EXPLORING MINORITY STRESS PROCESSES AND SOCIAL SUPPORTS IN THE WORKPLACE: HOW INDIVIDUALS IN SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS MANAGE THE WORK/FAMILY BORDER

BY

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DISSERTATION
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Abstract

Studies of minority stress processes (Meyer, 2003) in the workplace have focused on individual level outcomes, such as individual mental health (Velez, Moradi, & Brewster, 2013), or outcomes within the work context, such as job satisfaction or productivity (Button, 2001; Ragins Singh, & Cornwall, 2007). Very little attention has been given to the ways in which experiences with minority stressors in the work domain affect the same-sex partners of sexual minority employees and their relationships. This dissertation project used a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach involving quantitative secondary data analysis and qualitative case study analysis to examine the couple-level effects of minority stress processes and supports in the work domain. Results show that sexual minority employees continue to experience minority stress processes in the workplace, and specifically social stigma and other subtle microaggressions appear to be the predominant prejudice event reported. Further, these experiences with prejudice events and other forms of minority stress processes are associated with couple-level outcomes, such as decreased relationship satisfaction. However, participants in the case study analysis also reported ways in which their relationships were positively affected by these experiences, by being able to support one another for example. Findings from this project enhance our understanding of minority stress processes theoretically, but can also be applied to workplaces broadly to inform policy and practices within organizations.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

People who identify as a sexual minority, that is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer (LGBQ), face disproportionate barriers and discrimination in the workforce compared to heterosexual adults. Sexual minority employees have been passed over in hiring and promotion decisions because of their sexual orientation (e.g., Ahmed, Andersson, & Hammarstedt, 2013; Barron & Hebl, 2013; Pichler, Varma, & Bruce, 2010; Tilcsik, 2011), and in general receive less compensation or employment benefits than heterosexual employees (Badgett, 1995; Baumle & Poston, 2011; Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2007). Derogatory comments, jokes, and demeaning attitudes towards sexual minorities can leave LGBQ individuals feeling victimized in the workplace (Embrick, Walther, & Wickens, 2007; Ragins, Singh, & Cornwall, 2007; Velez, Moradi, & Brewster, 2013; Waldo, 1999). Although nondiscrimination laws and policies are beginning to be enacted in many states and large organizations (Human Rights Campaign [HRC], 2013, 2016), these standards are inconsistent and do not protect against every form of discrimination for LGBQ employees. Thus, differences between individual workplaces, i.e. workplace climate and organizational policies, may be of even more importance for LGBQ employees. Specifically, social support within the workplace has been found to minimize some of the negative effects of workplace victimization (e.g. Huffman, Watrous-Rodriguez, & King, 2008).

Nearly all of the research exploring LGBQ experiences of victimization and/or support in the workplace focus on individual level outcomes, including individual mental health (Velez et al., 2013) and work-related results, such as job satisfaction or productivity (e.g., Button, 2001; Ragins et al., 2007). Less attention has been given to the ways in which the workplace environment may affect LGBQ employees in terms of their romantic relationships and family life. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation is to examine the cross-contextual effects of minority stress processes and supports across the work/family border to enhance the understanding of how same-sex couples are affected by workplace contexts beyond individual-level outcomes for sexual minority employees.

LGBQ Discrimination in the Workplace

Employment difficulties have been documented for LGBQ individuals, including formal and informal discrimination in the workplace. Hebl, Foster, Mannix, and Dovidio (2002) defined formal discrimination as overt, quantifiable acts of discrimination, such as disparities in hiring, promotion, compensation, and direct verbal or physical harassment. Evidence shows that gaining employment can be difficult when potential employers view LGBQ candidates, or candidates perceived to be LGBQ, as less desirable or suitable for a position. Several experimental studies matched resumes or job candidates on skill-level but altered one key characteristic – implied sexual orientation (Ahmed et al., 2013; Barron & Hebl, 2013; Drydakis, 2009; Hebl et al., 2002; Tilcsik, 2011; Weichselbaumer, 2003). For example,
Barron and Hebl (2013) asked job candidates to don either a “Gay and Proud” hat or a “Texan and Proud” hat. In all of these studies, compared to the perceived heterosexual job candidates, the perceived LGBTQ job candidate received fewer interview invitations, was deemed less qualified for the position, or perceived the interaction with the potential employer to be more negative. Stereotypes about sexual minorities can influence employers’ beliefs about the individual’s ability to fulfill a job well and LGBTQ candidates can be excluded from certain positions (Ahmed et al., 2013; Pichler et al., 2010).

Significant wage disparities for LGBTQ employees have also been documented. These studies used large, population-based surveys such as the U.S. Census (Baumle & Poston, 2011; Klawitter & Flatt, 1998), the General Social Survey (Cushing-Daniels & Yeung, 2009), or the Current Population Survey (Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2007) to compare employment income of same-sex and heterosexual couples. Since 1990, the U.S. Census has included the term “unmarried partner” as a relationship descriptor, allowing scholars to infer a sexual minority identity for those indicating this relationship with someone of the same gender. This method, while excluding single LGBTQ individuals or those who identify as a sexual minority and are in a relationship with a person of a different gender, does allow researchers a way to classify non-heterosexual households. Using this technique, many studies have shown that gay men with comparable education and job type, on average earn significantly less than heterosexual men (Badgett, 1995; Cushing-Daniels & Yeung, 2009; Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2007; Klawitter & Flatt, 1998); some data show a 12.5% earnings difference (Baumle & Poston, 2011).

Furthermore, LGBTQ employees are vulnerable to direct forms of victimization in the workplace, such as verbal or physical harassment (Embrick et al., 2007; Herek, 2009). One policy report released in 2007 claimed that between 7% and 41% of LGBTQ people surveyed had been either physically or verbally abused in the workplace or had their property vandalized at work (Badgett, Lau, Sears, & Ho, 2007). LGBTQ employees reported receiving harassing emails or faxes or hearing anti-gay jokes in the workplace (Badgett et al., 2007; Colvin, 2004).

Hebl and colleagues (2002) contrast these examples of formal discrimination with what they termed informal discrimination, or more subtle acts of homophobia or heterosexism that occur as part of interactions with others. Heterosexism has been defined as “an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship or community” (Herek, 1992, p. 89). In this sense, LGBTQ employees may feel discriminated against if work colleagues assume a heterosexual identity of everyone or uphold belief systems that devalue nonheterosexual identities, even if more direct or formal discrimination (Hebl et al., 2002) experiences do not occur. Several studies of sexual minorities in the workplace describe these types of interpersonal discrimination as occurring frequently at work (e.g., Button, 2001; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). Both formal and informal discrimination are considered minority stress processes in that they are unique to LGBTQ individuals based
on their sexual minority status. These stress processes and their implications for health and well-being will be discussed further within the framework of minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) in Chapter 2.

**Couple-Level Effects of LGBQ Discrimination**

Although studies of workplace climate for LGBQ employees have focused predominantly on the individual in that context, a separate line of research has examined relationship outcomes given the minority stressors same-sex couples face (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; Frost & Meyer, 2009; Otis, Riggle, & Rostosky, 2006). Evidence shows that within a same-sex relationship, experiences with discrimination and other minority stressors can have detrimental effects on the romantic relationship (e.g., Dudley et al., 2005). Outside of the workplace, studies of same-sex couples show that relationship outcomes are affected by both the minority stressors directly and the related negative mental health outcomes. Internalized homophobia, for example, has been linked to decreased relationship quality overall (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; Otis, Rostosky, Riggle, & Hamrin, 2006), decreased relationship attractions and satisfaction (Mohr & Daly, 2008), and fearful or preoccupied adult attachment styles (Sherry, 2007). Being in a stigmatized or marginalized relationship with little social recognition may also lead same-sex couples to invest less in the relationship, making it more unstable long-term (Cohen, Byers, & Walsh, 2008; Fingerhut & Maisel, 2010; Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006).

Other research has shown that minority stress experiences may negatively influence an individual’s mental health and this in turn deteriorates the relationship quality (Frost & Meyer, 2009; Otis et al., 2006). Using data from forty-five lesbian couples, researchers found that poorer psychological health in one partner was related to decreased relationship satisfaction, feelings of support and intimacy, and relationship commitment in the other person in the couple (Otis et al., 2006). Thus, the process by which minority stress experiences affect relationship outcomes may be through an individual’s ability or inability to cope with these stress processes in the workplace.

Given this connection between minority stress processes and relationship outcomes, it is imperative to investigate workplace experiences that may either support or harm same-sex couples. The workplace is an important context to examine in terms of sources of stress and supports for couples given the amount of time adults spend at work. Further, family and in particular, intimate partner relationships, are an important dynamic to be studied given the overall importance of these relationships. For married, heterosexual partners, spouses often take on a role of primary social support and can greatly influence their partners’ well-being (Coyne & DeLongis, 1986). For same-sex couples facing less-than-supportive societal norms, the supportive roles of one’s partner may take on even greater meaning (Fitzgerald, Fassinger, & Betz, 1995; Kurdek, 1988), and have been linked to relationship satisfaction and stability for sexual minorities (Kurdek, 1995).
Therefore, as researchers explore discrimination and minority stress processes in the workplace for LGBQ employees, it may be especially important to understand how LGBQ employees in same-sex relationships experience couple-level effects as well. Drawing on minority stress theory (Meyer, 1995; 2003) and work/family border theory (Clark, 2000) in particular may assist in the exploration of how workplace experiences can affect same-sex couples. Specifically, minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) provides a framework for understanding how LGBQ individuals may experience minority stress in the workplace and the resulting individual mental health and relationship outcomes. Tenets of work/family border theory (Clark, 2000) can contribute to this understanding by describing the ways in which LGBQ employees, their families, and their work colleagues manage the border between family and work, modifying the cross-contextual effects of minority stress processes experienced in the workplace on same-sex couples. Studying the border characteristics for LGBQ employees may shed light on the processes through which couples in the family domain are affected by minority stress and supports in the work domain, and thus inform our understanding of the importance and role of workplace contexts.
Chapter 2

Literature Review and Guiding Theoretical Frameworks

The proposed research will draw on two theoretical frameworks to examine the phenomenon of cross-contextual minority stress processes from the work to home context for same-sex couples. Specifically, minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) details the unique stress processes experienced by sexual minorities, the social supports and coping mechanisms used to handle these stress processes, and the potential for mental health and relationship outcomes as a result of stress. Work/family border theory (Clark, 2000) provides a framework for understanding the ways employees find balance between their distinct work and family domains, characteristics of the border between these domains, and the constraints on and supports for this border. Minority stress theory and work/family border theory have not yet been used in conjunction, but complement one another nicely. This chapter will explore each theory in full and describe the literature supporting their tenets. The chapter will conclude with a proposed integrated theoretical approach combining minority stress theory and work/family border theory, and outline the research questions for the current dissertation project.

Minority Stress Theory

As conceptualized by Meyer (2003), minority stress theory explicates stressors unique to those with minority statuses; the theory explains why and how sexual minorities may have lower psychological health as a result of these unique stressors. Individuals who identify as LGBQ may experience increased stress specific to their sexual identity above and beyond general stressors experienced by all people. These unique stressors and the additional coping mechanisms they warrant can have deleterious effects on an individual’s mental health (Meyer, 1995). Furthermore, minority stress is considered both chronic and socially based; the underlying heterosexism that is continually reproduced in cultural interactions sets the stage for feeling marginalized (Meyer, 2003).

Meyer (2003) posits an intricate web of factors that explain the link between minority stress processes and mental health outcomes (see Figure 1). Environmental circumstances (e.g. the broader workplace environment) must be explored to understand the context within which an LGBQ person identifies as a sexual minority. General stressors must also be considered as they will undoubtedly affect one’s mental health. Distinct from these general stress processes, minority stress processes are categorized as either distal (occurring externally to the LGBQ person) or proximal (occurring internally within the LGBQ person). These stressors can include: victimization or stigmatization from others, expectations or fear of rejection, concealment, and internalized homophobia. Finally, Meyer (2003) discusses the ways in which these stress processes relate to mental health outcomes, as well as the ways in which social supports and characteristics of the minority identity that can moderate this relationship.
The presence of nondiscrimination laws or policies and supportive elements in the workplace do, in fact, have significant effects on the experiences of sexual minorities. The presence of an antidiscrimination law at the state-level, for example, has been associated with a more positive sense of self, feeling more supported in the community, and feeling more comfortable disclosing one’s sexual orientation (Riggle, Rostosky, & Horne, 2010), as well as reduced reports of discrimination (Barron & Hebl, 2013) and smaller wage disparities (Martell, 2013). At the organization level, LGBQ employees have reported significantly less interpersonal discrimination in their workplace when the company implemented antidiscrimination policies, diversity training that included sexual minority issues, or offered domestic partner benefits to same-sex couples (Button, 2001; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). An LGBQ-supportive workplace policy is also associated with increased sexual minority disclosure at work, an indication that LGBQ employees may feel safer and more protected in their job (Rostosky & Riggle, 2002). Thus, research has shown that the general work environment can have profound effects on an LGBQ employee.

To date, only twenty-two states (and the District of Columbia) have employment nondiscrimination laws protecting sexual minorities against discrimination in the workplace (HRC, 2016). Even in those states, individuals in small, private businesses (i.e. less than fifteen employees) and religious institutions are not covered by these laws. There is also no federal non-discrimination law protecting those in the workplace solely on the basis of sexual orientation. This patchwork of protection across the United States leaves many LGBQ employees vulnerable to discrimination.
However, many large organizations have taken it upon themselves to create a supportive and protective environment for LGBQ employees (HRC, 2014). Scholars have identified a host of organizational practices as supportive for sexual minority employees, including: an organization-wide policy prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation; inclusion of sexual orientation in company diversity statements or diversity trainings; extending domestic partner benefits to same-sex couples; offering sexual minority resource-support groups; public support of LGBQ issues; and a general sense of acceptance, such that same-sex partners are welcome at company social activities (Button, 2001; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). Often, these organization-wide policies and practices go beyond the support provided by state laws. Each of these factors can send a signal to LGBQ employees that they are welcome, valued, and supported within that particular organization. Therefore, the context of the workplace, or circumstances in the work environment, can vary greatly for employees, even those under the same state-wide laws.

**General stressors.** Within the context of these environmental circumstances, Meyer (2003) acknowledges that all individuals experience general stressors, stress experiences that are not specific to a minority identity. In the workplace, employees may experience some level of general stress, whether that is job stress, daily hassles, or work-family conflict. Despite the documented stressors in the work environment for many employees (Michel, Kotrba, Mitchelson, Clark, & Baltes, 2011), scholars investigating sexual minority specific stressors in the workplace rarely take general stressors into consideration. Rather, it seems, most investigations have presumed some level of stress for all as the baseline and simply focus on the unique characteristics and consequences of minority stressors. In fact, only one study using minority stress theory in the workplace included a measure of workplace stress in general as a control variable (Waldo, 1999). However, individuals who are under various levels of other work stress may experience and internalize minority stressors in the workplace differently; thus, it is important that studies begin to include measures of this variable from Meyer’s (2003) model.

**Minority stress processes.** The premise of minority stress theory is that those with a stigmatized social identity will experience unique stressors relative to this identity, above and beyond the general stressors experienced by all individuals (Meyer, 2003). Meyer calls these LGBT-specific stressors “minority stressors” and distinguishes between those that are distal or proximal to the individual.

**Distal.** “Distal stressor” refers to stigmatization or victimization that is perpetrated by another actor aimed at the LGBQ individual (Meyer, 2003). Such prejudice events can range from indirect experiences – presumed heterosexuality or other forms of heterosexism, social isolation, etc. – to direct experiences – anti-gay jokes or demeaning comments; emotional, verbal, or physical abuse; etc. (Waldo, 1999). While these acts of discrimination may occur in other contexts as well, it seems that victimization and stigmatization in the workplace result in unique job-related outcomes. In addition to the wage
disparities discussed earlier (Baumle & Poston, 2011; Cushing-Daniels & Yeung, 2009; Elmslie & Tebaldi, 2007), LGBQ employees who experience discrimination in the workplace report decreased job satisfaction, stronger intentions to leave that position, and withdrawing from the workplace (i.e., increased absenteeism; Ragins et al., 2007; Velez et al., 2013; Waldo, 1999).

In these studies, distal stressors are often measured using frequency scores from a list of potential prejudice events (Ragins et al., 2007; Velez et al., 2013; Waldo, 1999). For example, the Workplace Heterosexist Experiences Questionnaire (WHEQ) is a 22-item measure including questions such as “In the past 24 months in your workplace, have you ever been in a situation where any of your coworkers or supervisors called you a dyke, faggot, fence-sitter, or some other slur?” (Waldo, 1999, p. 223). Although Waldo created the WHEQ for his 1999 study, researchers more recently tested its consistency, reporting a Cronbach’s alpha of .94 for one sample (Velez et al., 2013). While this measure shows strong reliability and captures the occurrence of various events identified by the researcher, it is far from exhaustive. More subtle acts of social stigma or microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2011) may be missed by relying on this measure alone. Qualitative and more open-ended work is needed to capture the unique experiences individuals perceive to be stigmatizing or victimizing.

**Proximal.** Proximal stressors refer to stress processes that occur within the individual, rather than to them. Meyer (2003) includes three distinct stress processes in this category: expectations or fear of rejection, concealment, and internalized homophobia.

*Expectations of stigma/fear of rejection.* Living in a society that ranks sexual identities into moral and/or legal hierarchies predisposes sexual minorities to anticipate marginalization in a variety of contexts, even in the absence of direct or overt discrimination from a known perpetrator (Frost, 2011). This expectation or fear of rejection or harassment can itself be detrimental. Entering into social interactions with the belief that their sexual identity may disadvantage them could lead LGBQ individuals to: reduce social interactions that could actually prove supportive; experience less satisfaction with those interactions; become hyper-vigilant for cues to confirm this belief; or attempt to conceal their sexual identity (discussed more below).

Several quantitative studies have explored LGBQ employees’ expectations of stigma in the workplace. One study of post-secondary students about to enter the job force found that individuals who identified as a sexual minority expected significantly lower starting salaries when compared to heterosexual participants (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2012). This group was also more willing to accept a job offer, even if the position was not their ideal job. Regardless of all other demographic differences, compared to heterosexuals, LGBQ individuals expected less and were willing to settle for less. While striking on their own, these findings may also explain some of the other employment disparities documented regarding sexual minorities. If an LGBQ new professional is willing to settle for a lower
salary because he or she has come to expect less from a job, aggregate wage disparities will surely emerge. Expectations of stigma in the workplace and feared negative reactions from colleagues have also been correlated with increased psychological distress, decreased job satisfaction, less organizational and career commitment, and less workplace participation compared to those with fewer fears of rejection (Ragins et al., 2007; Velez et al., 2013). The expectation of social rejection or reprimand in the workplace (e.g. ignored for promotion, termination) can also lead to attempts at concealing a sexual minority status (Franke & Leary, 1991; Levine & Leonard, 1984), which in and of itself can constitute a minority stressor.

Concealment. Although disclosing one’s sexual orientation has colloquially been termed “coming out of the closet” or simply “coming out,” scholars have problematized this term given that the disclosure process for many is often more complex than the implied one-time event (Seidman, Meeks, & Traschen, 1999). Rather, a varying degree of openness and/or concealment more accurately describes the process of sharing or hiding one’s sexual orientation. In fact, individuals may vary greatly in degree of openness in various contexts (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005; Ragins, 2004) and may choose to conceal their sexual identity for a variety of reasons. Meyer (2003) conceptualizes concealment both as a unique minority stressor and as a coping mechanism in the face of other forms of stigmatization. In the LGBQ workplace literature, concealment has been examined as a predictor, moderator, and an outcome variable, thus making it difficult to tease apart the role of concealment or disclosure in the workplace.

As a minority stress process, concealment can be a heavy cognitive burden as an LGBQ employee maintains constant awareness to not reveal information that would indicate a sexual minority identity. Increased concealment in the workplace has been linked to decreased job satisfaction and increased job anxiety (Button, 2001; Driscoll, Kelley, & Fassinger, 1996; Ellis & Riggle, 1996; Griffith & Hebl, 2002). Avoiding references to same-sex partners or lying about one’s sexual orientation is also correlated with increased psychological distress (Velez et al., 2013). Concealment may also exacerbate the fear of rejection discussed previously; the time of concealment can become a time of anxiously waiting to be found out and discriminated against.

Predictors of concealment or disclosure in the workplace have been identified by scholars. Specifically, perceived support among supervisors and coworkers is positively correlated with levels of disclosure in the workplace (Ragins et al., 2007). Conversely, those who experience heterosexist discrimination in the workplace are more likely to avoid discussing their sexual orientation with coworkers (Velez et al., 2013).

Internalized homophobia. Internalized homophobia is essentially self-loathing or shame of one’s sexual orientation (Weinberg, 1972); it refers to the negative beliefs, prejudices, or stigmatizing attitudes that sexual minorities use to judge themselves (Herek, 2004; Herek, Cogan, Gillis, & Glunt, 1998).
Sexual minorities live within the society whose belief system devalues them. Hearing negative messages from others about one’s social position can be directly damaging (see distal minority stressors), but this may also shape an individual’s own beliefs about that social identity. Internalization of socially-generated meanings can result in self-devaluation for some sexual minorities (Frost, 2011). One study that examined the full range of minority stressors in a work context found that internalized homophobia was positively correlated with concealment of sexual identity at work and personal distress (Velez et al., 2013). Unlike the other stress processes tested, however, internalized homophobia was not significantly linked to job satisfaction.

**Social supports.** Social supports, as a resource for coping with minority stress processes, may moderate the effects of those processes on well-being (Meyer, 2003). Specifically, individuals with more supports available may not experience negative outcomes to the same degree as individuals without social supports would. Several studies of minority stress processes in the workplace have included variables that measure social supports in the work environment as well. Often, participants were asked how much support they perceived among coworkers or supervisors. LGBQ employees who felt less supported in the workplace were less likely to disclose in that context, reported more experiences of discrimination, and felt less satisfied with their job (Huffman et al., 2008; Ragins et al., 2007; Waldo, 1999). Social supports are so important in the workplace that one study found the relationship between disclosure of sexual orientation and job satisfaction to be fully mediated by coworker reaction (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). That is, disclosure of an LGBQ identity allowed the employee to tap into social supports among coworkers and this positive reaction increased job satisfaction. Despite the documented importance of these social supports, many studies in the workplace have ignored this aspect of minority stress theory in their analysis. Thus, much of what we know regarding concealment and discrimination in the workplace lacks the nuanced understanding of experiences with and without social supports in the workplace (e.g., Driscoll et al., 1996; Ellis & Riggle, 1996).

**Minority identity characteristics.** Minority identity characteristics can alter the way in which individuals internalize and make sense of the minority stress processes they experience. Specifically, three characteristics are identified in the model: prominence, valence, and integration. Prominence is defined as the salience or importance of the sexual minority identity; it is believed to moderate the relationship between stressors and well-being outcomes because “the more an individual identifies with, is committed to, or has highly developed self-schemas in a particular life domain, the greater will be the emotional impact of stressors that occur in that domain” (Thoits, 1999, p. 352). Valence denotes LGBQ individuals’ evaluation of their sexual orientation, in that negative valence or poor self-evaluation is linked to more mental health concerns (Meyer, 2003). A person with negative valence may be more likely to experience internalized homophobia, for example. Finally, integration refers to the way in which
individuals organize their distinct, yet intersecting roles and identities into a holistic sense of self. Identity synthesis, or the concept of fully integrating one’s sexual identity into their total self-identity, has historically been seen as a vital part of self-acceptance and coming out for sexual minorities (Cass, 1979).

The literature examining LGBTQ employees’ experiences in the workplace through minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) has given little attention to individual differences in identity traits. One theoretical article addresses the ways LGBTQ employees may utilize identity switching or identity redefinition to avoid workplace discrimination (Shih, Young, & Bucher 2013). Identity switching entails de-emphasizing a stigmatized social identity (i.e., an LGBTQ sexual orientation) and aligning with or highlighting a more valued identity – similar to Meyer’s (2003) concepts of adjusting prominence or integration of sexual identity. Identity redefinition involves highlighting the positive respects of an identity rather than focusing on the stigmatized aspect – similar to valence. While these authors hypothesized the ways identity switching and identity redefinition may protect or enhance stress in the workplace for LGBTQ employees, they did not collect empirical data to test the model (Shih et al., 2013). Likewise, Ragins (2008) theorized the ways in which internal psychological factors, such as the centrality or prominence of an identity, can influence disclosure decisions in the workplace. With theoretical frameworks indicating the importance of identity characteristics, future empirical studies of workplace stressors for sexual minority employees will benefit from including measures of these characteristics.

**Individual outcomes.** As posited, minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) asserts that individuals’ mental health could be negatively affected by these experiences in the workplace. In fact, Meyer’s 2003 study shows that sexual minorities who experienced minority stress processes showed significantly more psychological distress, including feelings of guilt, dread, sadness, hopelessness, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. This was also true for individuals who experienced minority stress in the workplace (Velez et al., 2013). One study of disclosure and concealment in the workplace for 379 gay and lesbian employees found that increased concealment was significantly linked to increased anxiety on the job (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). Exposure to prejudice events and discrimination has also been linked to an increase number of sick days take from work (Huebner & Davis, 2007). Thus, it is clear that the individuals who experience minority stress processes, for example concealment of their identity in that context or experiencing prejudice events at work, are affected negatively affected as individuals.

**Relationship outcomes.** To date, very few studies have examined both minority stress processes related to LGBTQ identity in the workplace and same-sex relationship outcomes. One qualitative study of same-sex dyads found that couples did experience homophobia and discrimination from a variety of social sources, including coworkers, and that this stigma exacerbated the normal stresses experienced by any couple working to form and maintain a committed relationship (Dudley et al., 2005). For example, some couples felt they needed to conceal their identity or same-sex relationship in the workplace in order
to reduce prejudice aimed at sexual minorities. Another study of 40 same-sex couples’ conversations regarding support of, or discrimination against, their relationship found that over half of the couples perceived institutional discrimination in the workplace (Rostosky, Riggle, Gray, & Hatton, 2007). One participant in particular felt he could not even mention his male partner casually the way heterosexual colleagues did. Together, these findings demonstrate that a workplace environment for LGBQ employees, whether supportive or discriminatory, can have effects on the employees’ relationships. That is, participants who experience prejudice events in the workplace or perceive discrimination feel more inclined to conceal their relationship, which may diminish relationship satisfaction (Dudley et al., 2005).

Critique of the Literature Using Minority Stress Theory in the Workplace

Overall, minority stress theory is a useful framework for considering the minority specific stressors LGBQ employees face. In the work context specifically, this theory has been utilized to address LGBQ employees’ experiences with supervisors and coworkers, decisions to disclose or conceal one’s sexual orientation at work, and the impact of support or hostility in the workplace on job satisfaction and individual mental health.

Although Meyer has arguably made great contributions to the field of LGBQ studies with this theory, there are limitations to minority stress theory and its application to studying workplace experiences. For example, minority stress theory does not fully explore the importance of other actors in the lives of LGBQ employees. Meyer (2003) includes social supports in addition to the implied perpetrators of prejudice events. However, there is no mention of the ways in which characteristics of these other individuals or their relationships to the LGBQ employee may influence the outcomes of minority stress processes. LGBQ employees may internalize homophobic comments differently if coming from a supervisor, colleague, or same-sex partner. Even in measurement, these other actors are often only considered from the perspective of the participant. Ragins et al. (2007) asked participants if they worked with other sexual minorities, yet no confirmation measurement was taken among the work colleagues. It seems inconsistent, in a study of sexual identity concealment at work, to assume that participants are aware of others’ sexual orientations and that no other colleague may also be concealing a sexual minority identity. Similarly, among the studies examining minority stress processes for same-sex couples, many researchers do not collect dyadic-level data and only report relationship satisfaction outcomes for one partner in the couple (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; Frost & Meyer, 2009). However, in order to fully understand relationship outcomes, it is important to collect data from both partners.

Furthermore, studies utilizing this theory to examine minority stress processes in the workplace for sexual minorities rarely consider other identities of participants. That is, the intersectionality of gender or race, for example, are often excluded from the conversation. While a select few scholars have considered the way race (e.g. Moore, 2011) or job position (Heintz, 2012; McDermott, 2006) may
influence these stress experiences, largely the LGBQ population under investigation has been treated as homogenous. Future studies should examine more nuances in individual characteristics to determine if sub-populations are particularly at risk for minority stress experiences in the workplace.

Methodologically, Meyer’s (2003) theory has been used piecemeal by scholars interested in studying one aspect of minority stress experiences. For example, Waldo (1999) asked LGBQ employees about general work stressors they experienced to use as a control in the model, but most scholars do not include measures of these general levels of stress. Rather, the assumption is made that all individuals experience some common stressors in addition to the unique minority stress processes. Not including this part of minority stress theory in a study makes it difficult to determine the unique contributions of minority stressors above and beyond general stressors. Moreover, very few studies of minority stress processes in the workplace have also included measures of social supports. Broadly, this leaves the literature on workplace climate with a negative slant. Understanding this context for LGBQ employees, however, requires a full examination of both the positive and the negative aspects as they occur simultaneously.

The operationalization of the various components of minority stress theory also differs throughout the literature. Concealment, for example, is theorized to be both a stressor and a coping mechanism. However, when asked in a closed-ended question (e.g., How much have you disclosed your sexual orientation to coworkers?), scholars cannot qualitatively determine the intent of concealment. An LGBQ employee may choose not to disclose out of fear of victimization, high levels of internalized homophobia, or lowered sexual identity salience. A simple quantitative measure of degree of concealment cannot capture this complexity. There may be more nuanced choices occurring that are not distinguishable in the current literature. Additionally, some researchers have used a single global item for support in the workplace (Ragins et al., 2007), possibly blurring over more dynamic situations such as perceived support from some colleagues and hostility from others.

Qualitative data from LGBQ employees about their experiences in the workplace that could illustrate some of these nuances are largely missing from the literature utilizing minority stress theory. Researchers have relied on quantitative measures of wage disparities, experiences with discrimination and other minority related stressors, internalized homophobia, disclosure, mental health, and job satisfaction. Although the literature tapping into relationship outcomes for same-sex couples uses qualitative data (Dudley et al., 2005; Rostosky et al., 2007), these studies infrequently focused on workplace stresses and experiences. Granted, quantitative analysis has been able to statistically support many of the correlations hypothesized by Meyer (2003); yet, a rich description of the lived experiences of LGBQ employees and the way these minority stresses in the workplace impact their romantic relationships is missing.
Finally, minority stress theory gives little attention to the cross-contextual experiences of everyday life. LGBTQ employees encounter other institutions with varying environmental circumstances, as well as personal situations with friends, family, or same-sex partners. Each of these contexts may have different stressors and supports present, but it is unrealistic to think that the effects of each context will remain in that context (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Stressors in the workplace may affect someone differently than the same stressors at home with family members; supports at work may buffer stressors at home differently than the reverse. In addition, individuals may change their presentation in various contexts. That is, characteristics of the minority identity, as Meyer (2003) describes it, can shift based on the individual’s surroundings. An LGBTQ parent may feel his or her sexual orientation to be more salient in a group of other LGBTQ parents and less salient in their role as an employee at work, for example (Holman & Oswald, 2011). These characteristics of prominence, valence, and integration should not be considered stagnant traits. In thinking about LGBTQ individuals holistically and the myriad contexts they inhabit, it is important to acknowledge the cross-contextual transference of minority stress processes and their effects.

Researchers who focus on the workplace environment for LGBTQ employees rarely look beyond this context. While studies have highlighted unique stress processes experienced by sexual minorities, few researchers have examined the effects of stressors in one context, such as sexual orientation harassment at work, on relationships in another context, e.g. with family at home. Work/family border theory (Clark, 2000) offers a complementary framework to examine the connections between work and family to understand these cross-contextual effects.

**Work/Family Border Theory**

As posited by Clark (2000) work/family border theory provides insight into the mechanisms by which people find a balance between their work context and family context. Clark defines balance as “satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home” (2000, p. 751). The author describes the active management strategies people use to negotiate both contexts and the borders between them, as well as the constraints and the supports for these border management strategies. The model developed by Clark to explain each of these processes includes four main factors: the domains of work and family, the border between these domains, the border-crosser, and other domain members including border-keepers.

**Domains.** Work/family border theory posits that, for most people, work and family domains are separate contexts with disparate goals and unique cultural patterns and expectations. The family domain is seen as a place to attain close, personal relationships and individual happiness, whereas activities in the work context provide sustainability (i.e. income) and a sense of accomplishment (Clark, 2000). Roles, values, and behavioral expectations in each domain vary in the degree to which they overlap. For example, individuals may feel in control at home to make decisions about their actions and how to use
their time, but in the workplace feel subordinate as these behaviors are managed by others. To avoid distress, individuals must find a way to balance their role expectations and identities in these distinct domains. Clark (2000) draws on the work of Nippert-Eng (1996) to describe the ways that people may either integrate these domains by using the same roles and identities at both work and home, or segment them – essentially compartmentalizing work and family contexts. The author makes clear that no one way is the ideal path to balancing work and family; rather, individuals must find for themselves the level of integration and segmentation that fits best (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Nippert-Eng, 1996).

