

ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION OF EMPLOYEES REPRESENTING SEXUAL MINORITIES IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Organizational socialization is a critical process through which employees learn workplace norms, develop professional relationships, and establish a sense of belonging. However, employees representing sexual minorities may experience this process differently because of concerns related to identity disclosure, discrimination, stigma, and workplace acceptance. This study explores the organizational socialization experiences of sexual minority employees in Pakistan, focusing on the three phases of anticipatory socialization, encounter, and change and acquisition. