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Workplace Contextual Supports for LGBT Employees: A Review, Meta-analysis, and Agenda for Future Research

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Abstract

The past decade has witnessed a rise in the visibility of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. This has resulted in some organizational researchers focusing their attention on workplace issues facing LGBT employees. While empirical research has been appropriately focused on examining the impact of workplace factors on the work lives of LGBT individuals, no research has examined these empirical relationships cumulatively. The purpose of this study was to conduct a comprehensive review and meta-analysis of the outcomes associated with three workplace contextual supports (formal LGBT policies and practices, LGBT-supportive climate, and supportive workplace relationships) and to compare the relative influence of these workplace supports on outcomes. Outcomes were grouped into four categories: (a) work attitudes, (b) psychological strain, (c) disclosure, and (d) perceived discrimination. Results show that supportive workplace relationships were more strongly related to work attitudes and strain, whereas LGBT supportive climate was more strongly related to disclosure and perceived discrimination compared to the other supports. Our findings also revealed a number of insights concerning the measurement, research design, and sample characteristics of the studies in the present review. Based on these results, we offer an agenda for future research.

1 INTRODUCTION

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) employees comprise a significant portion of the workforce. It is estimated that approximately 8 million people, or 3.5% of the U.S population, identify as LGBT (Gates, [2011](#)). This is a conservative estimate, given that LGBT identities can be invisible and, as a result, some LGBT employees decide to conceal their identities (King, Mohr, Peddie, Jones, & Kendra, [2014](#)). Indeed, deciding whether to disclose at work is often a challenging process that is accompanied by fear and anxiety due to the stigma associated with LGBT identities (Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, [2007](#); Trau, [2015](#)). Although public perceptions of LGBT people have become increasingly more positive in the United States, a large portion of Americans (45%) still believe that being gay is a sin (Drake, [2013](#)), and attitudes toward gender nonconformity are even more unfavorable (Norton & Herek, [2013](#)). Due in large part to social stigma, employees who identify as LGBT are at greater risk of unfair treatment, systematic oppression, and even violence. For example, a 2008 survey by the Williams Institute found that 38% of LGB employees reported being harassed at work, and 27% experienced employment discrimination based on their sexual orientation (Sears & Mallory, [2011](#)). More strikingly, in the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, approximately 78% of transgender employees reported being harassed or mistreated at work, and 47% reported being discriminated against in terms of hiring, promotion, or job retention (Grant et al., [2010](#)).

These negative experiences of LGBT workers not only stem from stigma, but also from a lack of federal legislation that protects LGBT employees from harassment and discrimination. While some states have instituted laws that cover LGBT harassment and discrimination directly, 30 states have no laws protecting the employment rights of LGBT individuals, and 3 states specifically prohibit the passage of such laws. This leaves approximately 52% of LGBT people living in states where they are especially vulnerable to harassment and discrimination at work (Movement Advancement Project, [2016](#)). Confronted with mistreatment and an incomplete patchwork of legal protections, many organizations have recognized the “social and economic imperative” (Day & Greene, [2008](#); King & Cortina, [2010](#)) of offering LGBT-supportive policies (Armstrong et al., [2010](#)). In fact, 93% of Fortune 500 companies include sexual orientation and 75% include gender identity in their nondiscrimination policies (Human Rights Campaign, [2016](#)).

Inconsistencies in legal and organizational protections for LGBT employees across states and organizations have prompted researchers to examine the impact of workplace contextual supports on the work experiences and decisions of LGBT employees. Theoretical frameworks have been proposed to provide a better understanding of these experiences, with most focusing on the management of LGBT identities at work and across life domains

(Croteau, Anderson, & VanderWal, [2008](#)). Two of the most prominent of these models are the Home-Work Disclosure Model (Ragins, [2004](#), [2008](#)) and the Interpersonal Diversity Disclosure Model (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, [2005](#)). While these two models offer slightly different perspectives, both agree on the importance of three common workplace contextual supports that are expected to exacerbate or alleviate the effects of negative work experiences for employees with stigmatized identities: formal LGBT policies and practices, an LGBT-supportive climate, and supportive workplace relationships.

While empirical research has been appropriately focused on examining the impact of contextual supports on the work experiences of LGBT employees, no research has examined these relationships cumulatively. Narrative reviews of the literature characterize the results of peer-reviewed studies examining the impact of contextual supports as decidedly mixed (Curtis & Dreachslin, [2008](#)) and lacking in terms of empirical integration (Croteau et al., [2008](#)). As a result, researchers are faced with a literature that presents mixed results from an assortment of studies on a wide array of variables, which lacks a coherent framework. The lack of integration and presence of mixed results provides an opportunity to fill an important gap in the literature that would help to advance progress in this area for both researchers and practitioners alike (Kulik & Roberson, [2008](#)). More specifically, synthesizing existing research, developing a cohesive framework, and shedding light on the relative importance of contextual supports on the workplace experiences of LGBT employees could be used to enhance understanding and advance theory. Additionally, such work will provide guidance for practitioners who seek to make their organizations more welcoming and inclusive of LGBT employees by providing some clarity regarding the types of workplace contextual supports that are most effective.

The purpose of the present study is to fill this gap in the literature by undertaking a cumulative review of nearly two decades of empirical research on the effects of workplace contextual supports (i.e., formal LGBT policies and practices, LGBT-supportive workplace climate, and peer and leader support) on LGBT employees' work experiences. In so doing, we contribute to the literature in four ways. First, by adopting commonalities across the prominent conceptual works in this area, we provide an overarching framework with which to organize and summarize the often fragmented and diffuse literature on LGBT workplace contextual supports and outcomes. Research in this area spans several disciplines, including psychology, psychiatry, sociology, and business, each of which brings its own theoretical and empirical approaches to studying this topic. While these multiple perspectives do advance the literature, they can also make it difficult to draw firm conclusions. The integrative approach taken here will allow scholars to use existing cumulative knowledge to inform subsequent theory building and empirical research. Second, we extend previous conceptual models of disclosure decisions across life domains (e.g., Clair et al., [2005](#); Ragins, [2008](#)) to a broader set of work outcomes. Better understanding the multiple ways in which workplace contextual supports may impact LGBT employees is important for researchers but also for practitioners tasked with justifying the development and implementation of workplace diversity initiatives. Third, we build on and overcome limitations inherent in narrative reviews by quantifying the direction and magnitude of the relationships between workplace contextual supports for LGBT employees and each of these outcomes. Finally, we compare the relative relationships among the three types of workplace contextual supports and outcomes using dominance analysis. This allows us to compare the relative importance of various types of supports on the work lives of LGBT employees. Disentangling the impact that these supports have on outcomes of interest will enable policy makers to make more informed decisions on how to create more inclusive, equitable, and supportive work environments. Taken together, these contributions inform and advance knowledge about LGBT experiences at work and practice aimed at increasing LGBT inclusivity.

2 WORKPLACE CONTEXTUAL SUPPORTS

Although all workers can benefit from working in supportive work contexts, contextual support is especially important for employees with LGBT identities (Huffman, Watrous-Rodriguez, & King, [2008](#)). This is recognized in

two of the most prominent models used to describe the workplace experiences of those with invisible stigmas [i.e., the Interpersonal Diversity Disclosure Model (Clair et al., [2005](#)) and the Home-Work Disclosure Model (Ragins, [2004](#), [2008](#))]. Both models call attention to personal (e.g., individual differences in personality) and contextual factors that help determine the workplace experiences of those with invisible stigmas. A complete review of all of the variables in these two models is beyond the scope of this study. Rather, we focus on the contextual supports identified by these models because they are the most often studied, most under an organization's control, and most relevant to both human resource management and individual workers.

