm. The open organizing of lesbian and gay communities, affirmative perspectives on LGBTQ+ people, and activist movements are largely responsible for changing these prevailing norms (Rothblum, 2000). These growing sentiments empowered the pioneering work of Evelyn Hooker, who conducted psychological studies on same-sex orientation with improved methodological rigor (Rothblum, 2000). This revolutionary research dispelled the idea of same-sex orientation as an illness and demonstrated that such attraction was not associated with deficiencies in mental health (Croteau et al., 2008).

Second wave (1972 – 1990)—changing attitudes. In light of the APA’s decision in 1973, the American Psychological Association followed suit in 1975 and charged the field of psychology with removing the stigma associated with homosexuality (Conger, 1975). The activism of the time provided the driving force for professional activism in psychology as well (Fassinger, 1991; Rothblum, 2000). The Committee on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Concerns and the Association of Lesbian and Gay Psychologists were formed in the American Psychological Association. These groups subsequently became APA Division 44 (Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues) in 1984 (Rothblum, 2000).

In terms of research, this period is characterized by research that shifted attention towards the individuals who hold negative attitudes toward sexual minorities (Maher et al., 2009). In particular, research focused on combatting homophobia, violence, and discrimination against sexual minorities (Maher et al.,

2009). Along with this, an increased emphasis was also placed on the perspective and experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals (Maher et al., 2009). Special concerns during this time included suicide among LGBTQ+ youth, and other political and social concerns (Maher et al., 2009). The first models of sexual identity development, or the process by which individuals develop a psychological sense of their sexual orientation, emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s (e.g., Cass, 1979, 1984; Coleman, 1978). Despite criticisms of these models as overly simplistic and exclusionary, they provided the theoretical foundation for LGBTQ+ affirmative psychology (Croteau et al., 2008; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Suicide among LGBTQ+ youth, in particular, added to growing concerns centering around political and social debates that ultimately led to the third wave of empirical research on sexual minorities. Specifically, these concerns lead to a call for action research aimed at changing institutions.

The third wave (1990 – present)—changing institutions and fostering inclusive workplaces. Beginning in the 1990s, scholarship during this period called for action research with a focus on changing institutions (e.g., schools, organizations, the military). The prevailing paradigm became one focused on affirmation and identifying anti-LGBTQ+ social and institutional prejudices and practices as the problem (Croteau et al., 2008). Early organizational research focused on employment discrimination and workplace climate, identity management, and career counselling for LGBTQ+ individuals (DeJordy, 2008; Ragins, 2008). Other areas of research, that have traditionally received less attention, include the influences of societal messages on occupational interests, choices, and perceptions and career interventions (Croteau et al., 2008). Recent research has begun to focus on countering heteronormativity and cisnormativity in the workplace, creating LGBTQ+ friendly workplaces and policies, and the career choices of LGBTQ+ individuals (Chuang, Church, & Ophir, 2011; Everly & Schwarz, 2015; Köllen, 2016; Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2012; Lewis & Ng, 2013; Ozturk & Rumens, 2014).

Contemporary perspectives within LGBTQ+ psychology are slowly becoming consistent with a psychological paradigm that is more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and contextual (Croteau et al., 2008). Early research in this area, as with other psychological research, has relied on samples comprised of predominantly White, middle class, educated males (Maher et al., 2009). It has become increasingly unacceptable for sexual minority research to rely on these unrepresentative convenience sample (Maher et al., 2009). Inclusive theories of sexual identity have increasingly considered the experiences of women, bisexual individuals, and transgender people (Lev, 2007; Potoczniak, 2007). In addition to this, researchers have begun to acknowledge the role of racial, ethnic, and cultural differences in the construction of sexual identity (Greene, 2000). In sum,

psychological research has coevolved alongside LGBTQ+ activism and greatly advanced our understanding of LGBTQ+ experiences in the workplace.

