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Marital Status, Gender, and Sexual Orientation: Implications for Employment Hiring Decisions

Joel T. Nadler and Katie M. Kufahl
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Marital status and sexual orientation discrimination has been largely underresearched and has not been researched using working professionals, or with the incorporation of sexual orientation, marital status, and gender interactions. Additionally, with the growing acceptance of same-sex relationships, marriages, and partnerships, the interaction of marital status (i.e., applicants with or without a spouse) and sexual orientation bias in the workplace needs to be examined. Our study used an experimental design that manipulated gender, marital status, and sexual orientation in interview simulations and examined participants' (N = 365 working adults) hiring decisions. A significant 3-way interaction was found such that single lesbian women received significantly higher ratings when compared with married lesbian women, and married heterosexual women received significantly higher ratings compared with single heterosexual women. The study revealed that sexual orientation interacted with marital status in women's ratings, but not for men. This research updates current knowledge about discrimination in employment settings and provides updated information on a topic for which the existing research has been largely outdated and underresearched.

Keywords: sexual orientation, marital status, gender, discrimination stereotypes, social roles

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Since 1990, there have been no studies in the top seven industrial/organizational psychology journals or top seven social psychology journals that focus specifically on the interaction of marital status discrimination and gender in employment settings (Nadler, Bartels, Sliter, Lowery, & Stockdale, 2013; Ruggs et al., 2013). This suggests that marital status discrimination has not received serious attention in recent years. Because past research has shown that sexual orientation can result in bias in workplace decisions (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Ragins, 2008; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001), it is interesting to study marital status as it relates to sexual orientation bias, especially as gay and lesbian marriages and partnerships become more socially and legally acceptable in the United States (Ragins, 2008). Sexual orientation may influence the degree and prevalence of gender differences in marital status discrimination in decision making within organizations. Our study examines the effects of marital status, gender, and sexual orientation in the evaluation and rankings of individuals in simulations of employment interviews.

Marital Status and Gender Bias

Despite 21 state laws making it illegal to discriminate based on marital status, (Unmarried America, 2012) marital status is still inquired about on application blanks and in job interviews, even in jurisdictions in which marital status discrimination is prohibited (Harcourt & Harcourt, 2002; Mullen, Thakur, & Hensel, 2007). Furthermore, even if marital status is not asked about directly, wedding rings and personal titles (e.g. "Ms.," "Mrs.") often make marital status easily identifiable (Dion & Schuller, 1990; Malcolmson & Sinclair, 2007). Because the decision-making literature indicates that most decisions tend to be quasi-rational (Strle, 2012) (i.e., include both intuition and analysis), biases may influence employment decisions. For example, intuitive assumptions often involve stereotypes, and an employer might use stereotypes based on marital status to determine whether or not to hire an individual (Beattie, 1991; Nadler & Stockdale, 2012). Beattie (1991) suggested that marital status is sometimes used as an indicator to determine how likely it is an employee will remain in the same geographical location, his or her willingness to travel, his or her health benefits, his or her level of commitment, and his or her fit within the organization (e.g., the relationship the employee will have with other employees).

Women have been found to be paid less than men for similar work (Blau & Kahn, 2006), are less likely to be promoted (Eagly & Koenig, 2008), are often evaluated more negatively (Davison & Burke, 2000), and are seen as less congruent with leadership roles compared with men (Rudman & Kilianski, 2000). Social roles theory suggests that men occupy a social role associated with earning money and financially providing for their families, whereas women occupy a social role primarily responsible for children and home-life duties (Eagly, 1987). The congruity or incongruity between social gender roles and work roles has been demonstrated to be partially responsible for gender bias in workplace decisions favoring men over women (Eagly & Karau, 2002). For example, typical gender stereotypes indicate that a man is commendable and loyal when he works to support his wife and their children; however, a woman is seen as commendable and loyal when she is willing to leave her career to follow her husband's career or care for their children (Eagly, 1987). Moreover,

Joel T. Nadler and Katie M. Kufahl, Department of Psychology, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Joel T. Nadler, Department of Psychology, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Campus Box 1121, Edwardsville, IL 62026. E-mail: jnadler@siue.edu

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when a man is married, he is considered to be socially supported and is seen as having less family or role conflict with work roles, whereas when a woman is married, she is considered to have more social responsibilities, contributing to greater work or family role conflict (Nadler & Stockdale, 2012). These assumptions may contribute to the perceptions that married men are more motivated and more dedicated to work, whereas married women are more motivated and more dedicated to their families.