Both the Interpersonal Diversity Disclosure Model (Clair et al., [2005](#)) and the Home-Work Disclosure Model (Ragins, [2004](#), [2008](#)) are based on stigma theory (Goffman, 1963). As described by Goffman ([1963](#)), a stigma is a “mark” or “badge” that indicates to others that someone possesses a characteristic that is devalued by society, which can lead the stigmatized person to be ostracized, rejected, harassed, and discriminated against. This can have negative consequences in terms of poor health and well-being, job loss, and the like for the stigma holder (Sabat, Lindsey, & King, [2014](#)). Because of their common grounding in stigma theory, it is not surprising that these two models highlight the importance of the types of contextual supports that address the stigma and its outcomes for the individual. Both models call attention to the symbolic attributes of an organization such as policies and practices, as well as the organizational climate and supportive social relationships that may serve as contextual supports for LGBT workers. These are seen as critically important to preventing harassment and discrimination, conveying acceptance and identity affirmation to the stigma holder, and protecting against status loss and social isolation.

Stigma theory not only underlies the three types of contextual support that are important to LGBT workers but also helps identify the types of outcomes those contextual supports would be expected to impact. The first of these is disclosure of the LGBT identity. Disclosure is the primary variable that the Interpersonal Diversity Disclosure Model (Clair et al., [2005](#)) and the Home-Work Disclosure Model (Ragins, [2004](#), [2008](#)) were intended to explain. For example, Clair et al. ([2005](#)) argue that contextual supports increase the likelihood of disclosure by reducing the risks associated with making one's LGBT status known. Stigma theory points to the discrimination experienced by the stigma holder as a result of the negative reactions of others. Workplace contextual supports attempt to formally and informally prohibit discrimination and reduce the negative reactions of others to the stigma.

Stigma theory also calls attention to the negative psychological states that those with a stigma may experience. By reducing the degree to which stigma holders are shunned, rejected, have a core aspect of their identity devalued, and subjected to the stress associated with having a stigma (Herek & Garnets, [2007](#); Meyer, [2003](#)), contextual supports would be expected to relate to lower psychological strains (e.g., anxiety, depression). Similarly, contextual supports may also impact the work-related attitudes of LGBT employees. This is because, by conveying positive regard (acceptance and identity affirmation) for a stigmatized identity and concern for the stigmatized person (protection against discrimination), contextual supports are likely to promote positive attitudes toward the employer. Work-related attitudes are also relevant because they relate to important work behaviors such as performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and turnover (Saari & Judge, [2004](#)). Taken together, the three types of contextual support and these four outcomes provide the framework for our review.

2.1 Formal LGBT-supportive policies and practices

A growing body of research has found that the adoption of human resource management policies and practices aimed at acquiring and managing talented employees enhances the performance of individuals and organizations (Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, [2006](#); Subramony, [2009](#)). One mechanism by which these performance-enhancing effects occur is via the impact of policies and practices on employee attitudes and behaviors (Gould-Williams, [2003](#); Kehoe & Wright, [2013](#); Macky & Boxall, [2007](#); Posthuma, Campion, Masimova,

& Campion, [2013](#)). Many organizations have adopted formal policies and practices that support the equality of LGBT employees (i.e., including formal written statements barring discrimination based on LGBT status), offering same-sex benefits coverage (i.e., including sexual orientation and gender identity in diversity training initiatives, providing new hires and supervisors awareness training), creating LGBT and allies-related employee resource groups, and actively inviting same-sex partners to company-wide social events (Button, [2001](#); Ragins & Cornwell, [2001](#)). Over time, best practices have become more expansive, including providing transgender-inclusive health/medical benefits, incorporating LGBT diversity metrics into senior management and executive performance measures, increasing LGBT employee recruitment efforts, enhancing supplier diversity program inclusion of certified LGBT suppliers, requiring U.S. contractors to comply with LGBT nondiscrimination policies, and fostering public commitment to the LGBT community, including philanthropic support.

Building on Schein's ([1992](#)) seminal work on organizational culture, researchers have theorized that formal policies and practices, when consistently implemented and enforced within organizations, can act as a visible representation of the values and beliefs held by an organization and explicitly convey to organizational members that discrimination and mistreatment of LGBT workers will not be tolerated (Ragins & Cornwell, [2001](#); Tejada, [2006](#)). This notion that formal policies and practices convey important information is an application of signaling theory (Spence, [1973](#)) to the organizational context. It suggests that formal statements by an organization send signals about the types of behaviors that are acceptable and expected. For non-LGBT workers, formal policies and practices signal information about treating their LGBT coworkers in a nondiscriminatory, welcoming, and inclusive manner. Importantly, they also signal information to LGBT workers about how they can expect to be treated in terms of hiring, promotion, termination, and other personnel decisions. They also reassure them that leaders and coworkers will be held accountable for instances of mistreatment even in the absence of legal protections (Ruggs, Martinez, Hebl, & Law, [2015](#)). In this way, organizational policies and practices may help to reduce or eliminate discrimination and harassment toward LGBT employees.

2.2 LGBT-supportive workplace climate

The adoption of formal LGBT-supportive policies and practices is intended to signal the types of behaviors that are acceptable and expected throughout the organization. However, the mere presence of these policies and practices does not necessarily reflect the messages that workers derive from them (Dwertmann, Nishii, & van Knippenberg, [2016](#)). When policies are not consistently implemented or enforced, they are likely to be interpreted as nothing more than “empty promises” (Clair et al., [2005](#), p. 84). This highlights the fact that even formal policies are subject to interpretation, particularly if actions are inconsistent. Recognizing these interpretations, researchers have called attention to the importance of psychological climate, which refers to a person's psychologically meaningful interpretation of their proximal work environment (James, Hater, Gent, & Bruni, [1978](#)). James et al. ([1978](#)) suggested that perceptions of the work environment take on significance when they are interpreted relative to employees' values and beliefs and in relation to their personal well-being. As noted earlier, formal policies and practices can signal a set of espoused values and beliefs and prescribe acceptable behaviors. Climate, on the other hand, represents the enactment of those values, beliefs, and behaviors as perceived by the worker (McKay, Avery, & Morris, [2009](#)). As such, it is a property of the individual worker that is distinguishable from the conceptualization of culture and attitudes (C. P. Parker et al., [2003](#)).

Research on psychological climate has focused on perceptions of the organization broadly, as well as specific facets of the organization. While a wide range of organizational perceptions might be conceptualized in terms of a general organizational climate, taxonomies of these perceptions commonly include an affective component (Ostroff, [1993](#)), sometimes referred to as psychological safety (Kahn, [1990](#)), that reflects positive social interactions (i.e., warmth, cooperation, and social rewards) and being able to express one's true feeling and self without fear of repercussion. Meta-analytic studies show that this aspect of climate is related to outcomes such as job attitudes, performance, and psychological well-being (Carr, Schmidt, Ford, & DeShon, [2003](#)). With regard

to climate surrounding specific facets of the organization, researchers have proposed organizations have a *climate for diversity* (Dwertmann et al., [2016](#)). Diversity climate is a psychologically meaningful construct that reflects the degree to which the worker views the organizational environment as nondiscriminatory, welcoming, and inclusive. Within the diversity climate literature, researchers have focused on climates for specific minority groups, including LGBT individuals (Liddle, Luzzo, Hauenstein, & Schuck, [2004](#)). The theorizing around diversity climate underpins much of the research relating LGBT-supportive workplace climate to employee outcomes.

2.3 Supportive workplace relationships

Supportive workplace relationships are interpersonal resources that can influence the work experiences of employees, and can be especially crucial for those with LGBT identities. The unique work situations that LGBT employees encounter, such as social rejection and isolation, can be mitigated by the presence of others who support and accept them (Huffman et al., [2008](#)), even individuals who are non-LGBT (Ragins, [2008](#); Ragins et al., [2007](#)). Social support is a person's belief that he/she is held in positive regard, valued, and cared for by others (Cobb, [1976](#)). The theoretical foundation underlying the relationship between social support and the work experiences of LGBT employees is rooted in classic social support theory (Caplan, Cobb, French, Harrison, & Pinneau, [1975](#); Cohen & Willis, [1985](#)), which asserts that having satisfying relationships with others can help to fulfill many basic needs such as belongingness, acceptance, companionship, and self-worth (Thoits, [2011](#)). In particular, prior research distinguishes among three forms of social support: emotional, instrumental, and informational (Beehr & McGrath, [1992](#); House, [1981](#)). With respect to LGBT individuals, coworkers and supervisors may offer emotional support by showing concern, listening, and empathizing with their experiences of prejudice and discrimination at work. In turn, they may provide instrumental support by offering tangible assistance, such as corroborating their LGBT colleagues' reports of harassment to HR or even confronting perpetrators themselves to deter such behavior in the future. Finally, they may offer informational support by giving advice or useful information on how to navigate and address a discriminatory work environment.