Litigation and Legal Advances

The experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, in the workplace and other life domains, are largely affected by enacted legislation. As it currently stands, only twenty-one states explicitly provide workplace protections on the basis of gender identity and twenty-two on the basis of sexual orientation (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2019). The legal situation in the United States is volatile, and faces constant challenges from within and outside the political and business spheres. Legislation is critical to protect LGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace and the absence of such protection is a crucial antecedent of discrimination. In fact, gay and lesbian employees in organizations covered by protective legislation reported significantly less workplace heterosexism compared to their unprotected counterparts (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001a). Barron and Hebl (2013) found that awareness of protection is heightened in communities with legal protection, and that job applicants presenting as gay, compared to those presenting as non-gay, experienced less discrimination in areas with protective legislation.

In order to understand the legal issues facing LGBTQ+ individuals, a review of existing laws and key legal cases is necessary. The Civil Rights Acts of 1964 deals with a variety of discrimination issues, while Title VII of this act is directed specifically at employment issues. According to Title VII, employers cannot discriminate based on color, national origin, race, religion, sex. Specific unlawful employment practices include: (1) organizations cannot refuse to hire, or fire anyone, on the basis of these protected classes, (2) organizations cannot classify employees so as to deprive anyone of employment opportunities based on these classes, and (3) advertising or training opportunities may not indicate preferences for any group. In order to help organizations to abide by Title VII, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was created.

While at its inception the Civil Rights Act may have only been applied to certain heteronormative cases, the Civil Rights Act has been upheld in court as defending citizens against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. While some disagreement exists as to whether these groups are considered a protected class to which Title VII would apply, *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins* (1989) set an early precedent for this protection by deciding that discrimination from failure to meet sex-related stereotypes is protected by the Civil Rights Acts. Under the Obama administration, the EEOC determined that discrimination based on sexual orientation is a form of sex discrimination and therefore prohibited under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. In *Baldwin v. Department of Transportation* (2015), the EEOC substantiated these claims. Similarly, *EEOC v. Scott Medical Health Center, P.C.* (2016) clarified that sexual orientation, which cannot be

considered without regards for a person's own sex, is a form of sex discrimination and is thus protected under Title VII.

In 2017, the U.S. Department of Justice concluded that Title VII does not prohibit sexual orientation discrimination (U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). Therefore, it currently remains legal to discriminate against employees on the basis of their gender identity or sexual orientation at the federal level (Miner & Costa, 2018). Two cases surrounding gender identity and sexual orientation have made their way to the Supreme Court and have the potential to affect millions of LGBTQ+ employees. The case of *R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes Inc. v. EEOC* seeks to rule on whether or not transgender people are protected by federal sex discrimination laws, while *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia* seeks to rule if these protections apply to sexual orientation. If the court decides that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act applies to LGBTQ+ employees across the nation, they would gain basic protections that other groups have access to. Currently, these appeals are pending adjudication before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Heterosexism in the Modern Organization

Discrimination and Prejudice in Organizations

A review of the extant literature paints a clear picture of the pervasiveness of workplace heterosexism. LGBTQ+ individuals tend to have markedly different work experiences compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts. These experiences include, but are not limited to, bullying (Hunt & Dick, 2008), discrimination (Badgett, Lau, Sears, & Ho, 2007; Lewis, 2009; Ozturk, 2011; Sears & Mallory, 2011), harassment (Das, 2009; Meyer, 2009), threats to dignity (Baker & Lucas, 2017), hurtful jokes or taunts (Baker, 2010; Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik, & Magley, 2008), unequal pay or benefits (Badgett et al., 2007), microaggressions (Galupo & Resnick, 2016), and ostracism (Embrick, Walther, & Wickens, 2007).

A survey study using a nationally representative sample found that 47% of sexual minorities experienced workplace discrimination during their careers, with 27% of those respondents reporting discrimination within 5 years of the survey (Sears & Mallory, 2011). Ethnographic research examining a large U.S. corporation revealed that 90% of respondents admitted they would not hire anyone they thought was gay, would not consider them the best or first choice for the position, and, if given the chance, would not rehire gay or lesbian employees already employed (Embrick et al., 2007).