**Borders.** Clark (2000) defines borders as “lines of demarcation between domains, defining the point at which domain-relevant behavior begins or ends” (p. 756). The author asserts that these borders can be physical, temporal, or psychological. Physical borders divide where work and family activities occur. Some individuals conduct work both in the workplace and at home, whereas others leave all work responsibilities and attachments in the physical workplace. Temporal borders separate when one is in the family role and when one conducts work activities. For instance, some individuals “clock in” and “clock out,” which bounds their work expectations to a given timeframe. For others, they are expected to be “on call” as an employee whether they are at work or at home with family. Psychological boundaries, on the other hand, are complex rules that an individual creates to determine what identity, culture, thought or behavioral patterns take the forefront in each domain; psychological boundaries delineate the work self from the family self. These psychological boundaries reflect individual desires and rules that may regulate the overlap between work and family domains.

Clark (2000) describes characteristics of these borders and the ways in which individuals may use them to either further separate the work and family domains or blend them together. On the one end of the spectrum, highly permeable and flexible boundaries allow for transfer of thoughts, tasks, and people between work and family life. The spillover of emotions may occur; individuals may post pictures of family members in the workplace or share work issues with family members. On the other end, very strong boundaries are less permeable and clearly differentiate what belongs at work and what belongs at home. Someone with inflexible work/family borders may choose not to discuss their family dynamic with coworkers at all.

**Border-crossers.** Clark (2000) uses the term “border-cropper” to describe the employees who transition between the work and family domains and utilize border management techniques to control their various roles and contexts. Characteristics of the border-cropper that allow them to modify both the domains and the borders to suit their needs and desires are important to include in the model. Specifically, the individual’s power and influence in each domain, identification with the values in each domain, and salience of the roles played at work and in the family may be variables of interest when examining LGBQ border-crossers through the lens of work/family border theory. LGBQ employees are particularly
interesting border-crossers, in that they may be negotiating minority specific stressors in one or both domains and utilizing border management techniques as a coping mechanism.

**Border-keepers and other domain members.** In addition to the desires and border management strategies of the border-crosser, work/family border theory also takes into account the potential impact of other actors in each domain (Clark, 2000). Specifically,

- since work and family activities are generally carried out with others, border and domain creation and management become an intersubjective activity in which several sets of actors – border-crossers, border-keepers, and other domain members – negotiate what constitutes the domains and where the borders between them lie. (Clark, 2000, p. 761)

In the workplace, colleagues, supervisors, or human resources representatives can, to some extent, control how permeable and flexible the work/family border can be; at home, same-sex partners or children may influence work/family border characteristics. For example, an LGBTQ employee with rigid boundaries may choose not to disclose their sexual orientation in the workplace or share personal information about their same-sex partner. However, this distinct boundary separating the work and family domains can be difficult to maintain when coworkers, supportive or not, ask direct questions about one another’s home lives. Clark (2000) refers to these work and family domain members as border-keepers.

**The work/family border for sexual minority employees.** Because of the scarcity of empirical studies that overtly utilize work/family border theory, I will draw on other literature that highlights aspects of Clark’s (2000) model to explore how each of these factors may be unique for sexual minorities in same-sex relationships. Although not specifically grounded in work/family border theory, the research described below examines the connection between work and family domains for sexual minority people and supports the tenets of Clark’s (2000) theory. Even without specific reference to work/family border theory, there is still only a small pocket of research that examines the work-family interface for LGBTQ employees.

The scarce literature that does exist provides evidence that LGBTQ employees in same-sex relationships actively utilize border management strategies as hypothesized by Clark (2000). For many sexual minority workers, assessment of the work domain for hostility or support and regulating personal identities (i.e., sexual orientation) is standard practice (Madera, King, & Hebl, 2012; McDermott, 2006; Mercier, 2008). LGBTQ employees, it seems, are making conscious decisions about when to actively identify as a sexual minority at work. Two qualitative studies provide data from lesbian mothers about their border management strategies (McDermott, 2006; Mercier, 2008). One participant in particular described her impermeable boundaries: “Well, I’ve not really told anyone that I’m lesbian. I work with all men … keep my personal life, my personal life and my work life, my work life” (Mercier, 2008, p. 39). However, the findings of several studies show that strong, impermeable boundaries, or the type of domain
segregation seen in the previous quote, may not be the most beneficial border management strategy for LGBQ employees (Day & Schoenrade, 2000; Madera et al., 2012; McDermott, 2006; Mercier, 2008; Tuten & August, 2006). The process of maintaining such an inflexible work/family border can be psychologically draining, similar to the minority stress of concealment, and create work-family conflict, particularly if other domain-members desire more flexible boundaries (McDermott, 2006; Mercier, 2008).

Scholars have also examined the role of power in the workplace to understand LGBQ employees’ abilities to negotiate the work/family border. LGBQ employees in managerial positions experience more control over the organization’s culture and ability to shift the work side of the work/family border to find a comfortable balance of domain integration or segregation (Heintz, 2012; McDermott, 2006; Mercier, 2008). LGBQ employees without this power are greatly influenced by the presence (or lack) of managerial support at work, with supervisor support related to less work/family conflict (Day & Schoenrade, 2000; Mendez, Holman, Oswald, & Izenstark, 2016; Mercier, 2008).

Finally, scholars have found that the fit between individual preferences and actual boundary characteristics predicts satisfaction and well-being. A few quantitative studies of LGBQ employees tested the person-organization fit as a mediator of the correlation between the characteristics of the work domain and job satisfaction (Lyons, Brenner, & Fassinger, 2005; Velez & Moradi, 2012). Sexual minority employees who felt supported in their work environment perceived that their value systems aligned with the organization’s values more closely and this fit increased job satisfaction. Conversely, experiences with discrimination in the workplace decreased person-organization fit, which then related to intentions to quit. Although these studies do not address the work/family border specifically, their findings highlight the importance of examining the individual fit of boundary preferences and boundary characteristics.

Critique of this Literature

The studies cited above provide evidence that LGBQ employees who act as border-crossers between the work and family domains do, in fact, negotiate this border (some by integrating domains, some by separating) in order to find a balance that fits their needs and desires in relation to their sexual orientation and family structure. However, none of this literature overtly utilizes Clark’s (2000) work/family border theory. It seems that no empirical studies of LGBQ experiences in the workplace that reference work/family border theory exist. Future research in this area could be enhanced by using a work/family border theory lens and incorporating the concepts as put forth by Clark. Specifically, work/family border theory sheds light on multiple contexts simultaneously, as well as the various other actors in each domain that may interact with and influence the LGBQ border-closer. Unlike minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003), work/family border theory acknowledges the possibility of cross-contextual transference of minority stress processes and negative outcomes.
However, work/family border theory lacks a complete conceptualization of what variables specifically in the work or family domain are of greatest interest. Rather, the focus is on the border between work and family, more so than on the domains on either side of this border. Given this theoretical lens alone, very little is known about the influential aspects of work and the effected aspects of a same-sex relationship (or vice versa). Instead, findings inform the understanding of border management strategies and the work/family interactions. Mercier (2008), for example, asked lesbian employees about the work/family interactions; although some participants described the work/family interface as tenuous or strained, the data did not detail specific relationship variables affected. McDermott (2006), as well, examined border negotiations among lesbian workers, but did not address the actual relationship factors affected in the family. Future research in this area utilizing the work/family border theory should place more emphasis on characteristics of both domains, rather than only highlighting the border negotiation strategies.

Finally, although Clark (2000) includes other border-keepers as possible supports or constraints, there is little theoretical focus on the social positions or actual agency of the border-crosser that may influence the border management strategies. Under the premises of work/family border theory, border-crossers manage the work/family border in order to meet their needs and desires. Work/family border theory positions the LGBTQ employee as one who has control over the relationship between the work and family domains. However, the literature depicts a slightly different image – where only those LGBTQ employees with status and power within the organization truly have the ability to negotiate the boundary between work and family in a way that suits their needs. While the person-organization fit appears to be highly important for the satisfaction of LGBTQ employees (Velez & Moradi, 2012), LGBTQ company executives and sexual minorities in positions of authority cited this power in the workplace as key in negotiating the border in the work domain (Heintz, 2012; McDermott, 2006; Mercier, 2008). In one study of 24 lesbian employees of various social classes, the working-class women were much less likely to disclose in the workplace and reported greater psychological distress as a result (McDermott, 2006). Therefore, when utilizing Clark’s (2000) work/family border theory, it is as important to give adequate emphasis to other domain members and the social position of the border-crosser as is given to the border management strategies. Social class, position in the organization, occupation, gender, race, and other identities may inhibit or assist LGBTQ employees’ attempts at negotiating the work/family border and the transference of stressors across this border. While LGBTQ employees should not be viewed as passive actors to whom acts of victimization simply occur and involve, scholars should also avoid giving too much agency or placing too much onus on the individual and assuming they have more control over their situation than may actually be true.
**Integrated Theoretical Approach**

Despite the limitations of each theory discussed, both provide a unique and valuable view of the possible couple-level effects of workplace experiences for LGBQ employees. While each theoretical approach independently misses a part of the bigger picture, taken together, minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) and work/family border theory (Clark, 2000) complement one another in a way that may highlight the entire stress process. For example, work/family border theory makes note of the various people involved in between-domain stress transmissions that are notably absent in minority stress theory. On the other hand, minority stress theory more fully formulates the potential stress processes in each domain that are missing from work/family border theory as the latter focuses more so on the border than on the domain experiences. Therefore, the current research benefits from taking an integrated approach that incorporates aspects of both theoretical approaches; see Appendix A for a visual model of this integrated theoretical perspective.

This integrated model includes the minority stress processes as proposed by Meyer (2003). Like the original minority stress theory, these work-related stress processes sit adjacent to the general stressors experienced in this context; while this is not an addition to the original theory, it is important to acknowledge that general stressors should not be excluded from data collection as many previous studies have done. In addition to looking at individual mental health outcomes, the integrated model also suggests that researchers should be examining the effect on relationship outcomes, both as a direct effect from these stress processes and as mediated through the mental health variables. The model also highlights the importance of taking a holistic view of individuals. Rather than isolating the sexual minority identity, this integrated approach would view individuals’ sexual orientation in relationship to other intersecting identities, such as race, sex, status, job role, geographic location, etc.

The elements of Clark’s (2000) work/family border theory that complement and enhance many aspects of Meyer’s (2003) minority stress theory may complicate the model in many ways, but also draw a more realistic image of an LGBQ employee’s lived experience. People live, work, and interact in multiple domains while playing various roles. Work/family border theory (Clark, 2000) acknowledges this between-domain movement. Drawing from work/family border theory, this integrated model also highlights the border between work and family domains, centering the LGBQ employee as a border-crosser. This model acknowledges that an LGBQ employee’s use of border management strategies may influence the transmission of minority stress process from work to family, but that one’s ability to negotiate this border is also influenced by other domain members, such as colleagues and same-sex partners. While some criticize this theory for focusing too much on the border between work and family (and less on the work and family experiences directly), it is still important to recognize the border management strategies utilized. To fully understand the lived experiences of LGBQ employees in same-
sex relationships, researchers must recognize that individuals continually manage these borders and that minority stressors in one context are not contained in that context alone. The research utilizing minority stress theory has given us much insight into the unique effects of minority stressors. Incorporating the cross-contextual view proposed by Clark (2000) will further open the door to understanding the complex links between work environment and family life for same-sex couples.

**Research Questions**

This dissertation project contributes to the aforementioned body of literature by examining the couple-level effects of LGBQ experiences in the workplace. To better understand the links between minority stress processes and support in the workplace environment and same-sex relationships, I examined four broad, open-ended research questions.

1. **What minority stress processes and supports do LGBQ employees report experiencing in the workplace?**

2. **How are romantic relationships between partners of the same sex affected by experiences of minority stress and support related to the employee’s sexuality in the workplace?**

3. **(How) do the borders between the work and family domains alter the cross-contextual effects of minority stress experiences?**

While these questions, and the proposed data analysis, are guided by minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) and work/family border theory (Clark, 2000), this study is also grounded in a critical theory framework (Held, 1980). That is, as a researcher, I recognize the ways in which the personal can be political for many marginalized groups and aim for this work to additionally highlight and rectify societal problems. Approaching this study with a critical paradigm was intended to shed light on the interconnected positions of privilege and oppression for LGBQ individuals in the workplace and empower this population to minimize discrimination in this setting. Thus, the final research question aimed to examine sexual minority employees’ views on social action strategies intended to support LGBQ employees.

4. **What recommendations do individuals in same-sex relationships have for workplace policies and climate that would benefit and support their romantic relationships?**

   To address these broad research questions posed regarding LGBQ employees’ experiences in the workplace and the work/family border, two concurrent studies were conducted.
Chapter 3
Methods

This dissertation project used a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach involving quantitative secondary data analysis and qualitative case study analysis to examine the couple-level effects of minority stress processes and supports in the work domain. Study 1 involved secondary data analysis using the Rainbow Illinois data set (Oswald & Holman, 2013). This quantitative analysis provided a preliminary understanding of the minority stress processes reported in the workplace (i.e., experiences with prejudice events, expectations of stigma, and concealment), perceived social supports in the workplace, and the direct and indirect associations with same-sex relationship quality. Study 2 involved a set of case studies, with qualitative analysis of the experiences of three sexual minority employees in same-sex relationships. These cases provided a detailed exploration of the ways in which sexual minority employees perceive minority stress processes and social supports in the workplace, as well as the border characteristics between work and family that may enhance or hinder the cross-contextual effects on the couple’s relationship.

Study 1

The primary purposes of Study 1 were to: to understand the nuances of individual and work demographics that may contribute to varied employee experiences in the workplace; establish an association between minority stress processes in the workplace and relationship outcomes; examine the indirect pathways through individual mental health; and analyze the moderating effects of perceived social supports in the workplace on both the direct and indirect effects.

Aims. The aims of Study 1 were threefold. First, to quantitatively describe the workplace experiences for this sample, univariate data analysis was performed. Findings provide an account of minority stress processes and perceived support within the workplace. Second, to identify which demographic factors are associated with increased minority stress processes in the workplace or increased social supports, bivariate associations were run. Given the narrow focus on LGBQ individuals’ sexual minority identity, often without consideration to their multiple identity statuses, this analysis will contribute to the literature by adding an understanding of the diversity of subgroups within this LGBQ sample. Exploring the nuances in these demographic variables also informed participant recruitment efforts for Study 2 (addressed in more detail below). Finally, analysis was conducted to explore the association between minority stress processes in the workplace for LGBQ employees and relationship outcomes. Establishing an empirical link through regression analysis is an important first step for research on this topic, as there is only limited work exploring the cross-contextual effects of minority stress processes. Further analysis examined if the association between these stress processes and relationship outcomes was mediated through individual well-being, specifically depression symptoms, or moderated
by workplace social supports. The aim here was to test the tenets of minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) as proposed, rather than piece out singular identities, minority stress processes, or supports without including other aspects of the model, as has been done in previous studies. Examination of these associations also provided a basis for the in-depth qualitative exploration in Study 2.

**Quantitative research questions.** To meet these aims, the following research questions were addressed in Study 1.

*Q1: What minority stress processes do LGBQ employees report experiencing in the workplace?* Minority stress processes included in this study were: experiencing prejudice events; expectations of stigma; and concealment. Measures for each of these are described more fully below.

*Q1a. Are there certain individuals who are more likely to experience minority stress processes in the workplace?* Exploratory regression analysis was used to determine if certain demographic characteristics (of the individual, the couple, and the workplace) were associated with increased reports of prejudice events, increased expectations of stigma, or increased concealment in the workplace. Specifically, I examined: age; sex; race/ethnicity; sexual orientation; importance of sexual orientation; parental status; years as a couple; belief in relationship sanctification; visibility of the relationship; living together; having had a commitment ceremony, domestic partnership, civil union, or legal marriage; sharing power of attorney; sharing finances; owning a home together; employment status; employment sector; distance from work; personal income; and poverty level.

*Q2: What social supports do LGBQ employees report experiencing in the workplace?* Supports in the workplace were indicated by employee perceptions of supportive behaviors or attitudes of their colleagues. The measure of social supports is described more fully below.

*Q2a. Are there certain individuals who are more likely to report social supports in the workplace?* Exploratory regression analysis was used to determine if certain demographic characteristics (of the individual and the workplace) were predictive of increased perceptions of social supports in the workplace. Specifically, I examined: age; sex; race/ethnicity; sexual orientation; importance of sexual orientation; parental status; years as a couple; belief in relationship sanctification; visibility of the relationship; living together; having had a commitment ceremony, domestic partnership, civil union, or legal marriage; sharing power of attorney; sharing finances; owning a home together; employment status; employment sector; distance from work; personal income; and poverty level.
Q3. Are minority stress processes in the workplace associated with relationship satisfaction for individuals in same-sex relationships? Based on minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) and previous research (e.g. Dudley et al., 2005), it was hypothesized that individuals who reported greater levels of minority stress processes would report lower levels of relationship satisfaction. Specifically, experiencing a prejudice event at the hands of a coworker, increased expectations of stigma, and increased levels of concealment in the workplace would be associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction.

Q3a. Are the direct pathways between minority stress processes in the workplace and relationship satisfaction moderated by perceived supports in the workplace? Following minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003), the moderating effects of social supports were also examined. It was hypothesized that a negative association between minority stress processes and relationship outcomes would be greatest for individuals with lower levels of perceived support in the workplace. The strength of these associations would decrease for individuals with greater levels of perceived support in the workplace.

Q3b. Are the associations between minority stress processes in the workplace and relationship satisfaction mediated by individual mental health, i.e. depression symptoms? Scholars have asserted that the negative effects on an individual’s mental health associated with minority stress processes can, in turn, affect relationship quality for couples (Frost & Meyer, 2009; Otis et al., 2006). Therefore, it was hypothesized that the relationship between minority stress processes in the workplace and relationship satisfaction would be at least partially mediated through individual mental health. That is, greater levels of minority stress processes at work (as described in the previous question) would be associated with increased depression symptoms, and this association will account for some of the association between minority stress processes and relationship satisfaction.

Q3c. Are the indirect pathways between minority stress processes in the workplace and relationship satisfaction moderated by perceived supports in the workplace? As social supports are also predicted to affect the relationship between stressors and individual depression symptoms (Meyer, 2003), moderated mediation was also run to examine the effects of perceived supports on the indirect pathways. Again, it was hypothesized that the negative associations between minority stress processes and depression, and depression and relationship satisfaction, will be the strongest for people with lower levels of perceived social supports in the workplace.
Procedures. The *Rainbow Illinois* project was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), and funded by the UIUC Research Board. This study used the second wave of the *Rainbow Illinois* survey data, which was anonymously collected data from sexual minorities across the downstate Illinois (IL) region between November 30, 2010 and May 31, 2011. Recruitment for the online survey involved distribution of the survey website through LGBQ organizations’ mailing lists and personal social networks. It is unknown how many individuals were informed of this web link, and thus a return rate cannot be calculated. Given the online platform for the survey, the data were analyzed for potential deception (i.e. multiple responses coming from the same Internet Protocol address); none was found. Participants were offered the option to submit an email address (which remained separated from survey responses) into a raffle for one of ten $25 gift cards. Full descriptive findings were summarized in a community report and distributed to the state legislature and LGBQ organizations (Oswald & Holman, 2013).

Participants. Of the 550 individuals who submitted an on-line survey, 458 were included in the final data set as they identified both as LGBQ and lived in downstate IL. Although this sample was not obtained using random recruitment and therefore may not be representative of the LGBQ population in downstate IL, it is notable that the respondents roughly matched the current gender and race characteristics for this region (US Census Bureau, n.d.). Specifically, 61% of the *Rainbow Illinois* sample identified as female (Oswald & Holman, 2013). The 2010 US Census documented that same-sex couple households in downstate were predominately female (Gates & Cook, 2011). Further, the *Rainbow Illinois* sample was predominantly White (90.4%), with less than 10% identifying as multi-racial (4.0%), Black (2.4%), Latino (1.6%) and Asian (1.6%). The counties where *Rainbow Illinois* respondents live were also predominately White (ranging from 75% to 99% of the general population), as reported on the 2010 US Census (US Census Bureau, n.d.).

For this study, a subsample was used that included only those participants who were in a same-sex relationship at the time of data collection and working full-time or part-time for someone else ($N = 171$). This sample was predominantly female (72.5%), well-educated (84.4% had a Bachelor’s or graduate degree), and earned, on average, $40,001 to $50,000. Twenty-eight percent of the sample were parents; the average age of this sample was 40 years old ($M = 40.42, SD = 11.79$). Participants had been with their current partner for approximately eight years, on average ($M = 7.85; SD = 7.27$). Although legal marriage was not available to same-sex couples in IL at the time of data collection, some participants ($n = 13$) had been married in other states; others were registered as domestic partners ($n = 22$) or had filed for a civil union ($n = 3$). See Appendix B for more detailed demographic information about the sample used for this study.
Measures. Participants were asked to describe both the minority stress processes and social supports in their workplaces, as well as satisfaction with their romantic relationships through a series of closed-ended questions. Only those individuals who indicated they were employed full-time or part-time answered questions regarding their workplace. Only those individuals in a romantic relationship reported on that relationship. See Appendix C for a complete list of items included in each created, multi-item measure described below.

Minority stress processes in the workplace. As described earlier, Meyer (2003) included four different types of minority stress processes in the model: experiencing prejudice events – that are distal, or external to the sexual minority individual; expectations of stigma or fear of rejection – a proximal, or internal stress process; concealment of sexual identity – a proximal stress process; and internalized homophobia or self-hate. The Rainbow Illinois survey did not include a measure of internalized homophobia and therefore this particular minority stress process could not be included in the current analysis.

Prejudice events. Rainbow Illinois participants were provided a list of 11 possible prejudice events. Individuals indicated whether, in the past year, they: overheard anti-LGBTQ comments; had been shunned, avoided, or ignored; been teased or called names; threatened with physical violence; been pushed, slapped, or tripped; been punched, kicked or beaten; asked to leave an event; refused services; had property vandalized; were outed without permission; or were followed. Participants were asked to identify the perpetrator of each act of prejudice. Individuals were able to identify that a “coworker or boss” initiated a particular act, in addition to: stranger; acquaintance; neighbor; student or teacher; family member; friend; partner; or service provider. Participants then indicated the frequency with which each incident occurred: 0 = never; 1 = once; 2 = several times; 3 = monthly; 4 = weekly; 5 = daily. Responses of “coworker or boss” initiated acts of prejudice were sum scored. Although coworkers and bosses may have perpetrated outside of the workplace context, this question set captured distal minority stress processes which LGBQ employees may have experienced in the workplace or in relation to work domain members (e.g. coworkers or supervisors).

Analysis for this study included univariate descriptions of the type of reported prejudice events perpetrated by a coworker or supervisor. For the bivariate and multivariate analysis, a dummy variable was created to indicate whether or not a participant experienced a prejudice event at the hands of a coworker in the past year. Forty participants reported that they had.

Expectations of stigma. Expectations of stigma in the workplace was assessed using 8 of the 20 items on the LGBT Climate Inventory (Liddle, Luzzo, Hauenstein, & Schuck, 2004). This inventory was designed to measure the “formal and informal aspects of an institutional environment that affect employees’ experience on the job” (Liddle et al., 2004, p. 33) for sexual minority workers. Overall, the
LGBT Climate Inventory showed good validity and reliability when validated with a sample of 93 US LGBQ employees, aged 19 to 62 (51% female; 90% White) across a wide range of job types and annual income ($8,000 to $300,000). Cronbach’s alpha was .96; Guttman split-half reliability was 0.97 (Liddle et al., 2004). The measure also correlated strongly to the Short Form of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ-SF; Weiss, Dawis, England, & Lofquist, 1977) which measures overall job satisfaction (Liddle et al., 2004).

Using the full Rainbow Illinois sample to test reliability, Cronbach’s alpha was 0.96. With the sample used for this analysis (N = 171), Cronbach’s alpha was 0.89. No item removed would have increased this alpha; therefore, all eight items were retained. Because it was a short scale with less than ten items, the inter-item correlations mean was also calculated (0.52) and suggested a strong relationship among items.

The 8 question sub-scale used in this study captured the degree to which an individual perceived her or his workplace as potentially discriminatory and wrought with anticipated stigma. An example item includes: “LGBT employees fear job loss because of sexual orientation.” See Appendix C for a complete list of items. Scores for each item ranged from: 1 = doesn’t describe at all/does not apply; 2 = describes somewhat or a little; 3 = describes pretty well; to 4 = describes extremely well. Item responses “doesn’t describe at all” and “does not apply to me” were both recoded as 1, given that both responses, conceptually, indicate no expectations of stigma in the workplace for that item. Mean scores for the continuous scale were calculated (M = 1.47; SD = 0.58).

Concealment. Participants were asked about their level of concealment as a sexual minority in the workplace in two items. Participants were asked, “To what extent are you out as LGBT at work?” Respondents answered twice; once for bosses and once for co-workers. Responses ranged from: 1 = no one knows; 2 = some people know, but most don’t; 3 = some know/some don’t; 4 = most people know, but some don’t; and 5 = everyone knows. Responses were then reverse coded so that lower scores indicate lower levels of the minority stress of concealment, and mean scores of concealment to both bosses and coworkers were calculated. Bin scores were then created so that 1 = everyone knows (no concealment stress; 52.7% of the sample); 2 = some know/some don’t (meaning concealment was negotiated in the workplace; 44.4% of the sample); and 3 = no one knows (higher levels of concealment stress; 3.0% of the sample).

Social supports in the workplace. Social supports in the workplace were also captured by the LGBT Climate Inventory (Liddle et al., 2004). In fact, the LGBT Climate Inventory was chosen specifically because it accesses both support and minority stress process in the workplace based on sexual orientation. Alternative measures of workplace experiences, for example the Workplace Heterosexist Experiences Questionnaire (WHEQ; Waldo, 1999), are limited because they only focus on minority stress
process. The LGBT Climate Inventory, on the other hand, also assesses more positive aspects of social support in the workplace environment (i.e., supportive coworkers, feeling respected, and a sense of belonging). Using this sample to test reliability, Cronbach’s alpha was 0.95.

Social supports were assessed using a 12-item subscale of the LGBT Climate Inventory (Liddle et al., 2004). Example items include: “LGBT employees feel accepted by coworkers” and “My immediate work group is supportive of LGBT coworkers.” See Appendix C for a complete list of items. Scores for each item ranged from: 1 = doesn’t describe at all/does not apply; 2 = describes somewhat or a little; 3 = describes pretty well; to 4 = describes extremely well. Item responses “doesn’t describe at all” and “does not apply to me” were both recoded as 1, given that both responses, conceptually, indicate no social support in the workplace for that item. Mean scores for the continuous scale were then calculated ($M = 3.10; SD = 0.73$).

**Relationship measures.** Individuals who indicated they were dating or in a same-sex relationship reported the length of their current relationship; whether or not they were cohabiting with their partner; the date of any legal or social ceremonies entered to recognize the relationship; and the level of disclosure of the relationship (i.e. a single item measuring the degree to which the same-sex couple is out, rather than their outness as an LGBQ individual). Individuals also rated their overall relationship satisfaction.

In order to assess relationship satisfaction, individuals completed the 7-item Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988). Scores ranged from: 1 = Unsatisfied; 2 = Somewhat satisfied; 3 = Average; 4 = More than satisfied; to 5 = Extremely satisfied. Example items include: “In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?” and “How many problems are there in your relationship?” See Appendix C for a complete list of items. The mean for this sample was 4.37 ($SD = 0.61$). The RAS was standardized with 235 undergraduate subjects and 57 dating couples; the scale showed strong construct validity when compared to other measures of relationship satisfaction (Hendrick, 1988). Cronbach’s alpha was 0.87. Using the *Rainbow Illinois* sample to test reliability, Cronbach’s alpha was 0.91.

**Depression.** Depression was measured using the Personal Health Questionnaire Depression Scale (PHQ-8; Kroenke et al., 2009). This eight-item scale captures the degree of depression symptoms experienced in a two-week period. Participants reported on a scale from: 0 = not at all; 1 = several days; 2 = more than half the days; to 3 = nearly every day, indicating the frequency with which symptoms occurred. Scores can range from 0 to 24. Participants in the current sample reported scores ranging from 0 to 20 ($M = 4.84; SD = 4.46$). Example items include: “feeling down, depressed, or hopeless” and “little interest or pleasure in doing things.” Tested with the general population, the PHQ-8 showed satisfactory reliability and validity; Cronbach’s alpha was .86 (Kroenke & Spitzer, 2002; Kroenke et al., 2009). Using the *Rainbow Illinois* sample to test reliability, Cronbach’s alpha was 0.91.
Descriptive variables. Participants reported on their individual demographic characteristics, as well as descriptive variables regarding their relationship and their workplace. Specifically, individuals reported their: age; sex; race/ethnicity; sexual orientation; importance of sexual orientation; parental status; years as a couple; belief in relationship sanctification; visibility of the relationship; living together; having had a commitment ceremony, domestic partnership, civil union, or legal marriage; sharing power of attorney; sharing finances; owning a home together; employment status; employment sector; distance from work; personal income; and poverty level (computed based on household income and size).

Several variables were recoded or binned for use in this analysis. Regarding sexual orientation, a new code was created to capture all poly-oriented identities in one, i.e., bisexual, queer, and pansexual, in order to save power. Three dummy variables were then created for individuals who identified as: gay, lesbian, or poly-oriented. Regarding sex, the one participant who identified as male-to-female transsexual was recoded as female so that a dichotomous variable could be created. With regards to employment, job types were identified using the 2010 Census Occupational Classification (US Census Bureau, 2011), which were then later binned in order to save power: Specifically, a dummy variable was created to indicate those who worked in a managerial or professional position \((n = 146)\) and those who did not \((n = 23)\) according to the Census classification system.

Quantitative data analysis. Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Mplus 7.3 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012) statistical software programs, data were examined through univariate and multivariate analysis. Prior to conducting statistical analysis for the current study, data were examined for any data entry errors or outliers. After screening all variables, data were deemed clean and free of errors. Only one outlier was identified for the item measuring distance from work to home. One individual reported living 1,200 miles from their place of employment, but telecommuted on a daily basis. This value was thus removed for this case as it did not reflect the distance traveled by the individual on a daily basis.

There was minimal missing data. Preliminary analysis showed that less than 2% of participants were missing on any given item used in later analysis. Only two cases, for example, were missing data for the entire LGBTCI measure. Most participants had merely skipped only one question on the 12-item social support in the workplace subscale. Missing data were determined to be missing completely at random and imputed using the multiple imputation procedure in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012). Multiple imputation (MI) was chosen as the most empirically responsible method of handling missing data as MI procedures utilized all available data at the item level (e.g. the 11 responses out of 12 that were given) to provide projected imputations, rather than imputing parameter estimates by considering missingness at the scale level. Fifty (50) imputed datasets were created, seeded at 73,293 for replicability (Allison, 2002). These complete data sets were then used to create the scales. Listwise deletion would
have resulted in a loss of 16% of the sample (Acock, 2005; Allison, 2002). Therefore, MI methods were preferred over listwise deletion (Schafer & Graham, 2002) and mean imputation, which can produce biased estimates (Eekhout et al., 2014).

Q1: What minority stress processes do LGBQ employees report experiencing in the workplace?

Q2: What social supports do LGBQ employees report experiencing in the workplace?

To address the first two research questions, descriptive statistics are reported in Chapter 4 for all measures of minority stress and social supports in the workplace. This univariate analysis provides a broad description of the types of minority stress processes and supports experienced in the workplace.

Q1a. Are there certain individuals who are more likely to experience minority stress processes in the workplace?

Q2a. Are there certain individuals who are more likely to report social supports in the workplace?

To address questions 1a and 2a, I conducted a series of correlations, t-tests, and chi-square analyses in SPSS to explore which of the descriptive variables related to the individual, relationship, or workplace were significantly associated with any of the minority stress processes and social supports reported in the workplace.

This analysis also informed recruitment efforts for Study 2 (described more fully below). Research has shown that income and status in the workplace, as well as individual characteristics such as race and age, may affect individuals’ perceptions of their workplace climate as well as their border management strategies (Heintz, 2012; McDermott, 2006; Mercier, 2008; Moore, 2011). Therefore, exploration of these factors in Study 1 were used to inform the sampling strategies used in Study Q3.

Q3. Are minority stress processes associated with relationship satisfaction for individuals in same-sex relationships?

Standard OLS regression was used to test the associations between minority stress processes in the workplace and relationship satisfaction. Preliminary analysis was first conducted to test regression assumptions (i.e., linearity, normality, homoscedasticity, independence, and collinearity) and found to be satisfactory. Then, individual, relationship, and workplace characteristics that were found to be significantly predictive of depression symptoms or relationship satisfaction were used as covariate controls in the regression analysis. All three measures of minority stress processes in the workplace (i.e. prejudice events, expectations of stigma, and concealment) were tested simultaneously. This model then shows the predictive ability of each independent variable while controlling for other types of minority stress processes and the included covariates.

Q3a. Are the associations between minority stress processes and relationship satisfaction moderated by perceived supports in the workplace?
Following the test of main effects, analysis was then conducted to explore the potential moderating effects of social supports in the workplace with each of the three minority stress processes. That is, does the association between minority stress processes in the workplace and relationship satisfaction vary as a function of the amount of perceived social support in the workplace? This involved creating a cross-product term by centering and then multiplying the measures of minority stress process and social supports. A regression test was then run, including the control variables (described above), the three independent variables (i.e. prejudice events, expectations of stigma, and concealment), social supports, and the interaction terms.

