THE EFFECT OF LGBT—INCLUSIVE POLICIES ON ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRACTION

E. Nicole Melton
George B. Cunningham

Today both academia and sport organizations devote considerable attention to human resource management programs that address diversity-related issues. The impetus for this interest derives from the belief that diversity can positively impact organizational outcomes (Cunningham, 2009) and creates a sustainable competitive advantage over rivals (Cox & Blake, 1991). Consequently, a greater number of diversity management programs are now provided in hopes of realizing the potential benefits diverse employees can engender for an organization (for an overview of these benefits, see Cunningham, 2011). Indeed, organizations are discovering that diversity initiatives foster inclusive work atmospheres (Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999), stimulate creativity (McLeod, Lobel, & Cox, 1996), enhance decision-making capabilities (Phillips, Northcage, & Neale, 2006), reduce legal issues (Robinson & Dechant, 1997), and improve organizational results (Cunningham & Sagas, 2008). Additionally, Turban and Greening’s (1997) findings suggest organizations enhance their public image by offering programs that benefit minorities. This is also true within a sport context; intercollegiate athletic departments with proactive diversity management programs are viewed more positively than are their counterparts, thus creating a larger pool of highly skilled and diverse applicants (Fink, Pastore, & Reimer, 2001).

Attracting and retaining these talented employees is essential to achieving economic success in an increasingly competitive marketplace (Newman & Lyon, 2009), and sport organizations should remain cognizant of how their image is perceived by others. The organizational image sends signals to outsiders concerning the current employees and management techniques, thus allowing applicants to envision their potential work experiences in the company (Williams & Bauer, 1994). Recent recruitment research has specifically examined how programs designed for women and racial minorities positively affect applicants’ initial attraction to a firm (Casper & Harris, 2008; Cox & Blake, 1991; Martins & Parsons, 2007; Williams & Bauer, 1994), which in turn increases job pursuit intentions (Rynes, 1991). These findings complement Turban and
Greening’s (1997) earlier work, and show that during the initial phase of recruitment, the perceived image is enhanced when diversity programs were available.

To date, this research has exclusively investigated strategies related to women and racial minorities, and ignored policies benefiting lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) Americans in the workforce. Despite this omission, research in this area is warranted on several fronts. First, there are significant numbers of LGBT employees nationwide, as research estimates that the LGBT community accounts for 4 to 17 percent of the United States population (Lubensky, Holland, Wiethoff, & Crosby, 2004). This percentage is comparable to estimates for African American (12%) and Hispanic (15%) populations (Day & Greene, 2008), thereby illustrating the prevalence of LGBT persons in the workforce. Second, though 85% of Fortune 500 companies offer some form of LGBT inclusive policy (e.g., posting nondiscrimination statements on company websites, or offering domestic partner benefits; see Luther, 2009), researchers have not explored how such policies affect job applicants or consumers. This is an interesting omission considering the prejudice held by many in the U.S. toward LGBT individuals (Herek, 2009). For instance, national surveys show that a majority of adults consider homosexuality as “always wrong” (see Herek, 2009), and sexual minorities are routinely rated less positively than any other minority group (Gill, Morrow, Collins, Lucey, & Schultz, 2006; Herek, 2009). Furthermore, sexual prejudice is, by many accounts, considered the last socially acceptable form of prejudice, and is rarely criticized or condemned (Herek, 2007). Finally, recent empirical work shows how athletic departments with high sexual orientation diversity and a commitment to diversity are able to significantly outperform their peers (Cunningham, in 2011b), and foster more creative work environments (Cunningham, 2011a).

Collectively, these factors suggest that additional research is needed to understand how these policies are perceived by external constituents, including potential job applicants.