Supporting social role theory, research on marital status discrimination has found that women are perceived to be less suitable for employment after marriage, whereas men are perceived as more suitable for employment after marriage (Hammer, 1993; Jordan, College, Zitek, 2012; Renwick & Tosi, 1978). Furthermore, following marriage, the performance of female employees is expected to decline, but not for men (Jordan et al., 2012). Because sexual orientation was not studied in this research, it is unclear from previous research on marriage bias whether these effects are specific to heterosexually married persons or all married persons. Additionally, it is important to note that these studies examined simulations of employment decisions rather than actual employment decisions.

Research pertaining to parenthood bias may be generalizable as gender bias as well. To the degree that a marital status indicates the intention to have children, perceptions of workers may change on the basis of marital status through assumptions of the different roles of motherhood and fatherhood (Budig & England, 2001; Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; King, 2008). For example, studies have found evidence of the "motherhood penalty" (women who are mothers are perceived as less competent and less committed to their organizations compared with positive stereotypes of fathers who are viewed as more committed to their organizations; Budig & England, 2001; King, 2008).

Sexual Orientation Bias

Approximately 25% to 66% of gay and lesbian employees and 75% of transsexual employees report experiencing some form of discrimination at work (Croteau, 1996; Human Rights Campaign, 2008; Ruggs et al., 2013; Waldo, 1999). These individuals are not protected under federal law in private employment decisions. As such, heterosexism (discrimination in favor of heterosexual sexuality, relationships, and marriage) may explain some discrimination toward gay or lesbian individuals. Additionally, gender roles are further influential with the inclusion of sexuality stereotypes. For example, Allen and Smith (2011) demonstrate reduced intrinsic motivation for men during a perceived feminine-induced task (e.g., involving an elementary school teacher). This reduction in motivation was not found for women, indicating that men, in particular, may have intrinsic motivational and performance consequences when engaging in role incongruent tasks, particularly when sexuality was made salient. Likewise, Hawthorne (2011) further demonstrated this idea through a finding of prejudice in gay military personnel resulting from a perception of lack of fit between the sexual orientation and role of male soldiers and the military. As such, it is possible that gay men may be more discriminated against when compared with lesbians in situations in which sexuality is made explicit.

Although the use of policies against discrimination of individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) is increasing in employment, many documented cases and previous research demonstrate that actual and perceived discrimination in the workplace, whether provable or not, is still a problem for LGBT individuals (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; Ruggs et al., 2013). For example, the decision to reveal sexual orientation at work contains an underlying fear that if and when sexual orientation is revealed, individuals will face ostracism, hostility, lost opportunities for promotions, and even loss of their jobs (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). Brand (2008) argues that gay and lesbian employees sometimes feel like they are forced to choose between protecting the privacy of their sexual orientation and having to disclose their orientation at work in order to pursue legal action if they are not receiving equal treatment.

No existing research has explored the idea that bias based on sexual orientation may interact with perceived marital status and gender bias on selection decisions. Because "partnered" may be perceived to be similar to "married," individuals who have claimed partnered status may also be viewed differently based on gender roles. It is interesting to consider how gender may further moderate this relationship. For example, because gay men are discriminated against more, and are seen as more in violation of traditional gender roles than lesbians (Blashill & Powlishta, 2012; Herek, 1988), it is plausible that a "partnered" status will more strongly negatively affect hiring decisions for gay men compared with hiring decisions for females.