Q3b. Are the associations between minority stress processes and relationship satisfaction mediated by individual mental health outcomes, i.e. depression symptoms?

Analysis was then conducted to explore the potential mediating effect of individual mental health on the relationship between minority stress and relationship satisfaction. For this analysis, depression symptoms – as measured using the PHQ-8 (Kroenke et al., 2009) – was used to indicate individual psychological health. Mediation analysis was conducted in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012). Three mediation models were run to examine the indirect pathways for each independent variable separately; the covariate controls, as well as the other two minority stress processes were still included each model. See Figure 2 below.

Q3d. Are the indirect pathways between minority stress processes in the workplace and relationship satisfaction moderated by perceived supports in the workplace?

Finally, analysis was conducted in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012) to explore any moderated mediation. That is, what effect do social supports in the workplace have on the indirect pathways? Again, three models were tested to examine this relationship for each independent variable separately.

Figure 2 below shows how the research questions tested in Study 1 map onto Meyer’s (2003) minority stress theory.
While Study 1 established a preliminary understanding of these experiences in the workplace, and the empirical relationships between minority stress processes in the workplace and relationship-level outcomes, findings from this secondary-data analysis do fully address the integrated theoretical model previously discussed (see Appendix A). Nor does this analysis address research questions three and four regarding the work/family border characteristics and recommendations for supportive work environments. Therefore, a qualitative study (“Study 2”) was conducted to examine the in-depth, lived experiences of sexual minority employees in same-sex relationships.

**Study 2**

Study 2 involved qualitative case study analysis to further explore the individual experiences of minority stress processes in the workplace, social supports in both the work and family domains, work/family border characteristics, as well as individual- and couple-level effects.

**Qualitative Research Questions.** The four broad research questions posed in Chapter 2 guided data collection and analysis for this study.

1. **What minority stress processes and supports do LGBQ employees report experiencing in the workplace?**
2. **How are romantic relationships between partners of the same-sex affected by experiences of minority stress and support related to the employee’s sexuality in the workplace?**
3. **(How) do the borders between the work and family domains alter the cross-contextual effects of minority stress experiences?**
4: What recommendations do individuals in same-sex relationships have for workplace policies and climate that would benefit and support their romantic relationships?

Rationale. In order to capture an in-depth understanding of the cross-contextual stress experiences for same-sex couples across the work/family border, a collective case study (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2000) was conducted with three identified participants. It has been suggested that examining too many more cases in a multiple case study can dilute the overall analysis by inappropriately leading to broad generalizations across the cases (Creswell, 2002). Studies with fewer cases are more suitable in order to enhance the complexity of individuals’ lives and highlight the richness of individual narratives (Daly, 2007). The purpose of conducting case studies is, in fact, not to generalize (or even compare cases), but to detail in-depth the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation (Becker, 1970; Creswell, 2013; Jarrett, 1992), and examine each case or family unit as a whole to explore the ways it can provide insight (Jarrett, 1992; Roy, Zvonkovic, Goldberg, Sharp, & LaRossa, 2015). This multi-site case study (Stake, 1995; 2000) helped illuminate sexual minority employees’ full range of minority stress processes in the workplace, the relationship these experiences have with their family life, and the ways in which the integrated theory (see Appendix A) manifests itself in real life situations (Stake, 2000). Given the under-explored nature of these experiences, qualitative case studies offered unique and valuable insight that reflect the more comprehensive understanding of the dimensions of the work/family border for LGBTQ employees.

Furthermore, case studies are useful in examining experiences within a bounded time and place (Stake, 2000; Yin, 2009). That is, the context is fully considered as an important factor in influencing the real-life experiences of the individual in their current situation (Yin, 2009). A case study analysis considers not only the nature of the case, and the current and historical experiences, but also the political and legal contexts surrounding and influencing the case (Stake, 2000). Given the varied and changing legal status of employment non-discrimination laws and policies across the US (HRC, 2013), limiting this case study analysis to the state of IL allowed for a more in-depth focus on that one state-wide political climate and variations between workplaces became more clear.

By collecting data about work, relationships, and the work/family border, this study captured the cross-contextual effects of minority stress processes and supports. Qualitative interviewing is ideal when exploring such intricate and highly complex phenomenon with a hard to reach population (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Goldberg & Allen, 2015). This approach is also instrumental in capturing the meanings that participants’ assign to their experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), an aspect of workplace discrimination that has largely been overlooked in the current literature. Therefore, in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews – which can transform our understanding of sexual minorities’ experiences in this field (McCormack, 2014) – was the primary source of data collection for study 2.
Recruitment. University of Illinois IRB approval was obtained before any recruitment efforts were made. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling procedures in order to identify a sample of information-rich cases (Morse, 1991; Patton, 1990). The use of purposive sampling was essential given the iterative process of this qualitative case study (Marshall, 1996). Based on the findings from Study 1, only females were recruited to participate in Study 2. However, recruitment efforts were made to diversify the sample in terms of workplace climate and border characteristics (Heintz, 2012; McDermott, 2006; Mercier, 2008).

Recruitment efforts for this study relied on personal networking, key informants, and word-of-mouth; additionally, targeted advertisements were posted on social media outlets, in LGBTQ organizations, and in public spaces in identified communities. Interested participants were screened for inclusion criteria and richness of the case. All three identified participants completed the three interviews, earning $40. All three romantic partners completed the two interviews, earning $20 each. See Appendix D for a copy of the consent form.

All participants met the following inclusion criteria: adults, aged 18 to 64; employed full-time (i.e., at least 30 hours per work in the workplace – according to the definitions in the Affordable Care Act; see http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/n-12-58.pdf) in IL; and in a committed, cohabiting, monogamous same-sex relationship. More detailed information about each case is provided in Chapter 5 below.

Sexual minority. Inclusion criteria intentionally specified same-sex relationships rather than sexual minority identity. In this way, sexual minority status was operationalized behaviorally (i.e., same-sex relationship) rather than by personal identity markers. In the current literature, participant recruitment relies predominantly on self-identification as LGBQ, regardless of behaviors or relationship status. Relying on self-identification using traditional identity labels though can oversample from individuals who are more open about their sexual minority identity and report higher SES (Gates & Badgett, 2006). Studying only same-sex couples, on the other hand, is a more behavioral measure of sexual minority identity. Using this inclusion criterion allowed room for participants who utilize more nontraditional identity labels, such as queer, pansexual, or choose not to label their sexual orientation (Savin-Williams, 2001).

Relationship status. Inclusion criteria required that couples be living together and in a monogamous relationship for at least one year. This allowed data from these couples to be comparable to other studies of relationship satisfaction among same-sex couples (e.g. Gottman et al., 2003). Individuals in committed relationships are more likely to share aspects of their lives with one another, e.g., shared residence, time together, or an introduction to significant others. Individuals in newer relationships may not have yet had the opportunity to decide whether or not to disclose this relationship to close friends and family, let alone work colleagues. Monogamy was a requirement for this study in order to isolate the one
romantic relationship of interest. Individuals in a committed, but open relationship, or those in polygamous relationships add a level of complexity to the case that was not the intended focus of the current study.

Further, because of the historical exclusion from legal marriage for same-sex couples, sexual minorities may express mixed opinions about the institution of marriage (Lannutti, 2005) and may have more varied paths to parenthood (Moore, 2011). Therefore, legal status of the relationship was not considered as part of the inclusion criteria. Couples who were cohabiting and in a committed relationship for at least one year were eligible regardless of the union status (e.g. marriage, marriage-like relationship, non-marital romances, registered domestic partnership, civil union, or cohabiting dating relationship; Bates & DeMaio, 2013; Umberson, Thomeer, Kroeger, Lodge, & Xu, 2015).

**Employment.** Given the more standardized benefits allotted to full-time employees (as opposed to part-time) and the increased opportunity for interaction with coworkers, participants were required to be employed full-time – at least 30 hours of work per week – in order to be eligible for this study. Participants for this study were all working within IL. Given the current variations of state-wide legal protections for LGBQ employees (see Appendix E for the current statewide employment laws and policies), recruiting participants from a single state allowed analysis to focus on individual differences between work contexts, rather than adding complexity of disparate state-level laws. State law in IL prohibits employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. Although the perception of community climate across IL varies person-to-person, the legal climate is objectively more supportive than many other states in the US. For example, discrimination based on sexual orientation is prohibited in employment, housing, public accommodations, and schools. Also, IL allows second-parent and joint adoption for same-sex couples. Further, same-sex relationships have been legally recognized since 2011 with civil unions, and marriage licenses being issues state-wide since 2014.

**Data collection and procedures.** Data were primarily collected through a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the identified participants. Additionally, in order to triangulate and contextualize participants’ narratives, data about the identified participant’s work experience, the work/family border, and the romantic relationship (the case) was also collected by interviewing the participant’s current romantic partner, as well as analysis of participants’ journal entries, and analysis of workplace documents. Each of these sources of data is described in more detail below. Collecting data from these various sources deepened the researcher’s understanding of the context and factors influencing the case; relying on one form of data collection, i.e. individual interviews, may not provide enough information to fully capture all aspects of the case for analysis (Creswell, 2013; Hamel, Dufour, & Fortin, 1993).
**Participant Interviews.** Identified participants were interviewed three times, at approximately one month intervals. Interviews were conducted in a location that was comfortable for the participant and protected confidentiality, e.g. the participant’s home. Interviews lasted between twenty minutes and two hours. The semi-structured protocol (see Appendix F) was designed to gather information related to the workplace climate, the work/family border, and contextual factors that may influence the romantic relationship. The intention was for each subsequent interview to build off the previous interaction, allowing preliminary analysis and interpretations to guide follow-up questions, aiding the process of rapport building between interviewer and participants, and giving the participants time to reflect and process in-between time points, potentially adding to the richness of data provided (Stake, 2010).

These in-depth interviews were important to highlight the individual’s own perspectives and understanding of their experiences (Crotty, 2003). The purpose was to capture the nuances and complexities of lived experiences and to elicit interviewees’ interpretations of their lives (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Thus, the broad research questions presented for analysis and the semi-structured nature of the interview protocol (see Appendix F) allowed the researcher to question aspects of the participants’ lives that are important to them, rather than focusing on the researcher’s own agenda (Berg, 2001; Jarrett, 1992; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). However, given the instrumental nature of this case study as an attempt to highlight how participants’ experiences do and do not align with the tenets of minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) and work/family border theory (Clark, 2000), the interview topics were guided by the integrated theoretical approach, what Burgess (1984) called “conversations with a purpose” (p. 102).

**Partner interviews.** Additionally, participants’ romantic partners may be able to shed some light on their understanding of the work/family border as a border keeper or other domain member (Clark, 2000). In fact, several scholars have criticized family research for over-relying on one individual’s perspective on the family (Sprey, 2013) or lacking a strong link between the unit of analysis and the unit of observation (Roy et al., 2015). Therefore, in order to examine the effects of workplace experiences on the same-sex couple, data was collected from both members of the couple. This allowed the researcher to capture processes and meaning-making at the couple-level rather than focus solely on the individual person as a representative of the couple, as previous research has done.

Interviews with the participant’s romantic partner focused solely on the identified participant’s workplace. Thus, partner interviews asked about the work/family border from the perspective of a domain member or border keeper, as opposed to the border crosser (Clark, 2000). Partners were also asked about their romantic relationship and recommendations for organizations to be supportive. Partners were interviewed on two separate occasions, approximately one to two months apart. Interviews with the identified participants and their romantic partners were conducted separately, and information disclosed
in each interview was not shared with their partner, in order to maintain confidentiality of both informants. The semi-structured interview protocol for partners can also be found in Appendix F.

**Critical incident journaling.** Participants and their partners were additionally asked to journal during the time between interviews. Specifically, participants were instructed to make note of any critical incident (Flanagan, 1954) or discrete event that occurred at work related to their sexual orientation or interactions with their partner related to workplace experiences or the work/family border. Participants were asked to note, for example, any occurrence of discrimination or direct support by work colleagues related to their sexual orientation and/or conversations with their romantic partner about these occurrences. Critical incident journaling was then used to direct subsequent interviews to relevant content and elicit information about both positive and negative experiences (Montalvo, 1999). Maintaining a journal about these incidences may have reduced recall bias and allowed for reflection between interviews, perhaps increasing the productivity and richness of interview data. Separate journals were provided for each informant at the end of their first interview; journals were collected from all participants at the completion of the final interview so that written entries could be included in the analysis for that case.

**Workplace documents.** When available, pertinent documents regarding participants’ workplace were also included as data available for analysis. This information provided a more contextualized understanding of the work environment. Documentation was collected from the participant; employers were not contacted in order to protect participant confidentiality.

**Qualitative data analysis.** Audio-recordings of participant and partner interviews were transcribed verbatim into MAXQDA. Journal entries and workplace documents were also transcribed and entered into MAXQDA as codeable data to contextualize participant interviews. Analysis for this project was an iterative process, as data was examined after each interview. Preliminary findings informed subsequent interview questions and member checking of initial results occurred (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 2010).

Analysis consisted of line-by-line and incident-to-incident coding techniques, as is often used in grounded theory analysis (Charmaz, 2006). That is, coding was done by reading through transcripts line-by-line to ensure that each piece of the data was considered; subsequent readings were done incident-to-incident (e.g. several lines of data or paragraphs at a time) to ensure that isolated stories within participants’ overall narratives were coded accurately. However, unlike grounded theory, this analysis was conducted using sensitizing topics grounded in minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) and work/family border theory (Clark, 2000). Pre-existing codes were developed prior to analysis, and cases were analyzed with the conceptual linkages described by the integrated theoretical model (Appendix A) in mind. Following these conceptual linkages, or “propositions,” to analyze data is “the first and most preferred
strategy” for case study analysis (Hamel et al., 1993, p. 130). Although analysis began with these a priori assumptions and coding schema, emergent issues from the data were identified and added to the codebook (see Appendix H). Data were then re-examined with these new sensitizing topics.

Beginning analysis with a priori theoretical assumptions adds to the literature in this area. Much of the research that has been conducted on this topic has lacked an overt acknowledgement of theory. As is typical with case study analysis, Study 2 findings include a full and rich description of each participant’s case, as well as the theoretical analysis guided by the posed research questions (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Results are presented in order of the broad research questions:

Q1: What minority stress processes do LGBQ employees report experiencing in the workplace?
Q2: What supports do LGBQ employees report receiving to cope with these stress processes?
Q3: How are romantic relationships between partners of the same-sex affected by experiences of minority stress processes related to the employee’s sexuality in the workplace?
Q4: (How) do the borders between the work and family domains alter the cross-contextual effects of minority stress experiences?
Q5: What recommendations do individuals in same-sex relationships have for workplace policies and climate that would benefit and support their romantic relationships?

Finally, cross-case synthesis occurred by analyzing the pattern of results for each case and using the researcher’s interpretations to present overall findings. Hamel et al. (1993) reason that this step of analysis provides an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, using the examination of each individual case as unique examples. This technique was not used to generalize findings beyond the cases included in this study, but rather to summarize analysis and findings across study 1 and study 2. This interpretive cross-case synthesis is presented in the discussion in Chapter 6.

Analytical evaluation. Although there is no broadly accepted set of guidelines to evaluate qualitative case study analysis, several analytical and reporting techniques will be utilized to strengthen the validity of this study. Collaboration with the dissertation chair, Dr. Ramona Oswald, and other colleagues throughout the analysis process increased consistency of interpretations. Steps were further taken to ensure the descriptive validity (Maxwell, 1992) of study findings. Maxwell defines descriptive validity as “factual accuracy” (1992, p. 258) of the data presented. That is, I clarified and confirmed details of each individual participant’s narrative to ensure that the information included in the case study was accurate, from the participant’s perspective. To this end, interviews were transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy by a secondary transcriber. Any uncertainty in participants’ described experiences prompted follow-up questions to the participant during each interview or in subsequent interviews.

This use of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) allowed the researcher to clarify statements and information provided. In addition, data was triangulated by comparing information
provided by the identified participant across interviews, interviews with their romantic partner, documentation, and researcher memos (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mays & Pope, 2000).

**Researcher positionality.** With the understanding that in qualitative studies, the researcher herself can be viewed as an instrument of data collection and analysis, the positionality of the researcher in relationship to study participants and the phenomenon under investigation should also be examined (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). A researcher’s own identities, background, and experiences inherently influences the interview questions asked, the interpretation of data, and the framing of analysis (Malterud, 2001). Yet, as Hamel et al. (1993) state,

The researcher’s subjectivity does intervene, but to the extent this intervention is clearly stated, it then becomes objectified into an object that is clearly the ‘sociologist’s’ point of view, or more precisely, the sociological point of view. They are put into conceptual and operative terms resulting from methodological tactics and concepts recommended for defining the object. Although these terms may impose the desired rigor, they do not necessarily impede the sociological imagination [or interpretation of data]” (pp. 42-44).

Therefore, for the sake of transparency, and to promote reflexivity throughout the research process, I will share some of my identities that may influence my view of data collection and analysis.

As a White, cisgender female in a same-sex relationship, who has been employed by multiple types of organizations (including a healthcare-related field similar to some participants in this study), I may share some insider status with the potential participants in this study. This shared identity, along with my training in active listening as a social worker, may have assisted me in developing rapport and gaining confidence of the participants – an important element to conducting case study interviews (Creswell, 2013). It may have also benefited the interview process, in guiding me to probe further and provide insight as to pertinent questions to ask (Yin, 2009).

On the other hand, any shared identities have the potential to obscure differentiations between participants’ experiences and my own. To this end, I attempted to separate my own experiences and perceptions of the work/family border from participants’ narratives. Recognizing that this is no easy feat for a social scientist, it was my goal to “be honest and vigilant about her own perspective, pre-existing thoughts and beliefs … [and] engage in [a] self-reflective process” (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1376). Further, in writing and presenting the study findings, I distinguished when the participants’ voices are being shared, and when the researcher’s interpretative and critical analysis is presented.

**Ethical Considerations**

Study 1 consisted entirely of secondary data analysis using anonymous data. The *Rainbow Illinois* project was approved by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign’s IRB in 2010; further IRB approval was not needed to analyze existing de-identified data. This project did not increase the potential
for harm to those who participated. Study 2 was also approved by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign’s IRB in 2015 before recruitment and data collection began.

**Risk and consent.** Prior to being interviewed, all Study 2 participants were presented with an informed consent form to read and sign. The informed consent letter advised participants of the study procedures, their rights as participants (including the right to withdraw at any point during the study), as well as the potential risk anticipated. See Appendix D for a copy of the informed consent letter approved by the University’s IRB. Given the nature of involvement for the participants and the questions included in the interview protocol, only minimal risk of harm or distress was anticipated. That is, answering questions related to prejudice events and/or their romantic relationship may have caused participants to relive distress or trauma they have experienced or reflect on negative aspects of their lives. Thus, the trained interviewer (a Licensed Social Worker) continuously evaluated participants’ well-being throughout the interview to protect against excessive discomfort. The interviewer assessed verbal and nonverbal cues for signs of distress (e.g. extreme change in mood or tone of voice, sobbing, shaking, agitation). Further, the interviewer debriefed with the participants at the completion of the interview to confirm that they were not experiencing undue distress.

**Data handling.** Individual confidentiality is important to maintain, even following study participation. Pseudonyms were used for all identifying information, including participants’ names, significant others identified in participants’ stories, employers identified, and home towns. These pseudonyms were used in interview transcriptions as well as throughout this paper. These pseudonyms will continue to be used in any future form of dissemination. Signed consent forms, audio files with identifying information, written journals, and any other material with participants’ information un-blinded have been kept strictly confidential. Electronic information has been kept in password protected files; paperwork has been stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office accessible only to the lead researcher on this project named on the IRB form.
Chapter 4

Study 1 Quantitative Results

Descriptive Analyses

Q1: What minority stress processes do LGBQ employees report experiencing in the workplace?

Q2: What social supports do LGBQ employees report experiencing in the workplace?

Table 1 displays the range, means and standard deviations for all measures of minority stress processes and social supports. Descriptions of both the raw data and imputed data sets are provided in this table below. Overall, this sample reported low levels of each of the three minority stress processes in the workplace. Specifically, participants reported low levels of concealment in the workplace to both coworkers and supervisors. That is, the majority participants were ‘out’ to at least some people in their workplace, if not everyone. In terms of expecting or fearing rejection from others in the workplace, the reported mean score in the raw data was 1.44 on a scale from 1 to 4, indicating that participants did not report much anticipated stigma in the workplace.

Furthermore, the majority of participants indicated they had not experienced a prejudice event at the hands of a coworker (n = 131). This dichotomous variable – experiencing or not experiencing a prejudice event at the hands of a coworker – was used for further analysis. Not reported in Table 1 below – or used in additional analysis – are details about the specific types of prejudice events reported. Of those who did experience a prejudice event at the hands of a co-worker in the previous year (n = 40), individuals indicated only experiencing five types (out of a list of 11 possible prejudice events: overhearing anti-gay comments (n = 23); being shunned (n = 12); beingouted by others (n = 11); being teased (n = 2); and being asked to leave an event (n = 1). These numbers do not total 40 participants as some individuals reported more than one type of event occurring. At most, some individuals reported experiencing three of these events, although the majority of participants who reported prejudice events happening, indicated that only one type occurred at the hands of coworkers. No one reported being followed, threatened, pushed, punched, had property vandalized, or was refused services by colleagues.

Finally, using the 12-item scale of social supports in the workplace, participants indicated high levels of support overall. The mean score for supports in the raw data was 3.10 on a scale from 1 to 4.
Table 1

**Minority Stress Process and Social Supports in Both the Raw and Imputed Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minority stress processes</th>
<th>Raw Data</th>
<th>Imputed Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Mean (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean concealment from everyone (higher scores mean more concealment stress)</td>
<td>1.00 – 3.00</td>
<td>1.50 (0.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations/ fear of rejection</td>
<td>1.00 – 4.00</td>
<td>1.47 (0.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice events</td>
<td>0 – 3 events</td>
<td>0.29 (0.57)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Social supports**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social supports</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
<th>Skewness Statistic</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.00 – 4.00</td>
<td>3.10 (0.73)</td>
<td>-0.58</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tests of Covariates**

*Q1a. Are there certain individuals who are more likely to experience minority stress processes in the workplace?*

*Q2a. Are there certain individuals who are more likely to report social supports in the workplace?*

Associations were conducted with the raw data to examine the relation between minority stress processes, social supports, depression, relationship satisfaction, and individual, work, and relationship characteristics. The associations between concealment, expectations of stigma, social supports, relationship satisfaction and continuous covariates were investigated using Pearson correlation coefficients; between these variables and categorical covariates using independent samples t-tests; and finally chi-square analysis to examine the relationship between experience with prejudice events and categorical covariates. For clarity, detailed results for each of these statistical tests are presented in Appendix G. Appendix G is organized by type of test. However, in the below section, summary results will be presented in order of covariate categories, i.e. individual characteristics, work characteristics, and relationship characteristics.

**Individual characteristics.** Individual characteristics examined were: sex, sexual orientation (gay identified, lesbian identified, and bisexual/pansexual/queer identified); importance of sexual orientation; age; education; parental status; and race (i.e., white versus person of color). Importance of sexual orientation, age, education, and parental status were not significantly related to any model.
variables, including expectations of stigma, concealment, prejudice events, social supports, depression, or relationship satisfaction. Significant covariates included: physical sex, sexual orientation, and race.

In terms of physical sex, individuals who identified as female (including transgender females) reported significantly higher levels of concealment in the workplace, lower levels of social support in the workplace, and higher levels of depression compared to those who identified as male. Examining the significant difference in concealment scores for those who identified as female \( (M = 1.56; SD = 0.58) \) and those who identified as male \( (M = 1.33; SD = .48) \), the magnitude of the difference in means (mean difference = -0.22, 95% CI: -0.40 to -0.04) was small (eta squared = 0.04). Examining the significant difference in social supports in the workplace for those who identified as female \( (M = 2.85; SD = 0.79) \) and those who identified as male \( (M = 3.17; SD = .61) \), the magnitude of the difference in means (mean difference = 0.33, 95% CI: 0.09 to 0.56) was small (eta squared = 0.04). Finally, examining the significant difference in depression scores for those who identified as female \( (M = 5.19; SD = 4.77) \) and those who identified as male \( (M = 3.76; SD = 3.13) \), the magnitude of the difference in means (mean difference = 1.43, 95% CI: -2.71 to -0.15) was small (eta squared = 0.03).

Regarding sexual orientation, there was a significant difference in depression scores for those who identify as gay \( (M = 3.80; SD = 3.02) \) and those who do not, i.e. lesbian, bisexual, queer, or pansexual \( (M = 5.21; SD = 4.82; t (167) = 2.25, p = .026, \text{two-tailed}) \). Individuals who identify as gay reported significantly lower levels of depression. This is consistent with the previous finding comparing sex, as most men identified as gay rather than lesbian, bisexual, queer, or pansexual. The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 1.41, 95% CI: 0.17 to 2.66) was large (eta squared = 0.23).

Finally, there was a significant difference in the expectations of stigma or fear of rejection between those who identified as white \( (M = 1.45; SD = .56) \) compared to those who identified as a person of color \( (M = 1.20; SD = .28; t (155) = 2.65, p = .02, \text{two-tailed}) \). The magnitude of the difference in means (mean difference = .094, 95% CI: .05 to .45) was small (eta squared = 0.04).

**Work and financial characteristics.** Workplace and financial characteristics examined were: personal income, miles from work, employment status, occupational category, and whether or not the household income fell below the poverty threshold. Personal income was not significantly related to any model variables, including expectations of stigma, concealment, prejudice events, social supports, depression, or relationship satisfaction. Significant covariates included: miles from work, employment status, occupational category, and household poverty level.

A significant relationship was found between miles from work and the level of social support reported in the workplace. Individuals who lived further from their place of employment reported significantly higher levels of support \( (r = .211, p = .008) \).
Full-time employment was significantly related to level of concealment in the workplace, and reported social supports in the workplace. Compared to part-time employees ($M = 1.69$, $SD = .62$), those who worked full-time reported significantly lower levels of concealment ($M = 1.45$, $SD = .53$, $t (162) = 2.395$, $p = .018$, two-tailed). The magnitude of the difference in means (mean difference = .25, 95% CI: .04 to .45) was small ($eta$ squared = 0.03). An independent samples t-test was also conducted to compare levels of social supports in the workplace. There was a significant difference in support scores for those who were employed part time ($M = 2.71$, $SD = .84$) compared to those who were working full time ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .73$, $t (158) = -1.978$, $p = .05$, two-tailed). The magnitude of the difference in means (mean difference = -0.29, 95% CI: -0.58 to -0.00) was small ($eta$ squared = 0.02).

In terms of household poverty, individuals living in households below the poverty threshold reported significantly more concealment in the workplace and significantly less support in the workplace. Examining the significant difference in concealment scores for those living in poverty ($M = 1.86$, $SD = .53$) and those who were not ($M = 1.47$, $SD = .55$, $t (158) = -2.56$, $p = .02$), the magnitude of the difference in means (mean difference = -0.38, 95% CI: -0.70 to -0.07) was small ($eta$ squared = 0.04). Examining the significant difference in level of support for those living in poverty ($M = 2.38$, $SD = .81$) and those who were not ($M = 2.99$, $SD = .74$, $t (155) = 2.81$, $p = .01$), the magnitude of the difference in means (mean difference = .61, 95% CI: 0.18 to 1.04) was small ($eta$ squared = 0.05).

Finally, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the concealment stress score for those who were in a managerial or professional occupation and those who were not. There was a significant difference in scores for those who were in a managerial or professional position ($M = 1.4468$, $SD = 0.52679$) and those who were not ($M = 1.8182$, $SD = 0.66450$; $t (161) = 2.963$, $p = .004$, two-tailed). The magnitude of the difference in means (mean difference = 0.37137, 95% CI: 0.12 to 0.62) was small ($eta$ squared = 0.05).

**Relationship characteristics.** Relationship characteristics examined were: duration of relationship; belief of religious sanctification of the relationship; having had a commitment ceremony; legality of the relationship, including having filed a civil union, domestic partnership, marriage license, or power of attorney; living together; sharing finances; and visibility of the relationship. Duration of the relationship, belief in religious sanctification, and having filed a civil union were not significantly related to any model variables, including expectations of stigma, concealment, prejudice events, social supports, depression, or relationship satisfaction. Significant covariates included: relationship visibility, living together, having had a commitment ceremony, having filed a domestic partnership, civil union, or legal marriage, power of attorney, owning a home together, and sharing finances.

Specifically, relationship visibility was significantly related to all model variables. That is increased visibility of the couple relationship was associated with decreased expectations of stigma in the
workplace \( (r = -0.26, p = .001) \), decreased individual concealment in the workplace \( (r = -0.52, p = .001) \), increased work support \( (r = 0.40, p = .001) \), decreased depression \( (r = -0.17, p = .03) \), and increased relationship satisfaction \( (r = 0.19, p = .02) \). Further, there was a significant difference in relationship visibility for those who had experienced prejudice at the hands of a coworker \( (M = 4.18, SD = .84) \) compared to those who had not \( (M = 4.62, SD = 0.65) \), meaning that individuals who reported experiencing prejudice events perpetrated by coworkers were significantly less out as a couple \( (t(167) = 3.51, p = .001, \text{two-tailed}) \). The magnitude of this difference in means \( \text{mean difference} = .13, 95\% \text{ CI: .19 to .70} \) was moderate \( (\text{eta squared} = 0.07) \).

Living together, owning a home together, and having had a commitment ceremony were all significantly related to lower levels of concealment only. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the concealment stress scores for those living together and those not living with their romantic partner. There was a significant difference in concealment scores for those living together \( (M = 1.42, SD = .53) \) and those not living together \( (M = 1.78, SD = .59; t(160) = 3.49, p = .001, \text{two-tailed}) \). The magnitude of the differences in the means \( \text{mean difference} = .01233, 95\% \text{ CI: -.02 to 0.20} \) was moderate \( (\text{eta squared} = 0.07) \). Additionally, there was a significant difference in scores for those owning a home together \( (M = 1.33, SD = .47) \) and those who did not \( (M = 1.63, SD = .59, t(162) = 3.58, p = .001, \text{two-tailed}) \). The magnitude of the differences in the means \( \text{mean difference} = .30, 95\% \text{ CI: .13 to .46} \) was moderate \( (\text{eta squared} = 0.07) \). There was also a significant difference in scores for those who had a commitment ceremony \( (M = 1.33, SD = 0.48) \) and those who had not \( (M = 1.55, SD = 0.57; t(161) = 2.19, p = .03, \text{two-tailed}) \). The magnitude of the differences in the means \( \text{mean difference} = 0.21282, 95\% \text{ CI: 0.02 to 0.41} \) was small \( (\text{eta squared} = 0.029) \).

Finally, several indicators of legal ties within a romantic relationship were significant covariates. For example, individuals who had filed domestic partnership papers reported significantly less expectations of stigma in the workplace \( (M = 1.23, SD = .30) \), compared to those who had not \( (M = 1.44, SD = .55, t(153) = 2.67, p = .01, \text{two-tailed}) \). The magnitude of the differences in the means \( \text{mean difference} = .22, 95\% \text{ CI: .05 to .38} \) was small \( (\text{eta squared} = 0.04) \). Further, those in a domestic partnership reported significantly less concealment in the workplace \( (M = 1.10, SD = .30) \), compared to those who had not \( (M = 1.57, SD = .57, t(157) = 5.77, p = .001, \text{two-tailed}) \). The magnitude of the differences in the means \( \text{mean difference} = .47, 95\% \text{ CI: .31 to .63} \) was large \( (\text{eta squared} = 0.18) \). There was also a significant difference in social support scores for those in a domestic partnership \( (M = 3.21, SD = .57) \) and those not \( (M = 2.91, SD = .78, t(153) = -2.13, p = .04, \text{two-tailed}) \). The magnitude of the differences in the means \( \text{mean difference} = -0.30, 95\% \text{ CI: -.59 to -0.01} \) was small \( (\text{eta squared} = 0.03) \).
Sharing finances and filing power of attorney with one’s partner were both significantly related to concealment and depression scores. Examining concealment in the workplace, individuals who shared finances with their partner reported significantly less concealment ($M = 1.39$, $SD = .51$) compared to those who did not ($M = 1.69$, $SD = .59$, $t(162) = 3.43, p = .001$, two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = .30, 95% CI: .13 to .47) was moderate ($\eta^2 = 0.07$). Examining depression scores, individuals who shared finances with their partner reported significantly less depression symptoms on the PHQ ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 4.45$) compared to those who did not share finances ($M = 5.74$, $SD = 4.36$, $t(167) = 2.02, p = .045$, two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 1.42, 95% CI: .03 to 2.82) was small ($\eta^2 = 0.02$).

Similar patterns emerged for power of attorney as the covariate. Those with power of attorney reported significantly less concealment in the workplace ($M = 1.34$, $SD = .48$) compared to those who did not have this legal tie ($M = 1.63$, $SD = .59$, $t(162) = 3.41, p = .001$, two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = .28, 95% CI: .12 to .45) was moderate ($\eta^2 = 0.07$). Also, those with power of attorney reported significantly less depression ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 3.75$) compared to those without power of attorney ($M = 5.71$, $SD = 4.83$, $t(167) = 2.88, p = .01$, two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 1.90, 95% CI: .60 to 3.21) was small ($\eta^2 = 0.05$).