As such, the purpose of this study was to examine the influence of LGBT-inclusive policies on people’s perceptions of that organization. Specifically, we drew from signaling theory (Rynes, 1991; Spence, 1974) and social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) to examine how signals regarding LGBT inclusiveness affected perceptions of organizational attractiveness. We predicted that, as with other diversity initiatives, LGBT-inclusive policies would enhance organizational attractiveness. The effects of LGBT inclusive policies were expected to be moderated by the type of organization (sport or non-sport) and the applicant’s social dominance orientation (SDO), with applicants’ high in SDO being attracted to non-inclusive organizations. In the following sections, we provide an overview of the theoretical framework and present specific hypothesis.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Signaling Theory

Signaling theory (Rynes, 1991; Spence, 1974) provides an explanatory framework as to why diversity management policies may affect potential applicants' perceptions of an organization. The theory postulates that when individuals lack adequate knowledge required for making important decisions, they will draw conclusions based on cues from the material that is available. Because little is known about prospective employers during the initial phase of recruitment, signaling theory suggests that any information applicants can obtain will influence their image of an organization (Rynes, 1991). Indeed, Dineen, Ash, and Noe (2002) found that images and messages presented on company websites are an effective way to attract potential job applicants. Specifically, the content found on these websites served as personally relevant environmental cues, and helped the potential applicants determine their perceived level of fit with the organizational culture. Findings from the study showed that when perceived fit was high; applicants were more attracted to the organization. In many instances, signals that provide job seekers with insight into the work environment may be relatively unrelated to specific job requirements or the organization’s purpose (Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991).

In the context of LGBT-inclusive policies, signaling theory contends inclusive policies send signals to potential applicants regarding the organizational climate for diversity (Pugh, Dietz, Brief, & Wiley, 2008). A job seeker who has never visited a company may interpret the LGBT-inclusive policies appearing on a company's website to signify an organization is accepting of all people. Thus, in addition to the explicit information that applicants collect regarding organizations, implicit information is also used to deduce unknown firm characteristics that impact the decision-making process (Rynes, 1991). For instance, Williams and Bauer (1994) observed that applicants assume everyone in the organization values equality if diversity is depicted in brochure images and policies. Additionally, job seekers tend to believe a recruiter is representative of all employees in the organization (Turban, Forret, & Hendrickson, 1998). Research also suggests that what diversity programs symbolize is equally attractive to non-minority applicants (Casper & Harris, 2008). In one illustrative study, Glover and Crooker (1995) found that employees who did not directly benefit from such programs still showed greater commitment and lower turnover rates because these programs signaled the organization's concern for the well being of all employees.

While there is considerable evidence of the positive effects of socially-conscious policies, there are some cases where this is not the case. For instance, Whites have been found to react negatively to affirmative action policies used in recruitment material because of their contention that these organizations do not value meritocracy principles (Avery, 2003; Walker, Field, Giles, Bernerth, &...
Jones-Farmer, 2007). Additionally, Martins and Parsons (2007) observed that, compared to women, men were less attracted to companies that promoted gender equity programs during recruitment. Similarly, many ultra-conservative groups have boycotted organizations that offer domestic partnerships due to the belief that such actions signal an organization’s lack of family-values (Davidson & Rouse, 2004). Concepts in social dominance theory may provide an explanation as to why prospective employees are attracted to organizations with LGBT inclusive policies and when they are not.

**Social Dominance Theory**

According to Sidanius and Pratto (1999), social dominance theory is an integrated framework used to understand and describe discrimination and oppression that exists in human societies. The theory argues that group-based social hierarchies characterize every modern culture, such that dominant groups will hold a disproportionate share of power, prestige, and privilege over subordinate groups. Within social dominance theory emerges a psychological element known as social dominance orientation (SDO), which is defined as, “the degree to which individuals desire and support group-based hierarchy and the domination of ‘inferior’ groups by ‘superior’ group” (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p.48). Evidence suggests that the level of SDO is indicative of whether individuals will support or abate social inequalities (Danso, Sedlovskaya, & Suanda, 2007; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Specifically, higher SDO is associated with prejudicial attitudes toward minorities, anti-lesbian and gay views, and the resentment of affirmative action policy (Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996; Whitley & Egisdottir, 2001), as well as negative feelings toward women (Bates & Heaven, 2001). Alternatively, researchers have reported that those with lower SDO generally favor gender equality, LGBT rights, and other socially-minded programs (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Whitley & Lee, 2000), which includes inclusive employment policies (Federico & Sidanius, 2002). Collectively, these findings suggest opposition to inclusive diversity policies reflect high-status groups’ (e.g., Whites, males, and hetero-sexuals) desire to maintain their dominant position over low-status groups (Black, Hispanics, women, and LGBT persons).

