

10-2009

The Influence of Being "Out" on Perceptions of Managerial Credibility and Positive Affect

Justin P. Boren
Santa Clara University, jboren@scu.edu

Mary B. McPherson

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarcommons.scu.edu/comm>

 Part of the [Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Boren, J. P. & McPherson, M. B. (2009). The influence of being "out"  in the workplace on perceptions of managerial credibility and affect. *Rocky Mountain Communication Review*, 6(2), 6 - 17.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts & Sciences at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Communication by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact rscroggin@scu.edu.

THE INFLUENCE OF BEING “OUT” ON PERCEPTIONS OF MANAGERIAL CREDIBILITY AND POSITIVE AFFECT

Justin P. Boren and Mary B. McPherson

Arizona State University and California State University, Long Beach



Volume 6 Number 2
October 2009

The purpose of this study was to determine if the revelation of sexuality by a gay man or lesbian manager would affect potential employees' perceptions of that manager. Using EVT, three hypotheses predicted that the manner in which information is revealed about the manager influences perceptions of that revelation as a violation, as well as perceptions of managerial credibility and positive affect. Employed participants (N = 470) completed surveys about a hypothetical manager. Results showed that the manner in which managers' sexuality was revealed influenced levels of expectedness. Mixed results were found for credibility and positive affect. The relationship between variables is discussed and practical applications of this material are presented.

Employees' opinions of their managers are integral to important workplace outcomes. For instance, employees' perceptions of managers affect work motivation (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000) job uncertainty (Ellis, 1992), group cohesion (Carless & DePalo, 2000), worker efficiency (Park, Sims Jr., & Motowidlo, 1986), job performance (Reio & Callahan, 2004), and job attitude (Schaubroeck, Ganster, & Kemmerer, 1996). As in the interpersonal context, individuals in the workplace typically develop opinions of others through the exchange of personal information (Bantz, 1993). These opinions, or judgments, are formed from various types of information such as observations of behaviors, self-disclosure, or comments from others.

Revealing personal information can result in constructive outcomes for managers. In fact, there is a positive relationship between managers' self-disclosure and employees' job satisfaction (Callan, 1993). Even in the instructional context, the typical step in career and life development, students report greater affective learning when instructors self disclose some types of personal

information (e.g. Sorensen, 1989). Although information revealed about managers may lead to positive changes in employees' perceptions, not all disclosures have the same effect. Disclosure of personal information that is considered unexpected and inappropriate for that environment is likely to garner more negative evaluations.

As Expectancy Violation Theory (EVT) explains, a violation of expectations will cause the violatee to form a judgment about the violation and the violator (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). Judgments can be based on a violation of a societal attitude or belief about proper communication behaviors or other salient characteristics (Levine, et al., 2000). Rooted in these societal attitudes and beliefs, discovering that someone is a gay man or lesbian often times leads to judgments that are negative (Russ, Simonds, & Hunt, 2002).

Since there are more heterosexual individuals than gay men or lesbians in society, the assumption of heterosexuality is a "norm," at least in the United States. Still, gay and lesbian characters are portrayed in popular media and gay and lesbian rights are consistently an issue in the political arena.



In fact, recent advances in same-sex marriage rights have brought a great deal of attention to issues of sexuality. Since societal images of gay men and lesbians are multifaceted, different aspects relating to the disclosure of sexuality might result in judgments about that individual. Additional evidence suggests that the way in which the information is received might also have an effect on those judgments. For instance, McPherson, Kearney, and Plax (2003) discovered that the manner in which teachers display anger to their students influence students' judgments of those teachers. Additionally, students evaluate some anger displays as more inappropriate than others. We argue that in organizational settings employees are likely to expect heterosexuality unless otherwise indicated (see Fone, 2000). However, when employees receive information about a manager being gay or lesbian, some ways in which they receive the information should be less expected than others. Moreover, those expectations should influence employees' perceptions of the manager.

EXPECTANCY VIOLATION THEORY

EVT describes the role that expectations play in the development of attitudes and beliefs about other individuals within various contexts. Burgoon and Hale (1988) explain that expectancies might result from both social norms and known idiosyncrasies of another. The violation of expected behavior causes psychological arousal followed by judgments of another after the violation has occurred (Burgoon, 1978). For instance, when students' expectations for course instructors are violated, students rate their instructors lower in credibility (Koermer & Petelle, 1991) than if the violation had not occurred. In a similar way, employees evaluate their managers when expected behaviors in organizations are violated.

Violations are interpreted based on two pieces of information: violation valence and communicator reward valence. First, violation valence is the extent to which the violation is perceived as positive or negative (Burgoon

& Hale, 1988). Some violations are inherently positive (such as an unexpected salary bonus), whereas others are normally considered negative violations (such as a public reprimand). However, when the valence of a violation is equivocal, judgments are influenced by a second kind of information, the communicator reward valence (Burgoon & Hale). Communicator reward valence is defined as the benefits outweighing the costs of continuing an interaction with the communicator. For situations in which the violation is unequivocal, though, judgments are based solely on the violation itself.