Summary and Hypotheses

Our study analyzes bias in simulations of employment hiring decisions. In order to simulate a realistic job setting, interviews were used as part of the selection process. Moreover, the potential influence of demographic characteristics is particularly relevant for selection systems that incorporate employment interviews, given the interpersonal nature of the interview environment, in which one person is being evaluated by another. Interviews are adaptable, allowing for follow-up questions, and can result in obtaining extremely in-depth and rich information. However, adapting the interview to each interviewee makes it very difficult to compare data across applicants, which can often lead to bias entering into the final decision-making process. One suggestion for reducing the impact of stereotype-based bias is to use structured interviews, rather than unstructured or semistructured interviews (Cascio & Aguinis, 2011). As such, this research will present a structured interview to test for gender, marital status, and sexual orientation bias in hiring decisions. Previous research has found evidence of gender (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Nadler & Stockdale, 2012) differences favoring men in hiring and promotion decisions. Additionally, marital status (Hammer, 1993; Jordan et al., 2012) has been found to interact with gender favoring married men and single women. Research has also found evidence of bias based on sexual orientation (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; Ruggs et al., 2013) favoring heterosexuals in general, and interacting with gender, with more negative perceptions targeting gay men than lesbian women (Blashill & Powlishta, 2012). Based on these past interactions, we also suggest that sexual orientation will interact with gender and marital status, resulting in biased decision making in organizations. As previous research has examined these biases based on how each may be related to the incongruence between perceived social roles associated with each group's membership

(gender, marital status, and sexual orientation) and perceived work roles, it is logical to assume that such bias may interact differently when multiple social roles are salient.

Hypothesis 1: Male applicants will receive higher rating scores when compared with female applicants.

Hypothesis 2: Heterosexual applicants will receive higher rating scores when compared with gay or lesbian applicants.

Hypothesis 3: There will be an interaction between marital status and gender, such that men who are married will receive higher rating scores when compared with men who are single, and women will receive a higher rating scores when they are single compared with when they are married.

Hypothesis 4: There will be an interaction between sexual orientation and gender, such that heterosexual men will receive higher rating scores when compared with gay men, and there will not be a large difference in rating scores for heterosexual women and lesbians.

Exploratory Hypothesis 5: There will be a three-way interaction between gender, sexual orientation, and marital status.

Method

Participants

This study had a total of 365 participants (after manipulation check) in eight conditions recruited from Mechanical Turk (MTurk). MTurk is an online contracted work site in which working professionals can sign up to work online in exchange for compensation through Amazon.com, which allows the participants to remain anonymous. In general, Mechanical Turk users are paid a small amount of compensation and usually report some degree of interest in taking surveys (Behrend, 2011; Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). Compared with the U.S. workforce, MTurk users tend to be younger (approximately 60% are younger than 30), female (approximately 65%), have higher education levels (78% hold at least a bachelor's degree), and have median levels of household income (median income is approximately $40,000 to $60,000). Although studies have found that worker populations stem from primarily the U.S. and India (Ipeirotis, 2010), this study was restricted to participants who are U.S. citizens, working at least 20 hr a week, and between the ages of 18 and 65 years. All areas considered, MTurk samples are generally substantially more representative of the U.S. workforce (for which the average age is 42, with an average income of $54,000) compared with other means of data collection, such as student populations (for which the average age is 20 and only approximately 13% of students work full time) or convenience samples (Behrend et al., 2011; Buhrmester et al., 2011; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Only U.S. citizens were used in order to focus on one country, as other countries may have more or less stigma associated with marital status, gender, or sexual orientation. The restrictions for this study were set because working ages are typically between 18 and 65 in the United States. Participants above or below this age may represent a select workforce with a different viewpoint and were therefore not included in the study. Lastly, the 20 hr/week restriction was set in order to justify the term "working adult" (as opposed to college student populations), which is one of the major contributions of this study.

This study's sample (N = 365) had a mean age of 31.37 years (SD = 9.68); men were 53.1% and women were 46.6% of participants. There were 73.8% who reported race as White, 7.4% as Black, 4.3% as Hispanic/Latino, 8.8% as Asian or Asian Americans, 1.7% as Native American, and 4.4% as mixed or other. There were 53.2% who reported their marital status to be single, 32.5% reported traditionally married, and 13.2% reported partnered. There were 86.9% who reported a sexual orientation of heterosexual, 6.3% as bisexual, 4.8% as gay or lesbian, and 2% who reported that they did not wish to answer. The majority of participants (95.2%) reported that they had interviewed for a job and on average, had interviewed approximately 8.76 times (SD = 8.94). Likewise, a large majority of participants (98.9%) reported that they worked a traditional salary job and, on average, had held a job for 11.22 years (SD = 10.75). Lastly, 50.4% of the participants reported that they have not made hiring decisions as a part of current or previous job, compared with 49.6% that reported they had made hiring decisions.