Lastly, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the expectations of stigma for those who were legally married to their partner and those who were not. There was a significant difference in expectation scores for those who were legally married ($M = 1.21$, $SD = .24$) compared to those who were not ($M = 1.45$, $SE = .56$, $t(155) = 2.93, p = .01$, two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = .08, 95% CI: .07 to .40) was small ($\eta^2 = 0.05$).

**Model Testing: Minority Stressors, Relationship Satisfaction, Depression, and Social Support**

In order to answer these questions, a series of regression tests were run. First, the direct effects of expectations of stigma in the workplace, concealment in the workplace, and experiencing a prejudice event at the hands of a coworker on relationship satisfaction were examined. Social supports in the workplace was then added as a moderating variable. Mediation analysis then included PHQ scores to examine the indirect pathways as well. Finally, moderated mediation was conducted to explore the effects of social supports on the indirect pathway. Given the findings from the previous analysis, several covariates were included in the models as control variables. Visibility of the romantic relationship was included in all models as it was significantly associated with both relationship satisfaction and depression; physical sex and sharing finances were added as controls to the mediated models as they were significantly associated with individual levels of depression. These analyses used the imputed data sets; results reported here are averaged over 50 imputed files.
Q3. Are minority stress processes associated with relationship satisfaction for individuals in same-sex relationships?

First, standard OLS regression analysis was used to assess the ability of three minority stress processes (experiencing a prejudice event, level of expectations of stigma, and level of concealment) to predict level of relationship satisfaction, after controlling for visibility of the romantic relationship. The model as a whole explained a total of 7% of the variance in relationship satisfaction, and was statistically significant (Wald Test of Parameter Constraints Value = 7.908; df = 3; p = 0.048). While controlling for relationship visibility, level of concealment in the workplace, and expectations of stigma in the workplace, experiencing a prejudice event at the hands of a coworker remained the lone significant predictor of variability in relationship satisfaction in this model. Experiencing a prejudice event perpetrated by a coworker was related to a 0.24 point decrease in relationship satisfaction. See Table 2 below for more detailed results from this analysis.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Satisfaction Regressed on Prejudice Event, Concealment, and Expectations of Stigma (Using Imputed Data)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unstandardized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations of Stigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Visibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wald Test of Parameter Constraints

| Value = 7.91 |
| df = 3      |
| p = 0.04    |

R squared

| 0.07 |

Model $\chi^2$

| $df = 3; \chi^2 = 61.22; p < .001$ |

RMSE

| 0.34; 90% CI [0.27, 0.41]; Probability RMSE ≤ .05 = 0.00 |

Note. N = 171. This model also controlled for effects of relationship visibility.

*p ≤ .05; ***p < .001
Q3a. Are the direct pathways between minority stress processes in the workplace and relationship satisfaction moderated by perceived supports in the workplace?

When social supports in the workplace was added to the model as a moderator, the interaction with experiencing a prejudice event was just at the conventional level of significance, $b = 0.31$, $SE = 0.16$, $p = 0.05$ (see Table 3). However, when the interaction was further probed, none of the simple slopes for social supports (i.e. mean level of support, and plus and minus one standard deviation) were significantly different from zero. For low levels of support in the workplace, the simple slope was -0.31 ($SE = 0.66$, $t = -0.47$, $p = 0.64$). For mean levels of support in the workplace, the simple slope was -0.07 ($SE = 0.42$, $t = -0.16$, $p = 0.87$). For high levels of support in the workplace, the simple slope was 0.17 ($SE = 0.35$, $t = 0.48$, $p = 0.63$).

Table 3

<p>| Relationship Satisfaction Regressed on Prejudice Event, Concealment, Expectations of Stigma, Support, the Interaction between Support and Experiencing a Prejudice Event (Using Imputed Data) |
|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unstandardized</th>
<th>Standardized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$b$</td>
<td>$SE$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.68***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice Event</td>
<td>-0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations of Stigma</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Supports</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports * Prejudice Event</td>
<td>0.31*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Visibility</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wald Test of Parameter Constraints</td>
<td>Value = 24.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R squared</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model $\chi^2$</td>
<td>$df = 6$; $\chi^2 = 24.55$; $p &lt; 0.01$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMSE</td>
<td>0.00; 90% CI [0.00, 0.23]; Probability RMSE $\leq .05 = 0.99$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $N = 171$. This model also controlled for effects of relationship visibility.

*p $\leq .05$; ***p $< .001$
Although not significant, the pattern of slopes revealed an interesting trend. See Figure 3. Specifically, the results indicate that for individuals with lower levels of support in the workplace, experiencing a prejudice event at the hands of a coworker was associated with lower relationship satisfaction with their romantic partner. However, for individuals with higher levels of social supports, experiencing a prejudice event at the hands of a coworker was actually associated with increased level of relationship satisfaction compared to those who had not experienced a prejudice event.

*Figure 3.* Association with Experiencing Prejudice Events and Relationship Satisfaction at High and Low Levels of Social Supports in the Workplace (Using Imputed Data).

No significant moderated associations were found between expectations of stigma and relationship satisfaction \((b = 0.12, SE = 0.11, p = 0.29)\), or concealment in the workplace and relationship satisfaction \((b = 0.25, SE = 0.25, p = 0.32)\).

**Q3b. Are the associations between minority stress processes in the workplace and relationship satisfaction mediated by individual mental health, i.e. depression symptoms?**

Next, mediation analysis was run to examine the indirect pathways through individual levels of depression symptoms. Due to the method used to deal with missing data (i.e., multiple imputation), bootstrapping could not be performed in Mplus. In addition to relationship visibility, physical sex and sharing finances were added to the following models as control variables given their significant covariation with individual depression.

Tests of the path model indicated excellent fit: RMSEA = .00, CFI = 1. The chi-square test of model fit was not significant, which also indicates the model fit the data well. Further, the Wald Test of
Parameter Constraints (value = 52.50; df = 7; \( p \leq .001 \)) indicates the overall model is significant. Unstandardized and standardized path estimates are reported in Table 4.

Table 4
Unstandardized and standardized path coefficients for the model testing direct and indirect effects of minority stress processes on relationship satisfaction (\( N = 171 \))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paths estimated</th>
<th>Relationship Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( b (SE) )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice event ( \rightarrow ) Relationship satisfaction</td>
<td>-0.06 (0.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prejudice event ( \rightarrow ) Depression</td>
<td>3.39 (0.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations of stigma ( \rightarrow ) Relationship satisfaction</td>
<td>-0.09 (0.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations of stigma ( \rightarrow ) Depression</td>
<td>0.19 (0.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment ( \rightarrow ) Relationship satisfaction</td>
<td>-0.05 (0.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concealment ( \rightarrow ) Depression</td>
<td>-0.05 (1.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression ( \rightarrow ) Relationship satisfaction</td>
<td>-0.05 (0.01)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. This model also controlled for effects of physical sex of participant, relationship visibility, and sharing finances.

*\( p \leq .05 \); **\( p < .01 \); ***\( p < .001 \)

For the model predicting relationship satisfaction, direct effects were not significant, yet significant indirect effects emerged via depression (see Figure 4). There was a significant indirect path from prejudice events to relationship satisfaction through depression (indirect effect = -0.18). Because bootstrapping was not possible, the Sobel Test was conducted to determine whether the mediating variable of depression was significantly different from zero (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2016). The Sobel Test statistic was -3.10 (\( SE = .057; p = .002 \)). Therefore, the Sobel test indicates this indirect path is significantly different from zero. Most importantly, the association between prejudice events and relationship satisfaction was no longer significant in this model (\( \beta = -0.04, SE = 0.08, p = 0.61 \)), compared to the previously significant direct effect. These results suggest full mediation. Thus, individuals who experienced a prejudice event at the hands of a coworker reported significantly more depression and this increased level of depression was significantly negatively related to relationship satisfaction.
Figure 4. Depression as mediating variable linking minority stress processes and relationship satisfaction.

![Diagram](image)

Note. Standardized path estimates are shown. In the above model, covariance parameters between prejudice events, expectations of stigma, and concealment were estimated, but are not shown. This model further included relationship visibility, physical sex, and sharing finances as control variables. *p ≤ .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Q3c. Are the indirect pathways between minority stress processes in the workplace and relationship satisfaction moderated by perceived supports in the workplace?

The final model tested was moderated mediation to examine the effects of social support in the workplace on both the direct and indirect pathways between each of the three predictor variables, and depression, and between depression and relationship satisfaction. Three separate models were run to test the interaction of social support with the three predictor variables separately (i.e. prejudice events, expectations of stigma, and concealment). Relationship visibility, physical sex, sharing finances, and the other two predictors remained in each model as controls. No significant moderated mediation was found.
Chapter 5
Study 2 Qualitative Results

Participants

Three individuals, and their romantic partners, participated in this study. Each case will be labeled by the pseudonym of the identified participants – Martha, Bridget, and Talia. Following a brief description of the case, results are presented in order of the proposed research questions (e.g. minority stress experiences, supports received, effects of the minority stress, border management strategies, and recommendations). Results of each case will be presented separately; cross-case synthesis will be presented as part of the discussion in Chapter 6.

All three participants and their partners meet the criteria outlined in Chapter 3: 1.) They are all over the age of 18; 2.) They live and work full-time in IL; and 3.) They have been in a committed, monogamous, same-sex relationship for over one year. See Table 5 for a brief overview of each case. All three identified participants work in a health-related field. Martha and Bridget both identify as a lesbian. Talia, on the other hand, identifies as a queer woman, and also identifies as a queer-therapist. Talia’s case is unique in that a significant aspect of her work is providing LGBTQ-related services. Martha’s case is unique in that she primarily works from home, and thus has mainly electronic contact with her coworkers. Bridget’s case is unique in that her romantic partner, Lara, is also employed in the same organization.

Taken together, these three cases offer a more comprehensive view of both workplace climate and work/family borders. Bridget’s overall workplace climate could be described as generally supportive, Martha’s as tolerant, and Talia’s as hostile. Further, Martha typically described rigid boundaries between her work and family domains; Bridget described highly permeable boundaries, while Talia applied a mix of rigid and permeable boundaries.
Table 5

Brief overview of each case.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Romantic Relationship</th>
<th>Workplace</th>
<th>Overall workplace climate</th>
<th>Work/Family Borders</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talia</td>
<td>34 years old; white; identifies as queer or pansexual</td>
<td>2.25 years together with Erin (26 year old, white, female lesbian); committed relationship with no legal status</td>
<td>Clinical social worker in a community health center; position includes LGBTQ-specific work; Annual salary $65,000</td>
<td>Hostile</td>
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<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>54 year old, white lesbian</td>
<td>6 years together with Sandy (43 year old, white lesbian); civil union, then married</td>
<td>Primarily works from home as an accountant for a hospital; Annual salary $42,000</td>
<td>Tolerant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridget</td>
<td>26 year old, white lesbian</td>
<td>2 years together with Lara (24 year old, white, gay); committed relationship with no legal status</td>
<td>Works at a healthcare and nursing hotline; romantic partner works for the same company; Annual salary $30,000</td>
<td>Supportive</td>
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Talia

Talia is a heavily tattooed, white woman in her early thirties who identifies as queer or pansexual. Her teal hair and quirky sense of style “flag pretty queer.” In fact, Talia believes that both her looks and the nature of her work increase the salience of her sexual orientation in many situations. She describes,

I think people interact with me, like people in the world interact with me in a pretty queer way and make assumptions about me … And because of the nature of the work that I do, being very LGBTQ centric, and then me being part of that population, it’s just like ever-present in personal and professional life … and a lot of my professional relationships are also personal relationships, and those people happen to be queer, um, it just keeps it pretty central.

In fact, in most contexts, including work, family, her social life, and in general public spaces, Talia states that she is “pretty out” about her sexual minority identity. However, this level of openness in Talia’s life is relatively new, and spurred in some ways by her committed relationship with Erin. As Talia says,

I didn’t like live closeted, I mean I wasn’t being secretive about it. I would be truthful with people but I wasn’t voluntarily disclosing information about myself and so I probably wasn’t seen as very out. I may not have even been seen as queer to some people … So, if then I’m in a committed relationship with a woman that it’s becoming more central to my life, then that starts...
to leak into more parts of my life … It’s hard to hide. Like you can’t hide it, even though I wasn’t really hiding it. Then you become more and more visible as a queer person through those relationships … It just becomes part of your identity or you, I’ve started getting asked more directly or often about things.

Talia has been in a relationship with Erin for a little over two years. They moved in together about a year and a half ago. Erin, at 26, is younger than Talia, but also identifies as a white female. She describes herself as a lesbian, meaning “I like women. I’m attracted to women.” Erin says she is “about 98% out” since there are a few family members who may not know her sexual orientation. Erin’s family is not very supportive of her identity or her relationship. Talia has yet to meet Erin’s family of origin. Erin has, on the other hand, met Talia’s parents. Talia and Erin are also quite friendly with several of Talia’s coworkers, often having dinner together and socializing outside of work.

Talia works as a licensed clinical social worker in a community mental health center approximately 40 to 50 hours per week. Talia has worked at this particular center for the past six years providing individual and group therapy to clients, as well as supervising social work interns and their training. Although Talia provides services to clients seeking support for a variety of concerns, she identifies a few of her clinical specializations, including LGBTQ populations and concerns. Colleagues in the mental health center include administration, other clinicians, interns, and staff members such as receptionists, janitorial staff, or bookkeepers – many of whom also identify as a sexual minority. Talia reports directly to the director of the center and earns approximately $65,000 annually. Her private office consists of a desk space (housing her computer and some filing cabinets) and a more therapeutic area with comfortable chairs, a small coffee table, and a few plants.

Given Talia’s background in social work and therapy, and her expertise in LGBTQ issues, she often relates her experiences with great insight using clinical language. For example, in describing her sexual orientation, Talia states,

I use the label queer most often, partially because a lot of people don’t know what pansexual means and I have to go into an educator role and I don’t really want to. And partially because of the political power of using the term queer and the community affiliation that that brings to identify as queer.

**General stressors.** Talia reported experiencing general, or normative, stressors in her workplace. Specifically, she discussed the stress of balancing all of her responsibilities as an employee and the organizational policies that make that difficult. For example, she is required to meet with a certain number of clients each week, as well as document case notes for each session within 48 hours of that meeting. However, she feels those expectations can be unreasonable at times; particularly when her schedule is full, Talia said it is unrealistic to record so many case notes in such a short amount of time.
In the family domain, Talia feels that her biggest stress is adjusting to living with Erin and keeping up with household chores. When asked about the biggest disagreements she has with Erin, Talia said, “Neatness of the house! That’s always been it. That’s our biggest thing. Yea, we’re very different. I’m neat and she’s all over the place! {laughter}”

**Minority stress experiences.** Talia is extremely unhappy in her current work environment. She describes numerous incidences when her superiors in administration have passed her over for promotion, antagonized her in meetings, and essentially shunned her by ignoring emails or written requests. She feels particularly targeted, not only as a queer advocate in her position – as being an active ally is a part of her job – but also as a queer, white woman. In fact, although Talia identifies these acts as “homophobic,” she acknowledges that her identities cannot be separated and isolated. When asked why she perceives these experiences to be occurring, she states,

My perception was homophobia in the past. And what’s very interesting, and I don’t know what this is too, the two people who have created the most barriers for me, in that area, are both women. They are women of color. So it’s hard to, there’s so many different identity things going on … It’s hard to piece apart. So we have two black, hetero women. One white, queer woman.

And this dynamic, back and forth for … years. Is it homophobia? Because it’s not happening to the queer men that are getting hired … I’m getting yelled at in my face and getting treated like the bad person. It’s yea, it’s hard to tell. Is it homophobia? Is it a mix of my identities and how I’m perceived? Is it me as a person? I don’t know.

Furthermore, because Talia’s position in the organization includes LGBTQ-specific services, the external stigma she feels is even more complex. She states, “It’s hard to tell if people’s reactions to me are because I’m an advocate or because I’m a queer advocate. Um, and it’s usually people in higher authority, um and it’s hard to separate those two because if you’re advocating for queer and trans things and you’re queer, you can’t really separate that. It’s personal as well as professional. And so as I’ve become louder, I’ve gotten more push back. I’ve gotten more negative reactions which it’s, like I said, it’s hard to separate. Is it full system level oppression or is it homophobia in there too?”

**Distal minority stress processes.** Talia identified several experiences with external victimization or stigma in the form of microaggressions. She perceives minority stress when coworkers and colleagues support heteronormative beliefs or minimize the complexity of queer experiences. She describes,

So it’s not like an anti- cause it’s not that overt, I just think there’s always so many microaggressions that occur. Like even if it’s an assumption that’s kind of all the way in the other direction. Like just because I’m partnered with a woman people call me a lesbian. It’s like did I ever tell you I was a lesbian? {laughter} stop calling me a lesbian to people. Like I never told you that. Or something like that. Um, I’m not offended cause I’m not gonna go to like gay hate,
{laughter} but that’s not my identity. And my identity is important to me. So it’s just like assumptions. Like the little stuff.

Some of the policies at the community counseling center are also read as microaggressions toward LGBQ individuals in that they display an organization-level misunderstanding and minimization of gender and sexual minority identities and experiences. For example, although the employee handbook includes a policy against discrimination or harassment on the basis of personal identifiers, the list contains the phrase *sexual orientation including gender identity*. Talia’s response was, “that’s very inaccurate.” She later went on to explain, “Well, there’s a difference [between sexual orientation and gender identity]… cause it’s not the same. … I think people think that it is and that’s part of the microaggression when that happens. That’s part of the oppression that happens.” Furthermore, in a section explaining partner and family benefits, one page of the handbook is entitled, *Marriage, same-sex marriage, civil union*. Talia laughs, “It’s a different kind of marriage. You know, the new kind.” These policies are just a few written examples of the inaccuracies or misunderstandings regarding LGBQ concerns in her workplace.

Talia states that she has chosen to voice opposition to experiences of microaggressions many times in her organization because she feels that it is part of her job as an LGBTQ ally, regardless of her own personal identity. However, it is this advocacy that perhaps leads to more directed stigma from her superiors. She states,

As long as I keep my head down and just do the work, like the silent advocacy … As long as I’m doing things silently and they seem like good things, then the administration of my center has things to brag about … But if something doesn’t go so well, or it’s within our center, and I speak up about it, then I’m, I don’t want to say it’s reprimanded. Because it’s almost more of an interpersonal retaliation … I can’t speak openly. I can’t critique things within my immediate center.

In fact, after Talia identified several microaggressions occurring in the community center and asked administration to rectify them, she feels she was verbally attacked by her supervisors and told these microaggressions were not happening. “And then ever since then I felt like everything’s been retaliatory. That I’ve raised my voice or asked for, everything’s been shut down. And not only shut down, sometimes I’ve been scolded just for asking questions or saying things. … Just not even told no, but scolded.”

**Expectations/fear of rejection.** Talia’s previous experiences with external victimization in the workplace may have primed her to be alert for more, an additional and unique form of minority stress described by Meyer’s model (2003). When talking about how she has stopped advocating against microaggressions in some ways, she says, “It’s easier to let it go. But I think I’m just afraid of more retaliation. Like, I fight. I’m not listened to. What happens if I keep pushing up against it? Like when is
the next horrible meeting where I get punished or something? What’s the next boundary that … Yea. It’s just like how far do I push it? And how much crappier will work feel because of me doing it?!” Thus, her experiences with these more directed acts of perceived homophobia have also increased her anticipation or expectations of future rejection and stigma.

**Concealment.** Finally, also in-line with minority stress theory, Talia talked about concealment as a minority stressor and how she experienced that in the workplace. While she feels that she is completely out with administration and coworkers now – “everybody I work with knows. I don’t hide my relationships or any part of my identity” – Talia describes the complexity of disclosure. She stated, “Yea, so I didn’t like live closeted, I mean I wasn’t being secretive about it. I would be truthful with people but I wasn’t voluntarily disclosing information about myself and so I probably wasn’t seen as very out. I may not have even been seen as queer to some people.” Despite choosing to be upfront about her identity if asked, Talia still describes feeling hesitation or slight anxiety around disclosing. She describes an incident that “happened years ago,”

I was on some committee and the committee chair came to my office one day after the meeting and asked me, oh we have to compile some demographic variables about our committee members to make sure, and she didn’t say the rationale, but I know they have to make sure our committees are diverse in a lot of different identities. And I hadn’t ever been on that committee before. So I got, it was like a drive by questioning … So I got asked how I identify racially, racially or ethnically, my gender identity, and my sexual orientation … oh but she asked specifically do you identify as LGBQ? As part of the LGBTQ community? And I said, uh, Q? {laughter} and they were like okay and then left. And I was like, I paused before I answered that. I was like, I’m not close with you. What is this about? But you’re asking me this because I guess it’s important at an administrative level. And I feel like I have to say something and I also want to be genuine to myself. And I’m not trying to be closeted, but what? Like it was really odd and so then I was just sitting there afterwards and I was like, so I just outed myself to someone I don’t really give two shits about? {laughter}

Interestingly, Talia also struggled with concealment because of her work as an LGBQ advocate. Aside from her personal identity development, her work identity influenced her decisions about disclosure. She stated,

Well I started to feel, because I work with this, and I talk with my clients about this all the time and go out to talk to people, I started to feel guilty. Like a fraud for the longest time … Like I could still flag as heterosexual and because I’m not like living all super out, like anybody could assume I’m heterosexual and that’s about being a good advocate … And what am I? And I
haven’t even told my family. And I’m having all these relationships and they don’t even know. And what the fuck?

Talia’s relationship with Erin was also an impetus in some ways to disclose her own identity to coworkers. For example, Talia said,

I think being in my current relationship helps me to live out more. Whereas before I don’t feel like I was really closeted but if I wasn’t in a relationship, I wasn’t, nobody was talking about relationship, asking about relationships. People don’t usually pry into your personal background and ask you your sexual orientation. So, it’s just not very visible or talked about. But it’s hard to not talk about in a relationship when it’s very central to your life. Or people asking ‘cause people care. And then ask how your partner’s doing this and that.

In addition to Meyer’s (2003) original conceptualization of concealment of sexual identity, Talia also talked about concealment as it related to the other minority stress processes she experienced. Because of the anticipation or expectation of further stigma and rejection from supervisors if she were to relate her perceptions of homophobia, Talia concealed her true reason for job hunting when asking her supervisor for a reference. She describes,

I hated to do it, but in order to protect my reference and make it a livable work environment for the coming months, I didn’t lie, but I just didn’t say the whole truth … I don’t want to be able to tell her [I’m leaving] until I can tell her the whole truth [about why I’m leaving]. It feels disingenuous for me to go in there and admit the truth or make up some excuse that I’m job searching just ‘cause I need a reference. And I got to the point of I guess I’m not going to use her as a reference cause I don’t want to feel disingenuous and I can’t tell all the truth right now cause what will happen to me? Will there be more retaliation? And then when I finally actually started the job process and realized shit, I really do think I need her as a reference and people were like yes, you need her as a reference and this is how you’re gonna have to handle it. And it’s okay, you’re not a bad person. You’re not disingenuous. You just are, it’s truthful that you will leave eventually, right?

Talia essentially felt she needed to conceal her experiences with other forms of minority stress, namely perceived microaggressions and external stigmatization.

**Denied support.** A final form of minority stress Talia experienced is not discussed in Meyer’s (2003) original minority stress theory. However, seeking support based on her negative experiences and being unable to garner that support may be considered an additional, and unique minority stress process. For example, Talia and a colleague approached the counseling center’s Human Resources (HR) department for support given the homophobia and retaliation she perceived. Talia described that interaction,
We went to HR. We had a meeting about all this stuff the last few months cause work’s just gotten worse and it feels retaliatory with one thing after another. And HR didn’t really do anything. They encouraged us to have individual conversations with our director or the coordinator who has been putting those barriers up. Or if we really do think it’s homophobia to go to Lambda Legal or something like that. If we really think it’s bias, to go right to them to report it. And I was like {sigh} so I can go back to the director and have another individual conversation but this time I don’t want it to sound like I’m threatening her, but be really honest and say hey we went to HR. This shit is real and this is what it feels like.

Rather than feeling protected by HR and supported by this outside entity in approaching in her supervisor, Talia was told to continue advocating for herself. Talia said, “It felt like a big waste of time. So, it’s like, I either have to make the decision to take even bigger risks that will likely get me retaliated against even though I’m supposed to be not getting retaliated against, I’m already getting retaliated against. What’s gonna make me think I’m not gonna get more retaliation?”

Talia was also denied support at times in the family domain from her partner. Specifically, there were times when Erin questioned whether Talia’s perceptions were accurate, thus minimizing rather than supporting Talia’s stress experiences. Erin said, “I mean it’s hard because I’m not in the situation and you definitely want to always think the best of people. And you want to think that that couldn’t possibly exist still. But on the other side, based on my own personal experiences and interactions in the world, I know that it does. You know, I think I always try to be a middle ground, balancing listening and saying you know, maybe there’s something else going on. But not downplaying her feelings in any way.” Later, when asked what she thinks when Talia shares her experiences with stigma, Erin stated, “at some point it’s like okay. Like it’s your side. It’s what you’re feeling. This is what I’m feeling. But you know it’s, I don’t want to rush into labeling people as like oh she’s for sure a homophobic. Again, I’m not in the situation.”

**Supports.** Still, Talia has sought – and received – support in coping with these minority stress processes in both the work domain and the family domain. In fact, when asked to rate the overall climate of the community counseling center, Talia states it is “supportive.” She describes, “LGBQ people who are in relationships get the same support as people who are not. If they need time off for partner things. They can talk about their partners openly and there is care for them and their partners. Um, I don’t think they’re treated in any other way than heterosexual employees. Um, yea. I think it just comes down to individual level.”

Talia differentiates individuals who provide support and those who create minority stressors. She describes, “I think if some of the people in power were removed, then things would be better. Of course, you always have the larger system level stuff when you’re dealing with LGBQ issues, like you shouldn’t
have to fight so hard to get funding to convert some gender inclusive restrooms or to go out and do a survey of where are the possible ones we can convert are and put signs. Like that’s frustrating. But that doesn’t make my day to day work life a living hell. What makes my day to day work life a living hell is when certain toxic people continually put up barriers to me just doing my fucking job.” Later, she added, “I mean, there is this dysfunctional power team, but everybody else is super supportive. And we can have those conversations and empathize with each other and support each other.” Talia also clarified that she feels supported specifically by other LGBQ-identified colleagues in her workplace. In describing what made those relationships uniquely supportive, she stated,

They get it in a different way. So, like I can talk with coworkers who are great LGBQ allies but they don’t have the same amount of passion I think. Or understand how it impacts your sense of your own being and value … they just get it on a different level because there is more emotional investment. More personal investment. It also helps personally because I think we can talk about those things on different levels that they empathize with my life … So like those bonds get really close that you feel supported that you can have somebody when times are rough at work too.

Talia also describes the ways that Erin supports her in the family domain, “Just listening to me, and validating, knowing that this is going to be hard.” Talia describes how this support at home helps her in the work domain, “I mean if Erin is validating me, saying you’re good at what you do. And focus on that. That will help carry me through so I’ll focus on my clients.” Erin also describes how she supports Talia, saying, “Usually I just listen. I don’t know if I really have a particular way of responding other than trying to make light of it. And just be like well, you’re gonna have to figure something out.” However, both Erin and Talia recognize that Erin is not the only source of support. Erin acknowledges Talia’s support from colleagues in the work domain: “She does have her peers that she talks to and seeks counsel with. But you know, it’s important to her that I also can be there for her.” Talia also admits to relying on supports from work colleagues to help deal with work-related stressors. When asked if it would be harder to cope with work stress without Erin’s support, Talia said “It might help me to like cope in the moment, but not really like resolve anything at work … I feel like I have other people I can go to at work too. So it’s not like I don’t have that at all then. Of course, it feels good, but I feel like I could get by.”

**Effects of minority stress experiences.** Although both Talia and Erin report that “we’ve gotten better about communicating and calling each other out on stuff [says Talia],” particularly since they have made the decision together that Talia will look for new jobs, both women discuss ways in which these minority stress experiences in the workplace have affected 1.) Talia, 2.) Erin, as another domain member in the family domain, and 3.) their romantic relationship.

Talia states that, as a result of these minority stress experiences, she has “been able to check out” in some ways as an employee, e.g., not putting in as much effort at work or caring about her professional
persona. For example, she tells a story about a recent change in her appearance, “my image at work – I think that’s mainly what’s been affected. Like when she (my stylist) talked me into teal, like that didn’t even cross my mind this time. Like I had no thought in my head, can I show up to work with teal hair? I was like okay, yea, do it. It’s like not even a thought. It’s just gotten to the grain of my being that I don’t care. I’m gonna do whatever the fuck I want.”

Additionally, Talia feels the stress she experiences at work has affected her mental health, specifically increased her irritability and agitation. This effect can and has carried over from the work domain into the family domain. She describes,

I mean I have more angry nights when I come home. And I’m venting more. And usually, like it used to be if things weren’t happening very often, I could vent and be done with it. But when things stack up one thing after another, it’s like I’m just carrying a bag of anger around and like Erin is good at checking me. Like you’re getting easily triggered. I think it’s because what’s going on at work. I’m sorry but don’t bring it home. I’m like I know. Checking in around that. Like am I really angry or am I just carrying it over from work or what’s going on? So I know it impacts me, if it’s taking a lot of energy and there’s not a lot of down time to recover from it, I’m carrying it over.

Erin also described this effect on Talia’s mood, saying,

I mean the days when she was agitated or had a shitty work day, things were easier to frustrate or we’d totally miss each other’s, like, paths and then it was like world war four. There’s been a number of arguments over the last several months. And they’re not all tied to her job specifically but if someone is constantly agitated and in a very high stress position and I have a stressful day, paths are easily missed and so, I’m sure it has contributed some.

Erin feels her mood also shift, saying “it makes me angry, I would say. And frustrated that she has to deal with that.”

Both Talia and Erin admit that Talia’s frustrations and negative experiences in her current work environment are a common topic of conversation. Erin says, “We have a very open communication style. So, you know, if I need to vent about work or she needs to vent about work, we know we are free to do that in each other’s presence.” However, it seems that Talia regrets burdening her partner and her relationship with so much consistent negativity. She became tearful as she described, “I seek out support from my partner, who is probably tired of hearing me talk about the same broken record stuff all the time.” Later, when asked why discussions of leaning on Erin for support brought up tears for Talia, she stated,

It’s probably appreciation tears of that’s great that she does that continually. It’s probably also sadness that I was that I wasn’t coming home on such a regular basis having to say those things
… it’s sadness that when I reflect on it that it happens so much. I’m like dammit Talia, you’re coming home bitching to your partner again, like you don’t need to bring this to her. She can’t fix it and she’s probably doesn’t want to hear your bitching all the time. But she still does it, so I feel sad that it keeps happening and I’m happy that she’s still there.

Erin separately admitted to growing fatigued by constantly needing to play the supportive role, but that not being fully present and listening to Talia has also led to fights between the women. Erin tells, There have been times, yes, when I have perhaps zoned out either because it gets talked about a lot and I know she’s venting … I mean, some of it gets repetitive. And I don’t think I should ever really like stop listening, but I think sometimes I go into auto pilot … But because she’s had a particularly crappy day at work or something … [and] is more emotional about something … Therefore, it’s just adds onto her day of frustration … [then] I storm out of the room … I’m sure I’ve been frustrated back at her then … But sometimes yea, it will escalate into further fighting.

Finally, Erin also describes a positive outcome of the minority stress experiences Talia has experienced at work. Despite the increased fighting at certain points in their relationship, both Erin and Talia feel they are in a good place now as the job search together. While a major shift, such as quitting a job and potentially moving long distance could distress some couples more, Erin is very supportive of Talia’s decision and has enjoyed helping her with the process of looking for new positions. Erin says, I think things have been good for the most part. The only, really thing that has changed has been just her job searching … So we’ve been spending some quality time together up in the office space … So I think it’s been good for the relationship … like she’s a little bit more excited I think just every shittier day that goes by at work. But it’s just exciting to think about what can be and what might be. In terms of not only job, but also like for us, like going on a different adventure. And what cities can we visit? So, it’s been good.

Work/family border characteristics. Both Talia and Erin describe a mix of rigid and permeable boundaries between the work and family domains for Talia. In terms of permeability, Talia describes how Erin has met the majority of her coworkers. The couple socializes with several of Talia’s colleagues outside of work, even throwing going-away parties when a coworker moved out of town. Talia and Erin describe permeable psychological, physical, and temporal boundaries as they meet with coworkers as friends outside of the work domain. Talia stated, “Erin knows a lot of my coworkers and they come play games. The people we’re close to and she goes out to like dinners when we have dinners together. So, they’ll check in on how she’s doing.”

It seems that allowing some degree of permeability in these borders allows Talia to be able to access supports. Specifically, by sharing work related stress and minority related stress from the workplace with Erin in the family domain, she is able to garner support from her partner. Talia said, “I get
support from my partner to have my work life be present. Not really present, but to talk about that at home and she does as well. She talks.” When asked if she would be missing an important source of support if she were to separate work and family domains more, Talia said, “For both. Yea, I feel like it takes more energy to keep it more separate.”