Lannutti, Laliker, and Hale (2001) studied students' evaluations of professors, after the professor violated expectations of appropriate touch. These researchers manipulated both the violation (touch) and the reward valence of the professor, with low reward teachers described as "disliked" and high reward teachers described as "liked" by students. The student respondents rated high reward professors higher in credibility than low reward professors across varying touch scenarios. Professors who were described as touching students' thighs, however, were rated as significantly lower in credibility than teachers who touched students' arms or did not touch students at all – regardless of teacher reward valence.

Much like the McPherson et al. (2003) study, Lannutti et al. (2001) found that the way in which teachers violated expectations of appropriate touch (type of touch) influenced students' evaluations of teacher credibility. In the Lannutti et al. study, general touch behaviors (e.g., arm touch) were considered more equivocal; therefore, students' evaluation of teachers' credibility relied primarily on the reward valence of the teacher. However, when the touch violations were extreme (e.g., thigh touch) students perceived the violation as unequivocal; therefore, the violation itself, rather than the reward valence, became more salient to the evaluation of the teacher. This more extreme violation led to student perceptions of the teacher as less credible regardless



of reward valence. Essentially, the type of touch, rather than touch in general, was the primary predictor of students' perceptions.

Directly expressing one's sexuality as gay or lesbian might be considered an unequivocal violation of expectation. After all, overwhelming evidence suggests that many people still react in a strong, negative way to gay men and lesbians despite sociopolitical advances in gay rights (Herek, 2002). Still, the violation occurs when managers reveal information about their sexuality. When the violation is unequivocal, then, the way in which information about managers' sexuality is revealed should influence specific employee perceptions of managers, regardless of the reward valence of the manager.

Lannutti et al. (2001) established credibility as an important outcome variable when expectancies are violated in power-distant relationships. Similarities can be drawn between students' ratings of instructors in the classroom context and employees' ratings of managers in the organizational context. Both teacher-student and supervisor-subordinate relationships involve accountability and power-distance, such that evaluation and recourse can occur in both contexts in very similar ways. Following from the instructional literature, credibility should be important in the workplace as well.

MANAGERIAL CREDIBILITY

Credibility is a very important construct in classroom settings (see Lannutti, et al., 2001; Russ, et al., 2002) as well as the workplace (see Cole & McCroskey, 2003; Ellis, 1992; Peterson, 1972) as both contexts involve power-distant relationships. McCroskey and Teven, (1999) found that credibility consists of competence (i.e. level of knowledge or expertise), trustworthiness (i.e. perceptions of honor, character, or ethics), and goodwill (i.e. perceptions of caring, empathy, and responsiveness). In the workplace, credibility is related to important organizational behaviors and judgments. For instance,

perceived credibility of opinion leaders is positively related to perceptions of effectiveness (Peterson, 1972) and managerial credibility is positively related to certainty about the worker's job (Ellis, 1992).

Importantly, managerial credibility may be influenced by the extent to which individuals conform to appropriate behavior in that context. Cole and McCroskey (2003) found that supervisors who were seen as more apprehensive or verbally aggressive were rated by their employees as lower in credibility than those who were less apprehensive or verbally aggressive. One could argue that when managers' aggressive behaviors violated social and/or normative assumptions of appropriateness, credibility was reduced. Similarly, Russ et al. (2002) discovered that when confederate guest lecturers explicitly disclosed their sexuality as being gay during an in-class simulation, students rated them lower in character and competence (two dimensions of credibility) than the guest lecturer who did not reveal that information. The violation of expectations can undoubtedly influence perceptions of credibility. Still, other judgments essential to worker productivity and attitude might also be affected by expectancy violations.

POSITIVE AFFECT

Positive affect, or feelings and communicated messages of positive emotion toward another person, are natural reactions individuals have toward others in various contexts (Murphy & Cleveland, 1991; Schaubroeck, et al., 1996). Management and business researchers have studied positive affect quite extensively. For instance, researchers have explored the relationship between affect and job performance (Reio & Callahan, 2004), group cohesion (Carless & DePalo, 2000), subordinates' attitudes about their jobs (Schaubroeck, et al., 1996), and performance feedback appraisals (Murphy & Cleveland, 1991; Varma, Denisi, & Peters, 1996).

Although research on positive affect in business is very



pervasive in the management literature, communication researchers have focused more attention on affect in the classroom. For example, Koermer and Petelle (1991) found that when students' expectations of classroom instruction matched what happened in the course, those students had higher and more positive levels of affect toward both the class content and the instructor's evaluations. Likewise, McPherson, Kearney, and Plax (2003) found that when instructors violate classroom norms by expressing angry messages toward that class, those students had lower levels of positive affect toward both the instructor and the class content. Clearly, expectations have an effect on feelings of liking. Results from both instructional communication and business and management literature indicate that communicated messages are commonly responsible for changes in receivers' levels of perceived positive affect toward the communicator.