Procedure

Participants were directed to assume the role of a Human Resources Manager and read a job description for a Marketing Manager. Next, participants were randomly assigned to view one of eight short video clips (3 min) of either a man or a woman being interviewed who was either married or not married (i.e., either had a spouse or did not have a spouse), and who was either heterosexual or gay or lesbian. The video featured a segment of a structured interview and followed a script that only deviated on one answer: "Are you willing to relocate for this position?" All applicants answered "yes," but had differing reasons based on marital status and sexual orientation. Participants then read over the résumé of the candidate. The résumé was the same for the woman and the man except for name (male or female) and the photo (drawn from the video, showing either a male or female with hands crossed with or without a wedding ring). Next, participants filled out the Hiring Decision Scale (HDS). A manipulation check was given, making sure that applicants correctly answered the question regarding applicant response to relocation (which indicated sexual orientation and marital status—spouse or no spouse), followed by demographics.

Pilot Tests

The job category and job description of a Marketing Manager was pilot tested and was not perceived as either strongly feminine or strongly masculine. Additionally, two male confederates (interviewer and applicant) and one female confederate (applicant) were trained in order to create the interview video clips. Three observers watched the videotaping of the interviews and separately rated each condition after each segment's taping. Observers were given direction to rate the applicants, and no further communication with the observers was allowed during each filming. The observers did not talk to each other before or during each rating process. Applicants in each condition were rated similarly in single-item ratings of attractiveness, age, warmth, eye contact, mannerisms, smiling,

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and head-nodding using 5-point scales. After each video recording, if any of the raters disagreed by more than 1 point on the 5-point scale, the issue was discussed, the actors were given further direction, and the segment was reshot. This was completed in order to stimulate standardized interview conditions.

Materials

Job description. Study participants read a job description for a Marketing Manager. The job description developed for this study is a shortened version of the description found on the O*NET (Occupational Information Network, 2011) website. A Marketing Manager was chosen because most participants should have at least a minimal grasp of what people in the field of marketing do (Rosenblum, 2012). Additionally, both men and women are attracted to the marketing discipline and are hired for jobs in the field (Fisher, n.d.). Furthermore, none of the job tasks are described as strongly agentic (stereotypically male) or communal (stereotypically female). Finally, the statistics regarding the gender distribution of marketing managers in the United States further support the use of this occupation (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). Furthermore, the Chartered Institute of Marketing's membership demonstrates a largely even split between the genders: 50.5% of its current members are female and 49.5% are male (Fisher, n.d.; Rockler-Gladen, 2008).

Video clip. Eight 3-min video clips were recorded. The first four videos had a male applicant and a male interviewer with separate videos: heterosexual single male applicant, heterosexual married male applicant, single gay male applicant, and married gay male applicant. The other four videos had a female applicant and the same male interviewer with separate videos: heterosexual single female applicant, heterosexual married female applicant, single lesbian applicant, and married lesbian applicant. Both the male and female applicants had the same job experience and were trained to respond to answers based on a script, so that answers were the same across gender and partner manipulations (i.e., either had a spouse or did not have a spouse). Spouse manipulation was a single response regarding potential difficulties with relocation: "Are you willing to relocate for this position?" All applicants answer "yes," but each applicant had a follow up statement that indicated marital status and sexual orientation, that is, for the married condition, "No, I am more than willing to move. My spouse (John/Lisa) is currently between jobs and is more than willing to relocate. Plus we do not have any children yet, so relocating is not a concern," or for the single condition "No, I am more than willing to move. I broke up with my spouse (John/Lisa) 6 months ago so I am currently single, plus I do not have any children yet, so relocating is not a concern." All married applicants referred to their significant other as their "spouse." In a discussion with a panel of researchers, it was determined that the term "partner" was less clear about marital status when compared with the term "spouse," especially for heterosexual applicants.

Résumé. The same résumé was used for males and females, with the exception of name and photo. All résumés listed that the applicant graduated from college in May 2003, and immediately thereafter working as a Travel Guide. As outlined on the résumé, applicants left the job as a Travel Guide in order to become a Marketing Research Analyst and had 4 years and 6 months of experience. The résumés used in this research were adapted from Rosenblum (2012).