3 METHOD

To locate relevant articles and dissertations, we employed four strategies. First, an electronic search was conducted using the PsychINFO, Web of Science, and Google Scholar databases. The keywords *LGBT, lesbian, gay, homosexual, bisexual, transgender, queer, gender nonconforming, gender identity, sexual minority, sexual orientation* were coupled with the keywords *policy, policies, practices, psychological climate, workplace climate, work environment perceptions, social support, allies, peer/coworker support, and leader/manager support*. Second, a manual search was conducted of the conference proceedings for the annual meetings of the Academy of Management (2013–2015), and Society for Industrial/Organizational Psychology (2013–2015). Third, reference lists of published and unpublished sources were mined for other potential articles. Fourth, to locate unpublished or in-press articles that would have been missed using previous methods, we sent a call to three Academy of Management listservs, Gender & Diversity in Organizations, Organizational Behavior Division List, and Human Resources Division List; however, this resulted in no additional papers or data sets.

Four inclusion criteria were selected prior to the start of the review. First, the study had to include a correlation coefficient or statistics that could be used to calculate a correlation. Second, the sample had to include employees working in the United States. Third, the sample had to be employees who were lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Fourth, we included studies that reported a relationship between a workplace contextual support and a plausible outcome.

We limited the analysis to studies using U.S. samples. Many scholars have pointed out that while sex is a biological concept, gender is socially constructed (e.g., Butler, [1990](#)). Thus, in both principle and practice, one would expect understandings of and attitudes toward sexual and gender nonconformity to vary significantly across societies and cultures. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religions all consider homosexuality to be a sin, but

countries differ dramatically in the degree of separation between church and state; even today, homosexual acts are crimes with punishments ranging from fines to jail time, to death. Thus, profound differences in culturally based attitudes would be expected to impact both the levels of the constructs in our study and the relationships among them. McDermott and Blair (2010) examined whether the factors predicting homonegativity differ significantly in four relatively similar nations of the “Western World”: Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Republic of Ireland. Distinct differences in the predictors of homonegativity were found between the North American and European samples. Similarly, Passani and Debicki (2016) found that high school students' opinions about LGBT issues and rights differed significantly among Belgium, Estonia, Italy, and the Netherlands, which the authors attributed to differing national contexts of rights recognition. These studies suggest that researchers must account for specific sociocultural differences in analyses of prejudice toward LGBT people across countries. Such an undertaking is beyond the scope of this paper, so the meta-analysis was limited to studies using U.S. samples. We should note that most of the studies presented in our review are cross-sectional, which prohibits us from inferring a causal relationship. Moreover, in two instances, authors published different studies using the same data set. Since each of the studies reported data on different constructs of interest, the studies were included in the review. A total of 27 studies fit the inclusion criteria. Two of the authors coded the following information from each study: sample size, reliability information, and effect sizes. For studies that included multiple measures of an outcome (e.g., included both anxiety and depression to represent psychological strain), a composite correlation was calculated using Hunter and Schmidt's (2004) formula that accounted for within-study correlations. Effect sizes were estimated for each relationship using Hunter and Schmidt's (1990, 2004) techniques.

4 REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Measurement of workplace contextual supports

One strength of the studies reviewed is the range of measures used to assess the different workplace contextual supports across studies. As research on LGBT employees is still rather new, this range of measures provides researchers with options to choose existing measures that best fit their research questions. Recognizing this, in the following section and in Table 1, we provide an overview of the measures used to assess workplace contextual supports.

Table 1. Summary of studies and their characteristics

Author(s) and dates/Sample LGBT identity characteristic	Workplace contextual supports/Measures	Outcomes/Measures	N	Recruitment strategy	Education/Salary
Allan, Tebbe, Duffy, and Autin (2014) LGB	Climate—Liddle et al. (2004)	Work attitudes—job satisfaction (Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998)	171	posted online announcement to social and professional sites and sent e-mail announcement to targeted listservs	NA
Androsiglio (2004) G	Climate—Liddle et al. (2004)	Psychological strain—emotional exhaustion (Maslach et al., 1996)	181	E-mailed online announcement to targeted social and professional networking listservs	Completed a college degree (100%)Average salary (\$83 k)

				Solicited members at a Gay Pride Parade in NYC	
Boyles (2008) LGB	Climate—Liddle et al. (2004) Social support—rewarding coworker interactions (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004)	Work attitudes—engagement (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006) Disclosure—integrating (Button, 1996)	295	Posted online announcement to LG news and information sites and sent e-mail announcement to targeted listservs	Completed a college degree (73%)\$26 k to \$50 k (31%); \$51 k to \$75 k (26%)
(2003) G	Policies & Practices—Ragins and Cornwell (2001)	Discrimination—Workplace Prejudice/Discrimination Inventory developed by James et al. (1994) and modified by Ragins and Cornwell (2001)	89	Solicited members at a San Diego LG Community Center	Completed at least some college (90%)
Brenner, Lyons, and Fassinger (2010) LG (2 samples)	Climate—Waldo's (1999) Organizational Tolerance for Heterosexism Inventory (OTHI)	Disclosure—Mohr & Fassinger's (2000) Outness Indicator	311 295	Part of a large online national study	Completed a bachelor's degree (sample 1, 76%; sample 2, 75%)
Brewster, Velez, DeBlaere, and Moradi (2012) T	Climate—Liddle et al. (2004)	Work attitudes—job satisfaction (Smith, Kendal, & Hulin, 1969) Disclosure—Mohr & Fassinger's (2000) Outness Indicator Discrimination—Waldo's (1999) Workplace Heterosexist Experiences Questionnaire (WHEQ)	263	Posted online announcement to social and professional sites	Completed at least some college (91%)
Button (2001) LG	Policies & Practices—self-developed	Work attitudes—job satisfaction (Weiss, Davis, England, & Lofquist, 1967); affective commitment (J. P. Meyer, Allen, and Smith, 1993) Disclosure—integrating (Button, 1996)	537	E-mailed announcement to organizations included in an e-mail distribution list compiled by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force	NA
Chrobot-Mason, Button, and DiClementi (2001) LG	Climate—Button (1996)	Disclosure—integrating (Button, 1996)	255	Solicited attendees at a national conference of LG workplace issues Contacted members of corporate LG employee groups Posted online announcement to social and professional sites	Average education was college or secondary education degree Over 25% reported completion of a master's or doctorate degree

Day and Schoenrade (2000) LG	Policies & Practices—single item (self-developed) Social support—single item of supervisor support (self-developed)	Work attitudes—job satisfaction (Ironson, Smith, Brannick, Gibson, & Paul, 1989); organizational commitment (N. J. Allen & Meyer, 1999) Psychological strain—Ironson et al., 1989) Disclosure—self-developed	744	Mailed announcement to list populated by the Human Rights Project Posted announcement in print media	NA
Driscoll, Kelley, and Fassinger (1996) L	Climate—adapted the Campus Environment Survey (Blankenship & Leonard, 1985)	Work attitudes—work satisfaction (Weiss, Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1967) Psychological strain—Osipow & Spokane's (1992) Personal Strain Questionnaire (PSQ) Disclosure—self-developed	123	Personally contacted potential participants Posted announcement in local LG newsletter Used snowball sampling	Average years of education was 16.62 Modal annual income ranged from \$30 to \$39 k
Griffith and Hebl (2002) LG	Policies & Practices — self-developed Climate — Waldo (1999) Social support—coworkers reactions (self-developed)	Work attitudes—job satisfaction (Ironson et al., 1989) Psychological strain—anxiety (self-developed) Disclosure—disclosure behaviors (Croteau, 1996)	379	Mailed surveys to LG-related nonprofit clubs and organizations Posted announcement in LG newsletter Solicited attendees from a LG business exposition	Average salary (\$49,430)
Hebl, Tonidandel, and Ruggs (2012) LG	Social support—psychosocial support (self-developed)	Work attitudes—job satisfaction (Balzer et al., 1990)	207	Solicited attendees at a gay-friendly business convention	Completed a bachelor's degree or higher (55.3%)
Huebner and Davis (2005) GB	Social support—Frankenhaeueser et al. (1989)	Work attitudes—work satisfaction (Caplan et al., 1980) Disclosure—Mohr & Fassinger's (2000) Outness Indicator	73	Solicited patrons of gay-friendly establishments Posted announcement in various media outlets	Completed a college degree (45%) Modal annual income ranged from \$25 to \$35 k
Huffman, Watrous-Rodriguez, and King (2008) LGB	Climate—Liddle et al. (2004) Social support—coworker support (Baruch-Feldman, Brondolo, Ben-Dayana, & Schwartz, 2002); supervisor support (Eisenberger, Huntington,	Work attitudes—job satisfaction (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1983) Discrimination—Waldo's (1999) WHEQ	99	Solicited patrons at gay-friendly establishments and a gay-pride event	Completed a bachelor's degree or higher (78.7%)

	Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986)				
King, Mohr, Peddie, Jones, and Kendra (2014) LGB	Policies & Practices—Button (2001) Climate—Rankin (2001, 2003)	Disclosure—self-developed	61	Posted announcement in various printed media outlets Used snowball sampling	NA
Law, Martinez, Ruggs, Hebl, and Akers (2011) T	Policies & Practices—self-developed (adapted from Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995 ; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001) Social support—coworker reactions (Griffith & Hebl, 2002)	Work attitudes—job satisfaction (Ironson et al., 1989); organizational commitment (Meyer et al., 1993) Psychological strain—anxiety (self-developed) Disclosure—Griffith & Hebl's (2002) Disclosure Scale	114	Solicited attendees at a transgender health conference Posted online announcement to social and professional sites Used snowball sampling	NA
Liddle, Luzzo, Hauenstein, and Schuck (2004) LGBT	Climate—self-developed	Work attitudes—work satisfaction (Weiss et al., 1977) Discrimination—Croteau et al. (1998)	93	Contacted researchers nationwide and asked them to distribute a paper-pencil survey to potential participants	Average salary (\$53,500)
Munoz (2005) LG	Climate—Liddle et al. (2004)	Work attitudes—job satisfaction (Cammann et al., 1983); organizational commitment (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979) Psychological strain—anxiety (D. F. Parker & Decotiis, 1983) Disclosure—integrating (Button, 1999) Discrimination—Workplace Prejudice/Discrimination Inventory developed by James et al. (1994) and modified by Ragins and Cornwell (2001)	346	Solicited members of a local professional association to participate through a newsletter Posted announcement in online newsletter Used snowball sampling	Completed a college degree (80%)\$26 k to \$50 k (39%); \$51 k to \$75 k (23%)
Rabelo and Cortina (2014) LGBT	Social support—supervisor support (Eisenberger et al., 2002)	Work attitudes—job satisfaction (Cammann et al., 1979) Psychological strain—emotional exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2001) Disclosure—self-developed Discrimination—Waldo's (1999) WHEQ	267	Mailed paper-pencil surveys to staff at small public university E-mailed announcement to LGBT staff from other universities	NA

Ragins and Cornwell (2001) LGB	Policies & Practices—self-developed	Work attitudes—job satisfaction (R. P. Quinn & Staines, 1979); organizational commitment (Mowday et al., 1979) Disclosure—self-developed Discrimination—Workplace Prejudice/Discrimination Inventory developed by James et al. (1994)	534	Mailed surveys to members of three national gay rights organizations in the United States	Completed a bachelor's degree or higher (84.7%) \$26 k to \$50 k (42.1%); \$51 k to \$75 k (25.1%)
Ragins et al. (2007) LGB <i>Same sample as used in Ragins & Cornwell (2001)</i>	Social support—coworker and supervisor support (Caplan et al., 1975)	Work attitudes—job satisfaction (Quinn & Staines, 1979); organizational commitment (Mowday et al., 1979) Psychological strain—depression and anxiety (Caplan et al., 1975) Disclosure—self-developed Discrimination—self-developed	534	Mailed surveys to members of three national gay rights organizations in the United States	Completed a bachelor's degree or higher (84.7%) \$26 k to \$50 k (42.1%); \$51 k to \$75 k (25.1%)
Reed and Leuty (2015) LG	Climate—Liddle et al. (2004)	Disclosure—explicitly out (Anderson, Croteau, Chung, & DiStefano, 2001) Discrimination—Waldo's (1999) WHEQ	135	Posted online announcement to social and professional sites Used snowball sampling	Completed a bachelor's degree or higher (62.2%)
Rostosky and Riggle (2002) LG	Policies & Practices—single item (self-developed)	Disclosure—self-developed	261	E-mailed online announcement to targeted listservs	??
Ruggs, Martinez, Hebl, and Law (2015) T <i>Same sample as used in Law et al. (2011)</i>	Policies & Practices—self-developed (adapted from Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995 ; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001) Social support—coworker reactions (Griffith & Hebl, 2002)	Disclosure—Griffith & Hebl's (2002) Disclosure Scale Discrimination—self-developed	118	Solicited attendees at a transgender health conference Posted online announcement to social and professional sites Used snowball sampling	NA
Tejeda (2006) G	Policies & Practices—single item (self-developed)	Work attitudes—work satisfaction (Smith et al., 1969) Disclosure—single item (self-developed)	65	Sent e-mail announcement to targeted listserv	Completed a bachelor's degree or higher (72%)

		Discrimination—self-developed			
Velez and Moradi (2012) LGB	Climate: Liddle et al. (2004)	Work attitudes—job satisfaction (Weiss et al., 1967) Discrimination: Waldo's (1999) WHEQ	326	Posted online announcement to social and professional sites and sent online announcement to targeted listservs	Completed a bachelor's degree or higher (83%) \$30 k to \$50 k (21%); \$51 k to \$70 k (20%)
Waldo (1999) LGB	Policies & Practices—self-developed Climate—self-developed the OTHI	Work attitudes—work satisfaction (Smith et al., 1969) Psychological strain: Derogatis & Spencer's (1982) Brief Symptoms Inventory Disclosure—self-developed Discrimination—self-developed the WHEQ	287	Solicited attendees at two gay community events Mailed surveys to members of an LGBT community center	More than half of the sample completed a bachelor's degree or higher

- Note: L = lesbian, G = gay, B = bisexual, T = transgender.

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4.1.1 Formal LGBT-supportive policies and practices

The studies reviewed measured a range of formal LGBT-supportive policies and practices. This range is reflected in the number of items included in the measures. Some measures relied on a single item focused on whether sexual orientation was included in an organization's nondiscrimination policy (e.g., Day & Schoenrade, 2000; Tejada, 2006), whereas other measures used multiple policy and practice items. For example, Ragins and Cornwell's (2001) Organizational Policies and Practices Index includes six items, and Button's (2001) Workplace Policies and Practices Inventory contains nine items. Both of these measures ask participants to indicate whether or not each of several policies are present in their organization (e.g., diversity training that includes LGBT awareness). The items are then summed to create an index of the overall prevalence of LGBT-supportive policies and practices. When using these types of multi-item measures, some researchers have endorsed examining the impact of each policy and practice individually, as well as the overall sum of the items (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). One notable issue among the measures is that not all of the items always refer to the full range of LGBT identities. Some refer just to sexual orientation (e.g., Waldo, 1999), while others refer to only gender identity (e.g., Ruggs et al., 2015). Although this is not an inherent limitation, researchers must take care that the measures they employ make use of the referent most germane to the population they wish to study.

4.1.2 LGBT-supportive workplace climate

The studies reviewed showed three general approaches to measuring LGBT climate. The first approach, developed by Waldo (1999), is the Organizational Tolerance for Heterosexism Inventory. This measure asks participants to respond to four scenarios that depict situations in which LGB employees experience mistreatment at their organization. Participants are then asked how they believe their organization would respond if a similar situation were to occur there. The second approach used by researchers adapts Rankin's (2003) campus diversity climate measure to LGB populations. The measure asks participants to rate their work environments using a bipolar adjective measure (e.g., respectful–disrespectful). The third and most common approach used by researchers is the LGBT Climate Inventory (LGBTCL; Liddle et al., 2004), which is a 20-item unidimensional measure assessing LGBT perceptions of their organizations' supportiveness toward them.