Park et al. (1986) argued that when the focus of attention is on an individual's message, and that message is perceived as unusual (or unexpected), perceptions of positive affect are more likely to be altered than if those individuals were simply interacting in a normal situation. For some, revealing one's sexuality might be an extreme violation, causing a significant change in positive affect toward the violator. Taken together, when an employee is aware of a manager's revelation of sexuality, a judgment will be cast by that employee, namely those of credibility and positive affect.

HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Attitudes and beliefs about others are fostered through expectations of their behaviors (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). These attitudes may be based on society's prevailing normative assumptions (Herek, 1984, 2002). Being gay or lesbian in American society generally garners strong, negative evaluations (Herek, 2002). Therefore, the revealing of a manager's sexuality as gay or lesbian can be considered an unequivocal message. Judgments of the manager should

then be based on how the message is delivered rather than the reward valence of the violator. Specifically, a manager revealing his or her sexuality should be evaluated differently from a coworker revealing a manager's sexuality. To that end, the following hypothesis is advanced:

H1: The way in which managers' sexuality is revealed (as gay or lesbian) will influence employees' perceptions of that revelation as an expectancy violation.

Expectancy violations result in judgments about the violator (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). Furthermore, research demonstrates that both perceptions of managerial credibility and positive affect are salient judgments employees make of their managers (Burgoon & Hale, 1988; Koermer & Petelle, 1991; Lannutti, et al., 2001; Park, et al., 1986). Moreover, perceptions of managerial credibility and positive affect should be influenced by the manner in which the information is revealed. Therefore, the next two hypotheses are:

H2: The way in which managers' sexuality is revealed (as gay or lesbian) will influence employees' perceptions of managerial credibility.

H3: The way in which managers' sexuality is revealed (as gay or lesbian) will influence employees' perceptions of positive affect toward their managers.

Previous research (e.g., Russ, et al., 2002; Waldo & Kemp, 1997), has only examined gay male disclosures. Therefore, to gauge whether or not sex of the violator affects the posited perceptions in the hypotheses, we asked:

RQ: Does sex of the manager affect employees' perceptions of expectations, credibility and positive affect?

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

A sample of student volunteers (N = 470) enrolled in



general education and communication courses at a large western university were solicited by the researcher to participate in the study. Importantly, participants were either currently employed or had been employed in the past. When asked about their work experience, 368 (78.3%) respondents indicated that they were currently employed, and 102 (21.7%) were not currently employed, but had held jobs in the past. Respondents who indicated no job experience ($n = 32$, 6.4%) were removed from the study. The participants worked in a variety of general industries with more than 80% working in either “retail trade” ($n = 199$, 42.3%), or “service industries” ($n = 191$, 40.6%). The remaining participants were classified under a wide variety of other industries.

Volunteers ranged in age from 18 to 55 years old ($M = 22.76$ years, $SD = 4.54$), with 70.9% indicating they were female ($n = 333$) and 29.1% indicating they were male ($n = 137$). The sample included students enrolled in upper division and general education undergraduate courses resulting in participants from various levels of education including 249 seniors (53%), 196 juniors (41.7%), 18 sophomores (3.8%), three graduate students (0.6%), and four who indicated other (0.9%). Respondents reported 52 different majors with communication studies ($n = 187$, 39.8%), business ($n = 35$, 7.4%), psychology ($n = 27$, 5.7%), biology ($n = 19$, 4%), and fashion merchandising ($n = 15$, 3.2%) reported most frequently.

Participants represented a variety of ethnic backgrounds, with most self identified as “Euro-American” ($n = 209$, 44.5%), followed by “Latino(a)-American” ($n = 84$, 17.9%), “Asian-American” ($n = 79$, 16.8%), “African-American” ($n = 26$, 5.5%), and “Native-American” ($n = 1$, 0.21%). Another 65 selected “Other” (13.8%) with six participants (1.28%) declining to indicate. Participants were also asked to self-report their sexuality by checking the category that best represented their orientations, with most indicating “heterosexual” ($n = 430$, 91.5%), followed

by “homosexual” ($n = 16$, 3.4%), “decline to state” ($n = 10$, 2.1%), “bisexual” ($n = 4$, 0.9%), and “other” ($n = 2$, 0.4%). Eight participants (1.7%) did not indicate their sexuality. Participants who identified themselves as homosexual or bisexual were not removed from the study since there are representative numbers of homosexual or bisexual workers who might still judge managers on message expectation.