**Current Study**

The focus in the current study was to assess applicants’ initial attraction to organizations that utilize LGBT-inclusive policies within a sport and non-sport context. The decision to concentrate specifically on LGBT-inclusive policy in two different contexts (sport and non-sport) was driven by several factors. First, even though they are not legally mandated to do so, 85% of Fortune 500 companies offer LGBT-inclusive policies (Luther, 2009). However, few sport organizations have elected to follow corporate America’s example.
(Human Rights Campaign, 2009). This occurrence has potential implications for the study at hand, as the attractiveness of inclusive policies may only be significant in non-sport settings. This reasoning is consistent with Sartore and Cunningham’s (2009) contention that sport is a context marked by heterosexism. Secondly, researchers in sport (e.g., Bruening & Dixon 2008; Cunningham, 2009; Fink et al., 2001) have generally only studied sport organizations. By comparing the reactions to sport and non-sport organizations, this study extends past research by exploring the potentially unique aspects of the sport industry (see Chalip, 2006).

The present study examined applicant attraction based on the presence or absence of LGBT diversity programs within an organization by using Corporate Equity Index scores to signal a firm’s level of inclusiveness. According the Human Rights Campaign website (www.hrc.org), the Corporate Equality Index (CEI) rating is based on an organization’s treatment of LGBT employees, consumers, and investors. Based on the Human Rights Campaign website, a company receives a score from 0 to 100 based on equity policy criteria. The flexible criteria can include, but are not limited to: a written policy of nondiscrimination based on sexual identity, inclusion of sexual orientation in diversity training, domestic partner benefits, and rejection of any activities that would limit equal rights for LGBT people. Using the CEI is consistent with previous research that used this rating to signal that an organization supported LGBT rights (Tuten, 2005).

As previously articulated, signaling theory is appropriate for examining organizational attractiveness based on diversity inclusion policies. Recruitment literature suggests diversity programs can produce a positive organizational image by signaling an organizations’ overall value for equality (Williams & Bauer, 1994) which in turn makes the firm more attractive to both minority and non-minority applicants (Rynes, 1991). This knowledge is important for organizations seeking to gain a competitive advantage by hiring the most talented employees (Truban & Greening, 1997). Based on the literature related to signaling theory and organizational attractiveness, we hypothesized that organizations with LGBT-inclusive policies, as evidenced by high CEI ratings, would be considered more attractive to applicants than organizations without such policies (Hypothesis 1).

Of course, other factors might also influence the link between LGBT-inclusive policies and attraction to the organization. We examined two in the current study: the type of organization and the SDO of the applicant. With respect to the type of organization, the influence of context provides norms and expectations for applicants, which dictates if LGBT-inclusive policies signal attractive characteristics. While heterosexism is prevalent throughout corporate America, there is evidence that it is particularly salient within the sport context (Sartore & Cunningham, 2009). In the sport industry, the absence of LGBT in-
clusive polices possibly stems from negative attitudes toward LGBT persons, which have been observed among future sport and fitness professionals (Gill, et al., 2006). In addition, qualified LGBT applicants have received lower ratings than their heterosexual counterparts when applying for jobs in the fitness industry (Cunningham, Sartore, & McCullough, 2010). These negative reactions and attitudes may contribute to why LGBT issues are ignored and heterosexual dominance is sustained in sports’ non-inclusive institutional norms and practices (Sartore & Cunningham, 2009), particularly in organizations that fear backlash from their key stockholders (Day & Greene, 2008). These patterns of non-acceptance may be associated with the notion that sport organization employees (or key stakeholders) are typically White, Protestant, able-bodied, heterosexual males (Fink & Pastore, 1999; Fink et al., 2001).