Dependent variable: HDS. Participants rated their impressions of the job applicants using the HDS. Five statements were rated using a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include, "This candidate is a good match for the available job" and "The candidate appears to be very qualified." These statements were adapted from the work of Barrick, Swider, and Stewart (2010) and Stewart, Dustin, Barrick, and Darnold (2008), who found the scales to be reliable and valid. Barrick et al. (2010) found that their scale had a coefficient alpha of .93, and Stewart et al. (2008) found that the scale had a coefficient alpha of .90. In this study, the internal reliability for the five items used was $\alpha = .96$.

Manipulation check. A manipulation check questionnaire was filled out immediately after viewing and rating the applicant at the end of the study. The manipulation check asked study participants to indicate the title of the position for which the job applicant is applying, whether the job applicant was a male or a female, the first job that the résumé listed, what the applicant stated when asked to relocate (including questions regarding partnered status and orientation), and whether the applicant submitted a cover letter or not. Any participant who incorrectly answered the questions regarding applicant response to relocate (which indicated applicant sexual orientation and marital status) were excluded from the analysis. A total of 78 participants were dropped from the study for incomplete responses or failure to accurately answer the manipulation check questions. The options were as follows: (a) The applicant is single and is willing to move, (b)The applicant has a spouse who is willing to move, (c) The applicant is not willing to move, and (d) The applicant has a spouse that is not willing to move. Participants needed to answer "a" (single condition) or "b" (married condition), and had to correctly identify the sexual orientation of the candidate in order to be included in the study results.

Results

An initial analysis examined the correlations between all of the variables of interest (see Table 1). Participants' age, gender, marital status, and sexual orientation were also entered but were not related to the outcome (hiring decision). The correlations indicated that significant main effects were not present in the analysis. All analyses were conducted after checking that the assumptions of the analyses were not violated. Data were checked for normalcy and no transformations were necessary.

A 2 (sex: man or woman) × 2 (marital status: single or spouse) × 2 (sexual orientation: heterosexual or gay or lesbian) factorial ANOVA was used to examine the hypotheses of the study utilizing an averaged five-question HDS as the outcome. A series of exploratory preliminary ANOVAs including participant factors such as gender, orientation, and marital status were conducted. None of these factors, and none of the interactions of these factors, were significant.

Hypothesis 1 (that male applicants will receive higher rating scores when compared with female applicants) was not supported, $F(1, 360) = .71$, $p = .40$. Additionally, although not hypothesized, the main effect of marital status was examined in the analysis. The differences between single and married were not significant, $F(1,$

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Table 1
Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Main Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Ps. Gender[a]	—							
2. Ps. Age	.11*	—						
3. Ps. Marital Status[b]	.09	.15**	—					
4. Ps. Sexual Orient.[c]	.11*	−.02	.09	—				
5. IV1: Gender[a]	.04	−.00	−.06	.05	—			
6. IV2: Marital Stat.[b]	01	.03	.03	.01	−.03	—		
7. IV3: Orientation[c]	.10	.00	−.03	.04	−.05	.10*	—	
8. DV1: Hiring Dec.[d]	.07	.04	.04	−.07	−.06	−.04	.00	—
Mean	—	31.37	—	—	1.53	1.46	1.49	4.37
St. deviation	—	9.68	—	—	.50	.50	.50	.71

Note. $N = 365$. •••.
[a] Participant sex: 1 = male, 2 = female. [b] 1 = single, 2 = traditionally married. [c] 1 = gay or lesbian l, 2 = heterosexual. [d] 5-point Hiring Decision Scale was rated on the following scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 4 = *agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

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360) = 1.08, $p = .30$. Hypothesis 2 (that heterosexual applicants will receive higher rating scores on the hiring scale when compared with gay or lesbian applicants) was also not supported, $F(1, 360) = .11$, $p = .75$.

Hypothesis 3 (that there would be an interaction between marital status and gender, such that men who are married would receive higher mean rating score when compared with men who are single, and that women will receive higher mean rating score when they are single compared with when they are married) was not supported, $F(1, 360) = .00$, $p = .98$.

Hypothesis 4 (that there would be an interaction between sexual orientation and gender, such that heterosexual men would receive higher rating scores when compared with gay men, and there would not be a large difference in rating scores for heterosexual and lesbian women) was not supported, $F(1, 360) = .22$, $p = .67$. Although not hypothesized, the interaction between marital status and sexual orientation was examined in the analysis, and the interaction was not significant, $F(1, 360) = 1.95$, $p = .16$.