PROCEDURES

Following past expectancy violation studies (Lannutti, et al., 2001), the present investigation used a scenario-base design to manipulate revelations of managers’ sexuality. Participants were randomly assigned to one of six scenarios. Participants completed basic demographic questions, and then were asked to imagine that they were the employees in the scenario presented to them. After reading the scenario, participants responded to a self-report questionnaire measuring the dependent variables. Following those measures, the participants were asked a few more demographic questions including their biological sex, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, current class standing, and major.

EXPECTANCY VIOLATION SCENARIOS

The scenarios depicting an employee/manager interaction were created based on Lannutti and colleagues’ (2001) study. In the present study, reward valence was held constant throughout all scenarios. This was accomplished by indicating that the manager (who, by virtue of being a manager, had high reward valence) is sending the employee on an all-expense paid training trip to Chicago. The manager’s age, educational background, work experience and attitude were also described. In order to manipulate the violation (revealing of sexuality) and sex of the manager, scenarios were modified in which the manager (either gay male or lesbian) revealed his or her sexual orientation directly to the hypothetical employee, or the reader found out indirectly (not directly from the manager) that the



manager was homosexual. Three manipulations were utilized: direct disclosure, indirect disclosure, and no disclosure. The direct revealing scenario was phrased "... and has told you that he/she is gay/lesbian;" the indirect scenario was phrased "and you have found out that he/she is gay/lesbian;" the no revelation condition was devoid of any reference to sexuality. With the exception of these manipulations, the scenarios did not differ from one another.

EXPECTANCY

In order to test whether participants considered the managers' revelation of sexuality to be a violation of expectations, participants completed a measure adapted from Lannutti et al. (2001) designed to tap into the unexpectedness of the information. This 12-item measure consists of a seven-point semantic differential scale prompting respondents to "indicate your feelings about the information you found out about your manager." Because not all of the items directly assessed expectancy violations, some items were eliminated and other items were added as replacements. These revised 12 items were submitted to a principal components factor analysis with Varimax rotation, resulting in a two-factor solution and accounting for 48.85% of the total variance with eight total items being retained (see Table 1).

MANAGERIAL CREDIBILITY

In order to assess managerial credibility, McCroskey's source credibility scale was employed (McCroskey & Teven, 1999). This seven-point, 18-item, semantic-

differential scale consists of three primary factors: competence, trustworthiness, and goodwill. Responses to this measure produced an overall alpha of .92 ($M = 98.01, SD = 15.03$)¹ for the present investigation.

POSITIVE AFFECT

Positive affect was assessed with a five-item semantic-differential scale, using the following polarities: "Friendly - Unfriendly," "Unapproachable - Approachable," "Likeable - Not Likeable," "Unpleasant - Pleasant," and "Would want to have as my manager - Would not want to have as my manager." Responses to these items were submitted to a principal components factor analysis, resulting in a single factor solution accounting for 67.4% of the variance ($M = 28.44, SD = 5.36, \alpha = .87$), higher scores on the scale indicated higher levels of perceived positive affect about the hypothetical manager.

Table 1.

Rotated component matrix for expectancy measure.

Items	Component	
	1	2
	0.709	0.139
Usual-Unusual	0.721	0.306
Typical-Atypical	0.786	0.193
Common-Uncommon	0.752	0.256
Appropriate-Innapropriate	0.308	0.833
Out of Place-Okay in the situation	0.276	0.825
Predictable-Unpredictable	0.718	0.083
Acceptable-Unacceptable	0.072	0.847

1 Although McCroskey and colleagues (McCroskey & Teven, 1999; McCroskey & Young, 1981) suggest that when their credibility measure is used as a dependent variable, each of the subscales should be tested independently. However, since we were interested in a global measure of credibility, and since each of the sub-scales were highly correlated with each other, we decided to analyze the concept as unidimensional.

Note: Extraction method is principal component analysis. Rotation method is varimax with kaiser normalization. Component 1 (expectancy) Chronbach's Alpha = .83, $M = 26.04, SD = 6.94$; Component 2 (appropriateness) Chronbach's Alpha = .83, $M = 16.08, SD = 4.01$; Total measure Alpha = .86, $M = 41.91, SD = 9.56$.



RESULTS

A one-way ANOVA (see Table 2) was computed to test the effect of revelation type on expectancy. Results indicated that expectancy varied significantly (see Figure 1) among the conditions ($F(2, 460) = 28.37, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.11$). Tukey's HSD post-hoc test indicated that all three conditions varied significantly from one another ($p < .05$). Direct disclosure ($M = 34.49, SD = 8.21$) was perceived as significantly less expected than indirect disclosure, ($M = 37.07, SD = 8.76$) and both types of disclosure were perceived as significantly less expected than no disclosure ($M = 41.48, SD = 7.70$). Therefore, Hypothesis One was supported.

Table 2.