Although each takes a different approach to measuring climate, they have all demonstrated acceptable psychometric characteristics. Similar to the measures assessing LGBT-supportive policies and practices, it is important that researchers take care to ensure that the referent used in the measure reflects the population under study.

4.1.3 Supportive relationships

The measures used to assess supportive relationships identified a number of possible sources of support. For example, one often-cited early study of LGBT social support (Day & Schoenrade, [2000](#)) consists of a single item that refers to support from “top management.” Rabelo and Cortina ([2014](#)) used items adapted from Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, and Rhoades ([2002](#)) to assess perceived supervisor support, and Ragins et al. ([2007](#)) used a classic measure of social support developed by Caplan et al. ([1975](#)) to assess support from coworkers and supervisors. Along these same lines, Griffith and Hebl ([2002](#)) used a composite measure that included support from various types of coworkers (supervisors, subordinates, and peers). Finally, although not labeled as such, items from Hebl, Tonidandel, and Rugg's ([2012](#)) measure of psychosocial mentoring could be construed as social support from one's mentor. Items such as “I consider my mentor to be a friend” and “My mentor provides support and encouragement” reflect the theoretical definition of social support in terms of being held in positive regard and valued by others. Thus, researchers have measures available to them that can be used to study specific sources of support and composite measures of support across those sources. We also note that all of the studies focused on emotional support rather than other forms identified in the broader literature (i.e., instrumental and tangible support; Beehr & McGrath, [1992](#); House, [1981](#)).

4.2 Workplace contextual supports and outcomes

Based on stigma theory (Goffman, 1963), we sought to identify outcomes represented in the literature that we reviewed in four meaningful categories. These four categories included: (a) work attitudes, (b) psychological strain, (c) disclosure, and (d) perceived discrimination. Based on our review of the literature, the outcomes commonly studied coincided with this framework. In the sections that follow, we summarize the meta-analytic findings relating the three workplace contextual supports to each of these outcome variables (see Table [2](#)).

Table 2. Correlations between workplace contextual supports and outcomes

Variable	k	N	r	ρ	SD ρ	95%CI	Q
Work Attitudes							
Formal policies and practices	7	2,634	.15	.16	.08	[.11, .22]	13.10
LGBT supportive climate	10	2,362	.39	.43	.12	[.35, .50]	43.35
Supportive relationships	9	2,688	.43	.48	.23	[.33, .62]	168.64
Psychological Strain							
Formal policies and practices	4	1,498	-.06	-.07	.04	[-.12, -.02]	1.68
LGBT supportive climate	6	1,600	-.26	-.29	.13	[-.39, -.19]	25.65
Supportive relationships	6	2,296	-.28	-.32	.16	[-.45, -.19]	55.56
Disclosure							
Formal policies and practices	10	2,979	.28	.29	.08	[.25, .34]	16.32
LGBT supportive climate	12	2,837	.48	.56	.11	[.50, .62]	41.64
Supportive relationships	9	2,599	.30	.32	.19	[.20, .45]	89.27
Perceived Discrimination							
Formal policies and practices	5	1,093	-.20	-.22	.17	[-.36, -.07]	26.11
LGBT supportive climate	6	1,441	-.64	-.69	.13	[-.79, -.59]	58.20
Supportive relationships	3	919	-.17	-.21	.13	[-.35, -.07]	11.10

Note: k is the number of independent samples; N is the total sample size; r is the sample weighted mean correlation; p is the mean score correlation corrected for measurement error in the predictor; SD_p is the standard deviation of the corrected correlations; CI is the confidence interval around the corrected correlation; Q is Cochran's Q , which is a measure of heterogeneity.

4.2.1 Work attitudes

The work attitudes that have received the most attention were job satisfaction and organizational commitment. As shown in Table 2, LGBT employees who worked in organizations with supportive formal LGBT policies and practices, informal climates, and relationships reported more positive work attitudes. Specifically, the relationship between supportive LGBT policies and practices and work attitudes was .16. Across the studies, the effect sizes ranged from .07 to .42. The largest effect size was reported by Tejda (2006). It is interesting to note that this study had a relatively small ($N = 65$) and homogeneous sample of gay men who worked full-time in geographic locations with no state legal protections for LGBT employees. In contrast, most other studies, with the exception of Law, Martinez, Ruggs, Hebl, and Akers (2011), who had a relatively small sample ($N = 88$) of transgender employees, included samples that were more heterogeneous and consisted of LGB employees. The relationship between LGBT-supportive workplace climates and work attitudes was .43. The effect sizes across the studies ranged from .20 to .58. The study with the smallest effect size was reported by Waldo (1999). Finally, the relationship found between supportive relationships and work attitudes was .48, and effect sizes ranged from .11 and .85. The lowest effect size was reported by Hebl et al. (2012). Relative to other studies, Hebl et al.'s study focused on support within the context of a very specific type of relationship (i.e., mentoring). This was a different approach than that used by Griffith and Hebl (2002), who reported the largest effect size. Griffith and Hebl's measure of social support captured the degree of social support from various sources (supervisors, subordinates, and peers).

4.2.2 Psychological strain

The psychological strains most commonly measured were anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion. As shown in Table 2, the three workplace supports tended to reduce the degree to which participants reported these psychological strains. The average corrected meta-analytic correlation found between formal LGBT-supportive policies and practices and psychological strain was $-.07$. In general, the effect sizes were relatively small and ranged from .00 to $-.09$, the smallest of which was reported by Waldo (1999). The average corrected meta-analytic correlation between LGBT-supportive climates and psychological strain was $-.29$. Across studies, effect sizes ranged from $-.05$ to $-.42$. The smallest effect size was from a dissertation (Androsiglio, 2009) based on a sample of 181 professional gay men with an average annual salary of approximately \$83,000. Conversely, the highest effect size was reported by Driscoll, Kelley, and Fassinger (1996), who used a sample of 123 lesbian employees. In that study, the modal annual salary for the sample ranged from \$30,000 to \$39,000. The other samples in the analysis consisted of both men and women who identified as either lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Finally, the average corrected meta-analytic correlation found between supportive workplace relationships and psychological strains was $-.32$. The range of effect sizes reported was $-.48$ to $-.09$, the smallest of which was reported by Day and Schoenrade (2000). One notable feature about this study was that it relied on a single item to assess top management support as the only source of support. The other studies included in this analysis relied on multiple-item measures that examined leader and coworker support. Interestingly, the study that reported the strongest effect size (Law et al., 2011) was the only study that focused on transgender workers.

4.2.3 Disclosure

As noted earlier, there have been conceptual models and narrative reviews describing the management of concealable stigmatized identities in general (e.g., Clair et al., 2005) and LGBT identities in particular (Croteau et al., 2008). These models describe a range of strategies and behaviors LGBT employees use to manage their identities at work. While some of the strategies and behaviors identified focus on the ways in which workers

conceal their stigmas, our focus was on disclosure of the stigmatized identity. Disclosure was one of the most often studied outcomes among the studies included in this review, and was operationalized in a number of ways. Some studies used a single item that asked, “At work, have you disclosed your sexual orientation to: 1) no one 2) some people 3) most people 4) everyone” (Ragins & Cornwell, [2001](#), pp. 1250). Other studies used multiple items asking respondent to rate the degree to which they were out to various others at work, such as coworkers, supervisors, and subordinates (Huffman et al., [2008](#); Rabelo & Cortina, [2014](#)). Still, other studies assessed a range of identity management strategies; when this was the case we focused on the one facet addressing disclosure [e.g., “explicitly out” (Reed & Leuty, [2016](#)) and “integrating” (Button, [2001](#))]. The average corrected meta-analytic correlation found between formal LGBT supportive policies and practices and disclosure was .29, with a range of .14 to .42. As was the case for the relationships between policies and practices and work attitudes ($r = .20$), as well as policies and practices and psychological strain ($r = .00$), we note that the smallest of these effect sizes was estimated in the study by Waldo ([1999](#)). The average corrected meta-analytic correlation found between LGBT-supportive climate and disclosure was .56, with a range from .32 to .69. In general, the estimated effect sizes were fairly similar and with no outliers. The average corrected meta-analytic correlation found between social support and disclosure was .32. The effect sizes reported ranged from $-.08$ to .50. Within this range, both Huebner and Davis ([2005](#)) and Ruggs et al. ([2015](#)) reported small negative effect sizes for the relationship between social support and disclosure ($r = -.08$ and $-.06$, respectively). These counterintuitive results were found despite that at least one of them (Ruggs et al., [2015](#)) used the same measures and sampling strategy as many of the other studies in the analysis.

