At the 2013 SIOP conference in Houston, it was brought to our attention that some SIOP members felt that the LGBT Committee was only for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals, in large part because of the name of the committee. After some debate, we decided that the name of the committee should remain the same for branding/recognition purposes but that we needed to do a better job of clarifying exactly who we are and what we do to the general SIOP membership. As such, in this article, we hereby state that the LGBT Committee is not just for LGBT individuals (in fact, we are delighted to meet new allies); provide some brief background information about our committee; and extend an enthusiastic invitation to the general SIOP membership to become involved in LGBT issues, activities, and research at this year’s SIOP conference and thereafter.

Background of the LGBT Committee

In 2003, Ann Marie Ryan (SIOP president at the time) proposed that an ad-hoc committee on LGBT research and membership issues should be formed (Chao, 2003). The vision for this committee was that would give “voice” to LGBT people within SIOP. Prior to this, though LGBT issues and concerns were being discussed in both research and applied settings, SIOP did not have a formal mechanism for this. Under the direction of the first cochairs, Scott Button and Mikki Hebl, this ad-hoc committee began exploring how to promote and encourage the awareness and scientific understanding of LGBT issues in the workplace.

The current mission of the LGBT ad-hoc committee is to increase favorable attitudes and awareness of LGBT
issues within SIOP, to encourage research on LGBT issues, and to promote the well-being of LGBT professionals in the workplace. The ad-hoc committee is currently structured into multiple “subcommittees:” research, outreach, policy, and SIOP planning. The committee is composed of students, academicians, and practitioners at multiple stages of their careers and is currently composed of roughly equal numbers of self-identified heterosexual and nonheterosexual SIOP members. Although the committee currently holds ad-hoc status, the goals of the committee are ongoing, and thus we will be petitioning for full committee status in the near future. The LGBT Committee presents an annual award to the best SIOP conference submission pertaining to LGBT issues, maintains ongoing partnerships with professional organizations such as Out & Equal, and meets regularly throughout the year to accomplish short-term goals. One of our most impactful accomplishments has been SIOP’s adoption of a workplace antidiscrimination policy statement that supports the passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which we have publicized to key congressional lawmakers as they deliberate this important legislation.

What Is an Ally?

Although the focus may seem to be on LGBT-identified people, an important part of our community is allies. The term ally typically refers to individuals who strive to end oppression through supporting and advocating on behalf of “oppressed” nonheterosexual minorities (Washington & Evans, 1991). Although “allies” are traditionally thought of in terms of LGBT equality, the idea of supporting and advocating on behalf of others has been seen with other groups as well. For instance, feminists support equality between men and women, and many racial nonminorities are supportive of racial equality. Like these other groups, allies subscribe to the notion that individuals should receive equal treatment regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Contemporary research on LGBT allies is mostly qualitative in nature and typically conducted in education or counseling fields. However, this work highlights two broad types of behaviors that allies can engage in: supporting LGBT individuals in an interpersonal way and advocating on behalf of LGBT individuals in improving social conditions. Sabat, Martinez, and Wessel (2013) recently high-
lighted several opportunities to advance our knowledge of allyship into organizational contexts. The SIOP LGBT committee has made several strides in advocating on behalf of LGBT employees and promoting LGBT research. However, we believe that involving the broader SIOP community will be instrumental in creating substantial changes to workplace equality policies at the federal, community, and organizational levels.

We recognize that the name of our committee may sound exclusionary to some. Perhaps a longer name (e.g., LGBTQAAI Committee) would be more inclusive. However, the operational point to keep in mind is that the committee is focused on LGBT issues not LGBT people. In fact, a more appropriate name, which does not rely upon delineated categories among people, would be something akin to CEMA’s name: The Committee for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Affairs. However, to avoid sounding like alphabet soup or losing brand recognition at the expense of technical correctness, we believe that “LGBT Committee” suffices.

Why Are Allies Important?

Allies are critically important in the pursuit of civil rights for any minority or stigmatized group, not just for LGBT individuals. Indeed, history has shown us the impact that allies have had in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Many non-Black civil rights activists at that time participated in sit-ins, marches, and freedom rides to show their support of racial equality. Of particular note is the fact that these allies typically fell victim to the negative repercussions that resulted from challenging the status quo.