LGBQ+ employees must weigh the choice to disclose their sexual orientation at work. As an "invisible identity", sexual orientation only becomes visible when these individuals communicate it via the "coming out" process (Ragins, 2004). As a result, LGBQ+ employees face an ongoing and often challenging process of negotiating their invisible identity in the workplace (Ragins,

2004). Individuals that choose to disclose their orientation, face discrimination on the job (Croteau, 1996; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001a), including termination of employment (Croteau, 1996), report lower continuance organizational commitment (Day & Schoenrade, 1997), earn less compensation (Ellis & Riggle, 1996; Schneider, 1987), and report less pay satisfaction (Ellis & Riggle, 1996).

While a growing body of research has expanded our understanding of LGBQ+ worker experiences, very few studies specifically examine the unique experiences of transgender employees. Given that a gender transition essentially discloses an individual's transgender identity, many of the same concerns and outcomes for LGBQ+ workers are heightened for transgender workers. As many as 90% of transgender and gender nonconforming respondents report experiencing harassment or mistreatment on the job or took action to avoid it (Grant et al., 2011).

In line with research on LGBQ+ employees, the supportiveness of the environment can have a great impact on outness and outcomes for transgender workers. In fact, 71% of transgender employees attempted to hide their gender transitions and 57% delayed their transitions to avoid workplace discrimination (Grant et al., 2011). Similar to findings for LGBQ+ workers, transgender workers that engage in identity management strategies that involve concealment experience lower job satisfaction, whereas transgender employees who engage in more explicit strategies experience greater job satisfaction (Brewster et al., 2012). It may be the case, however, that employees with more supportive environments are able to engage in more explicit strategies, thereby experiencing great job satisfaction. With these findings in mind, using employed individuals may result in samples of transgender individuals with greater passing privilege (as cisgender) or those who already work in supportive environments (Brewster et al., 2014). Nonetheless, specifically examining the unique experiences of transgender employees enhances our understanding of the impact of heterosexism in the workplace.

As previously noted, one reason for this continued discrimination is its legality. The United States lacks federal legislation prohibiting gender identity and sexual orientation discrimination and other protections are only available in 21 and 22 states respectively (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2019). At the organizational level, workplace discrimination is perpetuated by a lack of consistent formal policies as well as informal experiences of prejudice that affect wide array of material outcomes (Lewis, 2009). Clearly, the experiences of LGBTQ+ workers are manifestly different from the experiences of their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts. An acknowledgment of the influences at multiple levels of analysis (i.e., organizational, group, individual) allows for a fuller understanding of the mechanisms that maintain and advance heterosexism in the workplace. The proceeding sections examine such influences at multiple levels of analysis and presents a conceptual multilevel depiction of the forces that drive

heterosexism in the workplace and a summary of outcomes for targets (see figure 1).

Antecedents of Heterosexism

Organizational level. The policies and climate of an organization can play a key role in combatting heterosexism. Gender and sexual minorities have greater control of their environments outside of the workplace and may elect to spend their time in supportive contexts (Waldo, 1999). Exerting such control in the workplace may be difficult as there is less choice regarding who they interact with (Waldo, 1999). Organizational antecedents include policies that prohibit discrimination and other LGBTQ+ friendly practices (Button, 2001; Ragins & Cornwell 2001b). Sexual minority employees are less likely to report discrimination in organizations that (a) have written policies forbidding discrimination, (b) include sexual orientation discrimination in their definition of diversity, and (c) offer same-sex domestic partner benefits (Ragins & Cornwell 2001b). Supportive workplace climates, general social support, and positive transgender collective identity have all been linked to better job and mental health outcomes among transgender individuals (Brewster et al., 2014). The benefits of LGBTQ+ friendly practices are surprisingly most effective for informal, social practices. For example, one study found that invitations of same-sex partners to company social events had the strongest relationship with reduced reports of workplace discrimination for sexual minorities among factors considered in this study (Ragins & Cornwell 2001b). Moreover, recent research has demonstrated that heterosexuals also feel the negative effects of working in an anti-gay workplace context (Miner & Costa, 2018). In sum, organizations have a large role in combatting heterosexism in the workplace and can enact the positive benefits through a number of mechanisms.