Exploratory Hypothesis 5 (that there would be a three-way interaction effect between gender, sexual orientation, and marital status) was supported. The interaction between applicant sex, marital status, and sexual orientation was significant, $F(1, 360) = 6.86$, $p = .01$, partial $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Simple main effect tests were used to find the nature of the significant interaction. Specifically, for female applicants who were lesbians, single applicants ($M = 4.55$) received significantly higher ratings when compared with married applicants ($M = 4.31$). Conversely, female applicants who were married, heterosexual applicants ($M = 4.53$) received significantly higher ratings when compared with lesbian applicants ($M = 4.17$). In other words, lesbian women received significantly higher mean applicant ratings when they were single, whereas heterosexual women received significantly higher mean applicant ratings when they were married. Additionally, single lesbian females received higher ratings than single gay males ($p = .02$). This finding supports research that men are more likely to be discriminated against based on sexual orientation compared with women. Additionally, heterosexual married females received higher ratings when compared with heterosexual married males ($p = .02$). There were no significant differences between the ratings of men across conditions (see Figure 1).

Discussion

Previous research has indicated marital status discrimination in the workplace affects perceptions of women and men differently (Jordan et al., 2012; Renwick & Tosi, 1978). Building on these studies, this study examined the interview process, testing for gender, marital status, and sexual orientation bias affecting hiring decisions and starting salary. Marital status and sexual orientation discrimination have been largely underresearched and have not been researched using working professionals, or with the incorporation of how perceptions of marital status and sexual orientation interact. Our study found that lesbians receive significantly higher ratings when single compared with when they are married. Conversely, heterosexual women receive significantly higher ratings when married compared with when they are single. This finding supports Hypothesis 5, suggesting an interaction between gender, marital status, and sexual orientation. Sexual orientation interacted with marital status in women's ratings, but not men's.

In contrast with previous research, Hypotheses 1 through 4 were not supported. Men did not receive higher ratings when compared with women (H1; $p = .56$), and looking at the three way interaction in the married condition women were rated higher than men. Heterosexual applicants did not receive higher ratings than gay or lesbian applicants (H2; $p = .76$). Men did not receive higher ratings when married compared with women (H3; $p = .62$). There

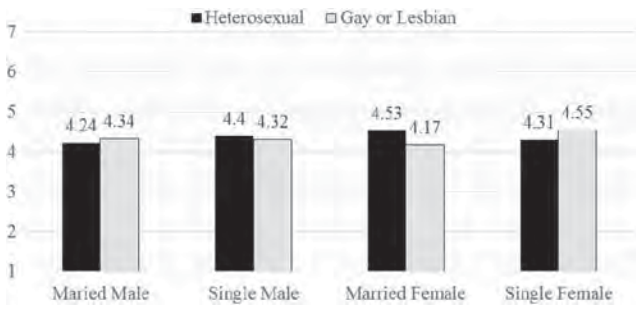


Figure 1. Three-way interaction between sexual orientation, marital status, and gender.

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was not a larger gap in ratings for gay men when compared with lesbian women (H4; $p = .77$); however, in the single condition, lesbian women were rated higher than gay men.

Our lack of main effects of gender and sexual orientation and the lack of an interaction between marital status and gender support the idea that social roles attached to gender, sexual orientation, and marital status maybe changing as more women move into the workforce, as expectations of gender roles within marriages change, and as sexual orientation becomes more widely accepted. With women now making up 46.9% of the workforce, and 51.5% of management, professional, and related positions (Catalyst, 2013), stereotypes regarding gender, marriage, and work roles may be changing.

Additionally, the sample we used may have affected the results. We made an effort to sample a group of working people that would be more representational of organizational decision makers. Although this may have resulted in a more educated, more computer-literate, younger sample compared with samples in previous organizational studies and the typical demographics of those making decisions in actual work places. Bias may also be stronger in more gendered occupations compared with the gender-neutral occupation used in this study.