4.2.4 Perceived discrimination

The studies in this review focused on LGBT employees' perceptions of workplace treatment discrimination. In contrast to access discrimination that focuses on the differential access that marginalized groups have to employment opportunities (e.g., hiring), treatment discrimination focuses on how these groups are treated once they are hired (Dwertmann et al., [2016](#)). Perceived discrimination was the least studied among the outcomes. Some studies measured perceived discrimination using Waldo's ([1999](#)) 22-item Workplace Heterosexist Experiences Questionnaire (WHEQ; e.g., Rabelo & Cortina, [2014](#); Velez & Moradi, [2012](#)). The measure asks respondents whether they have been in a number of social situations with coworkers or supervisors during the past year. Example items include “made you feel it was necessary for you to ‘act straight’” and “called you a ‘dyke,’ ‘faggot,’ ‘fence-sitter,’ or some other slur.” Other studies developed specific items for the study (e.g., Ragins et al., [2007](#); Tejada, [2006](#)) and some adapted James, Lovato, and Cropanzano's ([1994](#)) Workplace Prejudice/Discrimination Inventory (Munoz, [2005](#); Ragins & Cornwell, [2001](#)). In general, the results of the meta-analysis show that workplace contextual supports related to lower reported levels of discrimination. More specifically, the average corrected meta-analytic correlation between formal LGBT policies and practices and perceived discrimination was $-.22$. The effect sizes reported in the studies ranged from .31 to $-.35$. Tejada ([2006](#)) reported the only positive effect (.31) among the studies, and offered two explanations for this finding. First, he argued that unless a formal policy is enforced, employees may disregard that policy and engage in inappropriate behavior. The second explanation Tejada proposed was that in environments with formal LGBT supportive policies, LGBT minorities may feel more stigmatized and nonminorities may feel more threatened, thereby creating an environment conducive to greater hostility. Of the five studies that examined this relationship, this was the only counterintuitive finding. The next relationship examined was between LGBT supportive climates and perceived discrimination. The average corrected meta-analytic effect size found was $-.69$, and effect sizes ranged from $-.52$ to $-.79$. In general, the results seemed fairly consistent across studies, and all of the studies used similar measures and data collection strategies. Finally, the average corrected meta-analytic effect size was calculated for the relationship between supportive work relationships and perceived discrimination. Here, only three studies were located ($N = 919$). The estimated meta-analytic correlation was $-.69$.

.21, and ranged from $-.12$ to $-.42$. It is interesting to note that the study that reported the strongest relationship ($-.42$; Ruggs et al., [2015](#)) was the only study in the analysis to include only participants who were transgender.

In summary, based on the meta-analytic correlations, each of the three contextual supports demonstrated a significant relationship with work attitudes, psychological strains, disclosure, and discrimination across studies. One study that stood out from the others in some ways was the study by Waldo ([1999](#)). First, this was one of the earliest studies to examine supportive LGBT climate and policies on work attitudes and psychological strain. As such, it called attention to an area that had been largely neglected among those studying minority experiences in the workplace. It is also interesting to note that the results of this particular study reported some of the smallest relationships between, for example, LGBT-supportive climate and attitudes. It differed from the other studies included in the review in that it was the only study to rely on the Organizational Tolerance for Heterosexism Inventory to assess climate's relationship to attitudes and strains. As noted above, this measure assesses climate perceptions using a vignette methodology. The only other study to use this vignette methodology was by Brenner, Lyons, and Fassinger ([2010](#)), who examined its relationship to disclosure as opposed to attitudes and strains. One other feature of the Waldo study, compared to the others, was that it combined data from two different samples using two different methodologies. One portion of the sample came from data that were collected at two community events in a Northeastern city where researchers approached potential participants. For the second portion of the sample, data were collected by mailing surveys to members of an LGB community center in a Midwestern city. These differences in terms of measures used, data collection methods, and combining geographic locations may have played a role in the relationships reported relative to those reported in other studies.

4.3 Relative importance of workplace contextual supports on outcomes

One of the contributions of this review is to determine the relative importance of the three types of workplace supports in shaping the work experiences of LGBT employees. In order to do this, we conducted a dominance analysis (Budescu, [1993](#)) using the meta-analytic correlation matrix in Table [3](#). The matrix includes the corrected correlation coefficients among the study variables. In order to have a complete matrix, we coded all of the relationships from the primary studies (Viswesvaran & Ones, [1995](#)). As shown in Table [4](#), 26% of the total explained variance in the *work attitudes* of LGBT workers was attributable to the workplace contextual supports. Of that explained variance, supportive workplace relationships contributed 55%, LGBT-supportive workplace climate contributed 41%, and formal LGBT policies and practices contributed only 4%. For *psychological strain*, the workplace contextual supports accounted for 12% of the total explained variance, of which supportive workplace relationships contributed 57%, LGBT climate contributed 41%, and formal policies and practices only contributed 2%. Thus, for both work attitudes and psychological strain, supportive workplace relationships had the strongest effects, followed by LGBT-supportive climate. Regarding *disclosure*, the workplace contextual supports accounted for 34% of the total variance explained, as shown in Table [4](#). Of that explained variance, LGBT supportive climate contributed 73%, formal policies and practices contributed 14%, and supportive workplace relationships contributed 13% of the total variance explained. Finally, 55% of the total variance explained in *perceived discrimination* was attributed to the workplace supports, of which LGBT supportive climate accounted for 86%, supportive workplace relationships accounted for 9%, and formal policies and practices accounted for 4% of the total variance explained. For the outcomes of both disclosure and perceived discrimination, LGBT supportive workplace climate accounted for the vast majority of variance explained.

Table 3. Meta-analytic correlation matrix used for dominance analysis

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Formal policy	—						
LGBT climate	.26	—					

Supportive relationships	.32	.59	—				
Work attitudes	.16	.43	.47	—			
Psychological strain	-.07	-.29	-.32	-.30	—		
Disclosure	.29	.56	.32	.13	-.12	—	
Discrimination	-.22	-.69	-.21	-.34	.28	-.22	—

Note: All the correlations are corrected correlations that are calculated with the Hunter and Schmidt method.

Table 4. Summary of dominance analysis for workplace contextual supports and outcomes

	Work Attitudes				Psychological Strain				Disclosure				Discrimination			
	R^2	X1	X2	X3	R^2	X1	X2	X3	R^2	X1	X2	X3	R^2	X1	X2	X3
		DW	DW	DW		DW	DW	DW		DW	DW	DW		DW	DW	DW
		.03	.19	.22		.01	.08	.10		.08	.31	.10		.05	.43	.02
X1. Policy	.03		.16	.20	.01		.08	.10	.08		.25	.06	.05		.43	.02
X2. LGBT Climate	.19	.01		.07	.08	.00		.03	.31	.02		.00	.48	.01		.06
X3. Social Support	.22	.00	.04		.10	.01	.02		.10	.04	.21		.04	.03	.49	
X1, X2	.19			.07	.08			.04	.34			.01	.48			.07
X1, X3	.22		.36		.10		.02		.14		.20		.07		.48	
X2, X3	.26		.36		.12	.01			.31	.02			.54	.01		
X1, X2, X3	.26				.12				.34				.55			
Overall Avg. (C)		.01	.11	.14		.01	.05	.07		.05	.25	.04		.02	.47	.05
% of Explainable Variance		4%	41%	55%		2%	41%	57%		14%	73%	13%		4%	86%	9%

Note: DW = dominance weights.