Due to limited research on LGBT diversity initiatives, examining the impact affirmative action policies have on organizational attraction may help in understanding the potential effect of LGBT-inclusive polices. Walker (2007) and his colleagues observed that job applicants, specifically White males, were less attracted to organizations that used affirmative action policies in recruitment material. When considering the sport industry’s appeals to White, Protestant, able-bodied, heterosexual males (Fink & Pastore, 1999; Fink et al., 2001), it is reasonable to believe these individuals will not be attracted to LGBT-inclusive sport organization. Given this evidence, we hypothesized that one’s attraction to an organization with inclusive policies would be moderated by the type of organization, with applicants being less attracted to sport organizations with LGBT-inclusive policies than they are to non-sport organizations with similar policies (Hypothesis 2).

Attraction to an inclusive organization can also be influenced by the SDO of the applicant. Sidanius and Pratto (1999) suggest that high-status (high SDO) group members justify ideologies and political beliefs that reinforce group-based hierarchies because of their belief that dominant and subordinate groups’ positions are legitimate. Whitley and Lee (2000) observed that person with high SDO exhibited negative attitudes toward LGBT persons because they are perceived to have a lower-status than heterosexuals. This is consistent with Davidson and Rouse’s (2004) observation that heterosexuals may view equality for low-status groups (e.g., LGBT people) as threatening to traditional family morals, values, and beliefs, and be unsupportive of such policies. Consequently, we hypothesized that level of SDO moderates an applicant’s attraction to LGBT-inclusive organizations, such that high SDO applicants are less attracted to these organizations and low SDO applicants are more attracted (Hypothesis 3).
METHOD

Participants

Participants were 120 undergraduate students enrolled at two different universities (n = 68 and n = 52, respectively) in the United States. The first university is located in the Southwest in an area with conservative inclinations, whereas the other university is located in Washington, D.C., an area with more liberal-minded policies. The sample consisted of 64 men (53.3%) and 56 women (47.7%); 67 Whites (55.8%), 24 African Americans (20.0%), 16 Hispanics (13.3%), 11 Asians (9.2%), and 1 person listed "other" (0.8%; 1 person did not provide the information); 103 heterosexuals (85.8%) and 17 sexual minorities (14.2%). The mean age was 20.38 years (SD = 1.62).

Procedure

Study packets were randomly distributed to students at the end of the class period. The directions read, "Suppose you are searching for employment and are interested in a managerial position at this organization's corporate office. An article concerning the organization's policies was recently published in the local newspaper and is provided below. Please review the press release and respond to the items on the following pages. When answering the questionnaire, please be sure to answer the questions based on your feelings towards the press release. Try to not let your outside opinions regarding the organization influence your answers.

Make each item a separate and independent judgment." Participants then reviewed one of four conditions, which varied by the type of organization (sport: Gold's Gym or non-sport: Exxon Mobil), and the organization's level of LGBT inclusiveness (inclusive or non-inclusive). We chose to use Gold's Gym (for the sport organization) and Exxon Mobil (for the non-sport organization), because they are both well-known, international corporations. By using actual names of organizations, participants experienced a more realistic job searching situation and it enhanced the external validity of the study.