Summary of Hypotheses Results

	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>partial</i> <i>η</i> ²
Hypothesis 1	28.37	$p < .001$	0.106	0.110
Hypothesis 2	3.54	$p = .030$	0.011	0.015
Hypothesis 3 (ns)	2.93	$p = .054$	0.008	0.012

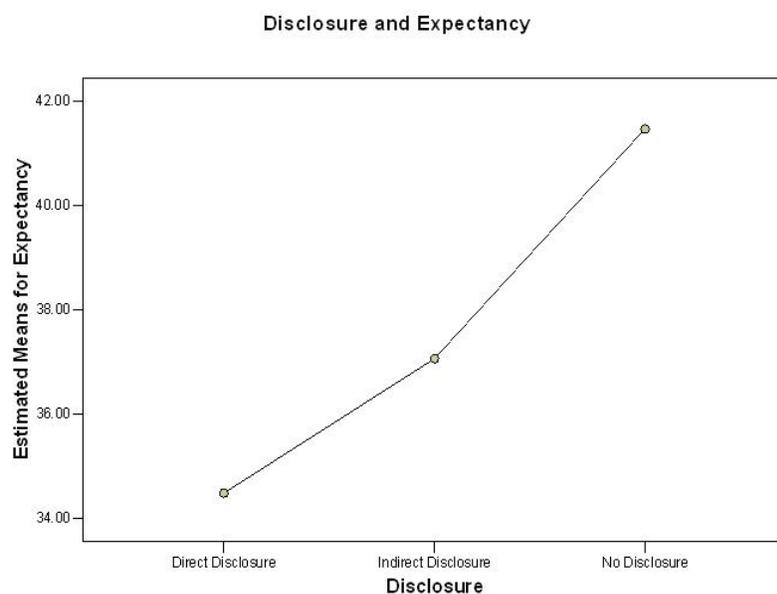
Hypothesis Two predicted that the way of managers reveal sexuality in the workplace would influence subordinates' perceptions of managerial credibility. Results of the ANOVA (See Table 2) indicated a significant difference in credibility for revelation type ($F(2, 462) = 3.54, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.02$). Credibility was rated the highest for the indirect disclosure condition ($M = 94.75, SD = 13.30$), second highest in the direct disclosure condition ($M = 91.52, SD = 15.95$) and lowest in the no-disclosure condition ($M = 90.65, SD = 13.64$). Tukey's HSD post-hoc test revealed that only "indirect disclosure" and "no disclosure" varied significantly ($p < 0.05$) from one another. Therefore, Hypothesis Two is only partially tenable.

Hypothesis Three predicted that the way managers reveal

their sexuality would influence subordinates' perceptions of managerial affect. Results of the ANOVA (see Table 2) indicated no significant difference in positive affect for revelation type ($F(2, 466) = 2.93, ns$), with means ranging from 27.97 to 29.28. Therefore, Hypothesis Three was not supported; revelation of sexuality did not significantly alter perceptions of positive affect of the employees.

Figure 1.

Results of the one-way ANOVA on revelation and expectancy



The Research Question asked if employees' perceptions of expectancy violations, credibility, and positive affect differed for male and female managers. Results of independent samples t-Tests showed no significant difference for any of the variables. Perceptions of expectancy between male managers' ($M = 37.57, SD = 8.98$) and female managers' ($M = 37.90, SD = 8.43$) revelation of sexuality ($t(459) = .40, ns$) did not significantly differ. Similarly, perceptions of male-managers' ($M = 91.78, SD = 15.75$) and female-managers' ($M = 92.85, SD = 12.84$) credibility ($t(461) = .79, ns$) did not differ. Perceptions of male-managers' ($M = 28.35, SD = 5.64$) and female-managers' ($M = 28.53, SD = 5.07$) affect ($t(465) = .36, ns$) was almost



Table 3.

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for all Dependent Variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Affect Measure	28.44	5.36	-	.71*	.32*
2. Credibility	92.30	14.40	-	-	.27*
3. Expectancy	37.73	8.71	-	-	-

Note: * = $p < .01$

identical. See Table 3 for descriptive statistics and inter-correlations for all study variables.

DISCUSSION

A few general themes emerged from data collected. First, revealing sexuality in the workplace is a violation of expectations and direct disclosure appears to be a greater violation than indirect disclosure. Second, revealing sexuality impacts perceptions of credibility. Finally, although an important variable in the workplace, perceptions of positive affect do not seem to be altered by the revelation of sexuality in these data. Our findings are useful to understanding that expectancies do operate in the workplace, and as EVT predicts, perceptual-based variables of the violator are affected by disclosure of information.