Group antecedents. At the group level, the composition of the work team and supervisor characteristics affect work experiences. Social identity theory supports the notion that our thoughts, feelings, and actions are influenced by social categorizations (i.e., gender, age, ethnicity, race, or nationality), and that these social categorizations influence later perceptions and behavior (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Following self-disclosure or perceived group status as LGBTQ+, individuals may be subsequently relegated to an out-group or devalued status. Conceptually related, relational demography theory suggests that the more similar the individual is to the work group, the more positive will be the individual's work attitudes and behaviors (Riordan, 2001). Ragins et al. (2003) found that gay and lesbian employees with gay supervisors or primarily gay work groups reported less heterosexism and were also more likely to disclose their sexual identity. In further support of this theory, sexual minority employees were more likely to disclose their sexual identity when they had supervisors of the same race or ethnicity, regardless of the supervisor's sexual orientation (Ragins, Cornwell, &

Miller, 2003). Perhaps more important than the composition of the work group are the attitudes held by individuals within the group. Regardless of their identity, employees with supportive coworkers and supervisor report less fear of disclosure and were more likely to be out at work compared to those with unsupportive work groups (Brewster et al., 2014; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001b). Simply the presence of supportive coworkers, or “allies”, may allow for the full participation of LGBTQ+ employees at work.

Individual antecedents. The extant body of research suggests that while individual traits do not cause heterosexism, there is a general profile of individuals most likely to hold these attitudes (Ragins & Wiethoff, 2004). At the individual level, heterosexist attitudes are more prevalent among individuals who endorse traditional gender roles (Kite & Whitley, 1998), right-wing authoritarianism (Whitley & Lee, 2000), socially conservative philosophies (Heaven & Oxman, 1999), and conservative religious values (Hunter, 1991). A study by Franklin (2000) found that perpetrators of anti-gay behaviors were most often men with traditional attitudes toward masculinity. This is consistent with findings that suggest that heterosexual men are less tolerant compared to heterosexual women (Moss, 2001). In light of research suggesting that race and ethnicity influence the construction of sexual identity, some research suggests that both Asians (Lippincott, Wlazelek, & Schumacher, 2000) and African Americans (Herek & Capitano, 1999) hold more heterosexist attitudes compared to their White counterparts. Other correlates of heterosexist attitudes include (a) general sexist attitudes (Stevenson & Medler, 1995), (b) personal contact with sexual minorities (Horvath & Ryan, 2003), and (c) the belief that homosexuality is a choice rather than a biological orientation (King, 2001).

Consequences of Workplace Heterosexism

In the workplace, heterosexist attitudes manifest as a variety of negative behavior ranging from indirect forms such as avoidance to overt forms of discrimination (Bernat, Calhoun, Adams, & Zeichner, 2001). Accordingly, the experience of heterosexism is associated with a myriad of detrimental outcomes. First, the experience of heterosexism may affect career progression (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1996), job and career choices (Fassinger, 1996), and wage differences (Badgett, 2001; Black, Makar, Sanders, & Taylor, 2003; Clain & Leppel, 2001).

The experience of workplace heterosexism is negatively associated with psychological and physical health (Waldo, 1999), job satisfaction (Driscoll, Kelley, & Fassinger, 1996; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001a; Velez, Moradi, & Brewster, 2013; Waldo, 1999), satisfaction with opportunities for promotion (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001a), organizational commitment (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001a), career commitment, (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001a), and organization-based self-esteem (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001a). Moreover, these experiences are positively associated

with heightened job and work withdrawal (Waldo, 1999), psychological distress (Lewis, Derlega, Griffin, & Krowinski, 2003; Silverschanz et al., 2008; Smith & Ingram, 2004; Velez et al., 2013; Waldo, 1999), physical health impairments (Lick, Durso, & Johnson, 2013; Waldo, 1999), and turnover intentions (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001a). The multitude of detrimental outcomes makes clear the value of addressing heterosexist attitudes in the workplace. A critical examination of the mechanisms that drive these attitudes, at multiple levels of analysis, allows for a replete understanding of the experiences of sexual minorities in the workplace. What emerges from such an examination is guidance to identify issues, theoretical gaps, and new directions for research.