The description of the LGBT-inclusive company read: "The Washington, D.C.-based Human Rights Campaign this week issued its Corporate Equality Index, which scored 305 companies out of 590 with a perfect 100. One organization with a perfect score of 100 was (Gold's Gym/Exxon Mobil). Companies that received all possible points had non-discrimination policies, conducted diversity training and offered benefits to non-married partners, among other criteria." On the other hand, the description of the company with non-inclusive practices read: "The Washington, D.C.-based Human Rights Campaign this week issued its Corporate Equality Index, which scored 305 companies out of 590 with a perfect 100. Many (sport) organizations received scores ranging from 85-100. However, (Gold's Gym/Exxon Mobil) scored a 0 this year. Companies that received all possible points had non-discrimination policies, conducted diversity training and offered benefits to non-
married partners, among other criteria. (Gold’s Gym/Exxon Mobil) made no attempt to include sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policies.”

After reading the press release, participants were asked to respond to items on the remaining pages. Specifically, they were asked to provide their demographic information and respond to items related to the attractiveness of the organization based on the information provided in the press release. After completing the questionnaire, the participants were debriefed, told that the information was developed specifically for the study, given the chance to ask questions, and then dismissed.

**Measures**

Organizational attractiveness. Organizational attractiveness was measured with five items adapted from Umphress, Smith-Crowe, Brief, Dietz, and Walkins (2007) and James, Brief, Dietz, and Cohen (2001). Examples of these items include “How attractive is Exxon Mobil (Gold’s Gym) as a potential employer to you?” and “Would you interview with Exxon Mobil (Gold’s Gym)?” Participants responded to these items using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The measure’s reliability was acceptable (α = .87).

Social dominance orientation. To assess SDO, we used Sidanius and Pratto’s (1999) 16-item scale. The scale measures respondents, attitudes towards various statements on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree), which reflect their endorsement for or against group-based hierarchies. Representative items from this scale include: “Superior groups should dominate inferior groups;” “To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on others;” and “We would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally.” Higher scores were reflective of greater SDO levels. The measure demonstrated acceptable reliability (α = .88).

**Demographics.** Participants provided their gender, race, sexual orientation, and age. Sexual orientation was measured using Kinsey’s (1941) scale from 0 = exclusively heterosexual to 6 = exclusively homosexual. When describing the participants, anyone answering 4 or higher was coded as a sexual minority. Only 17 participants (14.2%) responded with a five or six, while all others identified as being heterosexual.

**RESULTS**

**Manipulation check**

The effectiveness of the inclusiveness manipulation was assessed by asking the participants to indicate whether the organization (Gold’s Gym/Exxon Mobil) had implemented LGBT-inclusive policies. Responses were made on a Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). A t-test indicated that the manipulation was successful, t (118) = 9.94, p < .001: those in the inclusive condition were more likely to agree that the organization had LGBT-inclusive policies (M = 5.45, SD = 1.63) than
Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations

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<th>Item</th>
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<td>2. Race</td>
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<td>3. Sexual orientation</td>
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<td>4. Sex</td>
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<td>.13</td>
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<td>5. Organization</td>
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<td>-.10</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.02</td>
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<td>6. Policy</td>
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<td>7. SDO</td>
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<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.25&quot;</td>
<td>-.43&quot;</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<td>8. Attractiveness</td>
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<td>-.13</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.47&quot;</td>
<td>.06</td>
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Mean                   |     |     |     |     |     |     | 2.92 | 4.14 |
SD                     | .50 | .50 | .35 | .50 | .50 | .50 | 1.07 | 1.66 |

Notes. ** p < .01. Location coded as 0 = Southwest, 1 = Mid-Atlantic. Applicant race coded as 0 = White, 1 = non-White. Applicant sexual orientation coded as 0 = heterosexual, 1 = sexual minority. Applicant sex coded as 0 = male, 1 = female. Organization coded 0 = Gold's Gym, 1 = Exxon Mobil. Policy coded 0 = inclusive, 1 = non-inclusive. SDO = social dominance orientation.

were those in the non-inclusive condition (M = 2.57, SD = 1.51).