For the first hypothesis, respondents rated no disclosure of sexuality as significantly less unexpected than either indirect or direct disclosure. Since the no disclosure

scenario was devoid of discussion about sexuality, that result is not surprising. However, when the hypothetical manager directly disclosed his or her sexuality in the scenario, participants rated that more unexpected than indirectly revealing the information. These differences indicated that the manipulation in this study was effective, since participants recognized the revelation of sexuality as the unexpected event. Indeed, these results are based, in part, on societal norms and expectations about appropriate communication patterns. And yet, this study was conducted in a more socially liberal community with a higher gay and lesbian population than most of the county². We can infer that nation-wide studies might be likely to reveal even greater differences than found with this sample.

The act of disclosing one's sexuality might be a violation of expectation for several reasons. First, communicating managers' personal information to employees might not be appropriate in general, especially when the information is revealed directly from the manager. Disclosures of more intimate information, such as sexuality, might heighten awareness of appropriateness issues. Based on the results of this first hypothesis, the manner in which information is disclosed is the primary factor leading to perceptions of the message as a violation of expectancies.

For the second and third hypotheses, participants rated managers highest in both credibility and affect in the indirect disclosure condition. For credibility, respondents rated the

2 Demographic research reporting the number of gay men and lesbians per population areas are somewhat tentative. However, Gates (2006) conducted a nationwide survey of population centers based on congressional districts and found that California, Florida, New York, Texas, and Illinois have the largest proportions of gay men and lesbians (respectively) compared to the estimated 8.8 million gay men and lesbians living in the United States. Additionally, New York and Los Angeles rank highest in terms of population centers with gay men and lesbians. Since this sample was taken from the Los Angeles metropolitan area, we can infer that the sample was drawn from an area with a relatively high number of gay men and lesbians.



direct disclosure as next highest and the no disclosure as lowest. For affect, respondents rated the no disclosure as next highest and the direct disclosure as lowest. However, the only statistically significant difference was between indirect and no disclosure for credibility. These findings are meaningful given several explanations.

We might speculate that the disclosure of sexuality is more equivocal than originally argued. As noted earlier, Lannutti et al. (2001) found that when teachers' violations were more equivocal, students' evaluations of the teacher were more dependent on the reward valence of the teacher than the violation itself. Similarly, if individuals interpret the disclosure of managers' sexuality to be more equivocal than anticipated, judgments should be more influenced by the reward valence of the manager than the violation itself. Indeed, managers may be perceived as inherently high-reward communicators due to their ability to influence employee pay raises, bonuses, company-sponsored trips, and other positive workplace outcomes and incentives. Still, the description of the manager in the scenario may have been overly positive. Managers were described as well educated with years of work experience. Additionally, they were described as enthusiastic and willing to send the employee on an all-expense paid trip to Chicago. Thus, the high reward of the manager might have had a greater influence than the disclosure of sexuality.

Another explanation might lie in the respondents themselves. The sample for this study was drawn from a socially liberal community in which there is a high gay and lesbian population. As Brewer (2003) concluded, positive attitudes about gay men and lesbians can be directly related to the amount of contact individuals have with gay men or lesbians. Given the location of the study, individuals in this sample are likely to have more contact with gay men or lesbians than individuals in the larger population. Thus, they might not perceive the disclosure of managers' sexuality as gay or lesbian to be as much a violation of expectations, or

might be more accepting of such a disclosure. Furthermore, respondents might have felt compelled to provide a socially correct response, given that university students participated in the study.

Managers were rated high in credibility across scenarios; however, results did indicate a significant difference in judgments of credibility between the indirect and no disclosure conditions. Additionally, although the results were not significant for positive affect, respondents in the indirect condition rated managers higher in positive affect than the other conditions. Perhaps respondents considered the person revealing the managers' sexuality as the violator of the expectation. In the indirect scenario, then, the manager was not the violator, even though the information revealed was about the manager's sexuality. In that case, judgments about the violator should affect someone other than the manager. Still, the indirect disclosure condition should not have higher results than the no disclosure condition. The effects of social desirability bias may play a part in the evaluation process, with participants wanting to appear tolerant to a gay male or lesbian manager in the indirect condition. This bias might not have entirely manifested itself in the direct disclosure category as the participants may truly have considered the manager to be the violator and the disclosure to be inappropriate in that situation, thus lowering their overall credibility score.

Since Russ et al. (2002) only tested disclosure of sexuality by a male, it was necessary to ask whether female revelation differed from that of male revelation on perceptions of expectancy, credibility, and affect. There was no significant difference between gay male and lesbian revelation for any of the outcome variables. This finding is, however, contradictory to many public opinion polls that indicate that gay men are typically connoted in more negative fashions than females (Herek, 2002). In general, though, female managers might be perceived more negatively than male managers. These opposite negatives may have effectively



canceled each other out.

On the other hand, the fact that there were no differences between the categories and the sex of the manager might indicate that the manager in every case had inherent power. The power difference between managers and subordinates might have been stronger than managers' sex or sexuality. Perhaps a difference may appear if this study was replicated to include peer-interactions, where power does not play an integral role. On face, this is a promising finding that there is no difference in perceptions of gay men and lesbians for this study.