It seems these permeable boundaries also allow Talia to access supports in her work domain, specifically by talking about her relationship with colleagues at work. These more personal conversations fostered closer relationships with coworkers, thus increasing supports available in that domain. For example, describing when she disclosed her queer identity to coworkers Talia said,

I can’t remember exactly pinpoint situations, but there’s probably also something to be said about when Erin started coming around to work too. So like, if there would be the group of us closer coworkers would go out to dinner, … she would start coming around. And so I think there needed to be like a relationship built, so like face to face connection, meeting. And then feel like a relationship forming in that way. So it’s not just through me talking about Erin, but now they know her and like her and talk to her. And now they care for her because they’ve met her multiple times in person and then they hang out.

Later, she describes how building these relationships in the work domain also provide support for family-related stress. Talia said,

My coworker Hillary … I mean Erin even is really close to her and her partner … And so me and Hillary are close and we’ll talk about how our relationships parallel a lot. Like her partner, Bonnie is looking for a new job right now and shifting careers at the same time that Erin was shifting careers. So we’re always like checking in … Did Bonnie find a new job? And how’s Erin doing? … And so she’ll hear my worries and then she’ll be like yea … And so, it’s like that. But it’s not like a venting like things are horrible, and I don’t like my partner. And that’s not coming from her either. It’s just our, we’re talking about how our relationships are paralleling. And how we’re coping with it and how we talk about it.

On the other hand, Talia describes several ways in which the borders between work and family are more rigid. For example, her professional role as a social worker requires that she maintain confidentiality of her clients, and does not engage in dual relationships (e.g. dating a client or serving as a clinical therapist to romantic partners). Therefore, more rigid physical boundaries exist in that Talia stays late to work in the office because she cannot ethically bring client notes home to work on, for example. She describes rigid psychological boundaries in saying,

Well I can’t treat my partner like a client, cause it’s a whole different relationship. If I treat my partner like a client, then there’s pieces of me that isn’t in it. Because there’s a strict professional, like therapist boundary. So for me to be more transparent about me. I can’t be a therapist in my
Finally, it appears that rigid boundaries are used in some ways to inhibit the cross-contextual effects of stress. Erin and Talia have agreed to set some rigid temporal boundaries between work and home domains in order to protect time devoted to the relationship. Erin said, “Like when she’s at home she doesn’t want to be doing work so that we can have time together.” Talia also described, “I think we’ve just, we’ve had conversations about just committing to our time together when we can be together. We’ve negotiated ahead of time, we’re gonna have this night free and we’re committed to that. So there’s no work. It’s not work time, so stop. Don’t think about it kind of thing. And we’re holding each other accountable.”

Examples of these more rigid boundaries can also be seen in the work domain. For example, Talia described how she only shares personal information about herself and her relationship with people she trusts, saying “Yea [I talk about my relationship] to people I’m comfortable with, or feel safe with. Like, we have pockets of people who talk. We sit over lunch and talk. And everybody’s pretty relational.” However, those individuals she feels are discriminatory towards her are “just excluded from those conversations.”

**Recommendations.** As a final point, both Talia and Erin offered several recommendations for workplace policies that would support not only sexual minority employees, but also the work/family balance for all employees. First, they identified the need for employers to offer support with general work stress and respecting a healthy work/family balance for all employees. Talia listed several policy changes (i.e. more time allowed to complete therapy notes) that would ease her overall stress levels at work. Erin also agreed that supporting the work/family balance for families in general would be helpful, saying, “I think encouraging the personal days or making sure that people are taking vacations. Or if they haven’t, just being encouraging. So knowing that the staff shouldn’t feel like they’re constantly working or if they’re working past a certain time be like hey make sure you take that time off Friday. Or make a policy where no one stays past you know, six. It’s okay to go home, have family time.”

Additionally, both women felt steps could be taken to also support LGBTQ employees and their families specifically. For instance, in describing the importance of “recognition for all families, life partners,” Talia underscored the importance of language. She said,

How we talk about families or partners, that it not be heteronormative. It can be interpersonal. So if there are work functions that everybody feels comfortable to bring their partners and those partners are recognized and treated the same way as heterosexual couples. Just treated the same. I mean it might be interpersonal in the workplace as far as asking about partners and not feeling
like afraid to ask or afraid to talk about certain people’s families if they don’t look like theirs or something.

Erin also talked about a need for more inclusive language, stating, “if there’s company outings or company parties or whatever, saying you and your partner or friends and family can come. That makes it a very inclusive and it kind of leaves it open to what type of partner they are.” And also, “not asking questions like oh, do you have a boyfriend? Making that assumption. Like are you in a relationship is better.”

Other recommendations included organizations taking active steps to openly acknowledge and affirm LGBTQ employees. Talia offered, “I mean, I guess if they are larger institutions, the supportive get-togethers are really helpful, to network with other people. So [employers could support LGBTQ employees by] giving work time to connect with other people.” In describing the benefit of such groups in the workplace, she elaborated,

You can meet a lot of people in that and hear their experiences that are so different. Like, man, I’ve been here six months and I haven’t even come out. Or I don’t have a relationship with anyone in my area yet. For some people, that’s the only place they are making connections and if that didn’t exist. It just gives time for building more community. Especially when you live in a smaller town, the queer community is already smaller, and it might be really hard to make those connections.

Erin suggested posting visible symbols of support in the workplace:

Well, I do know from working at other places, someone did have an ally sticker in their window, which as a member of that community made me feel like oh, cool. Like I’ll be okay working here. … I was having a conversation with someone about the equality sticker. Like does it actually mean anything? And it’s the same thing with the ally sticker. Yes. For people of that community, like, you know, it’s a ‘I’m cool with you. Or I can be a support an ally to you if you need me. Or I am that way. Or I identify that way.’ … I mean that can go as far as to kind of set the tone for the company environment as well … that just kind of reaffirms that it’s an okay place.

Erin also stressed the importance of enforcing non-discrimination policies in practice.

I think having clauses like we’re not going to discriminate based on and including sexual orientation is good, but also making sure that that’s carried through. And if there is a complaint that it’s addressed appropriately in a non-shaming way. Because if, you know, a sentence in a handbook isn’t any good if it’s not actually carried out. You know, being open-minded when asking about significant others or partners. Opening and inviting at work functions, actively engaging.
Finally, Talia suggested that employers continue to strive for more a more supportive climate and welcoming workplace for LGBTQ employees. Rather than settling for ‘good enough,’ employers can and should constantly adapt policies to increase support. She described, I mean I guess it’s not like all supportive and it’s not all bad. Just like with everything. So it [the employee handbook] does show some support, that there is administrative effort that goes towards LGBTQ employees and staff. But there always could be more. So I mean there could always be more benefits stuff. There could always be more with how we list pronouns and things in our systems. How we give new hires and employees options to do so. So I’m always kind of critiquing that there could be more. But this is good.

Martha
Martha is a 54-year-old white woman who identifies as a lesbian. She says, “I love other women. I’m attracted to other women … I feel most comfortable in the presence of women.” She does not, however, feel that this identity is very central or important in her day-to-day life, saying, “I know that it kind of is part of everything I do, but I think it’s, you know, you get to know me as a person first, or an employee before that is like even an important conversation.” She went on to describe how other parts of her identity are more salient, “I identify as a recovering alcoholic, which I, for me is more important even than my sexual orientation because, you know, I have to be more diligent about what my life is in relation to that.” Although Martha has been sober for over twenty-five years now, she still attends Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings and draws on lessons from AA that shape her belief systems. She also links her drinking to concealment of her sexual identity as an emerging adult and contributes her disclosure, in part, to her sobriety. Martha details, I first came out, I was…28 years old and … a lot of my, um…ability to come out had to do with getting sober and not drinking. Because I drank about it a lot, you know. I didn’t want anybody to know, um, because I tried to fit into that box that said ‘husband and wife, kids, dogs, picket fence,’ you know? That whole thing and by the time I was, you know, in my twenties, I finally figured out that ain’t happening for me. … I came out to the people that I was around in AA first, um, before my parents.

Martha also describes herself as a very private person, “extremely introverted,” but also adaptable and non-confrontational. At one point in the interviews, she said “I just go along, that’s part of my personality. That like, ‘it’s fine, whatever you want to do,’ you know?”

Martha has been with her partner, Sandy, age 43, for the past six years. The couple initially dated long distance as Martha was living about one hour from Sandy. When Martha found a position in her field that would bring her closer to Sandy, Martha switched organizations and the women moved in together. The couple filed a civil union approximately four years ago and legally married last year. They have no
children. Sandy also identifies as a lesbian and first came out at age 19. Both women say they are “fully out” now, even with strangers. For example, when asked how she would respond if a stranger asked about her husband, Sandy said, “I would correct them, yeah. Absolutely. Yeah.” Martha also said she would do that, even with coworkers or supervisors at work. Compared to Martha, Sandy felt her lesbian identity was slightly more central to her life, saying “Generally, it’s important. … I mean it’s important in the fact that it’s a part of who I am and it’s not like the whole definition of me, but it’s a big part of, I think, what makes me who I am.” She expanded,

I think part of the reason that it is important to me in my identity and my sense of self is because it positions me as a member of a community and I’m a very community orientated person, so that’s one of the reasons that it’s important to me as an individual is because I identity as lesbian so that I can say that ‘I’m like you’ or that ‘I’m like you’ and I belong to this community because LGBT community is really important to me.

Martha works as an accountant for a medical center (McLaren), with an annual salary of approximately $42,000. She has been with her current employer for two years now, working 40 hours per week. However, because her position only involves reviewing and completing paperwork online, she works primarily from home, only going into the physical office for the occasional staff meeting. Martha describes, “I don’t have a lot of personal interaction with other people, except in the office when we have meetings or special groups or things like that.” Her company still maintains fairly strict scheduling rules though, requiring Martha to clock in and out remotely, even for lunch breaks. She is able to shift her work hours around in the day to accommodate other needs, saying “they are flexible with if I have an appointment in the middle of the day. I can stop work and go to the appointment and come back and finish my shift.”

**General stressors.** Martha describes general stress in her life related to her employment, work demands, and balancing home responsibilities with her partner, Sandy. Specifically, Martha spoke about the stress of trying to keep up with a heavy workload given the time constraints of her job. She feels her supervisor pushes her and her colleagues to file paperwork at an increasing speed while still upholding the rigid maximum-of-40-hours-per-week policy. She also mentioned experiencing work-related stress because she finds some of her coworkers’ personalities irritating. Not only does Martha seek out support from Sandy to help cope with these stressors, she also reached out to her company’s Employee Assistance Program to address these general stressors. For example, she said,

That person I told you about that gets under my skin … She was actually the person who was training me… {laughter} so I kind of had it on a daily basis and, um, and basically what that personality does, and it’s always done that with me, is they….ahh….I don’t get any compliments and they say, the person usually says things to me that are demeaning or they talk down, you
know, and that just ruins my confidence. I mean, within hours. {laughter} So, that’s why I went to employee assistance, because I would go into work and think ‘I’m going to fail! I can’t do this,’ you know, ‘they’re going to figure out I don’t know anything.’ {laughter}

In the family domain, both Martha and Sandy shared general stressors related to living with one another and sharing household responsibilities. When asked about the biggest arguments or disagreements she has with Sandy, Martha said, “Um, the dishes. Great conversation we’ve had probably two hundred times. {laughter} I leave the dishes in the sink until I feel like doing them. Sandy does them immediately when she’s done with them.” In a separate interview, Sandy declared “we don’t argue a whole lot,” but also stated that household chores were, at times, a point of contention. She explained,

Martha and I are alike in a lot of ways but we’re also very different in a lot of ways and one of the ways in which we differ is that I’m kind of a neat freak, she’s not. {laughter} … So, we don’t really argue but we nitpick about things like that because I’ll be like “are you going to put that bowl in the dishwasher?” {laughter} Um, so those are kind of obstacles for us, but again, I wouldn’t even say that we actually argue about it.

Minority stress experiences. Overall, Martha’s workplace could be considered tolerant in that Martha feels accepted based on her sexual minority identity, but not necessarily welcomed and openly supported as a sexual minority employee. When asked if she felt accepted by coworkers, Martha responded, “It depends. Some of them. I wouldn’t say every single person, but as a group, yea.” Martha felt this lack of direct or overt support for her may be descriptive of her workplace overall though. Because most employees in her department work from home, as Martha does, there is an overall culture of not becoming involved in coworkers’ lives or openly supporting them personally outside of the work domain. For example, in talking about the difference between tolerance and support and how coworkers did not actively engage one another about their personal lives, Martha said, “just because people don’t pressure new employees that much. You know? They’re not like intrusive to begin with. And if you wanted to, if the person wanted to stay closeted they could. You know, that’s up to them.”

Interestingly, Martha identified a hostile workplace as one where “People [are] talking about, you know, gossiping [about sexual minorities].” Yet, when asked how she disclosed her sexual orientation to her supervisor, she said, “I can’t remember how the boss knew. Probably one of the employees told her. {laughter} I don’t know.” Sandy added to this definition of hostility in her interview, saying,

Like, I don’t think the hostile has to be outright, I think that it can be varied and I think most of the time it’s not. I think it’s usually very passive-aggressive. Um, or you know, like they celebrated somebody’s wedding shower or, you know, somebody’s baby shower or whatever, but when you got engaged, they didn’t do anything.
However, Martha did mention that nothing was done for her at work when she married Sandy the previous year. She also discussed how some individuals at work ignore her and give her the sense that they are not comfortable with her relationship, for example, by going silent or changing the topic when Martha talks about her wife. Thus, although the acts identified as hostile in a work environment do happen to Martha in her workplace, neither she nor Sandy perceive the work context to be hostile. Rather, Martha feels her identity and her relationship is tolerated, and not overly supported given that no one’s family or identity is overly supported by supervisors or the organization broadly.

**Distal minority stress processes.** Martha did not feel that many prejudice events happened in her work environment or that she had been victimized by individuals in her work domain. She acknowledged that she had been outed without her permission on occasion, at least to her supervisor, and that people may gossip about her identity or her relationship to others. However, Martha minimized any sense of minority stress experienced related to this event. She said,

I mean, people talk. I mean, it’s not like it’s a secret. So somebody could of said something to one of their coworkers, you know, somebody that they’re close with. I don’t care. {laughter} … I mean, other people might be more upset about that, but I figured, you know, you get to know me and what’s there not to love? {laughter}

Martha also recognized that some people in the work domain may feel uncomfortable when she talks about being married to a woman or identifies as a lesbian, as they stop talking to her at that point or change the subject. Still, Martha denies ever hearing anti-LGBQ comments or jokes in her current workplace or feeling directly discriminated against or being the target of anti-LGBQ commentary.

When Sandy was asked about her knowledge of experiences with prejudice events in Martha’s workplace, Sandy also denied that any direct or overt discrimination occurred. She said,

I’ve met some of Martha’s coworkers and I know that she’s very, like she talks about me and refers to me as her wife and I’ve never had any indication that that’s ever been an issue for the people that she comes in contact with.

Sandy did mention the lengths to which she and Martha were required to go to receive health insurance covering initially through Martha’s employer. Sandy recalls questioning if this had anything to do with being a same-sex couple. She said,

From where I sat, it seemed like we had to go through an awful lot of red tape to make that happen. They didn’t make it easy and I know that’s just bureaucracy. Like, it’s not personal. But I did feel like—I mean, I remember going through that with her saying, ‘do you know any straight people who have had to go through this much fucking paperwork to get health insurance for their partner?’
Expectations of stigma/fear of rejection. While the women’s difficult experience with obtaining health insurance could be an example of systematic discrimination in the workplace (i.e. straight couples may not have had to deal with as much bureaucracy given unequal access at the time to legal marriage), it may have also had nothing to do with their sexual minority identity or same-sex relationship. In fact, it could have been just as cumbersome for any couple to obtain health insurance coverage. However, Sandy’s perception that it may have been related to being a same-sex couple can still be considered a minority stress process in that it also becomes an expectation of stigma. That is, in facing barriers in this negotiation with the employer, Sandy anticipated stigma or feared rejection (of their insurance coverage) on the basis of their sexual minority status. She did not expect that different-sex couples would face the same level of scrutiny.

Since the insurance issue was resolved, Martha still reports some experience with expectations of stigma in the workplace with a few of her coworkers. Specifically, she mentions feeling uncomfortable around a few of her coworkers as she senses they do not approve of her sexual orientation or may discriminate against her if she were to discuss her family life with them.

Have I ever had that happen [where I feel uncomfortable talking about Sandy because a certain person is here]? Yea, I kinda shut up. [laughter] If I feel somebody’s a little, um, how do I wanna say that, kind of like prejudice, yea. If I know that, then I’m not gonna like bring it up.

When asked what experiences she has had with these coworkers that indicate to her they are not comfortable or support of her as a sexual minority, Martha said, “I’m not sure. It’s kind of just a gut thing. You know, like you have gay-dar? It’s kind of like you have a … hostility-dar. {laughter}”

Martha also made known that she mentally maintains a “not-so-safe list” of “people [at work] … that can get me upset emotionally.” She indicated that those individuals who are uncomfortable with her when she speaks about her wife, Sandy are on that list and therefore she keeps her distance from them because of the anticipation of stigma or rejection if she were to engage with them more. Martha may feel somewhat protected from these individuals given that she primarily works from home, but did say that she would expect stigma or rejection from some coworkers if they were in the office together. She stated, “I think we got all [of the employees in my department] together, there would be a couple of people that would not be comfortable if we had a discussion about gay people.”

Concealment. Martha detailed the degree to which the minority-related stress due to concealment of her sexual identity has affected her life over the years. Namely, she feels that her drinking problems as an emerging adult were related to her attempts to conceal her sexual orientation. In fact, she said,

I think that just, from the very beginning when I finally came out to my parents and what I’ve experienced over the years with different people in my life, um, the people that have the most difficulty are the ones that are trying to stay in the closet. You know? It’s like, hello?! That’s
gonna cause problems. [laughter] You know? And, um, part of my recovery program is that I am true to myself.

Martha also spoke about past relationship problems she’s perceived to be a result of differing levels of concealment between herself and girlfriends she’s had. She said,

I can tell you that the girlfriends that I’ve had, if I compared them to the first one, each one became a little more out of the closet, but they all had like, maybe one foot stuck. Like, they didn’t to tell their parents or they didn’t want to tell at work or whatever and that was a big factor when I met Sandy, that she is totally not in the closet and out to everybody, including her parents and all of her [family], and I was like ‘oohh, thank God. I don’t have to go through that again.’

She also stated that her level of comfort with disclosing in the workplace has been affected by romantic relationships in the past. In fact, she described concealment in the workplace as one of the biggest stressors at her previous job. Martha said, “I can tell a difference between [the three places I’ve worked]. … It probably didn’t help that my partner at the time didn’t really want to be out. You know? She was more worried about that all the time. It probably affected my view.”

Given this history, and the fact that she feels her sobriety is dependent upon being “true to myself,” Martha was very clear that she was not willing to conceal her sexual orientation or romantic relationships in any context. She stated she was out to everyone at work, and she and Sandy live their lives very openly as a couple. Martha adamantly and consistently refused to experience minority related stress any longer, including in her current workplace. She described, “I haven’t had any experiences where it was a negative because I’m, you know, I’m not, I don’t hide. I’m not in the closet. I don’t hide. I talk about my wife. Um, with my boss even.”

Denied support / minimization of experiences. Despite being a huge source of support for Martha, Sandy seemed unaware about many aspects of Martha’s work experiences. During interviews about Martha’s workplace, Sandy often underscored that she could not know what it was like as she was not an employee there. In answering questions about whether the organization was supportive of LGBQ employees, she said, “I think so. I mean, and a lot of this is just because like I don’t work for them, so how would I know?” Sandy reiterated that she was probably oblivious to any experiences with discrimination in the workplace, or at least unable to speak to the overall climate, without being in that context every day and experiencing that context the way Martha does as an employee. When asked to give an example of microaggressions she was aware of in Martha’s workplace, Sandy replied, “I think that it’s true just because I think that’s true most places, so I assume that’s true at her workplace as well.”

This lack of understanding could minimize Sandy’s ability to empathize with Martha’s experiences in or perceptions of her workplace. For instance, when asked how she or their relationship might be affected if Martha were to experience minority stress processes in the workplace, Sandy responded, “That would
certainly have an effect on me. … I mean just because it would be uncomfortable for me to be married to somebody that was compromising their principles for the sake of their employment.”

**Supports. In the work domain.** Despite working from home and having little contact with coworkers face-to-face, Martha identified several colleagues who offer her support, at least for general stressors related to work. Specifically, she stated that she could turn to these colleagues if she was struggling with her work load or felt frustrated with a supervisor. Martha said, “During work, I can talk to someone [on the IM system]. That has been a life savior to me many times. Just that little, I’m talking to another person about something that’s either pissing me off or that I don’t understand.” She did not necessarily feel these coworkers currently offer support related to stress in the family domain, or minority related stressors specifically. However, she did acknowledge that she rarely asks for this type of support from work colleagues or is open enough with coworkers that they would even know if she needs support in these areas.

Martha did acknowledge several other ways in which the company, as a whole institute, offers support to sexual minority employees, through its training programs, benefits, and policies. For example, she stated that all new employees are required to attend a diversity training, during which she recalls sexual orientation being explicitly addressed. The organization also offered benefits to same-sex partners prior to marriage laws being enacted, and still specifies this in the benefits package. The handbook states that “Spouses (same or opposite sex), unless legally separated” are eligible for benefits. In fact, this page also highlights an image of a family that includes two men and a young child. Finally, Martha also pointed out the following passage in the employee handbook as a sign of organizational-level support of sexual minority employees:

> McLaren recognizes that our employees are the cornerstone upon which our reputation as a leader in healthcare rests. We afford equal employment opportunities to qualified individuals regardless of their race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, citizenship status, age, ancestry, marital status, disability, or any other legally protected status, and in accordance with applicable laws and regulations. We are committed to the policy of fair treatment of men and women in all aspects of the employment relationship, and strive to provide a constructive and professional work environment free of harassment, intimidation and favoritism.

**In the family domain.** Martha identified several sources of support outside of the workplace, in the family domain, that help her cope with stressors in her life. Both she and Sandy said they check in with one another nightly and try to support each other with stressors that exist in the work domains. Martha explained,

> Um, when I’m having a hard time, she listens and takes the time to ask me questions because she know, you know, I’m the introvert and I don’t just like, spill my guts, um... unless prompted,
basically. … So I feel supported there and I don’t know … We do things together. We have gotten in the habit of at the end of the day when we both—like she comes home and I’m here, we have, you know, a conversation without the television on, you know, just ‘what’s going on?’ and usually half an hour to an hour if it’s really…something big is happening, but yeah.

She also identifies AA has a huge source of support for her, including relationships she has built with people in the program and the lessons she has learned from participating. Even “for work stress,” Martha said, “I can get a lot of support from the other people in AA. You know, talking to them about anything. Doesn’t matter what it is. Whether it’s work or not.” She later elaborated,

Really, most of the time, if I’m not feeling supported it’s because I’m blocking it in some way. Because there’s people in the program that I talk to and one of the principles that we have is to clean up your side of the street. It’s like, if I think that this person over here is giving me a hard time all the time, how did I play into that, you know, or what is my part in provoking this person or whatever, you know?

Martha often drew on these lessons from AA when talking about how she coped with minority related stressors, such as concealment in the past or expectations of stigma in her current position.

Effects of minority stress experiences. In general, Martha appears to internalize her stress processes. That is, when experiencing stress in her family domain or in the work domain, whether it is general stress related to work or minority-related stress processes, Martha tends to withdraw from others and feel sad or shameful (rather than angry or other externalizing responses). For example, when asked how she might feel if someone were to make directed anti-LGBQ comments in the workplace towards her, she said, “Shame, um, well, um, sadness that, you know, why do we have to be mean? Or why do we have to, you know, make one group of people the villains and one group, you know…but it’s human nature.” Later, she added,

If I’m confident and feel good, then I’m fine with having that conversation or saying whatever I need to say [if I hear a demeaning comment]. But if I’m not, {laughter} then I’m more likely to go to the bathroom and ignore it, because it is too hard emotionally.

For Martha, who admits being sensitive to criticism, sensing that others may not like her – whether based on her sexual orientation or not – causes her to turn in on herself and shut others out.

In contrast, her partner Sandy feels angered when perceiving discrimination and stigma or experiencing prejudice events. When asked how she would respond to such minority stress processes, Sandy said, “I think it would affect me just because it would piss me off;” if this were to happen to Martha at work, Sandy indicated she would feel angry and defensive of her wife. Given the minority stressors Martha has experienced at work, e.g. expectations of stigma from those individuals she senses are less comfortable with her relationship and her identity, Martha indicated that her romantic relationship
with Sandy was actually positively affected. That is, these experiences gave Sandy the opportunity to be a support to Martha, which in fact, strengthened their relationship. When asked about how the expectations of stigma in the workplace affected her or her relationship, Martha said, “Yeah, I think that Sandy was worried about me, I mean, I’m not sure what she did at the time because it’s been a while, um, but we would talk about it, you know. She’d hold me and say ‘it’s gonna be okay.’”

Work/family border characteristics. Overall, Martha maintains fairly rigid boundaries between her work and family domains, including physical, temporal, and psychological. Martha describes the ways in which she keeps work space separate from her family life, despite working from home; she also abides by the rigid work schedule her employer requires so as not to do work after hours. Further, she shares very little of her personal life with work colleagues and brings few work stressors home to share with Sandy. Sandy is also cognizant of these rigid boundaries Martha has in place, saying, “I mean, Martha is kind of a private person. Um, I don’t think any more or less about our relationship in particular. I think, like I said, I think that’s kind of a wholesale. She’s just a private person.”

Generally, it seems that Martha uses such rigid psychological boundaries as protection against stress processes. In fact, when she senses that someone does not like her or feels uncomfortable with her sexual orientation, she describes how those psychological walls become even less permeable, saying,

I keep that wall up if I feel any way not safe. You know? Um, I’m not the real gregarious kind of person that just goes out there and talks to everybody. [laughter] so…[if I get the sense that they’re uncomfortable or not supportive of me and my family], I just don’t offer a lot of information or do the small talk as long as I possibly can. And then I [laughter] try to go away somewhere physically.

Martha said if she expects stigma from somebody, then conversations stay at the “very professional level. That’s what I do. I just, you know, we’re only going to talk about work and, yeah, I do censor because, um, I’m not into making myself a victim today.” This strict separation between the family domain and the work domain protects Martha, at least in her mind, from feeling judged about her romantic relationship at work or experiencing prejudice events based on her sexual orientation.

Even though she works from home the majority of the time, Martha also maintains very rigid temporal and physical borders. For example, Sandy explained, “Even when you work from home for McLaren, at least doing what Martha does, they’re very rigid. I mean, you still have to clock in, you have to clock out, and your productivity is tracked and all of that.” She also maintains those borders with Sandy if Sandy is working at home one day. Sandy described,

When I’m home when Martha’s home, because I work from home sometimes for one of my jobs and we’re pretty good about staying out of each other’s space, but I also—I have been guilty of when I’m home and I’m not working, I want to act like Martha’s just here not working.
{laughter} And often throughout the day, the response that I get is, ‘I’m working’ because I’m like, ‘but I want to talk to you about blah bah blah’ so she is so diligent. I am not.

Martha also does not spend much time in their home office when off the clock. She said,

I have gone back in there [the home office], but only for a few minutes, like to check something, um, that usually had to do with my paycheck or, you know, something that I needed to know right away, you know. … But yeah, when I turn that off, I’m not going back in.

When she is in the office, Martha still keeps her family life physically removed from the work domain. Her department does not assign cubicles, so Martha is free to use any open computer in the office. Therefore, she has no personal items or family pictures in the physical work domain.

It is possible that these rigid physical boundaries also act as a protective barrier to prevent minority stress experiences from happening in the work domain. When asked if LGBQ employees in her workplace were ever met with thinly veiled hostility, Martha stated,

I really haven’t experienced that. So, and I have to give credit to the fact that I work from home a lot. You know, I’m not putting myself out there to get that. … And I don’t see other people. I mean, I talk on the phone or I talk on email or whatever, but yeah. But that’s, you know, sometimes that’s a good thing.

The few examples of more permeable boundaries between the work and family domains involve only a few coworkers whom Martha trusts and feels safe talking to about her relationship and personal life. It seems she uses this permeability to share information about her family with individuals in the work domain in order to gather support. For example, she has traveled to work events with two colleagues in particular who reacted positively when she talked about her wife. Martha feels their reaction bolstered closer friendships. She now socializes with these colleagues outside of work and seeks support from these women to cope with stress stemming from the family domain. Martha also once explicitly discussed her same-sex relationship with her supervisor in order to gather support for a concern about Sandy’s health.

She described,

Yes. I’ve discussed it with my boss, um, when Sandy was having some health problems I needed to say to my manager, you know, ‘Hey, this is what’s going on with me and, um, don’t ride me so hard,’ you know. {laughter} She was fine with it. Very supportive and said, ‘Well, I hope everything works out.’ She would ask about Sandy later, you know, ‘How did that test go?’ you know, that kind of thing.

Had she maintained extremely rigid and impermeable boundaries in this situation out of fear of rejection or expectations of stigma, Martha may not have been able to obtain this kind of support from her supervisor.
**Recommendations.** Martha and Sandy had several recommendations for employers to be more supportive of sexual minority employees and their families. Specifically, they suggested that organizations and institutions should recognize that all employees experience general stressors in the workplace. Supporting employees with these concerns, for example, through Employee Assistant Programs, could make the workplace overall a more positive place where employees feel comfortable being themselves. Sexual minority employees with same-sex partners would also feel more welcome if the work context was open to and supportive of all families. For instance, Martha suggested,

I worked at a smaller company years ago and they had a, once a year they had a, um, like a fall picnic that everybody brought their families to, you know. And then if they did that and then included, you know, or were welcoming to LGBQ couples, right or whatever, like in the invitation, say specifically, like, ‘all partners are welcome’ or something.

It seems both women felt that simply treating sexual minority employees as equals would be enough for a workplace to be deemed supportive. That is, when asked what employers can do to make an organization feel less discriminatory or hostile, Sandy said,

The only thing that comes to mind is just like, equally...equally acknowledging their LGBT employees and their spouses and/or children. Like, if you’re gonna have a potluck and everyone’s going to bring cupcakes because Kate got engaged to Tony then you better be bringing fucking cupcakes and having a potluck when Trisha gets engaged to Tanya.

Similarly, Martha felt she was supported in her current position because she receives equal benefits as heterosexual married couples. When asked if there was anything she would want from her workplace to feel more supported as an employee who is in a same-sex relationship, she said, “No, I don’t think so. Cause we have the benefits.”

Both women additionally felt that staff training, or diversity training that specifically included LGBQ issues could benefit sexual minority employees in the workplace. As Sandy explained,

I worked at Grass Rivers a long time ago [which is another healthcare facility] and ... they had never had any kind of like LGBT training which I think is important and crucial and not just in that environment but particularly in any kind of a healthcare related field because, I mean, we get sexual harassment training, we get diversity training to a certain extent, but those things are all very visible differences. ... So, I think that any organization would benefit from that because, I mean, my experience as an LGBT person is that everybody thinks that they’re not—like, we all think we’re not racist, right? So most people think that they’re not homophobic but there are things that are so engrained in our society. We aren’t that because we chose to be that, it’s just so engrained, it like—power structures hide in plain sight, right? ... So that’s where that power structure hides in plain sight. Like, you don’t think that you’re being discriminatory but you could
be being discriminatory and you don’t even know that because you never stopped to ask the question.

While Sandy acknowledged that “those trainings are – I mean, they might not get everyone on board,” they could benefit the culture of the organization in the sense that they are “at least eye opening.” For example, she noted that the training that occurred in her previous position made some positive changes in that workplace. She said, “I think if nothing else, the message that they got and what I saw, at least a minor shift, it was in avoiding pronoun assumptions, like ‘how’s your husband?’ or ‘do you have a wife?’ or whatever.” Sandy felt that these types of tangible shifts would benefit sexual minority employees by making the organization broadly more supportive and welcoming.

**Bridget**

Bridget is a 26-year-old young woman with fair skin and chestnut brown hair. Wearing a short-sleeve, white polo shirt tucked into her tan khaki pants, Bridget has no visible piercings or tattoos. Throughout the interviews, she apologizes for talking too quickly, as she admits she tends to do when feeling nervous or meeting new people. She identifies as a lesbian, although often uses the term gay interchangeably. Bridget describes the salience of her identity saying, “It’s pretty central … I’m gay and my life revolves around me being gay.” Even though she says she is “pretty open” now about her sexual orientation, Bridget still acknowledges some hesitation. Bridget also described how her relationship affects her identity and its importance in her life. She said,

> when I’m single it’s not really that big. But when I’m with someone, it’s, I guess it’s, I see them every day so it’s brought right in front of my face like ‘Hey, you’re gay.’ Cause your partner’s right there. But when I’m single, which wasn’t very often, but it’s not really, it wasn’t that big, cause I was focusing on other stuff.

Bridget’s unique situation of dating a coworker makes her sexuality even more visible at work.

With regards to coming out in the workplace, Lara said,

> I don’t just be like oh yea, I’m gay. Like you know, randomly. There wasn’t really any kind of opportunity where it was even necessary to talk about [at work] so I just didn’t. I wasn’t like, hiding it, but you know, when I’m not in a relationship, it doesn’t really come up much at all. So yea, I don’t think I really talked about it much at all [with coworkers before dating Bridget].