Descriptive Statistics

We present the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations for all variables in Table 1. Of note, correlations suggest that companies with LGBT-inclusive policies are viewed as more attractive, whereas type of organization did not have a significant, bivariate effect. Similar to previous literature, the applicant's race, gender, and sexual orientation were related to SDO, with Whites, males, and heterosexual showing higher levels of SDO. Finally, a one-sample t-test comparing the mean score to the midpoint of the scale (4) showed that the mean participant SDO was low (M = 2.92, SD = 1.07), t(119) = -11.06, p < .001.

Hypothesis Testing

Moderated regression was performed to test all hypotheses. We entered four control variables (sex, race, sexual orientation, location) in the first step. These variables were included for several reasons. First, we controlled for gender and race because earlier research indicates that members of high-status groups, such as men and Whites, tend to display higher levels of SDO than do lower-status groups (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Secondly, Whitley and Lee (2000) observed that heterosexual individuals exhibit higher levels of SDO than LGBT persons. This occurrence may be due to
sexual minorities having lower status in society. Thus, we controlled for participants’ sexual orientation. Finally, same-sex marriage is prohibited in the Southwest area, and recognized in Washington, D.C. Davidson and Rouse (1994) suggested that people have more positive attitudes towards LGBT persons when the local government affords them equal legal rights. It is reasonable to assume that citizens who voted in favor of equal legal rights (e.g., allowing same-sex marriage) would also be in favor of LGBT-inclusive policies in an organization. Thus, location served as the final control variable. After entering the controls, we entered the first order effects (i.e., the standardized SDO score, inclusiveness, and type of organization) in the second step. The three two-way interactions (i.e., organization × SDO, policy × SDO, organization × policy) were entered in the third step, and the three-way interaction was entered in the fourth and final step.

We provide results of the regression in Table 2. The total model accounted for 40% of the variance in organizational attractiveness—a large portion of variance explained. The controls accounted

<table>
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<th>β</th>
<th>R²</th>
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<td>-.46***</td>
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<td>Organization × SDO</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.15***</td>
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<td>.26</td>
<td>.50***</td>
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<td>Org × Policy × SDO</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.53</td>
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Notes. *p < .05. ***p < .001. Location coded as 0 = Southwest, 1 = Mid-Atlantic. Applicant race coded as 0 = White, 1 = non-White. Applicant sexual orientation coded as 0 = heterosexual, 1 = sexual minority. Applicant sex coded as 0 = male, 1 = female. Organization coded 0 = Gold’s Gym, 1 = Exxon Mobil. Policy coded 0 = inclusive, 1 = non-inclusive. SDO = social dominance orientation.
for 3% of the variance ($p = .44$). With Hypothesis 1, we predicted that LGBT-inclusive organizations would be viewed as more attractive than would non-inclusive organizations. As seen in Step 2, policy was significantly associated with attractiveness ($\beta = .46$, $p < .001$). Recalling that policy was coded as $0 = \text{LGBT-inclusive}$ and $1 = \text{non-inclusive}$, the direction of the beta coefficient indicates that the LGBT-inclusive organization was perceived as more attractive than the non-inclusive organization. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypotheses 2 and 3 predicted that organization type and SDO orientation would both moderate the effects of inclusiveness on organizational attractiveness, respectively. Contrary to Hypothesis 2, the organization \times policy interaction was not significant ($\beta = .20$, $p = .14$). However, the results did support Hypothesis 3, with SDO moderating the LGBT-inclusiveness-organizational attraction relationship ($\beta = .50$, $p < .001$). The interaction term between policy and SDO explained a significant increase in variance in organizational attraction ($\Delta R^2 = .15$, $F(3,109) = 9.13$, $p < .001$). High SDO was a significant moderator of the relationship between policy and organizational attraction ($B = -0.73$, $p = .054$). However, those with low SDO were more sensitive to the type of policy offered by the organization ($B = -3.10$, $p < .001$). We plotted the interaction following Cohen, Cohen, West and Aiken's (2003) guidelines and depict it in Figure 1. LGBT-inclusive policies interacted with SDO such that the positive relationship between inclusiveness and organizational attraction was mitigated when SDO was high and significantly strengthened when SDO was low.