Taken together, these findings appear to be somewhat counterintuitive. However, looking at the societal norms that help to mediate expectancies in the workplace may say otherwise. For instance, the United States' military policy on "don't ask, don't tell" clearly illustrates this point. This policy indicates that being a gay man or lesbian is not the same as disclosing one's sexuality. This was evident in the results of the present investigation; direct disclosure was rated as more unexpected, lower in both credibility and affect than indirect disclosure. Gay male and lesbian managers might want to consider these findings prior to explicitly disclosing their sexuality to their employees. If managers choose to disclose their sexuality as a gay male or lesbian, a more indirect method of disclosure could foster the highest level of credibility. Additionally, managers might want to focus on the extent to which they are considered rewarding. Managers might want to ensure they have high reward value before revealing personal information in any manner.

Generally speaking, gay men and lesbian managers face challenging dilemmas in the workplace in regard to disclosure of their sexuality, especially considering that this is an important and personal decision. Still, perceptions based on violations of expectations are much more fluid than research originally indicated. In fact, Burgoon and Hale (1988) note this phenomenon as an important fact to consider when

conducting research on expectancy violations. For gay and lesbian managers, perhaps the temporary reduction in credibility when "coming out" directly is, in the long run, more beneficial and productive for them in the workplace. Although the results of the present investigation do not suggest that directly informing coworkers of one's sexuality would be a prudent choice, contact with gay and lesbian role models may help to overcome negative stereotypes. In fact, Herek's (2002) longitudinal research supports this finding by demonstrating that heterosexual individuals who had positive contact with gay and lesbians individuals changed their perceptions for the better. Gay and lesbian managers who have constructive work relations may have positive affect for future homosexual individuals in the workplace.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There are a number of ways to continue this line of research in future contexts. First, a manipulation that does not as blatantly indicate sexual orientation might address social desirability problems. Using videotaped interactions between manager and subordinates shown to respondents could be a more subtle way to manipulate the revealing of sexuality. Still, sexuality is very difficult to manipulate without the participants being alerted to the purpose of the study; thus, alternatives to the scenario may be utilized. For instance, resumes with subtle cues as to the manager's sexuality could be used. However, our study is useful as a preliminary indication that there is a research problem in this area.

Second, future research should include a corporate based sample from a variety of locations. The sample utilized in this research consisted of students who were enrolled in upper-division courses and who were currently employed in a variety of industries. Despite these controls, a non-student sample of individuals who were working full time might respond differently. In addition, researchers could examine the consequences of revealing sexuality in



more ideologically diverse areas of the country. The area in which the sample was drawn from has a relatively high gay and lesbian population², increasing the likelihood that the sample knows individuals who are gay men or lesbians. We know that individuals who have more contact with gay and lesbian individuals will hold different perceptions of those individuals than people without that experience (Brewer, 2003).

Third, future studies might also incorporate reward valences of the violator as part of the manipulation. Additionally, future researchers may manipulate the violation direction or magnitude (how much of a violation). Addressing the issue of timing the revelation may prove to be fruitful as well. Improperly timed disclosure might be precipitously more unexpected than a properly timed disclosure. Additionally, as Brewer (2003) confirms, since contact with gay men and lesbians change the perceptions of the person, perhaps more longitudinal data should be collected not only to evaluate this finding but also to test the assumption that perceptions of the violator would change over time.

This study shows that disclosure of sexuality can affect perceptions of the violator. Gay men and lesbians exist within organizations, yet they represent a rather understudied population. Undeniably, this line of research will help us better understand how expectancies operate in organizations and how the communicative act of revealing personal information

can affect perceptions of the violator (in this case, the manager). Future research can help explain the unique and often complicated perceptions of gay men and lesbians within organizations and those effects on various job outcomes.

REFERENCES

Bantz, C. R. (1993). *Understanding organizations: Interpreting organizational communication cultures*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

Brewer, P. R. (2003). Values, political knowledge, and public opinion about gay rights: A framing-based account. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 67, 173-201.

Burgoon, J. K. (1978). A communication model of personal space violations: Explication and an initial test. *Human Communication Research*, 4, 129-142.

Burgoon, J. K., & Hale, J. L. (1988). Nonverbal expectancy violations: Model elaboration and application to immediacy behaviors. *Communication Monographs*, 55, 58-79.

Callan, V. J. (1993). Subordinate-manager communication in different sex dyads: Consequences for job satisfaction. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 66, 13-28.

Carless, S. A., & DePalo, C. (2000). The measurement of cohesion in work teams. *Small Group Research*, 31, 71-88.

Cole, J. G., & McCroskey, J. C. (2003). The association of perceived communication apprehension, shyness, and verbal aggression with perceptions of source credibility and affect in organizational and interpersonal contexts. *Communication Quarterly*, 51, 101-110.