Inclusive Company Policies

With a clear understanding of the challenges facing LGBTQ+ individuals at work, it is also essential to acknowledge progress and the state of the modern organization. Recent years have been marked by innumerable changes in workplace equality for LGBTQ+ people in many parts of the world. These changes are largely indicative of a positive trend resulting in increased legal protections, improved workplace climate, and more opportunities for professional advancement for sexual minorities and transgender people. Business are increasingly adopting inclusive policies for LGBTQ+ employees and are being recognized for their commitment to equality.

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation's 2019 Corporate Equality Index (CEI) is a national benchmarking tool on corporate policies and practices relating to LGBTQ+ and transgender employees. The 2019 CEI reported that 571 major businesses, spanning nearly every industry and geography, earned a perfect score and the distinction of "Best Places to Work for LGBTQ Equality" (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2019). According to the CEI, the number of major businesses that earned this distinction has increased exponentially since the first report was released in 2002, from 13 to 571 businesses in 2019 (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2019). This finding is significant considering the increased stringency of the criteria to reflect changes in the sociopolitical landscape of LGBTQ+ equality. The increased visibility and advocacy of the transgender community, in particular, has made such a distinction increasingly rigorous.

At its inception, only 5% of the rated businesses offered gender identity non-discrimination protections in the workplace. Today, more than 97 percent of CEI-rated businesses have embraced both sexual orientation and gender identity employment protections for their employees (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2019). A major concern for transgender workers is the access to routine, chronic care, and transition-related medical coverage for transgender employees and dependents (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2019). Currently, 62 percent of Fortune 500 company and over 84 of the CEI-rated

businesses offer transgender-inclusive health care coverage (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2019). Despite these promising findings, nearly 50% of LGBTQ+ workers nationwide remain closeted on the job. Further, retaining LGBTQ+ workers is largely about improving everyday experiences on the job.

The “business case” for diversity may motivate organizations to develop and implement LGBTQ+ policies and benefits (Ng & Rumens, 2017). A study by the Williams Institute found that top Fortune 500 companies stated that LGBTQ+ inclusive diversity policies were good for their business. These benefits include increases in employee morale and productivity (Sears & Mallory, 2011). While the CEI reflects a positive trend towards workplace equality for LGBTQ+ workers, these findings should be interpreted with caution. Tayar (2017) indicates that many of these equality indices are fraught with problems and encourage superficial conformity rather than real change for LGBTQ+ workers. These rankings serve as a legitimization of one set of practices and do not give small organizations a clear path towards inclusion (Tayar, 2017). With that said, these indices do provide a useful benchmarking tool on corporate policies and practices relating to LGBTQ+ policies. Ultimately, these indices should reward substantive changes and center the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people (Tayar, 2017).

Challenges and Theoretical Gaps in the Psychology of Heterosexism

Despite comprising a relatively small portion of the research corpora, existing literature on LGBTQ+ workplace issues is both empirically and theoretically rich (Ng & Rumens, 2017). Despite this richness, a number of issues, challenges, and theoretical gaps abound in the literature. One key practical and methodological issue is the operationalization of sexual orientation. The two primary methods for measuring sexual orientation are behavioral reports and self-labeling, each with their own set limitations (Martin & Knox, 2000). Behavioral reports are limited by excluding individual who self-identify as a sexual minority but have not acted on their feelings due by choice or lack of opportunity, those in early stages of sexual identity development, and those who are celibate. Behavioral reports may also misclassify individuals who have engaged in same-sex acts but maintain a heterosexual identity. Self-labeling also presents challenges because people may fear that openly assuming an identity can make them targets of discrimination (Herek, 1991). This concern is especially salient considering aforementioned consequences of heterosexism in the workplace.