![Figure 1. The influence of social dominance orientation (SDO) on the relationship between LGBT-inclusive policies and organizational attractiveness](image-url)

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Finally, though not specifically hypothesized, it is worth noting that in Step 4 organizational attractiveness was regressed on the 3-way interaction (policy × organization × SDO), and no significance was found ($\beta = .04, p > .05$).

**Discussion**

Currently no federal non-discrimination employment act has been mandated to protect the rights of sexual minorities; yet, more and more organizations are including LGBT-inclusive policies under their umbrella of diversity management (Day & Greene, 2008). In seeking to understand the effects of these actions, and expand recruitment literature, our primary objective in this study was to examine the potential advantages and disadvantages associated with offering LGBT-inclusive policy. Results indicate that the presence of LGBT-inclusive policies was positively associated with people’s attraction to the organization. While the type of organization (sport versus non-sport) did not moderate this relationship, one’s SDO did: people with high SDO were less attracted to LGBT-inclusive organizations, whereas people with low SDO were substantially more attracted to inclusive organizations. In the remaining sections, we expand on these findings in greater detail, highlight potential implications, outline possible limitations, and discuss avenues for future research.

Consistent with the first hypothesis, companies with LGBT-inclusive policies were perceived as more attractive than were their counterparts. There are a host of reasons for this relationship. From a signaling theory perspective, LGBT-inclusive policies demonstrate an organization’s commitment to fairness and inclusion (Williams & Bauer, 1994)—characteristics that job applicants, irrespective of their sexual orientation, are likely to find important. The findings are also consistent Fink et al.’s (2001) research, as these authors found that sport organizations utilizing a proactive (i.e., inclusive) diversity management strategy were better able to attract and retain highly skilled employees. Their study showed that sport organizations with this type of diversity management are better equipped to realize all the benefits diversity can bring, thus creating an amicable and productive work environment for prospective employees. Finally, it is possible that persons from all sexual orientations value LGBT-inclusive policies because of the values such practices might bring to them. Consider, for instance, that the percentage of married adults has decreased to around 50% of the U.S. population, as more couples elect to co-habit without getting legally married (Davidson & Rouse, 2004). These individuals may seek the same domestic partnership benefits offered to LGBT employees, and could contribute to the favorable reactions expressed toward LGBT-inclusive policies.

Contrary to the second hypothesis, organization type did not moderate the relationship between LGBT-inclusiveness and organizational attraction. Research conducted by Pugh et al. (2008) may explain this occurrence and aid in
understanding why LGBT-inclusive (as opposed to non-inclusive) sport organizations were considered a more attractive employment option. Their study suggested that when an organization is located in a non-diverse area (e.g., a predominantly White community), workforce diversity has a greater impact on organizational attractiveness. That is, when the presence of minority employees is unanticipated, applicants will interpret this diverse workforce as signaling a positive organizational climate for diversity and be more attracted to the company. In the same way, LGBT-inclusive policies may have greater signaling value for sport organizations due to sports heteronormative nature (Anderson, 2005; Messner, 1992) and prevalence of sexual prejudice (Cunningham et al., 2010; Sartore & Cunningham, 2009). Thus, considering few sport organizations offer LGBT-inclusive policies, having such policies in place may allow the firm to stand out among competitors.

In line with the third hypothesis, we found that SDO moderated one’s attraction to an inclusive organization. Scholarship in the area of social dominance theory helps explain these findings. To begin, researchers have demonstrated that SDO is significantly correlated with racism and with attitudes toward minority targeted policies such as affirmative action (Federico & Sidanius, 2002). In addition, Federico and Sidanius (2002) found that the tendency to oppose principled equal employment opportunity policies was substantially driven by dominance-related concerns, rather than just racist predispositions. Despite these advances, examination of the relationship among SDO, LGBT-inclusive policies, and reactions to an organization had not been endeavored. Thus, this study adds to this stream of literature by empirically demonstrating that attraction to LGBT-inclusive organizations is at least partially motivated by SDO, as opposed to being arbitrary or stochastic. That is, the tendency to view LGBT-inclusive firms as less attractive, in part, is driven by people’s desires to maintain and/or reinforce existing group-based hierarchy.