In particular, as nonminority individuals, allies have (by definition) a numerical majority in social and workplace contexts. They also typically hold more power within organizational hierarchies, which also enables them to wield power that minorities cannot. With regard to socially stigmatized minorities, research has shown that minority group members receive negative backlash after standing up against even blatant discrimination, which majority group members do not (Kaiser & Miller, 2001). In addition, confrontations of prejudice enacted
by minority group members themselves elicit more negative responses than identical confrontations enacted by nontargeted majority group members (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006). These studies also show that there was no difference in subsequent prejudiced behaviors on the part of perpetrators of prejudice (prejudice was reduced in both cases). Thus, standing up for minority groups is equally effective in reducing prejudice, but allies do not typically receive negative backlash for doing so.

There are also very positive implications for LGBT individuals who have supportive allies. In organizational contexts, Ragins and Cornwell (2001) found that LGBT employees who felt supported at work were less likely to report discrimination and other negative workplace outcomes. Ragins, Singh, and Cornwell (2007) also found that the fears associated with not disclosing one’s sexual orientation at work were related to lower incidences of disclosure in the workplace. Thus, if allies can show that they would be supportive of LGBT individuals, these individuals would be more likely to come out at work. Other work has highlighted the positive consequences of disclosing one’s sexual orientation (Day & Schoenrade, 2000; Griffith & Hebl, 2002) and gender identity (Law, Martinez, Ruggs, Hebl, & Akers, 2011) including more positive workplace attitudes and lower turnover intentions.

In summary, allies can wield power that may be unavailable to LGBT individuals, they are less likely to receive negative backlash after standing up for minority group members, and they can contribute to an organizational climate that encourages disclosures and authenticity at work, which is related to more positive workplace outcomes for LGBT individuals. However, SIOP allies are in a unique position to contribute to workplace equality for LGBT employees. The SIOP membership represents an extremely talented, educated, and capable group of individuals who can have considerable influence in organizational and federal policies. We now highlight some specific things that SIOP members who believe that individuals are entitled to workplace and social equality regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity can do at this year’s SIOP conference and beyond.
How Can SIOP Allies Participate in LGBT Activities at SIOP?

There are a number of LGBT-related activities at the annual SIOP conference, and this year is no exception. There is an annual full committee meeting, in which we recap the previous year and set goals for the following one. This is open to any SIOP member who is interested, not just committee members, and is a good way to get an overview of what the committee is currently working on. This meeting is scheduled for May 16 at 2:30PM, Room 301A, Hawaii Convention Center. There is also an annual LGBT reception, which is a less formal opportunity to network with individuals interested in LGBT issues. The presentations of the Best LGBT Submission Award are given at this reception as well. This is scheduled for May 16 at 4:30 pm, Nautilus Suite, Hilton Hawaiian Village. Both of these events are fantastic ways to get involved with LGBT issues at the conference, a relationship that can be maintained throughout the year through committee work between conferences. We also encourage you to sit in on symposia, poster sessions, and expert panels related to LGBT research. These sessions will highlight some of the interesting work SIOP members are doing relevant to LGBT workplace issues including selection, withdrawal, leadership, and work–family issues.

We sincerely hope that you will consider stopping in to the committee meeting to get more information about what we are currently working on and to the reception to chat. Our goals for this article were to clarify who we are as a committee and extend a heartfelt invitation to SIOP members who are interested in learning more. Looking forward to seeing you in Hawaii. Aloha!

References


Remember to visit **SIOP’s external award resource** for a select list of ongoing award opportunities. These external awards bring significant visibility and recognition to our members, SIOP, and our profession.

There are submission deadlines throughout the year. We encourage you to check out these award opportunities and submit nominations even if the deadline is months away!

For more information, to tell us about a nomination or award, or to suggest an award to be included in the resource table, please contact the External Awards Committee at [ExternalAwards@siop.org](mailto:ExternalAwards@siop.org).