An examination of these results reveals several clear patterns. First, formal policies and practices were found to be the weakest predictor of all four outcomes relative to each of the other workplace supports based on the dominance analysis (Table 4). This does not imply that they are unimportant. After all, formal policies and practices were predictive of all four outcomes. Instead, this finding provides evidence for the often-made assertion that, by themselves, formal policies and practices are “not enough” to protect LGBT workers (Ragins et

al., 2007). Indeed, as noted earlier, it is not simply the presence of formal policies and procedures that matters, but also the extent to which they are consistently implemented and enforced within the organization; that is, the extent to which such policies and procedures are embedded in the organization's culture. One explanation for why policies may not be consistently embedded in an organization's culture can be drawn from the work of Martin (1992, 2001), who proposed that culture need not be uniform throughout the organization. Rather, she suggested that culture can be differentiated (i.e., subcultures) and even fragmented (i.e., around a specific issue). Based on this logic, there need not be consensus about the interpretation and implementation of policies organization-wide, across subcultures within the organization, or around specific LGBT policies. Further support for this observation can be seen in the finding that supportive workplace climate had the strongest relative importance to both disclosure and discrimination and the second-strongest relative importance to work attitudes and strain. This suggests that, in contrast to formal policies and practices that merely espouse a set of values, beliefs, and behaviors, it is the *perception* of these that matter more to LGBT workers especially with respect to their disclosure and perceptions of discrimination. The relatively strong findings for LGBT-supportive workplace climate vis-à-vis work attitudes and strains is also noteworthy. They support theories of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) and person–environment fit (Kristof, 1996), which assert that favorable job attitudes and even well-being result when there is a match between characteristics of the work environment and of the worker. The results reported here extend the empirical findings of these theories to include LGBT-supportive workplace climate as an organizational characteristic and an LGBT identity as an employee characteristic. Finally, even more so than an LGBT-supportive workplace climate, our results call attention to the importance of supportive workplace relationships. This type of support was found to be the strongest predictor of work attitudes and well-being relative to the other types of workplace supports. This finding is consistent with models of occupational stress in general (Ganster & Rosen, 2013) and theories of minority stress in particular (I. H. Meyer, 1995, 2003). Both of these literatures suggest that social support provides important coping resources that can help mitigate the negative effects of stressors that are experienced in the workplace. Moreover, social support may play a particularly important role in directly reducing specific stressors (e.g., social isolation; Sabat et al., 2014) experienced by LGBT workers.

4.4 Theoretical implications

Although not always explicitly stated, a number of different theories were used across the studies to explain the relationship between workplace contextual supports and outcomes. For policies and practices, most studies use signaling theory to justify the relationships between LGBT supportive policy and practices and outcomes (e.g., Day & Schoenrade, 2000; Law et al., 2011; Rostosky & Riggle, 2002). Other studies relied on Schein's (1984, 1992) work that points out that policies and practices are visible artifacts for organizational culture and represent expected employee behavior (e.g., Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; Tejeda, 2006). Few studies explicitly pointed out the underlying theory used in making predictions about LGBT-supportive climates and outcomes. Brenner et al. (2010) suggested that a supportive climate implicitly signals to LGBT employees whether the work environment is one in which they are protected and feel comfortable in revealing their status. Others have employed Kahn's (1990) theory of employee engagement, which suggests that one of the key drivers of engagement is the condition of psychological safety (e.g., Boyles, 2008). Studies involving social support varied in terms of underlying theory. These theories included Blau's (1964) social exchange theory (e.g., Huffman et al., 2008), Kahn's (1990) theory regarding psychological meaningfulness (e.g., Boyles, 2008), and Goffman's (1963) stigma theory (e.g., Ragins et al., 2007). This use of multiple theories to explain complex phenomena such as workplace experiences of LGBT workers is neither surprising nor should it be considered a weakness of the literature reviewed. Studies come from multiple disciplinary areas that bring to bear their own dominant theoretical lenses. An advantage of this is that there is the potential for cross-fertilization across disciplinary boundaries that may advance science and practice. On the other hand, when diffuse perspectives are not integrated, it can lead to a lack of clarity and duplication of effort.

In the present study, we empirically integrate and summarize research on the workplace contextual support variables included in the two most prominent conceptual models describing the experiences of LGBT workers: the Home-Work Disclosure Model (Ragins, [2004](#), [2008](#)) and the Interpersonal Diversity Disclosure Model (Clair et al., [2005](#)). Although we did not test these models in their entirety (i.e., did not include individual differences owing to too few studies), our results provide important insights about them. First, we provide meta-analytic evidence for the proposition that workplace contextual supports are related to disclosure decisions as predicted by the models. In addition, we extend those models to include a wider range of outcomes, including work-related attitudes, psychological strain, and experienced discrimination. In so doing, we demonstrate the efficacy of stigma theory, which lies at the base of both models, for understanding the workplace experiences of LGBT workers. We also make it possible to draw firm conclusions from past research. First, in support of signaling theory, LGBT-supportive policies and practices and climate convey important information to LGBT workers. Second, social support theory (Beehr & McGrath, [1992](#); Cohen & Willis, 1984) was also supported as key to their experiences at work. Taken together, the contextual supports previously examined relate to the work attitudes, well-being, and behaviors of LGBT workers. These findings should steer research toward the less well understood aspects of the processes linking contextual support to outcomes for LGBT workers. This could be done, for example, by examining theoretical mechanisms (e.g., mediators such as belongingness, self-esteem, identity affirmation derived from social support theory) for the relationships we found, and the boundary conditions under which theory would suggest the favorable effects of supportive workplace contexts are more (or less) likely to be realized. Other suggestions for future research are given below.

4.5 Future research

Our review reveals important insights regarding the relationships between workplace supports, both individually and relative to each other, and the experiences of LGBT employees at work. It also identifies a number of areas for future research. From a methodological perspective, it is important to note that nearly all of the studies included in our review used cross-sectional designs. This makes it impossible to determine the causal ordering of contextual support variables in relation to each other and to the four outcomes. For example, some researchers have suggested that formal policies and practices stem from and reflect the values and beliefs of an organization's members (Ragins & Cornwell, [2001](#); Tejada, [2006](#)). This implies that the values and beliefs temporally precede the adoption of policies and practices. An alternative to this view is that like other HRM policies (e.g., Bowen & Ostroff, [2004](#); Ferris et al., [1998](#)), the implementation of LGBT-supportive policies and practices can influence the values and beliefs held by employees. This would suggest organizational policies and practices would temporally precede employee values and beliefs. In order to determine this type of temporal precedence, a necessary condition for establishing causality, longitudinal studies are needed.

Another area warranting further investigation concerns the possible impact of sampling strategies used in most LGBT studies, including social and professional websites, LGBT conference attendees, and members of LGBT national organizations. As reported in Table [1](#), all of the studies that report education and/or salary data ($k = 18$) for respondents use sampling methodologies that yield a substantially more educated and higher earning sample than national averages. According to the 2000 Census, 24.4% of adults had a bachelor's (BA) degree or above. In 2015, it had risen to 44%. In comparison, educational attainment of the samples used in the studies ranged from 53 to 100% BA or above. Most samples also had substantially higher earnings than the 2015 national average of \$48,000. The use of convenience samples are not automatically problematic. However, researchers should articulate why the convenience sample is sufficiently similar to the intended population. The characteristics of the samples for which we have demographic data clearly exhibit range restriction on education and earnings. To the extent that these variables are correlated with the workplace contextual supports examined in the present study or that respondents have higher than average occupational status (which tends to provide greater resources that may buffer the experience of harassment), the external validity of the findings

is compromised. One must also question whether these samples represent the overall LGBT population, particularly women. Lesbians and bisexual women are least likely to have completed college and have high levels of occupational attainment (Ueno, Pena-Talamantes, & Roach, [2013](#)). Thus, additional research that captures the experiences of a broader range of LGBT workers is needed.

