

Chapter 91

Sexual Identities in the Workplace:

Avoiding Organizational Trauma When Disclosure Occurs – Current Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The global progression of human rights advocating for marginalized communities, especially LGBTQ, has seen tremendous change over the past several decades, including the conditions for disclosure of sexual identity in the workplace. The decision-making process of disclosure and the necessity for others to know is key to understanding how best to support and address the potential organizational trauma that may result. Not all disclosure of minority identity is negative and the availability of positive policy development within organizations can assist in smooth transitions toward more equal inclusion and dispel previous heteronormative and heterosexist ideologies. Through increased knowledge about the LGBTQ community and case analysis, a cross cultural lens will be utilized from Brazil, Turkey and the U.S.; prominent sexual identity disclosure perspectives for numerous occupations, as well as recommendations for systemic awareness and change will be offered.

INTRODUCTION

The decision to disclose one's sexual identity can be difficult even under the most optimal of circumstances; in today's politically charged global environments within the broadest context of human rights it can run an entire continuum of challenges. When considered collectively through a cross-cultural lens, the dialogue between universal principles and cultural relativism, as applied to this disclosure decision-

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making process, should be viewed as interconnected across multiple psychological processes (Berry, Poortinga, Breugelmans, Chasiotis, & Sam, 2013). For the individual, a painstaking cost/benefit analysis utilizing the two disclosure process models (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Cleve, 2012) are critical for any person holding membership in a group identified with a concealable stigmatized identity and includes drug addiction, victims of rape, criminal histories, or sexual minority. Concealable stigmatized identity comprise identities that are not readily visible, but rather require that the person make a decision about whether or not they are shared with another individual in the context of a given situation. These, unfortunately, each contain unique socially negative identifiers.

For those maintaining membership with minority sexual identities, the influence of both internal and relational mediating factors through the decision making process allows one to consider reactions from a relatively broad reference point; individuals, families, colleagues, counselors, supervisors/managers, and specifically, human resource managers can successfully develop a better understanding of inclusive work practices with and within diverse communities. This process can also potentially support institutional and organizational goals for diversity inclusion and may provide a variety of benefits for administrators, managers, staff, and the overall organization (Cunningham & Green, 2007; Saxena, 2014; Stevens, Plaut, & Sanchez-Burks, 2008).

For members of the LGBTQ global community, the cost/benefit analysis includes contemplating a broad spectrum of possible outcomes ranging from acceptance, to tolerance, of being ostracized/ alienated or in the most severe cases, death. The additional requirement of a multilayered analysis (personal, professional, systemic, and organizational) necessitates evaluating the continuum from personal impact to an organizational one, and the layers of this process can become extremely complex. "For sexual minorities, sexual identity disclosure has an impact on workplace commitment and the quality of relationships with coworkers. Gay and bisexual men must weigh the benefits of disclosure with the potential risks for career development" (Mock, Sedlovskaya, & Purdie-Vaughns, 2009, p. 124).

One may question "why is it even necessary to share" such personal information in a work environment. To best understand the 'why' the authors offer definitions and discuss the constructs of heterosexism, homophobia and human rights across several cultural contexts to assist in providing an important discourse on how inherent structures of oppression can create tensions within any system, particularly functional organizations. As the dissonant forces that create these tensions are explored, a plan for navigating or circumventing them can more effectively be established.

The focus of cross-cultural perspectives is essential to the discourse outlined in this chapter and comes from three diverse nations offered from the context of each of the participating authors. One author in the United States, one in Turkey and the third in Brazil, will guide the variety of national perspectives and current ideologies. Each is a university academic with a strong interest in the topics of social justice and advocacy, transformative psychology for stigmatized and marginalized communities; and they have contributed to research work focused on LGBT disclosure decisions for sexual identity.

Research conducted within diverse cultural contexts demonstrates that various types of explicit and non-explicit violence (e.g. homophobia, transphobia, harassment, discrimination, bullying, and stigmatization) towards LGBT individuals in the workplace may potentially generate long lasting traumatic consequences (Ferreira, 2007; Pizer, Sears, Mallory, & Hunter, 2012; Prunas et al., 2016; Siqueira, Saraiva, Carrieri, Lima, & Andrade, 2009; Willis, 2012). Such traumatic consequences include the potential development of psychiatric disorders (e.g. depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress), psychological distress, negatively impacting self-esteem, increasing feelings of anger and even suicidal ideation. The additional stress of fundamental religious doctrine that may call for the extinction of fam-

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