Ellis, B. H. (1992). The effects of uncertainty and source credibility on attitudes about organizational change. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 6, 34-57.

Fone, B. (2000). *Homophobia: A history*. New York: Picador USA.

Gates, G. J. (2006). *Same-sex couples and the gay, lesbian, bisexual population: New estimates from the American community survey*. Los Angeles: University of California Los Angeles School of Law, Williams Institute on Sexual Orientation Law and Public Policy.

Herek, G. M. (1984). Beyond "homophobia": A social

2 Demographic research reporting the number of gay men and lesbians per population areas are somewhat tentative. However, Gates (2006) conducted a nationwide survey of population centers based on congressional districts and found that California, Florida, New York, Texas, and Illinois have the largest proportions of gay men and lesbians (respectively) compared to the estimated 8.8 million gay men and lesbians living in the United States. Additionally, New York and Los Angeles rank highest in terms of population centers with gay men and lesbians. Since this sample was taken from the Los Angeles metropolitan area, we can infer that the sample was drawn from an area with a relatively high number of gay men and lesbians.



psychological perspective on attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 10, 1-21.

Herek, G. M. (2002). Gender gaps in public opinion about lesbians and gay men. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 66, 40-66.

Koermer, C. D., & Petelle, J. L. (1991). Expectancy violation and student rating of instruction. *Communication Quarterly*, 39, 341-350.

Lannutti, P. J., Laliker, M., & Hale, J. L. (2001). Violations of expectations and social-sexual communication in student/professor interactions. *Communication Education*, 50, 69-82.

Levine, T. R., Anders, L. N., Banas, J., Baum, K. L., Endo, K., Hu, A. D. S., et al. (2000). Norms, expectations, and deception: A norm violation model of veracity judgments. *Communication Monographs*, 67, 123-137.

McCroskey, J. C., & Teven, J. J. (1999). Goodwill: A reexamination of the construct and its measurement. *Communication Monographs*, 66, 90-104.

McCroskey, J. C., & Young, T. J. (1981). Ethos and Credibility: The construct and its measurement after three decades. *Central States Speech Journal*, 32.

McPherson, M. B., Kearney, P., & Plax, T. G. (2003). The dark side of instruction: Teacher anger as classroom norm violations. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 31, 76-90.

Murphy, K. R., & Cleveland, J. (1991). *Performance appraisal: An organizational perspective*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Park, O. S., Sims Jr., H. P., & Motowidlo, S. J. (1986). Affect in organizations: How feelings and emotions influence managerial judgment. In H. P. Sims Jr. & D. A. Gioia (Eds.), *The thinking organization: Dynamics of organizational social cognition* (pp. 215-237). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Peterson, B. D. (1972). Differences between managers and subordinates in their perception of opinion leaders. *Journal of Business Communication*, 10(1), 27-37.

Reio, T. G., & Callahan, J. L. (2004). Affect, curiosity, and socialization-related learning: A path analysis of antecedents to job performance. *Journal of Business & Psychology*, 19, 3-22.

Richmond, V. P., & McCroskey, J. C. (2000). The impact of supervisor and subordinate immediacy on relational and organizational outcomes. *Communication Monographs*, 67, 85-95.

Russ, T. L., Simonds, C. J., & Hunt, S. K. (2002). Coming out in the classroom...An occupational hazard?: The influence of sexual orientation on teacher credibility and perceived student learning. *Communication Education*, 51, 311-324.

Schaubroeck, J., Ganster, D. C., & Kemmerer, B. (1996). Does trait affect promote job attitude stability? *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 17, 191-196.

Sorensen, G. (1989). The relationship between teachers' self-disclosure statements, students' perceptions, and affective learning. *Communication Education*, 38, 259-276.

Varma, A., Denisi, A. S., & Peters, L. H. (1996). Interpersonal affect and performance appraisal: A field study. *Personnel Psychology*, 49, 341-361.

Waldo, C. R., & Kemp, J. L. (1997). Should I come out to my students? An empirical investigation. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 34, 79-94.

Justin P. Boren and Mary B. McPherson

Justin P. Boren (M.A., California State University, Long Beach) is a doctoral candidate in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University and Mary B. McPherson (Ph.D., Ohio University) is an associate professor in the Department of Communication Studies, California State University, Long Beach. This manuscript is based on the first author's master's thesis, which was directed by the second author. We would like to thank thesis committee members Amy Bippus and Patricia Kearney for their insightful comments and guidance as well as two anonymous reviewers. A version of this manuscript was presented as a top paper at the 2005 annual meeting of the National Communication Association in Boston. Direct correspondence to the first author by e-mail at jpb@asu.edu

Copyright of Rocky Mountain Communication Review is the property of University of Utah, Department of Communication and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.