In addition to measurement concerns, sexual identity is often experienced as a fluid and changing state that varies by time, place, and person (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). Martin and Knox (2000) advocate for an approach that provides respondents with a host of options to describe their sexual identity. Specifically, Martin and Knox (2000) suggest that respondents should be allowed to indicate

same-gender attraction, sexual and affectional behaviors, and to report if they have sexual minority identities. Traditional measures of sexual orientation, often times, fail to represent the diverse experiences of sexual minorities. Of particular concern is research that groups all gender and sexual minority individuals together, and research that fails to take into account asexual and transgender individuals (Galupo et al., 2014).

Another issue relating to LGBTQ+ research is the lack of representative and diverse samples. The preponderance of research has centered the experiences of White, formally-educated, middle class, lesbian and gay individuals (Gabbay & Wahler, 2002; Szymanski & Gupta, 2009). As such, a key challenge in the study of sexual orientation in the workplace is obtaining representative samples of sexual minority respondents. Given concerns surrounding the disclosure of sexual identity, privacy and confidentiality concerns are critical to getting representative samples. While research regarding the specific experiences of transgender (e.g., Brewster et al., 2012, 2014) and bisexual (e.g., Green, Payne, & Green, 2011; Köllen, 2013) employees has begun to emerge, discussions of sexual orientation in the workplace often overlooks the unique experiences of these groups. There is also a scarcity of empirical investigations that examine the intersection of aging, sexual orientation, and gender identity, especially among racial minorities (Woody, 2014). Ultimately, further investigation of the similarities and differences in workplace experiences among gender and sexual minorities is warranted as it is reasonable to expect that the nature, form, and consequences of heterosexism may differ for these groups (Ragins & Wiethoff, 2004).

As heterosexist attitudes and discrimination manifest in more subtle ways (e.g., microaggressions), another important issue is the distinction between direct and indirect forms of workplace discrimination (Ragins, 2004). Direct forms of discrimination are overt (i.e., denial of a promotion due to sexual minority status), whereas indirect discrimination is experienced by observing heterosexist treatment or remarks from coworkers. Both forms of discrimination present problems to organizations and are associated with negative outcomes. The degree to which an employee is “out” in the workplace is important to consider in investigations of discrimination in the workplace. Direct forms of discrimination are driven by knowledge of the employee's sexual orientation. Considering an employee's self-disclosure can allow researchers to disentangle the issues related to indirect and direct forms of discrimination.

New Directions in Research on Heterosexism

Intersectionality as a Critical Lens

Feminist intersectional theory emphasizes the importance of examining relationships among social identities as intersecting categories of oppression and

inequality and is a useful framework for understanding heterosexism in the workplace (Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991). The term intersectionality references insights from critical theory indicating that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, ability, and age do not operate as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but rather as reciprocally constructing phenomena (Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1991). Research relating to sexual orientation (Anzaldúa, 1990; Trujillo, 1991), and more recently gender identity (Fütty, 2010; Galupo et al., 2014; Monro & Richardson, 2010), has incorporated intersectional approaches.

The utility of intersectionality lies in its attentiveness to overlapping systems of oppression, power relations, and social inequalities (Collins, 2015). When done correctly, intersectionality as an analytical strategy provides new angles of vision on social phenomena (Collins, 2015). Studying heterosexism within this framework allows an understanding of the way in which systems afford privilege to normative identities (heterosexual/cisgender) and render non-normative identities (sexual minorities/transgender individuals) invisible or abnormal (Galupo et al., 2014). Gender, race, and sexual orientation uniquely contribute cumulative and independent effects to the experience of heterosexism in the workplace (Ragins et al., 2003).