Another explanation for our study's incongruent findings is the shifting standards theory (Biernat & Manis, 1994). Because the study did not have participants compare the female applicant to the male applicant, participants may have used subjective response scales to evaluate each applicant. For example, if participants believe the stereotype that managers are more typically male than female, the participant might be impressed by the female applicant's qualifications, thereby making the female applicant seem to be "above average," whereas a male applicant might seem "typical," thus increasing the female applicant's starting salary and mean applicant rating score. In other words, our participants only rated one applicant and were unaware of the total applicant pool. Therefore, if the participant perceived there to be mostly male applicants, then a female applicant may have seemed to be above average when compared with other applicants. However, if the participant perceived there to be mostly male applicants, then a male applicant may have seemed to be average compared with other applicants. Depending on the position being hired for and the number and type of other applicants, this theory may also influence hiring managers in the workforce. Thus, although our measures of ratings and starting salary found small trends and one significant interaction, actual decisions comparing men and women, and heterosexual and gay and lesbian candidates, in the same pool of applicants may result in larger evidence of bias.

Implications

The primary finding of our study is that sexual orientation interacted with marital status in women's ratings, but not in ratings of men. This indicates that there is the potential for interactions between sexual orientation, marital status, and gender in biasing employment decisions. This research updates current knowledge about discrimination in employment settings and provides updated information on a topic for which the existing research has been largely outdated and underresearched. Furthermore, our study directly responds to a call for research by two different research teams. Ruggs, Law, Cox, Roehling, and Wiener (2013) reviewed 20 years of selection research in business and industrial/organizational psychology journals, and found both gay and lesbian and marital status research sadly lacking in the top journals used by practitioners. Nadler et al. (2013) found a similar lack of focus on these issues in top social psychology journals covering the same 20 years.

Although our study found small effects, such effects can have large impacts when compounded across a career of hiring, performance appraisal, and promotion decisions. Martell, Lane, and Emrich (1996) used a computer model to illustrate how a 1% bias favoring one group over another in compound evaluations in a typical hierarchical organization explained real-world demographic differences in upper management positions. Our significant differences were small, but were found with the manipulation of a single line contained within an interview (marital status and sexual orientation) on a single rating. Such bias, compounded over a long career, can result in a large impact. Additionally, the primary interaction occurred in the female condition featuring an interaction between marital status and sexual orientation. In these conditions, participants were always watching the exact same video of the same women, with the exception of the single sentence varied to communicate orientation and marital status.

Decision-making literature indicates that most decisions tend to be quasi-rational and include both intuition and analysis (Strle, 2012). Intuitive assumptions often involve stereotypes, and employers may use this information to determine whether or not to hire an individual (Beattie, 1991; Nadler & Stockdale, 2012). Our research suggests that marital status, gender, and sexual orientation had an influence on ratings of simulations of employment decisions, and because sexual orientation and marital status are not protected by federal law, this information is of potential importance for hiring managers. Hiring managers should be adamant that non-work-relevant information not affect employment decisions, especially as Facebook, LinkedIn, and other social media websites continue to prosper in the workplace, providing decision makers easy access to nonrelevant information such as gender, orientation, and relationship status (34% of organizations use social media in recruiting and contacting potential employees and 13% use social media as a screening tool; Davison, Maraist, & Bing, 2011).

On a more macro level, professionals should work to show the importance of extending federal protection for all marginalized groups within the workplace. Furthermore, research needs to be conducted in this area in order to inform businesses and policymakers of the prevalence and degree of workplace discrimination. State and local employment antidiscrimination laws can, and do, promote positive attitudes toward marginalized groups and reduce some forms of interpersonal discrimination. Conducting this type of research is important because it stimulates further support for policymakers in creating such protective legislation through illustrating how non-work-relevant information can influence ratings and hiring decisions.

Limitations

This study had a few important limitations. One limitation of the study is the use of the word "spouse" to describe married applicants. There is a lot of complexity in how people describe themselves as married or partnered, and in their use of "spouse" and

"partner." Sometimes the use of these terms is not consistent with how the relationships are defined across different states. However, it was decided to use the word "spouse" rather than "partner" because the term "spouse" may indicate a married status better than the term "partner," especially for heterosexual applicants. From a sociopolitical perspective, this could also produce difficulty, as in many states, homosexual partners cannot legally use the terms "married" or "spouse." However, to keep the wording in the conditions consistent, all applicants who were married referred to their significant other as their spouse rather than their partner.