Bridget has been in her current relationship with Lara, age 24, for two years; they met at work after Lara joined the company. Lara describes how they began dating after going out for drinks with a group of coworkers,

> Yea, it just kind of went on from there. We just kept talking and it was just like, actually it was funny. She ended up saying to [a mutual male coworker], she was like ‘Hey, will you find out if Lara is interested in me?’ And he was like ‘okay.’ And so he literally walked over to my cubicle
and is like ‘So Bridget wants to know if you’re interested in her’ … so from there, we had been like talking on the office communicator … like a messenger program … And so I asked her if she liked coffee. And she was like ‘I do like coffee.’ And I was like ‘we should go get coffee.’ So that was kind of like our first date sort of.

Their relationship is known to nearly everyone in their lives, including friends, family, and coworkers. However, Bridget admits she shies away from public displays of affection, describing,

I’m not big on like the whole PDA, hugging, holding hands thing. But I will say hon, or babe or something like that. But, you can probably tell there’s something more than a friendship between us two, but it’s not like we’re making out in front of people … I want to respect other people.

Like I don’t want to see people doing that, so I’m not going to do it myself.

Bridget reports feeling “very satisfied” in her relationship with Lara overall, saying, “I feel secure … Like, she’s just my rock.”

Both women are employed as certified health technicians for a healthcare and nursing hotline. Bridget has worked there full-time (approximately 40 hours per week) for the past three years; Lara started approximately six months after her. Bridget earns approximately $30,000 annual salary. Bridget’s cubicle affords her some privacy, but the lack of door also provides open access to colleagues nearby. She described, “I have a couple [people] behind me that we can hear [each other]. So, we always turn around and talk to each other and throw things at each other.” The office space for the Wellness Hotline is essentially one large, open room full of cubicles. Individual employees have assigned cubicles, which seem to be grouped by department (e.g. customer service, hotline support, billing, etc.). Bridget has decorated her cubicle space with colorful scarves and a few pictures of her and her siblings.

When Lara first started at the Wellness Hotline, both she and Bridget worked in the same department. However, due to company policy that individuals with personal relationships cannot work in the same department, Bridget moved to another area within the organization. Administration actually assisted in this shift so that both women could remain employed at the Wellness Hotline. However, this only came after their relationship was made known on social media, and the stability of their jobs were questioned.

**General stressors.** Bridget described experiencing general stressors related to her work, including the amount of calls she takes during a shift, feeling micromanaged on the hotline, and varying schedule (i.e. working day shift one month, and nights the next). Both women identified ways in which their individual mental health and their relationship were affected by more general stresses in their lives. For example, Bridget says that when she feels overwhelmed with work demands, she tends to internalize her feelings and become more quiet and isolated. This individual response can also distance herself from her girlfriend. Lara also identified ways that Bridget’s mental health is affected by work-related stress,
saying “if she didn’t have that stress at work every day, she wouldn’t feel like all that pent up anxiety and frustration.”

Bridget and Lara also discussed how working in the same organization has been stressful for them has a couple; specifically, having opposite schedules limits the amount of social time they can share together, and this has somewhat decreased their relationship satisfaction. Bridget said,

These last few months have been really hard, and we’ve probably fought a little bit more. Like bickered. Just because we’re on completely opposite schedule and … maybe because the time that I am with her, she’s wired and awake and everything and I’m like starting to go to sleep and she’s trying to talk. And I’m like oh my god shut up and go to bed. So I think we’re just on two different wave lengths when we are together and it’s just not meshing.

Furthermore, being in separate departments now, Lara has opportunities for promotion not available to Bridget. Bridget explains how this affects her and her relationship with Lara outside of work,

It feels, with Lara potentially getting a promotion, she’s in a completely different area than me. It really wouldn’t affect me. But if she gets a promotion, I’m gonna be a little jealous. … I would never even have the opportunity to get a promotion like her. … But I would feel I would get a little jealous.

Finally, Lara also described how Bridget’s work-related stress can affect her individually. For instance, she indicated feeling guilty because she experiences less stress at work following her departmental shift. In turn, she tends to share less with Bridget about her work experiences, as she does not want Bridget to feel jealous or angry that she does not feel the same way about her position. Lara said,

I’ve said to her, you know, I’m sorry. We should have had you come over here. And she’s like there’s no way we could have known. You know, I decided to stay here and it’s one of those things where if we could go back, I think the decision may have been different, but I don’t. She doesn’t ever make me feel guilty about it. The guilt doesn’t come from her. It’s more just you know, just [me] feeling bad that she’s not liking where she’s at right now.

Minority stress experiences. Bridget reported minimal experiences with minority stress in the workplace. When asked if LGBTQ employees feel accepted by coworkers there, Bridget emphatically said, “Yes, one hundred percent!” She later said, “It totally is [the greatest place to work]! I’m telling you, the people make the job.” Bridget also added, “It’s just an awesome place to work. Like, I feel totally comfortable there.”

However, when discussing her workplace, Bridget describes experiences that fit the academic definitions of minority stress processes. These are reported in detail below. Bridget does not, however, identify any of these experiences as minority stressors herself. When presented with a list of minority stressors, Bridget denied that they occur in her workplace. For instance, when asked if she had ever
overheard anti-LGBTQ comments, Bridget said, “No … never.” Yet, she later goes on to describe an event when anti-LGBTQ comments were made by a colleague.

**Distal minority stress processes.** Bridget described several experiences in her work place that fit Meyer’s (2003) definitions of acts of discrimination or external victimization. Specifically she has been outed without permission by her coworkers; additionally, individuals in the workplace have made ignorant or anti-LGBTQ comments, and gossiped about a coworker’s sexual orientation. Bridget stated that a few times, coworkers have made comments that indicate a lack of awareness of LGBTQ issues. For example, Bridget shared an argument she had with one coworker in the workplace.

I don’t know how we got on that subject, but me and Jeff, he works the night shift … But we were like having a pretty heated argument … Pretty loud and everyone could hear us. … I wish I remember what he said. It was ignorant, what he said … it was something about, oh, Miley Cyrus. It was about how she should be done playing with her sexuality now and should have it figured out. So then I got all defensive about that and had to like school him.

Bridget also shared an example of how employees’ sexual orientation is gossiped about in her workplace, and made reference to stereotypes about gay men. When asked if she knew if any of her other colleagues also identified as a sexual minority besides her, her girlfriend, and one other identified coworker named Brent, she said that no one else was out in the workplace, but that “George, I mean, he also, the gay men just have that voice. So he kind of has that. And then I’ve heard rumors that he might be bisexual.” These types of assumptions, for example that “gay men just have that voice,” can also be considered a type of prejudice event – aimed at George.

In addition, Bridget shared several stories in which she was outed by a coworker. Bridget talked about how administrators in her organization first found out she was dating Lara.

So Brent was a team leader at the time, and I think he has a big mouth. So I think he let it slip that we were kind of hanging out a little bit. And I think it got up to them and that’s how they found out.

Bridget did not perceive being outed to be a form of discrimination, saying, “I haven’t received any negative anything from it [being outed].” She did, however, acknowledge the additional stress it brought for her and Lara. Because their company had a policy against dating or family relationships between coworkers in the same department, the couple experienced a time of job instability as administrators considered letting one of the women go if unable to find a new position in another department. In addition to the stress of job insecurity, Bridget felt stressed by a lack of control over her identity disclosure: “it’s just the fact that I wasn’t ready for the whole entire company to know that I’m gay … [it felt] out of control … it sucks … just, the internal battle with myself. … I want to control who knows that I’m gay.”
Even now, as Bridget described being fully out to coworkers and administration in the workplace, she experienced some minority-specific stress when outed without her permission to new employees. She talked about one incident with Lara and another coworker as she was training a new technician:

I was, had a new person shadowing me. And Lara came up and then Silvia, who sits behind me was talking to, or teasing Lara about how [she’s] dating me, about dating me. And so Lara was totally chill with it and I like, was like ‘eeeeeep’ a little. Like cringed a little … Cause it’s like yea, the new person that I’m not, I don’t know totally. … Lara played off of it and I was just like {gasp} okay. Like it just shocked me a little bit. Cause that, just that initial outing. When asked if her stress response was related to being outed by someone else – rather than choosing when and if to disclose herself, Bridget responded,

Yea, that’s exactly it. Because I feel like if I would have said it, and joked around with it, it would have been fine. I wouldn’t have had that initial like shock. So it’s just because I wasn’t in control of it, it kind of made me a little uncomfortable.

**Internalized homophobia.** Although not limited to the work context, Bridget describes experiencing minority related stress due to internalized homophobia. Both she and Lara perceive this sense of internal unease related to her sexual orientation as stemming from Bridget’s early experiences coming out in high school. In describing how Bridget is not completely comfortable or content with a sexual minority identity, Lara said, “I just think that whole formative period of time in her life was just so like, anti-, it was just so negative. Like it just seemed way more negative than any kind of experience that I had. So … I would think that would probably have something to do with it.”

Although she first came out to her mom at age 14, Bridget still struggles with feeling comfortable with her identity. When asked about her lesbian identity, she said,

I mean, I still have a stigma attached to it for some reason … I think just from growing up, you know. I grew up catholic and so you’re not supposed to be gay and you know, just kind of my childhood experiences … I’m very traditional in that sense, of you have a role kind of, even with the, with the ‘okay, who’s the husband? Who’s the wife in the relationship?’ That’s still kind of, I have that stigma a little bit.

This stress processes is also exhibited in the workplace in that Bridget’s sense of internalized homophobia seems to drive her unease related to being outed in the office despite being already disclosing to most coworkers.

**Concealment.** Bridget often struggles with outing herself or being identified as a sexual minority to others in the workplace. Bridget shared how she feels when so often choosing to conceal her sexual orientation. She said,
I think just kind of panic. I just blurted out friend, roommate; something that’s not gonna peg me as gay … It’s just like a defensive. It’s like an instinct, like a defense mechanism that maybe when I was younger was hammered into me, like you know, you can’t be out. You have to pretend, you know.

In the workplace, Bridget is now completely out with coworkers and supervisors about her own identity as well as her relationship with Lara. Following the incident where a coworker made their relationship known to administration, the women chose to stop concealing in the workplace. However, Bridget still admits to struggling with feeling comfortable with this level of openness, saying, “Yea, I’m pretty open. I mean, a little, internally I’m freaking out, but externally I’m open about it.” Other sexual minority employees in their organization continue to conceal their identity from the majority of coworkers and supervisors. For instance, although Bridget and Lara are aware of a nurse working for their organization who identifies as gay, Bridget said,

She also keeps it on the DL … When she found out I was gay, she was like ‘Hey! Guess what.’ And I’m like oh my god. And then … she’s like I don’t really want other people to know, cause she’s like, older and she’s in the army still so she kind of has that ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ mentality still.

When asked if there were any qualities of the workplace that might inhibit someone’s disclosure or pressure LGBQ employees to conceal their sexual orientation, Lara replied, “I would hope not. I really, especially with us being there and being so obvious, I would hope that that’s not why. But I guess I can’t 100% rule it out.”

Nevertheless, when it first became known within the organization that Bridget and Lara were in a relationship, one supervisor did, in fact, suggest concealing the relationship because of the dating and family relationship policy in the company. Bridget explained,

Before, when the whole thing with me and Lara coming out at work was happening, one of my managers actually Facebook messaged me, so that it wasn’t like official. And was like yea, this is totally off the books but I think you guys should take it down from Facebook. You guys shouldn’t make it official and just pretend like you’re friends so that work isn’t going to be having to transfer one of you, [or] potentially fire one of you.

In the end, despite dealing with the stress of job instability and the minority specific stress of choosing whether or not to conceal a sexual minority identity, the women remained open about their sexual orientation and relationship status in the workplace. Lara described,

We ended up taking it down off of Facebook, and were talking to some coworkers and some of them who had been managers were like just lie. If you’re asked, don’t say that you are. I was like I’m not doing that. I’m not doing that. I was like I’m finally okay with who I am and where
we’re at, and I’m not going to lie about that. If it’s lying for one reason because I’m trying to hide that I’m gay, or because I don’t want to lose my job.

Bridget agreed, saying she chose to stop concealing in the workplace because

I was just tired of hiding. I had hid my sexuality all through high school and I just was tired of it. And I just wanted to live a normal life … normal in the sense that if I want to hold hands, I can. Or if I want to say girlfriend or her, I can … I’m working through that. But, by being out at work it’s made me be more comfortable with myself, I guess you could say.

Expectations/fear of rejection. Finally, Bridget also expressed some minority related stress due to expectations of stigma or fear of rejection from others based on her sexual orientation. Again, this may be related to her upbringing as discussed earlier in regards to internalized homophobia, but she often spoke of concern regarding disclosure because she was unsure of how others would react to finding out about her sexual orientation or relationship. She said,

I guess I fear that negative reaction from other people of oh girlfriend? Oh? And being in that moment of oh, you know … it’s usually just when I first meet somebody and I don’t know where they stand. You know, like there, even at work, there was a new coworker … But um, you know, so it’s just the more, when I don’t know somebody. And then especially in a work environment cause again, at work, they know that we’re out, that we’re together. And um, there’s never been anything negative there, but it’s just, it’s just one of those weird things.

Lara also commented on Bridget’s anticipation of stigma or rejection from others and the ways in which she downplays their relationship or her identity around strangers because of this expectation. For example, Lara said,

I mean she’s gotten so much better but you know, more like last year, the first year of the relationship, it would be a situation where um, you know, hand holding down the street. And then all of a sudden there was more people around and she would just drop it.

In the workplace specifically, Bridget remains concerned about new employees finding out about her sexual orientation because of her expectations of stigma. Lara relayed a conversation the women had after their relationship was made known to a trainee. Specifically, Lara felt that Bridget was concerned how their new coworker would react to finding out the women were in a relationship. Lara stated,

[A comment about us dating] was said in front of a newer person that is now Bridget’s trainee. … I had talked to her about it later [saying how great it was that coworkers could casually joke about us dating] and [Bridget] was like ‘yea, no. Actually that caused like a moment of minor panic.’

Lara also described how expectations of stigma influenced her own decision to join the company and disclose her identity at work before meeting Bridget. She said,
I mean it was definitely something I thought about. Cause I was just worried that it would change things. Especially when I first started, I didn’t know specifically what the dynamic was at work. I mean I knew that as a company it was, it seemed fairly inclusive. But I didn’t know anyone else. I didn’t know if anyone else at work was gay. So when I met Bridget, she ended up telling me about some other people … And so that calmed my fears … there was that mild fear of like if they, if whoever was above me, if my boss wasn’t comfortable with it, you know, … they can fire me for no reason. So you know, if there was any kind of animosity held that I didn’t know about, you know, I didn’t want to put my job on the line.

To summarize, it seems that Bridget’s experiences with stress processes in the workplace are all interrelated. Her overarching sense of internalized homophobia is connected to her desire for concealment in the workplace and also perhaps indicative of why being outing in the workplace by others is a stressful experience for her as a sexual minority. The expectation of stigma or rejection she has in the workplace may also be tied to her own sense of stigma regarding her sexual orientation.

**Supports. In the work domain.** Bridget feels supported by her company and direct supervisors for general work stressors within her workplace. She offered, for example,

like today it was a giant mess and I was running around the office joking around with people. Like, we do have a lot of interaction with each other … [my supervisors] are kind of mixed in with us. … I actually have one that sits right behind me. So we’re interacting and joking with them all day.

When asked if she felt comfortable approaching her supervisors for support when feeling overwhelmed with work, Bridget said, “Yea. Oh yea. They’re like the, the way they have it set up, like everyone’s amazingly nice … and they’re all really receptive to what you have to say and your feelings and trying to fix it.”

Bridget and Lara also classify their employer as “super supportive” (Lara) of sexual minority employees specifically. Characteristics of their workplace that provide a sense of support include: organization-wide nondiscrimination policies; enforcement of these policies from administration; the presence of other sexual minority employees in the workplace; and feeling as if they were treated the same as (or ‘no different’ than) heterosexual couples are treated.

First, the organization has implemented several policies that prohibit discrimination in the workplace, and offer specific benefits which could support same-sex couples. Lara said,

I know that they had before, um, before the DOMA was repealed. They had domestic partnership benefits would transfer over and everything like that. That was just the policy of the company as it was. So that is openly supportive. Which was one thing that really attracted me to them in the first place.
Despite not being in a relationship (or a domestic partnership) when she joined the company, Lara presumed this company policy to be indicative of greater levels of support for employees overall within the organization. In fact, the company has articulated this organizational benefit of being supportive in the employee handbook. A supportive statement in the employee handbook specifically includes “sexual orientation,” reading,

The Wellness Hotline’s vision is to be a model of championing diversity, welcoming and serving everyone. Our goal is to have our Board of Directors, management, staff, and volunteers genuinely demonstrate the principles of diversity, which enrich our country and its communities. Diversity is valuing individuals without regard to race, creed, religion, color, gender, nationality, citizenship status, sexual orientation, physical challenge, and age. We need diversity because our work has taught us its value. Every day we experience the dramatic changes occurring in our country: changing demographics, changing workplace attitudes, and changing needs in our communities. Our ability to embrace diversity and to make it an integral part of our business will enable us to serve our members and their communities more effectively. It will also help us attract new volunteers, new staff, and new members.

Beyond addressing the importance of diversity in writing, the company, and its administration also enforce such policies, leading both Bridget and Lara to feel they would be protected in the workplace if an individual discriminated against them. Specifically, the Equal Employment Opportunity policy in their employee handbook stated,

The Wellness Hotline does not discriminate in employment opportunities or practices on the basis of race, creed, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, citizenship status, genetic information or any other characteristic protected by law. … Any employees with questions or concerns about any type of discrimination in the workplace are encouraged to bring these issues to the attention of their immediate supervisor or the Vice President for Human Resources or other designated compliance officers. Employees can raise concerns and make reports without fear of reprisal. Anyone found to be engaging in any type of unlawful discrimination will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

When asked how she would react if someone were to make anti-LGBQ comments at work, Lara said,

If it were an attack on me or Bridget, or our relationship, then I am comfortable enough in our support system at work that I would probably make a comment to a manager about it. Cause I would, my work space right now is like awesome and if somebody were to come in and mess with that, I would, I’m not gonna let that fly. And that stuff is in the manual as not being okay in the first place. So I know that I’ve got that policy to back me up. That it would get fixed.
Similarly, when Bridget was asked how her workplace supports her as a sexual minority, she replied, “I feel like if I had any problem at all, someone’s going to be there to listen to me. And try to help me to the best that they can.”

In addition, both Bridget and Lara felt that having another coworker, Brent, who openly identifies as LGBQ in the workplace makes that context feel more supportive. Bridget said, “I think the fact that there was just another person that was out already and then me coming in and he was already out into that environment. And just made me feel better because there’s already someone that’s gay and open about it and no one’s really having an issue with it.

In a separate interview, Lara explained what it meant to her to have other sexual minorities open about their identities in the workplace. She said, “I think the fact that there was just another person that was out already and then me coming in and he was already out into that environment. And just made me feel better because there’s already someone that’s gay and open about it and no one’s really having an issue with it.

While acknowledging that having other sexual minority employees out in the workplace can make that workplace feel more supportive, the women also felt that support came in the form of ‘no difference.’ That is, having administration and coworkers treat their relationship like any other relationship (i.e. heterosexual relationships) and not directly focusing on their sexual orientation was seen as a form of support. Lara said, “I’d say [the workplace is] supportive. I think, I don’t receive any special treatment, other than anyone else. So I’d say, it’s kind of like oh, okay. It’s no different. … I mean I just want to be treated equally. And I have. Every, all the benefits are equal. Everything is equal. So I mean, I’m just a normal person.

When asked how the company specifically supports her same-sex relationship, Bridget said, “Again, from like kind of from last time, there’s just not a difference between me and, you know, someone that’s married to a straight person … they don’t like go out of their way to do anything special for the LGBT people. It’s just, I mean we have the same benefits. We have the same everything as everyone else. I feel like that, in that way, they support me even though it’s the law technically now. {laughter} but I mean, they just, it’s not, they don’t do anything overly hey you’re gay, you get a special prize!

She reiterated in another interview, “Yea. I mean they don’t make me feel any differently than anyone else. So I feel like supported in that way … like I’m an equal. So they treat me like everyone else, so I feel supported in the fact that they’re not like hounding me about one certain thing because I’m gay.”

Interestingly, although Bridget and Lara both felt that being treated no differently than a heterosexual couple felt supportive, the two women did not always interpret situations the same way. For
example, the incident discussed earlier when Bridget felt minority-related stress due to being outed by a coworker in front of a new mentee, Lara actually discussed this experience as an example of workplace support. In describing the incident, Lara said,

I was like alright, this is cool. Like whatever, this kind of thing can be said and it’s not any different than if we were a, like an opposite-sex couple. It just seemed natural, a natural thing to kind of say.

Yet, in speaking with Bridget, Lara understood how this interaction was received differently. Lara related,

I personally was like oh see, it doesn’t even bother me. It was just funny … And I had talked to her [Bridget] about it later and she was like ‘yea, no. Actually that caused like a moment of minor panic’ … And I was like man, cause it was totally a different impression of that situation than what I got. And so it was weird to hear that she felt like that afterwards.

Finally, Bridget and Lara discussed the level to which they have developed many personal relationships with colleagues, and how they feel these close friendships in the work domain increase the perceived support they receive at work. When asked who she most often turns to for supports when feeling stressed, Bridget said, “Probably Lara [who I met through work], or one of my other friends … I mean, we all, all my friends work in the same place so they all know what I’m going through.” In fact, both coworkers and supervisors were often described as being extremely supportive to deal with general work-related stress. When faced with the possibility of being fired due to the workplace relationship policy, Bridget felt the effort administration made to find one of the women a position in another department showed the level of support they had for the couple. Bridget said,

She [the supervisor] was just trying to like let me know … because we didn’t know at the time that they were gonna put her in another department, so it was just kind of, okay this is the situation … because I love you both and I want you both to work here. And so that was just her trying to help us figure out what the hell we were gonna do … it felt reassuring that they were rooting for us almost. Like the management was.

Since then, Lara was able to move into another department in the company, meaning both women have been able to keep their jobs and continue working together. However, this shift also adjusted their schedules so that Bridget and Lara often did not work at the same time, thus minimizing the time they can spend together as a couple both inside and outside of the workplace. Both women voiced their displeasure with the situation and how having opposite work schedules was putting a strain on their relationship. In her final interview then, Lara talked about her supervisors working to adjust her schedule so that it was more in line with Bridget’s. In doing so, they specifically acknowledged her (same-sex) relationship and took direct action to support it. Lara described,
My manager’s, they were working on the schedule for this month I think it was, and they came to me. They literally called me and were like … we know that Bridget is going to end up being on days next month. Now would be a great time to go to days if that’s what you guys wanted. So it was just super cool that they know that there’s that relationship between the two of us. It’s not even a problem … and it was just a super cool moment … Like they went out of their way to find out what her schedule was going to be…without my asking, because I’d been in contact with them beforehand, you know, being like I can’t do this yet because Bridget’s gonna be working nights. We’ll never see each other. They’re like no, I totally understand.

In the family domain. In addition to finding support in the work place, Bridget also identified several sources of support and coping mechanisms she developed in the family domain. Specifically, Bridget identified her partner, Lara, as her biggest support in dealing with general work-related stress. She detailed,

Yea, just to get it [work stress] off my chest and out in the open. It always helps just to, phew … So I told Lara about it and it just felt good to get it off my chest … she was just supportive. And was like, yea, you know, you just gotta do it though … [giving] advice, and just being someone to listen to. And also bouncing off ideas about how I can resolve that problem.

Because the women also work together, Bridget sees Lara as a support (stemming from the family domain) in the workplace. She said,

Like, even though we are in work and supposed to be professional, like Lara does do some nice things for me. Like little, couple things I guess you could say. She’ll go get me water if she sees my cup is empty. Or she’ll pay for lunch and sit over by my desk for lunch. So things like that.

Effects of minority stress experiences. As discussed earlier, both women felt the ir individual mental health, as well as their romantic relationship, were negatively affected by general work-related stressors in their lives. Bridget felt as if she internalizes this stress and pulls away from Lara; she also identified feelings of jealousy given their differing work experiences. Further, experiencing prejudice events, such as being outed by others, or the expectation of stigma in the workplace, Bridget reported increased anxiety and individual distress (i.e. when outed at work she said, “Internally I’m freaking out”). Lara also reported increased worry and concern for Bridget, as well as frustration regarding her inability to reduce Bridget’s sense of internalized homophobia or expectations of stigma. When discussing how Bridget felt distressed after being outed at work, Lara said,

I was like, ‘well dang.’ … I mean I know it might always be hard for her … I would never say something like that now [to out her] just because that, I know it would like draw attention to it with new people. I know she doesn’t want it to be that way, like she wants that kind of feeling to
stop. And so it was just kind of a, ‘I don’t know what to do about this’ kind of thing and I just felt bad [that I couldn’t do anything to help her in that moment].

However, in terms of minority stress processes affecting the women’s relationship, it seems as if they only identified positive couple-level outcomes. For example, Bridget talked about how she had shared with Lara her level of discomfort with her sexual orientation and how having a conversation with her about concealment and disclosure actually made her feel closer to Lara. Lara’s understanding and acceptance of Bridget’s choice to conceal her identity and their relationship, usually in new situations, has strengthened their relationship. Bridget was also able to see a positive side of minority stress processes in the workplace. When faced with anti-LGBTQ comments from a coworker, Bridget confronted her colleague and began a dialogue. She said,

Actually, as we were having the argument, I was kind of like happy because it felt nice to like have an intellectual conversation with someone that in-depth and serious [about LGBQ issues]. So it was kind of nice that I was doing that at work. … He was listening to what I had to say. I was listening to what he had to say. It just was a really good conversation.

For her, even this experience with prejudice from others was seen as positive because it also became an opportunity to educate others in her workplace.

**Work/family border characteristics.** The physical, temporal, and psychological borders between the work and family domains for Bridget were all extremely permeable. That is, both women described the high degree of overlap between work and family roles, rules, and domain members. This may be due, at least in part, to the fact that Bridget and Lara work in the same office. Bridget said, “We both work at the same place. So, I mean our lives are just like molded together, so it just feels like a continuation of the day.” Bridget also stated that her entire friend group outside of work consisted of work colleagues, and that even her relationship with Lara, who she also first met at work as a new coworker, simply felt like an extension of her work day.

It is not just interactions with coworkers happening at home, however. Bridget described how social and more intimate interactions happen with her romantic partner and her friends in the work domain as well. She said about her interactions at work, “I don’t really have a filter … I share pretty much everything with my coworkers … for the most part, I’m really an open book.” When asked to describe how she plays both the friend role and the coworker role with these individuals in both work and family domains, she said, “it’s hard [to explain] because we switch back and forth sentence to sentence. Of this is professional. This is fun. This is professional. This is fun. So it’s all just kind of melted in together.” Lara also described how they interact as a couple at work, saying,
She’ll come and talk to me like all the time. Like she’ll come by my desk and chat with me. You know, uh, like as she’s leaving she’ll tell me that she loves me. You know, we keep our voices low, but it’s something that noise travels. We’re still saying it out loud at work.

Both women seemed content with this level of permeability between work and family, with Lara saying, “I like making those kinds of personal connections with people at work and having that extension of friends and family at work. That is definitely ideal!”

This degree of flexibility between the work and family domain has helped Bridget to build those relationships with people she now considers a huge part of her support system. She describes how she began to open up to and connect with these colleagues, building friendships with them, saying,

Before I even knew Lara, it was, you know I came to work to work. And I had some coworker friends, but we didn’t really hang out too much. So as we got closer and tighter and hung out more outside of work, then it – [work and family roles] – started blending more.

Bridget discussed how having these friendships at work helped her deal with work related general stresses. Colleagues could understand and commiserate when she had a difficult day on the hotline. The couple was also able to gather support from administration to deal with the stress related to having opposite work schedules. By sharing with supervisors about their relationship and desires in the family domain, they were able to shift schedules in the work domain to be more conducive to their relationship.

Lara explained,

Our happiness is a priority. You know, they like schedule-wise, they are so open to working with you on getting a schedule that makes you happy. And the schedule I have right now isn’t super thrilling. Especially with Bridget working days … So I was making a couple comments … like you know, it was just frustrating. And she, [the supervisor] was like I totally understand. And she was like you know, my husband and I worked just like off schedule like that for a while too and it was not a good time. And I was just like yea, it kind of sucks. So there was that kind of, you know, understanding of you don’t get to see your partner. And I understand that sucks. And we want to do everything that we can to help you guys out.

Being open about their relationship in the work domain with supervisors, allowed them access to supports for their relationship. Administration made it clear that they would be shifting the schedules to align Bridget and Lara’s work schedule specifically because they were in a relationship.

On the other hand, the extremely permeable boundaries between work and family domains have also created stress for the couple at times. In fact, the concern about their job stability (when the women were first found out to be a couple) stemmed from a post on social media that was noticed by a work supervisor. Because they were friends with this person outside of work – who inside the work domain had power to enforce the ‘no relationships’ policy – Bridget and Lara experienced general stress about
possibly losing their jobs, and also minority related stress in that together they discussed concealing their relationship and their sexual orientation in the workplace. Lara also voiced concerns for Bridget sharing her drug use with friends (who are also work colleagues), as this may have negative ramifications in the future. The permeability could also negatively affect their relationship, given that the two women are also coworkers and they play these dual roles together. For example, Bridget explained, “I might be a little snarky towards her [at work] which could throw things off at home. And then I’m probably gonna be mad at her at work because I’m mad at her at home.”

Despite the overall flexibility and permeability of the work/family borders for Bridget, both she and Lara described some rigidity in these borders as well. Primarily, it seems these women implement more rigid boundaries in order to prevent work related stress spilling into the family domain. Specifically, Bridget uses more rigid psychological boundaries at the end of her work day, saying, “As far as the [work] stress goes, I check out. Whatever, it’s done. It’s over with. It’s done. Cause it’s a daily basis that I get people that are screaming at me.” Lara agreed, saying, “Yea, it’s one of those things where when you’re done with work, you leave it at work. You don’t take it home with you.”

They also seem to have more rigidity in the borders between family and work as a means of minimizing their relationship so as not to violate work policies. Bridget described her relationship with Lara at work, “At work, I mean we talk. We really try to keep it professional though so that we just don’t get in trouble. You know, you do your job. I’ll do my job. If we need to interact then we do. I mean we talk all the time. We sit like 15 feet away from each other. But we usually try to keep it professional.” Lara also talked about downplaying their relationship in the workplace in order to maintain her professionalism.

My only fear is just crossing the line of what’s appropriate at work. For any couple that’s at work. They told us as long as there are no inappropriate gestures that kind of thing at work … And just pointing out that we’re dating isn’t crossing that line, so I was like whatever, this is fine. But that’s where my concern is. I just don’t want anybody made uncomfortable to the point of, or uncomfortable and not even like in a just being, like uncomfortable because we’re gay kind of way. I just don’t want anyone to be uncomfortable, period.

**Recommendations.** Finally, Bridget and Lara offered several recommendations for workplaces to support sexual minority employees. They indicated that non-discrimination policies, enforcement of those policies, active steps of acknowledgement and affirmation, and support for LGBQ employees holistically would be beneficial. First, workplace policies supporting sexual minority employees and same-sex couples were seen as supportive, not only to current, but also potential workers. Lara said, “I know that they had before, um, before the DOMA was repealed. They had domestic partnership benefits would transfer over and everything like that. That was just the policy of the company as
it was. So that is openly supportive. Which was one thing that really attracted me to them in the first place … They listed it on their website talking about their policies and so it just kind of stood out as like an oh, okay. That they were openly pushing that as a ‘hey you can’t get married yet. But we are still willing to support you in any way that you can.’

While applauding the presence of policies that support LGBQ individuals (e.g., same-sex partner benefits or non-discrimination policies), the women also reiterated how important it is for organizations to follow through on such policies. It seems the enforcement of these policies is what is needed day-to-day. When asked how a hypothetical company should respond if discrimination were happening, Bridget said,

I feel like the workplace would just need to really address the people that are being negative that way. … If they could just sit down like that and be more stern with people instead of like coddling them and being like eh, it’s not okay to do this. Instead of you’re going to get fired [if you are openly hostile in the workplace].

Lara added,

The big one is just like not tolerating like discriminatory language against age, gender, race, creed, sexuality. Even that alone, that blanket policy of we won’t tolerate those kind of, that kind of talk in the workplace. And then actually following through with it. Cause if it’s there and nobody does anything about it, whatever. But I just think that’s the biggest thing. And just having administration take it seriously is huge. Just because seeing that, you’re like, ‘cool. I’ve got somebody to back me up if I’m having trouble with a coworker.’ And knowing that administration will stand behind you for it.

Lara said that she feels the administration in her organization does this particularly well, and explained how this support from higher up in the company benefits her. She said,

And that is why I just don’t have any fear of you know, new people coming in and shaking things up. I just don’t think that would fly … it’s like this new person can have a problem with it. That’s fine. That’s their right. But you know, if they’re gonna come and be mean about it … the policy says that’s not their right [and the company will be on my side in that situation].