One of the more exciting findings in our review was the overwhelming positive impact that supportive workplace relationships can have on the work attitudes and well-being of LGBT employees. It is important to recognize that the studies in the review operationalized social support as a general support measure. It seems likely that there may be differences among the types of support received. For example, it is unclear whether the support was active, passive, or specific to one's LGBT identity. This difference may help to explain some of the variation in effect sizes across studies. Future research on support for LGBT employees should investigate possible differences in types of support by focusing more broadly on the developments in the ally literature. Allies are nonstigmatized individuals who support and advocate on behalf of those who are stigmatized (Ragins, [2008](#)). Sabat et al. ([2014](#)) distinguished between two types of ally strategies: (a) ally confrontation and (b) ally acknowledgment. Ally confrontation is the outward expression of dissatisfaction toward acts of prejudice and discrimination by others that are targeted toward LGBT employees. Ally acknowledgment, on the other hand, refers to positively demonstrating support for and acknowledgment of LGBT identities. Both strategies of support are specific to one's LGBT identity. Future research should examine the ways that allies can help improve the work lives of LGBT employees by specifically identifying behaviors that are beneficial in the workplace. For example, researchers could examine the ways in which allies can stand up to or “confront” those who act in a discriminatory manner toward LGBT employees. The current work highlights the potentially untapped power of allies and creates an impetus for organizations to engage *all* employees in supporting their LGBT peers.

Future research might also focus on the links between the micro perspective taken in the present review with a more macro perspective. The micro perspective focuses on variables measured at the individual level, while a macro view focuses on variables aggregated at the firm or industry level. Research adopting a macro focus shows that adoption of LGBT supportive policies and practices provides benefits to the organization relative to their competitors (Badgett, Durso, Kastanis, & Mallory, [2013](#)), including increased financial performance (Johnston & Malina, [2008](#)). Although this is important research, it suffers from what is sometimes referred to as the “black box” (Becker & Gerhart, [1996](#)); the underlying mechanisms linking formal policies to firm performance remain unexamined. That is, current macro-level research does not specify the intervening mechanisms that link HR policies and practices to financial performance. Research relating other types of HR policies to firm performance suggests that individual-level variables, such as attitudes and psychological climate, may play just such a linking role (e.g., Gardner et al., [2001](#)). It seems likely that LGBT supportive policies and practices would be linked to firm performance via some of the individual-level variables included in this review. Thus, future research may benefit from empirically testing such linkages.

5 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Given the negative public relations that might result for companies that do not support LGBT employees, organizations wishing to be labeled “best in class” for diversity and inclusion would stand to benefit from proactively supporting LGBT employees instead of waiting for formal legislation that protects LGBT individuals from discrimination. However, our findings demonstrate that employers who wish to truly be inclusive of LGBT employees need more than just policies and practices; they need cultures of support for LGBT employees that are grounded in supportive coworker interactions. In 2016, there were 321 organizations in the Fortune 500 that participated in the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index (CEI) ranking of “Best Companies to Work For” for LGBT employees in 2016 (Human Rights Campaign, [2016](#)). However, the requirements for a 100%

ranking are entirely based on the presence of policies and procedures, and not on corporate culture. Thus, while 165 of these companies received a perfect score on the CEI (Human Rights Campaign, [2016](#)), this may not be enough evidence to suggest that these companies truly have a positive impact on LGBT employees' workplace outcomes. As a result, these companies may continue to experience a lack of engagement and higher turnover rates for LGBT employees relative to the general population, causing both talent and productivity losses.

Although companies ranked at the top of the list might appear externally to be inclusive, our study demonstrates that true inclusivity starts with the attitudes, well-being, and experiences of individual employees. Companies might be best served by asking LGBT employees about their perceptions of the corporate climate and active initiatives that truly inspire attitudinal change in employees who may have misconceptions about the LGBT community (or who are simply unaware of the concerns of the community in general). Leveraging employee resource groups might provide an avenue for employers to engage LGBT employees as partners in creating positive organizational change. Proactively engaging LGBT allies might also enable an inclusive climate to take root, mobilizing those who wish to support LGBT employees but who are unaware of how or when it is appropriate (Brooks & Edwards, [2009](#)). Promoting allyship might be particularly useful given that allies have been characterized as engaging in both supportive and advocacy behaviors (Ji, [2007](#)). Because this study provides evidence that supportive behaviors are effective in increasing positive workplace outcomes for LGBT employees, empowering allies may help to create true organizational change. Thus, finding ways to create and engage allies at work may be an effective practice to enhance LGBT inclusivity.

Overall, managers would be well suited to use the findings from our study as leverage to enhance organizational-level commitment to creating truly inclusive workplace cultures, as opposed to solely focusing on eliminating bias from the workplace. While avoiding negative, discriminatory behaviors is certainly important, an absence of negative work behaviors does not mean that the workplace overall, or coworkers more specifically, will be actively inclusive of LGBT employees (i.e., focusing on being “diverse” without also focusing on breeding inclusivity; Hope Pelled, Ledford, & Albers Mohrman, [1999](#)). Thus, our findings suggest that managers, and organizational leaders more broadly, should shift their focus from avoiding traditional forms of deviance (Bennett & Robinson, [2000](#); Robinson & Bennett, [1995](#)) to modeling positive deviance (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, [2003](#)). Positive deviance, or honorable and voluntary behaviors that depart from current organizational or team norms (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, [2004](#)), has been linked to a host of positive workplace outcomes outside of the diversity and inclusion literature (R. E. Quinn, [1996](#); R. E. Quinn & Quinn, [2002](#)). By encouraging employees to actively and voluntarily (i.e., not because a policy requires it) treat LGBT employees honorably, managers may be able to improve the work attitudes of LGBT employees, ostensibly improving their workplace performance as a result. Further, given that increased representation of minority groups can enhance the job attitudes of majority group members, but only if the workplace culture is inclusive (Kossek, Markel, & McHugh, [2003](#)), this strategy may increase job attitudes and work performance for non-LGBT employees as well. Finally, because top management team support of diversity initiatives is key in supporting workplace culture (Konrad & Linnehan, [1995](#); Roberson, [2006](#)), managers should view our findings as further impetus to become fully invested in LGBT equality at work. This might mean attending or leading LGBT employee resource group meetings or events or taking a public stand on issues of LGBT equality at a national, state, or local level. By role modeling ally behavior from the top down, leaders may be in a unique position to create or expand an LGBT inclusive work climate, as well as the number of supportive relationships at work.

Finally, our findings demonstrate that disclosure is related to supportive relationships and organizational climate. We also mentioned previously that a bulk of the participants in prior studies came from white collar jobs, with higher than average salaries. As a result, it is important to note that our participants may have had more access to support and positive organizational climates because they were in greater positions of power within their organizations and society at large. Prior work has demonstrated that LGBT employees often have to

choose between being satisfied at work and being successful, given that being “out” can have detrimental consequences on perceptions of promotability and salary (Ellis & Riggie, [1996](#)). Thus, while some LGBT individuals may benefit from coming out at work, those in noninclusive cultures may be negatively affected. For example, research has shown that men are more likely to discriminate against gay men (Fasoli, Maas, Paladino, Sulpizio, [2017](#)), and that individuals living in particular regions within the United States (Hasenbush, Flores, Kastanis, Sears, & Gates, [2017](#)) or in other countries globally (see Barak, [2016](#), for a review) may also face greater discrimination. If possible, we recommend that employees who work in noninclusive workplace climates might attempt to create change from within by making the business case for inclusivity. Specifically, the findings derived from the current study help to make the case for the negative impact of heterosexism and the positive impact of LGBT inclusivity at work, using rigorous methodology. If the risks of advocating for oneself are too high, we hope that LGBT employees who are concerned about broader disclosure and advocacy at work might make known allies aware of the current findings and request help in raising awareness about the importance of LGBT inclusivity at work. This kind of action may be possible even in workplaces that have a noninclusive climate, given LGBT employees often come out to select, trusted individuals even under adverse circumstances (Ragins, [2008](#)). Of course, not every workplace contains allies or leaders open to positive change. In these instances, we hope that our findings are useful to LGBT employees who might look for more fulfilling and affirming organizations to work for in the future.

ENDNOTE

*References marked with an asterisk indicate studies included in the meta-analysis.

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