Future Research

In order to fully address and combat heterosexism in the modern organization, researchers must consider the ever-changing sociopolitical landscape of LGBTQ+ discourse and activism. In the United States, legal protections for gender and sexual minorities face constant challenges from within and outside the political and business spheres. With the dynamic nature of these issues in mind, a number of areas necessitate further research. Namely, more research using intersectionality as an analytical tool is warranted. Failing to do so prevents researchers from taking into account the effects of multiple group membership on workplace experiences.

Specifically, future research should provide further tests of the double- and triple-jeopardy hypotheses of workplace discrimination. According to these hypotheses, multiple group memberships make certain individuals the primary targets of discrimination and harassment. Given that most victims of sexual harassment are women, and most victims of ethnic harassment are ethnic minorities, examining the effects of sexual orientation makes these relationships increasingly complex. Past research supports the notion that gender, race, and sexual orientation may have cumulative or independent effects on experiences of heterosexism and other forms of workplace discrimination (Ragins et al., 2003). For example, past research has suggested that gay men of color are more frequent targets of workplace discrimination than other groups (Crow, Fok, & Hartman, 1998). However, one would expect these relationships to vary across contexts (e.g., male-dominated environments), location (e.g., states with legal protections), and

organizations (e.g., those with formal policies regarding discrimination). Similarly absent from the literature are empirical investigations that consider the intersection of aging, sexual orientation, and gender identity, especially among racial minorities (Woody, 2014).

Along with intersectional approaches, future research should explore emerging forms of harassment and discrimination. As policies preventing overt discrimination become more prevalent, heterosexism may take subtle and even subconscious forms. These subtle forms may manifest as microaggressions, which are subtle derogatory or negative messages in the workplace which are based on marginalized group membership (Galupo & Resnick, 2016). In addition to this, heterosexual coworkers may ostracize their sexual minority counterparts (Embrick, Walther, & Wickens, 2007). Such ostracism is associated with negative outcomes and may be characterized by increased social distance, more formal interactions, and avoidance of development of close work relationships (Embrick et al., 2007).

Maher et al. (2009) make it clear that rather than relegating LGBTQ+ issues to special issues, industrial and organizational psychology journals should consider integrating such research into all of their issues. Areas such as leadership, leader-member exchange, performance management and feedback seeking, and team dynamics, to name a few, provide ripe areas for future research. For example, given negative stereotypes about LGBTQ+ leaders, areas such as building trust in sexual minority leaders (Morton, 2017) and challenging traditional masculine views of leadership (Clarke & Arnold, 2017) warrant future exploration.

Research on sexual minorities should also consider the incorporation of multilevel theory and the Meso paradigm, a framework that accommodates research that incorporates both micro and macro variables (House, Rousseau, & Thomas-Hunt, 1995). A great deal of research relies on correlational concurrent data and does not allow for causal inferences about the nature of the proposed relationships. Organizations are inherently multilevel systems, but each level (e.g., individual, group, and organization) has been studied within different disciplines, theories, and approaches. This review briefly highlighted existing research at three levels of analysis. Examining the interplay of multiple levels of analysis is necessary to capture the full experiences of sexual minority employees in the workplace. As such, the existing influences on heterosexism in the workplace should be tested using multilevel, longitudinal field research that looks across organizations, as well as across individuals over time within organizations.

Conclusion

The aim of the present paper was to review the reciprocal contributions of LGBTQ+ activism and psychological science, while evaluating the modern state of heterosexism in the workplace. Despite the theoretical and empirical richness of

existing LGBTQ+ research, there remains a need for research that examines the work experiences of gender and sexual minorities. While past reviews have considered the historical trajectory of LGBTQ+ activism and psychological science independently, the progression of these respective areas inextricably linked. First, a contribution of the current paper is the historical consideration of these respective areas concurrently, rather than independently. Second, this paper sought to identify the influences of heterosexism at multiple levels of analysis by presenting an overall conceptual model of antecedents and outcomes. Finally, existing gaps in the literature were identified, with a focus on identifying issues and avenues for future research. Ultimately, understanding the historical trajectory of LGBTQ+ activism and psychology research allows for a clearer path to addressing the inequalities of today.