Implications

This research has practical implications. Most importantly, this study emphasizes the increased use of LGBT-inclusive policies reflects how diversity issues have expanded beyond women and racial/ethnic minorities. Furthermore, though the decision to use LGBT-inclusive policies is oftentimes socially driven, it can enhance organizational performance outcomes when such policies attract talented employees to the organization. Sport organizations that have feared backlash from traditional sport employees (e.g., White, Protestant, heterosexual, males) may now begin to realize the benefits LGBT-inclusive initiatives can bring to their organization. Specifically they can improve their recruiting initiatives and be more competitive in the marketplace. It is very cost effective to make LGBT-inclusive policies readily available on company websites and to advertise support of
sexual minorities. Thus, sport organizations should be receptive to this recruiting idea.

If a sport organization is not currently offering some form of LGBT-inclusive policy, organizational leaders should consider the advantages of becoming involved and publicizing their support for this minority group. Organizations that already support sexual minorities should recognize that promoting their LGBT-inclusive programs can be an easily executed recruiting method. Finally, and consistent with signaling theory (Rynes, 1991), advertising the organization’s acceptance of LGBT issues may be successful even if the applicant does not have extensive knowledge concerning the organization’s record for diversity. The findings from the present study suggest that even a limited amount of information regarding the LGBT-inclusive policies offered can have a significant effect on whether or not an applicant is attracted to an organization.

**Limitations and future research**

Despite the many strengths of the current study, there are potential limitations. The use of college students as a sample may be viewed negatively by some. As a counter to this criticism, it is important to note that most large organizations devote substantial resources on campuses (e.g., sending recruiters to career fairs and placing advertisements in campus publications) to recruit college students (Rynes & Boudreau, 1986). This implies organizations actively attempt to recruit individuals who are similar to those represented in the study’s sample. From this perspective, the sample in the current study was ideal.

A second potential limitation is that students might not have actually been pursuing a job with that organization. However, Chapman, Ueggerslev, Carroll, Piascntin, and Jones (2005) observed individuals’ perceptions of organizational attractiveness, and their intentions to apply, were not dependent on if the applicant was actually pursuing a job. Thus, concern over the study design is likely unwarranted.

Lastly, electing to use actual organizations is both a limitation and an advantage. While it may be difficult to separate LGBT-inclusive signals from previous experience, it does represent an emerging trend in diversity management initiatives that applicants commonly encounter. It also replicates the pattern set in marketing research that has used existing brands when assessing the response to gay-friendly brands (Tuten, 2005). However, it should be noted that the participants’ prior perceptions of the organization could have influenced their responses. For instance, they could have had a very positive (or negative) experience with one of the organizations.

Notwithstanding these potential limitations, there are several areas for future research. Primarily, future research should examine diversity strategies focused on LGBT inclusiveness, such as those mentioned in the Human Rights Campaign press release, and the potential effects of these initiatives on...
current and prospective employees. As applicants rely more heavily on the Internet as their primary source of information concerning employers, prudent sport organizations should explore what signals their websites send to the public. Future researchers should investigate how different socially minded policies (e.g. LGBT inclusiveness, environmental activism, or wellness programs) impact the overall attractiveness of sport organizations. As the competition for skilled labor becomes more intense, it will be paramount for sport organization to understand how to attract and retain the most talented leaders in sport and physical activity.

REFERENCES


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*Dr. Nicole Melton is with the Sport Administration and Leadership Program at Seattle University.*

*Dr. George Cunningham is with the Laboratory for Diversity in Sport, Department of Health and Kinesiology, Texas A&M University.*