Additionally, Bridget shared a few ideas about how a company could take active steps to acknowledge and affirm sexual minority employees. Attention to language could make sexual minority employees feel more comfortable. Bridget explained,

I guess instead of like, like a husband or wife. Maybe using like partner or spouse. Being more kind of neutral so that you don’t have to be like ‘eeeee, yea.’ Just so that you’re not like put on the spot to come out if you don’t want to. That would be nice. I mean just like wording, how they put things in paperwork and policies. I feel like would be, if we could just make it neutral, that’d
be easier. Cause then you’re not outing yourself right off the bat before you get hired or something.

She also felt that providing LGBQ-specific resources within the organization could be beneficial. She said,

I think, having, if people wanted to join a [LGBTQ social] group like that, that’d be kind of cool for like little support. … if there could be like some kind of support outreach for people just to find friends that are similar minded and orientation, just to have something. That’d be kind of cool.

Taking steps to make this support of LGBTQ individuals visible outside of the organization is another way to create a positive atmosphere for sexual minority employees and members of the surrounding community. Bridget indicated it would “be kind of cool” if their organization participated in Pride activities or had a float in the local Pride parade, and “show a little local support, especially because there is so many of us that work there.”

Finally, Bridget and Lara recommended that companies provide support for employees holistically. That is, it is important to recognize their employees not just as diverse individuals with varied identities, but as part of diverse families with partners and/or children. When asked what makes a workplace feel supportive, Lara said,

I mean getting asked personal questions. Like how is your family and home? That kind of thing. It is positive. … just kind of that, that extra indication that they care about you as a person rather than just as like, a source of labor.

Lara went on to say that creating a work environment where colleagues get to know one another’s families in this way can also benefit LGBQ employees specifically, explaining,

Having them take the time for like, just kind of social events, you know, so coworkers can get to know each other. And by that extension, maybe get to know their family members through that. And you know, having that opportunity for them to be exposed to same-sex couples. … And then from there on you’re just even more comfortable at work.

In Summary

Q1: What minority stress processes do LGBQ employees report experiencing in the workplace?

Talia: Perceived “homophobia”; has been passed up for promotions; feels ignored and stigmatized by supervisors; consistent microaggressions; feels retaliated against when reports microaggressions; anticipates future and continued retaliation; concealment of perceived homophobia; denied support in work and family domains

Martha: Feels ignored and shunned by some coworkers who are not comfortable with her identity or her relationship; has beenouted without her permission; expectations of stigma with several
coworkers, so she refrains from interacting with them socially; isolation of experiences in the workplace as her partner has little understanding of minority stress processes in the work domain.

Bridget: Perceived little minority stress processes in the workplace; has been outed by a coworker though, and overheard anti-LGBTQ comments; experiences internalized homophobia in general, but also exists in the work environment; negotiates concealment in the workplace with new or unknown coworkers due to expectations of rejection and stigma.

**Q2: What supports do LGBTQ employees report receiving to cope with these stress processes?**

Talia: Described the overall workplace climate as supportive, even if specific individuals in power are discriminatory; felt supported by many colleagues in the work domain; romantic partner supportive by listening to her vent about stress and validating her experiences.

Martha: Described the overall workplace climate as tolerant; felt accepted and supported by some coworkers while ignored by others; company policies and diversity training at the organizational level felt supportive; partner supports outside of work; AA community also a huge source of support.

Bridget: Described the overall workplace climate as extremely supportive; policies in place to support diverse identities and same-sex couples specifically; administration acknowledged and supported her relationship; partner acknowledged and supported her with internalized homophobia and expectations of stigma.

**Q3: How are employees and their romantic relationships between partners of the same-sex affected by experiences of minority stress processes related to the employee’s sexuality in the workplace?**

Talia: Decreased commitment to job; increased irritability and agitation; support fatigue in romantic partner; increased fighting with partner; also increased closeness with partner through job search.

Martha: Withdraws from others and does not interact socially at work; felt sad and shameful; no couple-level outcomes were identified given the degree of separation between work and family domains.

Bridget: Increased anxiety due to expectations of stigma and internalized homophobia; positive effects of minority stress include opportunities to educate coworkers on LGBTQ issues and strengthened relationship with partner because of the support they provide one another.
**Q4: (How) do the borders between the work and family domains alter the cross-contextual effects of minority stress experiences?**

Talia: Mixed boundaries – permeability in boundaries provides access to support (in family domain for work stresses; and in work domain by disclosing relationship status); Rigid boundaries protect relationship in some ways (prevents stress spillover effects)

Martha: Overall, extremely rigid and impermeable borders; rigidity used as protection against stress processes, i.e., does not talk about romantic relationship at work so as not to feel judged; maintains rigid temporal and physical boundaries to prevent work spillover into the family domain; few examples of permeable boundaries fostered relationship building and gaining support in the work domain for family-related stress

Bridget: Overall, extremely permeable and flexible borders; permeability allows access to supports in both the work and family domains from friends/coworkers and her partner; permeability has also created stress by violating work policies outside of work when socializing with coworkers; few instances of more rigid boundaries used to prevent general work related stress from spilling over into family domain

**Q5: What recommendations do individuals in same-sex relationships have for workplace policies and climate that would benefit and support their romantic relationships?**

Talia: Employer support of general work stress; attention to heteronormative language; providing open and affirming support of LGBTQ employees by offering LGBTQ support groups, posting ally stickers in the workplace, etc., enforcing non-discrimination policies

Martha: Employer support for all types of stress processes can make the workplace an overall more comfortable place to be; equally acknowledging LGBTQ employees and their partners; providing equal benefits and supports for all families; diversity training, particularly giving attention to heteronormative language

Bridget: Employer support of employees holistically, acknowledging all identities and family dynamics; non-discrimination and same-sex benefits policies; enforcement of such policies in day-to-day interactions; attention to heteronormative language; providing open and affirming support to LGBTQ community by making internal company stance known publically
Chapter 6
Discussion

This dissertation used concurrent mixed methods to understand sexual minority employees’ experiences in the workplace and to describe the cross-contextual effects of these experiences in the family domain. Using an a priori integrated theoretical approach drawing constructs from minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) and work/family border theory (Clark, 2000); both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to answer the research questions. This section discusses and integrates the findings from both Study 1 and Study 2. Specifically, the results discussed here reveal that even under a state-wide nondiscrimination policy in IL (Illinois Human Rights Act, 2006), LGBQ employees still experience minority stress processes in the workplace. Further, findings indicate that couples’ relationships are, in fact, affected by one partner’s experiences in the workplace, although these outcomes may not always be entirely negative. The present research makes significant contributions to the research with implications for theory and measurement, as well as practice and policy.

Minority Stress Processes and Supports in the Workplace

As stated earlier, residents of IL (as well as the participants in both Study 1 and Study 2) have been protected since 2006 by the Illinois Human Rights Act, which prohibits workplace discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. Specifically, this law states that employers may not “refuse to hire, to segregate … [or have] the effect of making unlawful discrimination” (Illinois Human Rights Act, 2006, 2-102). Direct and overt prejudice events, e.g. physical or verbal harassment, are prohibited by this law. However, it seems that LGBQ employees continue to report experiences of prejudice events, or distal minority stress processes, in the workplace; these prejudice events are now simply much more covert and subtle.

Social stigma as the predominant prejudice event. In Study 1, the participants who reported experiencing prejudice events at the hands of coworkers only reported social acts of stigma. Of the eleven acts of victimization listed, only five were indicated, including: overhearing anti-gay comments (n = 23); being shunned (n = 12); being outed by others (n = 11); being teased (n = 2); and being asked to leave an event (n = 1). Similarly, in Study 2, the only experiences with prejudice events described by Talia, Bridget, Martha, and their partners were subtle acts of microaggressions – e.g., being shunned or ignored by coworkers, or using incorrect identity markers. While these experiences may seem less noxious than other forms of victimization, as a type of minority stressor, microaggressions can still have deleterious effects on LGBQ employees and their family relationships.

Microaggressions have been described as these subtle, derogatory acts that imply hostility or prejudice (Nadal, 2008), or as one article defines it, “death by a thousand cuts” (Nadal et al., 2011). They are so commonplace and embedded in larger social systems that often these individual slights go
unnoticed until they pile up into a contextual climate that feels less than supportive. Colleagues’ tone of voice, facial expressions, or intentions behind ignoring one particular (sexual minority) coworker are so difficult to precisely identify – and measure – as prejudice events. In fact, same-sex partners of these sexual minority employees may even question the legitimacy or hostility of such forms of stigma. This minimization of experiences then may add to the minority stress processes.

And yet, one study of 100 sexual minority employees reported experiences of microaggressions in the workplace, oftentimes revealing a disconnect between existing state-wide non-discrimination laws and organization-wide diversity statements, and employees’ day-to-day lived experiences in that context (Galupo & Resnick, 2016). Indeed, as Erin stated in the current study, “a sentence in a handbook isn’t any good if it’s not actually carried out.”

Thus, even within a state with a non-discrimination policy, within an organization with a publically-available diversity statement, sexual minority employees can and do experience minority stress as a result of prejudice events perpetrated by others. Sexual minority employees who experience these microaggressions in the workplace appear to be affected similarly as if they had experienced direct and overt forms of prejudice events. That is, LGBQ employees report a negative shift in mood as well as overall wellbeing, decreased job satisfaction and commitment, and a negative effect on relationships with colleagues (Galupo & Resnick, 2016, Nadal et al., 2011). Therefore, in an examination of minority stress processes in the workplace, it is as important to capture experiences with and perceptions of microaggressions, at both the interpersonal and systemic levels.

**Levels of climate: Personal versus institutional.** Participants in Study 2 highlighted an important aspect of the work domain, in that the interpersonal, day-to-day interactions with coworkers and supervisors (i.e., the social climate in the workplace) is distinct from, and yet just as important as the institutional and cultural climate of the organization. Findings from all three cases indicated that LGBQ employees may feel supported by their immediate coworkers, or feel victimized by them, but this may not directly line up with their sense of support or discrimination in the overall organization. Talia, who spent hours sharing her experiences with microaggressions and other prejudice events she experienced at the hands of her colleagues, rated her overall workplace as “supportive.” She said, “I wanted to make sure I could talk about the overall environment [and not just individual interactions I’ve had] ‘cause it didn’t come across at first. You asked about that [separately], so I’m happy.” Bridget, who felt supported by the overall organization as well as through personal interactions with individuals, also stressed the importance of the day-to-day social climate, saying “I’m telling you: the people make the job [great, rather than the organizational structure or institutional policies].”

It seems there are often very real differences between the climate of the whole organization, taking into account the policies and the culture of the institution, and the social climate, which
encompasses more of those individual level attitudes and beliefs. Even if an employer or an organization puts all of the desired supports in place for marginalized employees, a workplace can still feel tolerant, as Martha explained, if the attitudes of individual coworkers are more distant and prejudiced towards LGBQ employees. This understanding has very real implications for organizations trying to create supportive atmospheres for sexual minorities. Beyond the policies in place and diversity statements made at the institutional level, the interpersonal interactions in a workplace also need to be addressed. While some of this may fall on individuals’ shoulders, the organization is still responsible for hiring employees and setting the limits of allowing intolerant attitudes to permeate a work domain. Therefore, organizations must be aware of the social climate of the workspace, and regardless of how supportive the institution is overall, take responsibility for the level of support existing at the interpersonal level as well.

This finding also speaks to the ways in which workplaces, and contextual climates more broadly, have been conceptualized and measured. That is to say, researchers have often treated the contextual climate as unidimensional, polarizing hostility and support. Whether measured objectively – by scoring laws, policies, or other indicators of support, or reported hate crimes and other indicators of hostility – or measured subjectively by asking for individuals’ perceptions of the climate, contexts have often been deemed simply supportive or hostile. On the contrary, these results show that work contexts are much more complex than that oversimplified assessment. Instead, a work context should be assessed with the understanding that hostility and support may coexist. As these results show, it is possible to experience minority related stressors in the workplace and feel supported in the work domain; it is possible to see the overall workplace as supportive even if experiencing prejudice events at the hands of coworkers. Fully capturing experiences for LGBQ employees in the workplace then requires that researchers measure both hostility and support at the institutional as well as the personal levels.

**Perception matters.** Given the complexity of labeling a workplace as supportive and/or hostile, as well as identifying these subtle forms of social stigma and microaggressions, it is important to recognize how critical individuals’ perceptions of the situation are. It seems that experiences with minority stress processes, and even support, are highly subjective and effects are dependent upon how the minority stressor is interpreted by the individual LGBQ employee. Indeed, in Study 1, results indicated that individuals’ depression symptoms mediated the association between prejudice events and relationship satisfaction. That is, how individuals internalized and were affected by these experiences statistically explained the effect on their romantic relationship.

This point was also made evident in Bridget’s case, as both she and her girlfriend, Lara worked in the same organization, shared the same coworkers, and often experienced the same situations together, and yet often perceived situations very differently. For instance, when being teased about their relationship by a colleague in front of a new employee, Lara perceived this as support, saying “This is
cool. … It’s not any different than if we were a, like an opposite-sex couple.” Bridget on the other hand shared this same story as an example of an experience of minority stress; she felt outed by the colleague without her permission and felt expectations of stigma or rejection from the new employee. Talia also very clearly perceived homophobia in her workplace and identified it as such; yet, her girlfriend, Erin said “maybe there’s something else going on.”

While this perception of experiences has not been widely applied to studies of LGBQ minority stress processes in the workplace, understanding the importance of individual perceptions is not new. In fact, the meaning attached to a stressful event is a key concept in the ABC-X model of family stress (Hill, 1958). As discussed by Boss (2002), a stressor event – perhaps experiencing a prejudice event perpetrated by a coworker – has the potential to cause stress, but is in fact, not synonymous with stress. She states,

The degree of stress caused by the event depends not only on the actual magnitude of the event but also on the family’s perception of that event. Families often view the same event differently … We cannot automatically assess such events as stressful without first asking the family how they define the event. (Boss, 2002, pp. 48-49)

Therefore, it is important for researchers to not merely measure level of concealment, or objectively count experiences with prejudice events without separately assessing the level of stress resulting from these minority stress processes. Future research in this area should take care to capture individual perceptions of such events to understand the true effects of these types of stressors.

**Interconnected nature of minority stress processes.** A key to understanding individuals’ perceptions of these minority stress processes is to recognize the interconnected nature of the different types of minority stress processes. In fact, Boss (2002) indicates that the meaning of a stressor event is often defined by other aspects of the context, including the social climate, the amount of supports available, or how the individual feels about themselves or their situation. Thus, examining the effects of experiencing an interpersonal prejudice event in the work domain is not complete without also assessing the overall institutional climate, an individual’s perceived social supports, or their level of internalized homophobia. Yet, very few studies measure all types of minority stress processes in conjunction while also including available social supports.

As critiqued earlier, the literature using minority stress theory often pulls out only a few constructs to test without giving full consideration to the model as a whole. However, results from this study indicate that minority stress processes are so interconnected, that to pull them apart and study one independently may actually misrepresent LGBQ individuals’ experiences. For example, in Study 2, Bridget’s early experiences with prejudice events was clearly linked to her increased sense of internalized homophobia. This internalized homophobia seemed to lead to increased expectations of stigma in the
workplace, which appeared to drive her desire to conceal her identity from new colleagues and other strangers.

Thus, future studies examining the effects of prejudice events in the workplace, for instance, should also measure and control for additional stress processes (such as concealment or expectations of stigma), as was done in Study 1. Studies of same-sex couples should also account for varying levels of stress between the individuals, as each partner may have different levels of internalized homophobia, expectations of stigma, or interpretations of the stressor event. Scholars should be aware of the interaction between these different types of minority stress processes, and the idea that one partner’s internalized homophobia could have an effect on the other’s level of concealment, therefore determining how they make meaning of these stressors.

**The Use of Work/Family Border Characteristics**

Analyzing the border characteristics in Study 2 also resulted in interesting findings that warrant deeper examination in future studies. Overall, it seemed that participants utilized border management strategies to alter the flexibility or inflexibility of the temporal, physical, and psychological borders between the work and family domains. Rigid borders were used primarily to protect the partner and couple relationship in the family domain from being affected by stressors in the work domain. For example, Talia discussed how she and Erin designated ‘work free’ nights in order to protect the time devoted to their relationship from stressors in the work domain. Permeable borders, on the other hand, appeared to foster closer relationships with coworkers, providing LGBQ employees more sources of support in the work domain. Martha, for instance, allowed more flexible psychological borders with only a select few coworkers and now feels closest to and most supported by these particular colleagues.

However, there is certainly no singular recommendation for work/family border characteristics for sexual minority employees. Martha was as contended with her fairly rigid borders as Bridget was with her extremely permeable ones. Although much more research is needed in this area to draw further conclusions, it does seem that individual employees must find for themselves the level of overlap and separation between the work and family domain that fits best (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999; Nippert-Eng, 1996).

**Same-Sex Relationships Are Affected by Minority Stress Processes at Work**

Finally, future work should focus on and highlight couple- and family-level outcomes as the results from both Study 1 and Study 2 show that same-sex relationships in the family domain are, in fact, affected by minority stress processes in the work domain. Specifically, it seems that employees’ relationships are most affected by employees’ experiences with distal stressors, i.e. experiencing prejudice events at the hands of coworkers. In Study 1, only this independent variable was significantly associated with relationship satisfaction. In Study 2, Talia, who perceived the most external prejudice in
her workplace, discussed the greatest effects on her relationship with Erin. While Martha and Bridget experienced other forms of minority stress processes, experiences with prejudice events were not predominant in either case; interestingly, neither of these cases showed significant effects on the couples’ relationship either.

Even if an individual is concealing their sexual orientation (or their same-sex relationship) in the work environment, or expecting stigma to happen in the workplace, it appears that actually being a victim of prejudice events in the work environment is what affects relationship quality. Perhaps distal and proximal (or internal) stressors affect individuals and couples differently, although these differences have not been adequately explored in the literature. More research needs to be done to distinguish differing effects of internal and external minority stress processes and how individuals and couples are affected.

Additionally, results revealed that experiences with these prejudice events may not always be deleterious. That is, Talia’s and Bridget’s cases both highlighted ways in which the relationship was strengthened by these experiences. As partners served as a support to one another in the face of minority stressors; as partners banded together to fight the sources of external prejudice; as such experiences prompted conversations which brought partners closer together – couples reported ways in which they felt more satisfied in their relationship. Indeed, results trending towards significance in Study 1 also indicated that although individuals with low levels of social supports in the workplace reported lower levels of relationship satisfaction if they had experienced a prejudice event, individuals with higher levels of social support in the workplace actually reported slightly higher levels of relationship satisfaction if they had experienced a prejudice event. These findings counter the current literature which suggests that minority stress processes are uniformly linked to negative outcomes.

**Implications for Theory and Research**

Theoretically, this set of studies adds to the literature examining minority stress processes. While LGBQ scholars have widely accepted the tenets of minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) and the damaging effects of minority stress processes, little work has been done to understand the cross-contextual effects of such processes on same-sex couples. Using an integrated theoretical approach that also draws from Clark’s (2000) work/family border to examine multiple domains, or contexts an individual inhabits, furthers not only the theoretical approach to studying minority stress, but also the larger body of knowledge regarding stress and supports.

The findings reported here suggest that minority stress processes may be more complex, and more intertwined, than what the current literature shows. First and foremost, minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) and the way it has been used by researchers, lacks subjectivity. In quantitative studies, indeed in Study 1, concealment was used, for example, as an objective measure of one type of minority stress. Yet, case examples from Study 2 specifically show that perception matters. Why people are
concealing their identity may affect the amount of stress perceived. Coming out, or not coming out in a declarative way, is not necessarily the same as actively concealing. It may be misleading then for researchers to assume that not disclosing one’s sexual orientation in the workplace is inherently stressful for all LGBQ employees. Future research would benefit from measures adapted to capture the complexity of minority stress processes, ones which truly understand the sexual minority individual’s own understanding of the experience.

Furthermore, future research should also focus on couple- and family-level outcomes of experiences with minority stress processes. Many studies of same-sex couples fail to measure and acknowledge important contexts influencing the relationship, such as individuals’ work environments (Umberson et al., 2015). Findings from this project contribute to the understanding of the couple-level effects of minority stress for LGBQ individuals. Results of these studies set the ground work for future analysis. Establishing a link between workplace experiences and relationship outcomes through regression analysis is the first step in exploring this new area. Future studies might utilize latent class analysis or cluster analysis to identify distinct patterns of stress and supports within the work domain. Moreover, collecting data from both partners in Study 2 was important to understand how experiences were perceived and interpreted for each member of the couple. Therefore, collecting additional quantitative data from both partners in a relationship will allow future research to examine specific pathways of stress processes across the work/family border. The actor-partner interdependence model (Kenny & Ledermann, 2010) tests, for instance, the effect of work stress for partner A on partner B’s relationship satisfaction, and vice versa. This model has been used to study racial discrimination with African American couples, for example (McNeil, Fincham, & Beach, 2014).

Finally, beyond the couple relationship, future studies can also examine the effects of workplace support or discrimination on other domain members, including children or other family members. Parenting may also be influenced by individual experiences with minority stress processes outside the family. Again, this study is an important first step as it opens the door to exploring the cross-contextual pathways of minority stress processes that can affect LGBQ individuals and their families.

**Implications for Practice and Policy**

In addition, these findings have important implications for practice and work-related policy. Practically speaking, LGBQ individuals and same-sex couples continue to face discrimination through personal, social, organizational, institutional, and legal avenues. Identifying and understanding these sources of stress as well as strategies used to cope with these stress processes is vital in supporting these families. The workplace, in particular, continues to be a hotbed of debate in terms of regulating protections or allowing discriminatory practices to continue. Findings from this project show that employment non-discrimination policies, and even institutional policies and diversity statements are not
enough to protect sexual minority employees from all experiences with minority stress processes in the work domain. The social climate of an organization must also be attended to to ensure that LGBQ employees feel welcomed, accepted, and supported.

In fact, the recommendations provided by participants in Study 2 were suggestions not only at the institutional level, but also at the personal level. These individuals urged companies to set the tone in the work domain with policies and affirmative statements that show support, but also to create a work environment that fosters supportive interpersonal relationships with coworkers. For example, participants asked for employers to support sexual minority employees holistically. That is, to recognize and support the work-related general stressors that all employees may face; to recognize and support family-related stressors that may affect employees in the work domain; as well as to recognize and support minority-related stressors unique to LGBQ employees. This type of holistic employee support system allows LGBQ employees to feel equally acknowledged in the work domain, while also uniquely welcomed based on marginalized identities.

Specifically, employers could pay particular attention to language use in the work domain. Heteronormative language that assumes all partners or spouses are of a different sex can create stressful situations for sexual minority employees. Using more gender-neutral terms, such as partner, can give LGBQ employees the space to feel comfortable talking about same-sex relationships. Additionally, addressing microaggressions in direct and clear language may prevent some of these acts from occurring. Fahrenhorst and Kleiner (2012) suggest that

anti-bias workplace policies should be specific, precise, and comprehensive and that employees should be advised on how to avoid discriminatory acts. Providing definitions of microaggressions to employees in addition to concrete examples may assist in recognizing discriminatory behavior that employees do not realize is offensive. (pp. 6-7)

Further, companies can display symbols of LGBQ support in the work domain, including physically posting the diversity statement in a visible place, posting equality or safe space stickers, or in large organizations, provide LGBQ employees a support or social group to meet like others. External gestures could include participating in a local Pride event or even supporting local or national LGBTQ groups. Similar to microaggressions which add up to a climate of hostility, these multiple positive signals of support could add up to a more welcoming and accepting work environment.

Lastly, as discussed earlier, no workplace is fully supportive all of the time. Even if an organization is welcoming of LGBQ employees overall, it is important to recognize the need to constantly be vigilant for shifting climates, particularly at the interpersonal level, and strive for more supportive and inclusive work environments. Even the participants in this study who described their work domain as “the greatest place on earth to work” still had recommendations for improvement and support. Organizations
should never be satisfied with just a policy or diversity statement. Continued enforcement and enactment of such statements is needed for a work domain to remain supportive of sexual minority employees.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Despite the numerous contributions of this research, no study is without limitations. Findings from both Study 1 and Study 2 should be considered in light of several limitations. First, both Study 1 and Study 2 looked at the cross-contextual transference of minority stress processes from work to home. While it is important to acknowledge that minority stress processes may occur in both domains, and thus have effects across the work/family border in both directions, it is beyond the limited scope of this dissertation. The goal of this project was to explore and understand experiences in the workplace and therefore the current studies limit analysis to a unidirectional approach. However, I recognize that border characteristics may vary depending on the lens used to examine them (i.e. permeable family to work transference, but rigid work to family). Future studies examining these more complex relationships between the work and family domains would benefit this area of study.

Study 1 investigated the experiences of workplace discrimination and the effect on relationships from an individual perspective; that is, data were collected from an individual within a same-sex relationship rather than treating the same-sex couple as a whole unit (Umberson et al., 2015). Furthermore, Study 1 only used 171 individuals from the 458 cases in the *Rainbow Illinois* data set given the employment and same-sex relationship criteria. While this data set still provided rich information about these individual experiences, it did limit the type of analysis and interpretations that can be made. The reduced sample size, along with the demographic limitations of this data set (e.g. significantly few people of color participated in the larger study), limited the statistical power of analysis. Future work should be conducted with larger, more diverse samples.

Regarding Study 2, case study analysis has been criticized for lacking external validity. However, as it has been noted earlier, the generalizability of findings was not the aim of this study. Rather, the goal was to explore in-depth the experiences of a few LGBQ individuals in the workplace to inform existing theory at the integrative level by embedding theory in people’s real life narratives (Gilgun, 1992). Nevertheless, interpretations of findings should acknowledge the bounds of representativeness. Results are limited to these three white women working in healthcare related organizations and their same-sex partners. While the similarities between these cases heightened the unique and interesting aspects of each case, it is recommended that future qualitative studies recruit participants of more diverse genders, ethnicities, and employment sectors to allow researchers to speak to the experiences of other populations as well.

Additionally, the study design may have altered the data gathered in Study 2. Experiences shared by participants throughout the interviews may lack validity due to memory lapses, participant
misunderstandings, or social desirability bias. The use of critical incident journaling and interviewing over the course of three months may have also heightened awareness of events in the workplace that might not have otherwise been perceived as prejudice events or minority stress.

Finally, it is important to note that the scope of this work was limited to the experiences of sexual minority employees in the workplace. While one participant in Study 1 identified as a transgender woman, her data were retained as she also identified as a sexual minority. This is not to exclude or minimize the experiences of transgender employees from this area of study. In fact, transgender employees deserve their own spotlight on prejudices and discrimination in the workplace (Sawyer, Thoroughgood, & Webster, 2016). It is my goal for future research to focus on this population and to understand the ways that sexual minority’s experiences may differ from those of transgender employees.

Conclusions

Despite these limitations, this dissertation makes important contributions to the literature on sexual minority employees’ experiences in the workplace. Theoretically, it adds to minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) by promoting the use of the theory in its entirety, considering all stress processes in conjunction while also measuring aspects of support. These constructs cannot be untied or investigated in isolation. Furthermore, scholars are encouraged to expand their viewpoint to consider the multiple contexts in which people live their lives. It is clear that outcome variables are not limited to the work context if that is where one is experiencing minority stress. Examining couple- and family-level outcomes will enrich our understanding of the effects of minority stress processes across the work/family border.

In summary, these studies increase our understanding of minority stress processes in the workplace and the ways in which same-sex couples’ relationships are affected by these experiences. Findings suggest that the work environment can be complex for LGBQ employees who may experience both stressors and supports directly related to their sexual orientation, and that partners in the family domain may also be affected by the work context. Employers wanting to support diversity in the workplace should consider all of the ways in which sexual minority employees may perceive microaggressions and other minority related stress processes and should take active steps to create a welcoming and equitable work space.
References


Appendix A

An Integrated Model Including Elements of Minority Stress Theory and Work/Family Border Theory.
Rainbow Illinois subsample demographic characteristics ($n = 171$) using the raw (not imputed) data. All participants were employed for someone else (either full-time or part-time) and in a romantic relationship with someone of the same sex.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual orientation</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>95 (55.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>46 (26.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual/Queer/Pansexual (poly-oriented)</td>
<td>30 (17.5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of Sexual Orientation</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all important</td>
<td>2 (1.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort of important</td>
<td>18 (10.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>58 (33.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>57 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely important</td>
<td>36 (21.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current physical sex</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female (including MTF transgender)</td>
<td>129 (75.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42 (24.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>124 (72.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44 (25.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queer/Androgynous</td>
<td>3 (1.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M = 40.42; $SD = 11.79$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/ethnicity</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White only</td>
<td>155 (92.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed race or person of color</td>
<td>12 (7.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest level of Education</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma</td>
<td>8 (4.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>16 (9.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
<td>2 (1.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>43 (25.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some graduate school</td>
<td>18 (10.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or professional degree</td>
<td>80 (47.9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental Status</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>47 parents (27.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual income</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M = $40,001 – $50,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household below the poverty threshold</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 households (8.8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance from home to work*</th>
<th>$M = 8.68$ miles; $SD = 13.35$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time employment</td>
<td>133 (77.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time employment</td>
<td>38 (22.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of Professional occupation</td>
<td>146 employees (85.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years as a couple</td>
<td>$M = 7.85$; $SD = 7.27$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that relationship sanctified by god</td>
<td>$M = 2.40$; $SD = 0.77$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>27 (17.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>41 (25.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, definitely</td>
<td>90 (57.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship visibility</td>
<td>$M = 4.51$; $SD = 0.72$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one knows we are a couple</td>
<td>1 (0.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some people know, but most people don’t</td>
<td>3 (1.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some people know, some people don’t</td>
<td>8 (4.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most people know, but some people don’t</td>
<td>53 (31.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone knows we are a couple</td>
<td>104 (61.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living together</td>
<td>131 (77.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had a commitment ceremony</td>
<td>37 (21.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered as domestic partners</td>
<td>22 (13.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had a civil union</td>
<td>3 (1.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legally married</td>
<td>13 (7.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared power of attorney</td>
<td>78 (45.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owned a home together</td>
<td>77 (45.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared finances</td>
<td>109 (63.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* One outlier was removed in calculating distance from home to work. This individual reported living 1,200 miles from their place of employment, but telecommuted on a daily basis.
Appendix C
Study 1 Quantitative Measures

LGBT Climate Inventory (Liddle et al., 2004)

Please tell us what best describes your primary workplace.
[1 = Doesn’t describe at all; 2 = describes somewhat or a little; 3 = describes pretty well; 4 = describes extremely well; 5 (missing) = does not apply]:

Expectations/Fear of Rejection in the Workplace.

1. LGBT employees must be secretive.
2. The atmosphere for LGBT employees is oppressive.
3. Coworkers make comments that seem to indicate a lack of awareness of LGBT issues.
4. Employees are expected to not act “too gay.”
5. LGBT employees fear job loss because of sexual orientation.
6. There is pressure for LGBT employees to stay closeted (to conceal their sexual orientation, gender identity, or relationship status).
7. LGBT employees are met with thinly veiled hostility (e.g. scornful looks or icy tone of voice).
8. LGBT people are less likely to be mentored.

Social Supports in the Workplace

1. LGBT employees are treated with respect.
2. Coworkers are as likely to ask nice, interested questions about same-sex relationships as they are about heterosexual relationship.
3. LGBT employees consider it a comfortable place to work.
4. Non-LGBT employees are comfortable engaging in gay-friendly humor with LGBT employees (e.g. kidding them about a date).
5. LGBT employees feel accepted by coworkers.
6. My immediate work group is supportive of LGBT coworkers.
7. LGBT employees are comfortable talking about their personal lives with coworkers.
8. Employee LGBT identity does not seem to be an issue.
9. The company or institution as a whole provides a supportive environment for LGBT people.
10. LGBT employees are free to be themselves.
11. LGBT employees feel free to display pictures of a same-sex partner.
12. The atmosphere for LGBT employees is improving.

Rainbow Illinois – Experiences with prejudice
Please tell us how frequently in the past year each of the following happened to you [0 = never; 1 = once; 2 = several times; 3 = monthly; 4 = weekly; 5 = daily]. Please also tell us what type of person did this to you [including boss or coworkers]:

- Overheard anti-LGBTQ comments
- Shunned, avoided, ignored
- Teased, called names
- Threatened with physical violence
- Pushed, slapped, tripped
- Punched, kicked, beaten
- Asked to leave an event
- Refused services
- Had my property vandalized
- Outed without my permission
- Been followed
Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988)

1. How well does your partner meet your needs?
   [1 = extremely poor; 2 = below average; 3 = average; 4 = above average; 5 = excellent]

2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?
   [1 = unsatisfied; 2 = somewhat unsatisfied; 3 = average; 4 = more than satisfied; 5 = extremely satisfied]

3. How good is your relationship compared to most?
   [1 = extremely poor; 2 = below average; 3 = average; 4 = above average; 5 = excellent]

4. How often do you wish you hadn’t gotten in this relationship?
   [1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = average; 4 = often; 5 = very often]

5. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?
   [1 = hardly at all; 2 = below average; 3 = average; 4 = above average; 5 = completely]

6. How much do you love your partner?
   [1 = not much; 2 = somewhat; 3 = average; 4 = a lot; 5 = very much]

7. How many problems are there in your relationship?
   [1 = very few; 2 = some; 3 = average; 4 = many; 5 = very many]
Appendix D
Study 2 Consent Form

Work-Life Balance for Same-Sex Couples is a project that aims to understand the work stress of individuals who experience discrimination in the workplace and the effects it has on the work-life balance. Participants of this study include adults age 18 or older in a committed same-sex relationship and work at least 30 hours per week. You are being invited to participate in this study and share your important stories because you meet these inclusion criteria.