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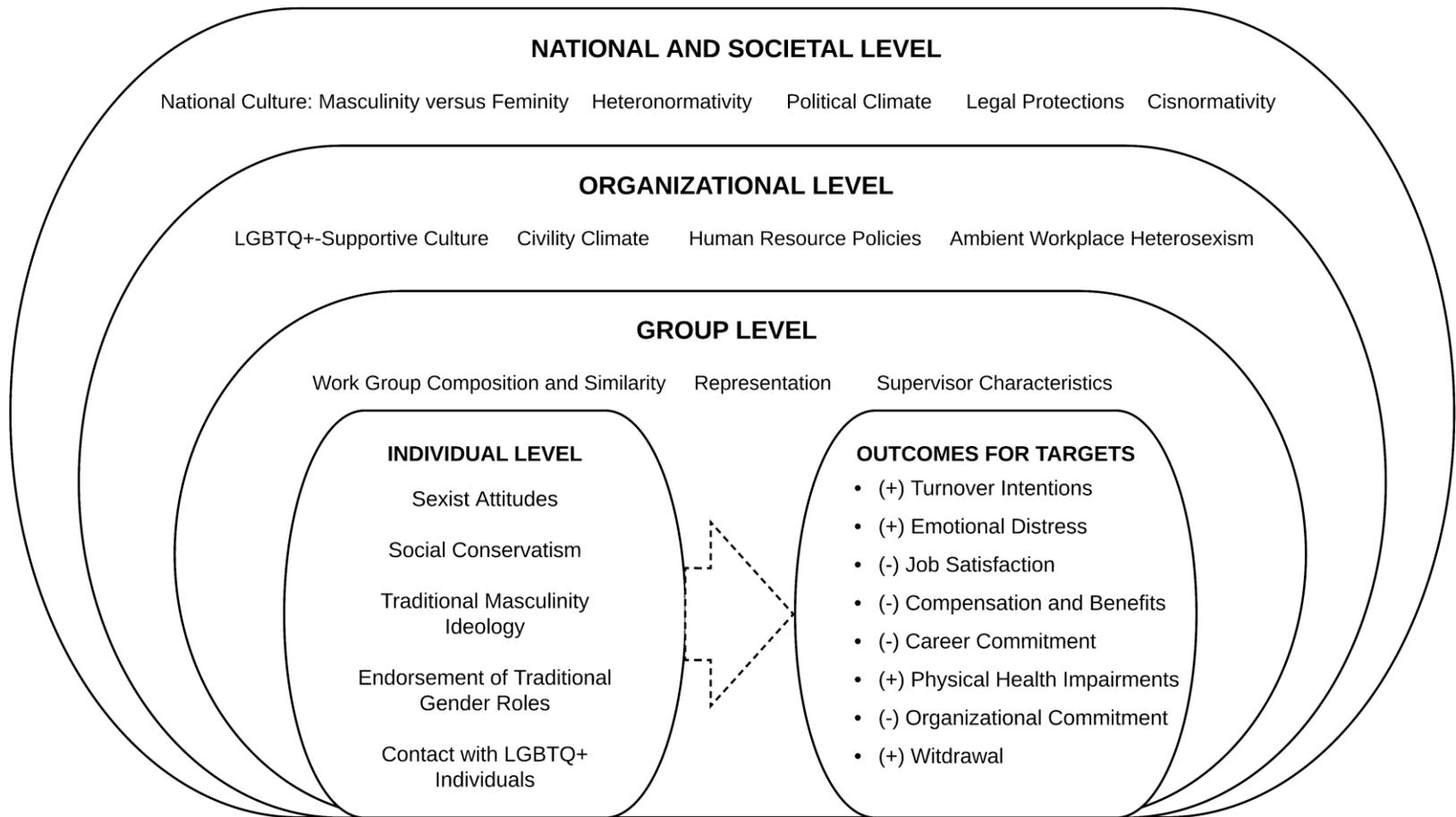


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Multilevel Influences on Heterosexism and Outcomes for Targets.