Additionally, another limitation of this study is the wording of the single applicant's response to relocating. In this experiment, marital status of the interviewee relies on the confederate mentioning the word "spouse," or "I broke up with my spouse . . . so I am currently single." This manipulation includes more than simply being married or single, but also the factor of being divorced. Though divorced applicants were not meant to be included in this study, the results have stronger implications for divorced applicants as opposed to never-married or single applicants.

Another limitation of the study was the use of video-taped interviews as opposed to real interviews, and simulations of hiring decisions as opposed to real hiring decisions. This study utilized one male and one female actor in an attempt to standardize the conditions. Efforts were made to ensure the male and female actors were seen as of a similar age and appearance; however, nonverbal behaviors may have differed between genders and between conditions. If one applicant moved around more in their seat, participants may have perceived this candidate to be less confident, or if one applicant smiled more, participants may have perceived this applicant to be more excited for the job. These characteristics may have influenced applicant ratings. Although the interviewed candidates were rated similarly on items such as age, attraction, body movements, rate and volume of speech, and so forth, additional training could have been provided in order to standardize applicant behavior. Additionally, once the video performance had been standardized through the ratings of the panel of reviewers during the pilot tests, these videos could have been ranked by a separate panel of raters to further ensure similar behaviors and appearance.

The study also utilized short video interviews rather than actual interviews, and simulations of hiring decisions rather than actual hiring decisions. Actual interviews may have increased the ecological validity, or the perception of a realistic employment interview, but it may also have reduced the standardization of conditions. This study used video-taped interviews in order to target working adults on MTurk. Actual interviews may have increased the perception of a realistic employment interview, but would not have been possible using MTurk participants.

Future Research Directions

Future research should focus on additional characteristics of applicants and participants. The race, socioeconomic status, and number (and age) of children of both the applicants and of the participants could be used as additional factors in studying marital status, sex, and sexual orientation. For example, Keil and Christie-Mizell (2008) found that the number of children is detrimental to the earnings of White mothers, but has significantly less effect on Black or Hispanic mothers. In addition, although early childbearing significantly depresses the earnings of Black and Hispanic mothers, it does not significantly depress earnings for their White counterparts (Keil & Christie-Mizell, 2008). Therefore, including the intentional expression of having children as an additional factor to marital status and sexual orientation would be an interesting study. Future research should also include the manipulation of the age of children and the age of the individuals whose marital status is being evaluated. It is possible that age of applicants may play a huge role in gender role expectations. For example, younger parents may be perceived as less responsible, and therefore less qualified for organizational positions.

Future research could also manipulate the sex and marital status of the interviewer to see whether it affects hiring decisions. This design could test for the "similar-to-me" effect, in which individuals might hold less stereotypical views if candidates are similar to the interviewer or the person making recommendations. (This study did not have enough variance to test for differences, as both actors were perceived as Caucasian and 73.8% of participants reported their race as Caucasian).

Expanding the categories of marital status, sexual orientation, and career type would also improve the existing knowledge about discrimination. Divorced and widowed individuals should be included in studies that examine marital status. Additionally, existing knowledge about discrimination based on sexual orientation would greatly benefit by researching each group separately (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered) because workplace issues may not be the same for each group. Future research should use a variety of career types to test the effects of typically female-dominated (e.g., Secretary, Teacher, Nurse) versus typically male-dominated (e.g., Construction, Landscaping, Principal) organizations.

Lastly, more research needs to be conducted in order to explore why the three-way interaction of marital status, gender, and sexual orientation occurred. This study found significant differences in female applicant ratings based on marital status and sexual orientation. The study ultimately found that heterosexual women receive significantly higher ratings when married, and lesbian women receive significantly higher ratings when single. More research needs to be conducted in order to understand why these trends occur.

Conclusion

This study revealed a significant three-way interaction, finding statistically significant differences in female mean applicant rating scores, such that lesbian women were rated higher when they were single compared with when they were married, and heterosexual females were rated higher when they were married compared with when they were single. Hiring managers should recognize that marital status, gender, and sexual orientation biases do effect hiring decisions and introduce unwanted bias. Hiring managers should also take precautionary actions to make sure that non-job-relevant criteria do not influence their hiring decisions. This may involve not using social media to prescan candidates or using a third party to look for specific criteria (e.g., illegal activity, ties to a competitor). This research has updated current knowledge about discrimination in employment settings and has provided updated information on a topic for which the existing research has been largely outdated and underresearched.

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