This letter is intended to give you information about the study, as well as contact information about the research investigator. The primary investigator, Elizabeth Holman or the responsible project investigator, Dr. Ramona Faith Oswald, both from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, can answer any of your questions about this research project at any time. If you have additional questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board.

As a participant in this study, you will be interviewed once a month for 3 months. Each interview will take approximately one to two hours of your time. You will meet with an interviewer from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign at a convenient time and location. The researcher will ask you questions about your work experiences, your current romantic relationship, and your work-life balance. You are invited to share experiences and stories related to the questions being asked of you. This interview will be audio-taped and later typed into an electronic document word-for-word. As your interview is transcribed, all identifying information (such as your name, your partner’s name, your workplace, etc.) will be removed or given a fake name. Participants who do not wish to be audio-taped during the interview should not participate. You will also be asked to write short journal entries between interviews. After the third interview, the researcher investigator will collect this written journal. Your partner will also be interviewed twice about their perceptions of your workplace.

Your confidentiality is of great importance. We will take several steps to protect your privacy before, during, and after each interview. All information given to the researcher will remain confidential. Any information you share with the researcher will not be shared with your partner, and vice versa. Any paperwork with identifying information (such as this signed consent form or your written journal) will be kept in the researcher’s locked office in a locked filing cabinet. After five years, the form will be destroyed. Only the researchers will have access to the audio files, electronic transcripts, and the written journal. Information from these interviews may be shared with others through published research papers or conference presentations. Broad findings may be shared or direct quotes from your interviews. In these instances though, no identifying information will be used. Stories will not be linked to you personally in any way.

It is important to note that the research staff and the interviewer are mandated reporters. That means that we are required by law to report instances in which minors or other vulnerable individuals (such as the elderly, or individuals with developmental disabilities) are at risk of harm. We do not anticipate such information to be part of the interview process, but if it is revealed, please know that confidentiality may be broken in order to report such information to appropriate authorities.

Participation from this study is completely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate in the interview. Additionally, you are free to choose not to answer any individual question during the interview, even after agreeing to participate in the study. You can refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Illinois, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. By agreeing
to participate in this study, you are not waiving any of your legal rights, or affecting your status with any programs you may currently be involved in.

Participation in this study may benefit you in several ways. First, many individuals find it cathartic to share their personal stories. You may also benefit others who are experiencing similar situations. It may also benefit you to know that one goal of this study is to create more supportive and welcoming work environments for all in the future and your participation can help with that aim. As a participant in this study, you will also receive $40 upon completion of this interview as a thank you for your time.

We do not anticipate risk for participating in this study. However, we acknowledge that you might feel uncomfortable at times talking about your experiences. Please let the researcher know at any point if you are feeling distressed and the interview can be paused or stopped. Remember, you are also free to refuse to answer any question that makes you too uncomfortable and you can stop the interview at any time. At the completion of the interview, the researcher will also provide you a list of resources that may help if you feel distressed following your participation.

Again, you may ask any questions about this project or the research process to the interviewer, Elizabeth Holman, at any time via email at eholman@illinois.edu. You may also contact the principal investigator, Dr. Ramona Oswald, at any time at (217) 333-2547 or at roswald@illinois.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant, the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board may be contacted at (217) 333-2670 or via email at irb@illinois.edu.

Please initial each statement and then sign below:

I understand and have been given a copy of the consent form.

I agree to participate in this study.

I agree to be audio-taped for my interview.

I agree that my partner may be contacted for an interview.

__________________________________________
Signature of Research Participant

___________________
Date
Appendix E
Statewide Employment Laws and Policies
(as reported by the Human Rights Campaign, 2016) as of 5/9/16
Appendix F  
Study 2 Interview Protocol

**Interview 1.**

This is interview # _________________. Thank you again for agreeing to be interviewed and to share your experiences with me. The goal of this interview is for me to learn about your workplace and experiences you may have had their in relation to your sexual orientation or your relationship. I’m also interested in knowing about your work/family balance as well, so I’m going to ask you about your work environment, your relationship, and how you balance work and family responsibilities. Does that sound okay? ____

So today, we are specifically going to be talking about your workplace and then we will schedule a time to meet in about one month when we can talk more about that work/family balance. Remember, participation is voluntary, so if you ever don’t want to answer a particular question, we can skip it.

First, I want to get some basic information about you and your family.

- How old are you?  
- What is your race? 
- Do you identify as: 
  - Male 
  - Female 
  - Transgender 
  - Or another gender label? 
- How do you label your sexual orientation? 
- What does that label mean to you? 

- How important or central is your sexual orientation to you (generally in your life with your family)? 
  - Not at all important 
  - Sort of important 
  - Important 
  - Very important 
  - Extremely important 
- Can you describe what you mean by that? How so? 
- Does your relationship affect this importance at all? 

- How important or central is your sexual orientation to you (in your role at work)? 
  - Not at all important 
  - Sort of important 
  - Important 
  - Very important 
  - Extremely important 
- Can you describe what you mean by that? How so? 
- Is there ever a time when this importance level changed at work? 
  - Describe what changed. 

- Are you currently in a relationship?  
- Inclusion criteria (Monogamous, living together, at least one year)!
How long have you been in this current relationship?

What is the status of your current relationship?
- Legally married
- Commitment ceremony (without a legal marriage license)
- Civil Union
- Domestic Partnership
- Committed relationship, but no ceremony or legal recognition

Have you ever had any of the others?

What is your partner’s gender?

Do you currently live together?

Are you a parent?
- How many children do you have? What are their ages?
- What is your relationship to each child? What is your partner’s relationship to them?
- Do the children live with you full-time?

What is your current primary employment status?
- Employed full-time for wages 🔗 Inclusion criteria!
  - Not eligible if: Employed part-time for wages; Self-employed; Out of work, but want to return to work; Homemaker; Retired; Full-time student
- How many hours per week are you at this job? 🔗 Inclusion criteria (30+)!
- How long have you been at your current organization?
- Have you held any other jobs since you have been with your current partner?

What kind of work do you do in your primary job?
- So, broadly, would you say you are in:
  - Architecture/Engineering
  - Arts/Design/Entertainment/Sports/Media
  - Building and Grounds Cleaning/Maintenance
  - Community/Social Services
  - Construction/Extraction
  - Farming/Fishing/Forestry
  - Health Care Practitioners/Technicians
  - Installation/Maintenance/Repair
  - Life/Physical/Social Scientist
  - Military
  - Office/Administrative Support
  - Production/Manufacturing
  - Transportation/Material Moving
  - Business/Financial Operations
  - Computers/Mathematical
  - Education/Training/Librarian
  - Food Preparation/Serving
  - Health Care Support Worker
  - Legal
  - Management
  - Municipal Protective Services
  - (e.g., police, fire)
  - Personal Care/Service
  - Sales

Describe a typical work day for me.
- Where are you?
- What do you do?
- Who do you interact with?
  - Bosses? Coworkers? Clients?
- How would you describe your actual workplace?

How much power or status do you feel you have in your current position at work? Explain your answer.
(For example, can you set your own hours? Do you supervise any other employees? How many people do you report to?)

- Can you easily take a day off work for family or personal issues?

- How much stress do you feel in your current work position?
- What are your biggest stressors at work?
- Where do you get support when something is overwhelming or stressful at work?
- Does your workplace support you in any ways? How so?

- I’m curious about the general culture at your workplace. Is it friendly? Do people chat about their personal lives? Or is it more clock-in, clock-out/people don’t interact a lot on a personal level? Is it cliquish or welcoming to new employees? That type of stuff.
- Talk to me about the overall culture.
  - Do your work colleagues talk about their personal lives at all? Do you know about their partners or children?

- How would you describe the overall climate towards sexual minorities in your workplace?
  - Supportive; Tolerant; or Hostile
- Can you describe what you mean by that?
- What would [supportive/hostile] workplace look like to you?
  - Use a different descriptor than what they gave.

- Have you disclosed your sexual orientation to anyone at work?
  - Tell me about that experience. How did you disclose that information?
  - What thoughts or factors went into your decision to disclose (or not)? What was your reason for disclosing?
  - If you have not disclosed, what makes you choose not to?
  - What was the reaction you received and how did you respond to that?

- Do you talk about your relationship with anyone at work?
  - Who? Why or why not?
  - What types of things do you talk about?
  - What is the general reaction when you talk about it?
  - Can you share a specific conversation you’ve had?
- What types of things do you talk to your coworkers about regarding your relationship or your family?

- Do you know if there are any other LGBT employees at your work or if any of your colleagues are also in a same-sex relationship?
  - How do you know?

Okay, now I’m going list some experiences with discrimination that other people have had happen to them. I’m wondering how much you see this going on in your workplace, whether it has happened to you, you have witnessed it happening to someone else, or someone has told you it happened. So have any of the following experiences happened at work or involving a coworker?

- Overheard anti-LGBTQ comments
- Shunned, avoided, ignored
- Teased, called names
- Threatened with physical violence
- Pushed, slapped, tripped
- Punched, kicked, beaten
- Asked to leave an event
- Refused services
- Had my property vandalized
- Outed without my permission
- Been followed

If the participant says yes, ask them to elaborate on the story?
  - Did this happen to you or someone else?
  - How often does it happen?
  - Who does it?
  - What was your reaction?
  - Did you talk about it at home with your partner?
  - How did your partner react?
  - Did you alter your approach at work or with coworkers?

Now I’m going to share some sentences that other people have used to describe their workplace and how employees who identify as LGBT are treated. And I want you to think about and tell me how much you think these statements describe your current workplace.

- Coworkers are as likely to ask nice, interested questions about same-sex relationships as they are about a heterosexual relationship.
- Non-LGBT employees are comfortable engaging in gay-friendly humor with LGBT employees (e.g. kidding them about a date).
- The atmosphere for LGBT employees is oppressive.
- LGBT employees feel accepted by coworkers.
- Coworkers make comments that seem to indicate a lack of awareness of LGBT issues.
- LGBT employees fear job loss because of sexual orientation.
- LGBT employees are comfortable talking about their personal lives with coworkers.
- There is no pressure for LGBT employees to stay closeted (to conceal their sexual orientation, gender identity, or relationship status).
- LGBT employees are met with thinly veiled hostility (e.g. scornful looks, icy tone of voice, being ignored in meetings).
- The company or institution as a whole provides a supportive environment for LGBT people.
- LGBT employees feel free to display pictures of a same-sex partner.
- The atmosphere for LGBT employees is improving.

(Follow up questions)
- What do you mean by that? How so? Can you give a specific example?
- Is there anything else you would like me to know about your workplace?

Thank you so much for your time. Can we now schedule another time to talk again in about a month? I would like to follow-up with you then about any questions I might have after I have a chance to reflect on our conversation today. I would also like to hear more about your work/family balance.

Also, I would like to give you this journal. You can use this journal to reflect on experiences that happen in the workplace related to your sexual orientation or relationship. If you have a particular conversation with your partner about your work, you might jot notes down in this journal. Or if you simply think about
something between now and our next interview that you want to share with me about your workplace or the work/family balance, you can write that down as well. I will collect this journal at our last interview together, but it might be a nice way to start the conversation next time we meet.

Do you have any questions for me? __________

Interview 2.

It’s so nice to see you again. Thank you for agreeing to speak with me for a second time. How have things been since we last talked?
- Has anything changed in terms of your employment?
- Do you have anything written in your journal that we can talk about?

First, I have a couple of questions I want to ask you about our last conversation.
- [Questions generated for this section will be based on anything that is unclear from the prior interview as well as preliminary analysis that has been conducted up to this point.]

Okay, now I want to ask a few questions about your relationship with your partner and how you balance your work and family responsibilities.

Tell me about your current relationship.
- How visible are you as a couple (with family / in public / at work)? Do people know you are together?
- What are some of the biggest arguments or disagreements you have with your partner?
- Do you feel supported by your partner?
  - How?
  - Is there any other type of support you would want from them?
- How well do you feel your partner meets your needs?
- Where do you feel support when something is frustrating with your relationship?

- What would you say your main source of stress is right now?
  - How do you cope with these stressors?
- In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?
  - What is most satisfying about it?
  - What is taking away from your satisfaction?

- What types of things do you talk to your partner about related to your work?
  - What made you decide to share these things?
  - Was there ever a time when you did not share these types of stories? What changed?
- Does your partner talk to you about their work? Explain.
- How much time do you spend interacting with your partner when you are at work or discussing family life with work colleagues?

Now I want to know a little bit about your work/family balance. First of all, what does work and life balance mean to you?
- Can you describe your current work/family balance?
- What are the main challenges you face when attempting to balance your work and family roles?
- Do you believe that your work/family balance is better/the same/or worse than that of your colleagues? In what ways?
• Can you describe how your current or previous supervisors/managers have supported your work/family balance?
• What about hindered your work/family balance?

Now I’m going to tell some things that other people have said about their work/family balance. Can you tell me how much you feel like these statements reflect your own current work experience?
• There isn’t much time to socialize, relax with my partner, or see family in the week.
• I have to take work home most evenings.
• I often work late or at weekends to deal with paperwork without interruptions.
• Relaxing and forgetting about work issues is hard to do.
• I worry about the effect of work stress on my relationship.
• My relationship with my partner is suffering because of the pressure or long hours of my work.
• Finding time for hobbies, leisure activities, or to maintain friendships and extended family relationships is difficult.
• I would like to reduce my working hours and stress levels, but feel I have no control over the current situation.

• How frequently do your responsibilities at home reduce the effort you can devote to your job?
• How frequently do your personal or family worries and problems distract you when you are at work?
• Do you feel that stress at home makes you irritable at work? How so?

• Do you feel supported by your workplace? How?
• Does your workplace support your relationship in any way? How so?
• Do you feel your workplace supports you as an LGBTQ person?

How much do you agree with the following statements? Explain or give an example.
• Talking with someone at home helps you deal with problems at work.
• The love and respect you get at home makes you feel confident about yourself at work.
• Your home life helps you relax and feel ready for the next day’s work.

• Overall, do you feel balanced in your work and family roles? Why or why not?
• What would you like to feel more balanced?
• Do you separate your work life from family life? How? Why?
• In what ways do your work and family life overlap?
• Is there any discomfort with your current work/family border?
• What would the ideal border between work and family look like for you in terms of separation or overlap in roles, activities, and behaviors?

• What would you like from your workplace to feel more supported? As an employee? As an employee in a same-sex relationship?

• Is there anything else you would like me to know about stress or discrimination you experience related to your relationship or your sexual orientation?

Thank you so much for your time and sharing your experiences with me. I really appreciate it. As I mentioned before, I am going to set up a time to talk to your partner as well in the next week or so. I would also like to set up one more interview with you in about a month to check in. Is that still okay?
I’d also like to remind you to continue journaling between now and then. We can use that to start our conversation next time as well.

I’m wondering if you can also get me some more information about your workplace. Does your company have any written materials about workplace policies, human resources materials, grievances in the workplace, or a general employee handbook? Can you please get me a copy of any information like this that is available? I would like to see it at our next interview.

Interview 3.

Thank you again for agreeing to meet with me today. This will be our last interview, so I just want to check in with you to see if there is anything else that you would like to share with me about your work experiences or your romantic relationship.

- Do you have anything written in your journal that you would like to talk about?
- Can I now take this journal with me?
- Do you have any work documents (e.g. Human Resources materials or an employee handbook) that you can share with me?

[Questions generated for this section will be based on anything that is unclear from the prior interview as well as preliminary analysis that has been conducted up to this point.]

Finally, I’m wondering what you think are ways that workplaces can be more supportive of LGBTQ employees moving forward.

- What would the ideal work environment look like for you?
- What workplace characteristics seem the most family friendly?
- What policies or programs do you believe would be most beneficial to you as a sexual minority?
- Are there any current programs or policies that your organization offers that support your work/family balance? Which ones?
- What recommendations would you make to your organization to improve your work/family balance?

Thank you again so much for talking with me over these past few months. It has been wonderful getting to know you. Do you have any last questions for me?

Interview Protocol for Partners

Interview 1. This partner interview will take place around the time of Interview 2 for the identified participants.

This is interview #_________. Thank you again for agreeing to be interviewed and to share your experiences with me. The goal of this interview is for me to learn about experiences with discrimination or harassment in the workplace and your work/family life balance. We’re going to focus on one workplace, so with _______ as the identified participant, I want to know about your relationship with their workplace and how your family is affected by their work. Does that sound okay? Remember, participation is voluntary, so if you ever don’t want to answer a particular question, we can skip it.
First, I want to get some basic information about you and your family.

- How old are you? ⇔ Inclusion criteria!
- What is your race?
- Do you identify as:
  - Male
  - Female
  - Transgender
  - Or another gender label?
- How do you label your sexual orientation?
- What does that label mean to you?
- How out are you as a __________?
- How important or central is your sexual orientation to you (generally in your life with your family)?
  - Not at all important
  - Sort of important
  - Important
  - Very important
  - Extremely important
- Can you describe what you mean by that? How so?
- Does your relationship affect this importance at all?

- Are you currently in a relationship? ⇔ Inclusion criteria!
  - How long have you been in this current relationship?
  - What is the status of your current relationship?
    - Legally married
    - Commitment ceremony (without a legal marriage license)
    - Civil Union
    - Domestic Partnership
    - Committed relationship, but no ceremony or paperwork
  - What is your partner’s gender?
  - Do you currently live together?

- What is your overall perception of your partner’s workplace? Do you think it is supportive, tolerant, or hostile towards LGBTQ people?
  - What makes you think that?
  - What would a __________[supportive/tolerant/hostile]_________ workplace look like?
- Have you talked to your partner about any type of harassment or discrimination they may have experienced at work?
  - Walk me through that conversation. How did it go?
  - How did that make you feel?

Okay, now I’m going list some experiences with discrimination that other people have had happen to them. I’m wondering how much you see this going on at your partner’s workplace. Whether it has happened to them or to someone else, I’m wondering if they have ever talked to you about any of these experiences.

- Overheard anti-LGBTQ comments
- Shunned, avoided, ignored
- Teased, called names
- Threatened with physical violence
- Pushed, slapped, tripped
• Punched, kicked, beaten
• Asked to leave an event
• Refused services
• Had my property vandalized
• Outed without my permission
• Been followed

• If the participant says yes, ask them to elaborate on the story?
  o Did this happen to you or someone else?
  o How often does it happen?
  o Who does it?
  o What was your reaction?
  o How did you talk about it with your partner?
  o How did your partner react?

Now I’m going to share some sentences that other people have used to describe their workplace and how employees who identify as LGBT are treated. Can you tell me whether any of these describe your workplace very well, a little bit, or not at all?
• Coworkers are as likely to ask nice, interested questions about same-sex relationships as they are about a heterosexual relationship.
• Non-LGBT employees are comfortable engaging in gay-friendly humor with LGBT employees (e.g. kidding them about a date).
• The atmosphere for LGBT employees is oppressive.
• LGBT employees feel accepted by coworkers.
• Coworkers make comments that seem to indicate a lack of awareness of LGBT issues.
• LGBT employees fear job loss because of sexual orientation.
• LGBT employees are comfortable talking about their personal lives with coworkers.
• There is no pressure for LGBT employees to stay closeted (to conceal their sexual orientation, gender identity, or relationship status).
• LGBT employees are met with thinly veiled hostility (e.g. scornful looks, icy tone of voice, being ignored in meetings).
• The company or institution as a whole provides a supportive environment for LGBT people.
• LGBT employees feel free to display pictures of a same-sex partner.
• The atmosphere for LGBT employees is improving.

(Follow up questions)
• What do you mean by that? How so? Can you give a specific example?

• Where do you get support when something is overwhelming or stressful at work?

• Is there anything else you would like me to know about your workplace?

Okay, now I want to ask a few questions about your relationship with your partner and how you balance your work and family responsibilities.

Tell me about your current relationship.
• How visible are you as a couple (with family / in public / at work)? Do people know you are together?
• What are some of the biggest arguments or disagreements you have with your partner?
• Do you feel supported by your partner?
  o How?
  o Is there any other type of support you would want from them?
• How well do you feel your partner meets your needs?
• Where do you get support when something is frustrating with your relationship?

• What would you say your main source of stress is right now?
  o How do you cope with these stressors?
• In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?
  o What is most satisfying about it?
  o What is taking away from your satisfaction?

• What types of things do you talk to your partner about related to their work?
  o What made you decide to share these things?
  o Was there ever a time when you did not share these types of stories? What changed?
• Do you talk to your partner about their work? Explain.

• What does the idea of work-family balance mean to you?
• Overall, do you feel your partner is balanced in their work and family roles?
  o Why or why not?
• What would help to feel more balanced?
• Do they separate their work life from family life? How? Why?
• In what ways does your partner’s work and your family life together overlap?
• How well do you know your partner’s colleagues?
• What types of interactions have you had with your partner’s colleagues?
• Is there any discomfort with your current work/family border?
• What would the ideal border between work and family look like for you in terms of separation or overlap in roles, activities, and behaviors?

• Is there anything else you would like me to know about stress or discrimination experiences related to your relationship or your sexual orientation?

Thank you so much for your time and sharing your experiences with me. I really appreciate it. As I mentioned before, I would like to follow up with you in about a month. Is that still okay? Can we schedule that time to meet now? _____________

Interview 2. This partner interview will take place around the time of Interview 3 for the identified participant.

It’s so nice to see you again. Thank you for agreeing to speak with me for a second time. How have things been since we last talked? Has anything changed significantly?

I have a couple of questions I want to ask you about our last conversation.
• [Questions generated for this section will be based on anything that is unclear from the prior interview as well as preliminary analysis that has been conducted up to this point.]
Finally, I’m wondering what you think are ways that workplaces can be more supportive of LGBQ employees moving forward.

- What would the ideal work environment look like for you?
- What workplace characteristics seem the most family friendly?
- What policies or programs do you believe would be most beneficial to you as a sexual minority?
- Are there any current programs or policies that your organization offers that support your work/family balance? Which ones?
- What recommendations would you make to your organization to improve your work/family balance?

Thank you again for meeting with me and sharing your story. I really appreciate your time.
### Table 7

**Correlation matrix for minority stress processes, social supports, relationship satisfaction, and continuous covariates using raw data.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Years as a couple</th>
<th>Relationship sanctified by god</th>
<th>Visible relationship</th>
<th>Importance of sexual orientation</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Miles from work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work stress expectations</td>
<td>-0.02 (p = .79)</td>
<td>0.07 (p = .39)</td>
<td>-0.26** (p ≤ .001)</td>
<td>0.10 (p = .23)</td>
<td>0.07 (p = .37)</td>
<td>-0.14 (p = .09)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean Concealment</td>
<td>-0.05 (p = .53)</td>
<td>-0.03 (p = .69)</td>
<td>-0.52*** (p ≤ .001)</td>
<td>0.07 (p = .35)</td>
<td>-0.02 (p = .80)</td>
<td>-0.02 (p = .78)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work support</td>
<td>0.01 (p = .92)</td>
<td>-0.02 (p = .81)</td>
<td>0.40*** (p ≤ .001)</td>
<td>-0.14 (p = .09)</td>
<td>0.02 (p = .84)</td>
<td>0.21** (p = .01)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PHQ sum</td>
<td>-0.13 (p = .10)</td>
<td>-0.09 (p = .25)</td>
<td>-0.17* (p = .03)</td>
<td>0.11 (p = .15)</td>
<td>-0.02 (p = .81)</td>
<td>-0.12 (p = .13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship satisfaction</td>
<td>-0.051 (p = .52)</td>
<td>.03 (p = .72)</td>
<td>0.19* (p = .02)</td>
<td>-0.04 (p = .61)</td>
<td>-0.12 (p = .15)</td>
<td>0.06 (p = .42)</td>
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*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

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135
Table 7 (cont.)

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<th></th>
<th>Education</th>
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<tr>
<td>Work stress expectations</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.13</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(p = .87)</td>
<td>(p = .10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean Concealment</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(p = .55)</td>
<td>(p = .16)</td>
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<td>Work support</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.03</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(p = .11)</td>
<td>(p = .72)</td>
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<td>PHQ sum</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(p = .56)</td>
<td>(p = .09)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship satisfaction</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(p = .78)</td>
<td>(p = .73)</td>
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*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
Table 8
*T-test matrix for minority stress processes, social supports, relationship satisfaction, and categorical covariates using raw data.*

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<th>Living together</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$ (SD)</td>
<td>$M$ (SD)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work stress expectations</td>
<td>1.43 (.56)</td>
<td>1.42 (.46)</td>
<td>$t = -0.12$</td>
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<td></td>
<td>N = 124</td>
<td>N = 34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean concealment</td>
<td>1.42 (.53)</td>
<td>1.78 (.59)</td>
<td><strong>t = 3.49</strong>*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>N = 126</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.97 (.74)</td>
<td>2.78 (.84)</td>
<td>$t = -1.31$</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 123</td>
<td>N = 35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHQ sum</td>
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<td>4.38 (.58)</td>
<td>$t = 1.67$</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 128</td>
<td>N = 36</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship satisfaction</td>
<td>4.37 (.62)</td>
<td>4.38 (.58)</td>
<td>$t = 0.14$</td>
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<td></td>
<td>N = 128</td>
<td>N = 36</td>
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*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

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<th>Commitment Ceremony</th>
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<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$ (SD)</td>
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*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
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*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

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*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
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*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
Table 8 (cont.)

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* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

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* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$
Table 8 (cont.)

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*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
Table 8 (cont.)

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*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

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<td>2.85 (.79)</td>
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|                                | Racial Minority |                                   |         |
|                                |                 |                                   | t       |
|                                | Yes             | No                                |         |
|                                | M (SD)          | M (SD)                            |         |
| Work stress expectations       | 1.20 (.28)      | 1.45 (.56)                        | t = 2.65*|
|                                | N = 12          | N = 145                           |         |
| Mean concealment               | 1.55 (.69)      | 1.50 (.55)                        | t = -0.24|
|                                | N = 11          | N = 149                           |         |
| Work support                   | 2.73 (.94)      | 2.96 (.75)                        | t = 0.93|
|                                | N = 10          | N = 147                           |         |
| PHQ sum                        | 5.92 (5.71)     | 4.66 (4.24)                       | t = -0.96|
|                                | N = 12          | N = 153                           |         |
| Relationship satisfaction      | 4.43 (.41)      | 4.37 (.62)                        | t = -0.31|
|                                | N = 11          | N = 151                           |         |
|                                | *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001 |             |         |
Table 8 (cont.)

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<td>1.69 (.62)</td>
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<td>$t = 2.40^*$</td>
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<td>N = 38</td>
<td>N = 131</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship satisfaction</td>
<td>4.36 (.60)</td>
<td>4.38 (.62)</td>
<td>$t = -0.18$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 37</td>
<td>N = 128</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$p < .05; \; **p < .01; \; ***p < .001$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Below the Poverty Threshold</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>$t$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( M (SD) )</td>
<td>( M (SD) )</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work stress expectations</td>
<td>1.61 (.62)</td>
<td>1.41 (.54)</td>
<td>$t = -1.23$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 12</td>
<td>N = 145</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean concealment</td>
<td>1.86 (.53)</td>
<td>1.47 (.55)</td>
<td>$t = -2.56^*$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 14</td>
<td>N = 146</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work support</td>
<td>2.38 (.81)</td>
<td>2.99 (.74)</td>
<td>$t = 2.81^{**}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 13</td>
<td>N = 144</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHQ sum</td>
<td>6.80 (5.23)</td>
<td>4.55 (4.22)</td>
<td>$t = -1.93$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 15</td>
<td>N = 150</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship satisfaction</td>
<td>4.46 (4.01)</td>
<td>4.36 (.63)</td>
<td>$t = -0.55$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = 14</td>
<td>N = 148</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001*
Table 8 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Management/Professional Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work stress expectations</td>
<td>1.43 (.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean concealment</td>
<td>1.45 (.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work support</td>
<td>2.95 (.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHQ sum</td>
<td>4.70 (4.52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship satisfaction</td>
<td>4.38 (.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
Table 9
*T-test analysis for prejudice events and continuous covariates based on raw data.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Experienced Prejudice Event at the Hands of a Coworker</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years as a couple</td>
<td>8.15 (6.23)</td>
<td>7.76 (7.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 40</td>
<td>N = 129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship sanctified by god</td>
<td>2.37 (.75)</td>
<td>2.41 (.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 38</td>
<td>N = 120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible relationship</td>
<td>4.18 (.84)</td>
<td>4.62 (.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 40</td>
<td>N = 129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of sexual orientation</td>
<td>3.80 (.97)</td>
<td>3.57 (.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 40</td>
<td>N = 131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>41.72 (11.45)</td>
<td>40.02 (11.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 39</td>
<td>N = 125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miles from work</td>
<td>9.05 (12.81)</td>
<td>8.57 (13.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 39</td>
<td>N = 130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>6.95 (1.12)</td>
<td>6.59 (1.79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 39</td>
<td>N = 128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal income</td>
<td>6.13 (3.22)</td>
<td>5.27 (3.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N = 39</td>
<td>N = 128</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
Table 10

*Chi-square matrix for prejudice events and categorical covariates based on raw data.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Experienced Prejudice Event</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At the Hands of a Coworker</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>$\chi^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living together</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 169)</td>
<td></td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>76.0%</td>
<td>82.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*p &lt; .05; **p &lt; .01; ***p &lt; .001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment Ceremony</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 170)</td>
<td></td>
<td>76.9%</td>
<td>82.5%</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*p &lt; .05; **p &lt; .01; ***p &lt; .001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Partnership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 166)</td>
<td></td>
<td>85.0%</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*p &lt; .05; **p &lt; .01; ***p &lt; .001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Union</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 168)</td>
<td></td>
<td>98.4%</td>
<td>97.4%</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*p &lt; .05; **p &lt; .01; ***p &lt; .001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experienced Prejudice Event At the Hands of a Coworker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--|--
|                              | No           | Yes    | $\chi^2$ |
| Legal Marriage (N = 167)     | No           | 92.9%  | 90.0%    | 0.07 |
|                              | Yes          | 7.1%   | 10.0%    |
| *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001 |
| Power of Attorney (N = 171)  | No           | 53.4%  | 57.5%    | 0.07 |
|                              | Yes          | 46.6%  | 42.5%    |
| *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001 |
| Own a home together (N = 171)| No           | 55.7%  | 52.5%    | 0.03 |
|                              | Yes          | 44.3%  | 47.5%    |
| *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001 |
| Share Finances (N = 171)     | No           | 36.6%  | 35.0%    | 0.00 |
|                              | Yes          | 63.4%  | 65.0%    |
| *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001 |
Table 10 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Experienced Prejudice Event</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At the Hands of a Coworker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>$\chi^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Status</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 170)</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Experienced Prejudice Event</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At the Hands of a Coworker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>$\chi^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Identity</td>
<td>74.0%</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 171)</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Experienced Prejudice Event</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At the Hands of a Coworker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>$\chi^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian Identity</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 171)</td>
<td>53.4%</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Experienced Prejudice Event</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At the Hands of a Coworker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>$\chi^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual, queer, or</td>
<td>79.4%</td>
<td>92.5%</td>
<td>2.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pansexual identity</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 171)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001
Table 10 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Sex (N = 171)</th>
<th>Experienced Prejudice Event At the Hands of a Coworker</th>
<th>χ²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>No 25.5% Yes 22.5%</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>No 74.8% Yes 77.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Minority (N = 167)</th>
<th>Experienced Prejudice Event At the Hands of a Coworker</th>
<th>χ²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No 93.0% Yes 92.3%</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No 7.0% Yes 7.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employed Full-Time (N = 171)</th>
<th>Experienced Prejudice Event At the Hands of a Coworker</th>
<th>χ²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No 24.4% Yes 15.0%</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No 75.6% Yes 85.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household below poverty threshold (N = 167)</th>
<th>Experienced Prejudice Event At the Hands of a Coworker</th>
<th>χ²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No 90.6% Yes 92.3%</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No 9.4% Yes 7.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001
Table 10 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management or Professional Occupation (N = 169)</th>
<th>Experienced Prejudice Event At the Hands of a Coworker</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>( \chi^2 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>86.8%</td>
<td>85.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

*Note. Chi-square tests reported here use Yates’ Correction for Continuity to compensate for the 2x2 nature of these analyses.*
Appendix H
Study 2 Codebook

Demographic Information
- Information about employment
  - Previous employment
  - Current workplace policies
- Information about Participant
  - Participant identity characteristics
- Information about partner
  - Partner identity characteristics
- Information about romantic relationship

General Stressors

Minority stress processes at work
- External victimization or stigma
- Expectations of stigma or anticipation of rejection
- Internalized homophobia
- Concealment
- Denied support or partner unaware of stress processes

Work-family border characteristics
- Psychological borders
  - Inflexible psychological borders
  - Permeable psychological borders
- Temporal borders
  - Inflexible temporal borders
  - Permeable temporal borders
- Physical borders
  - Inflexible physical borders
  - Permeable physical borders

Supports received
- Supports from within the family domain
- Supports within the work domain

Effects of stress processes
- Stress affecting participant
- Stress affecting partner
- Stress affecting the relationship

Recommendations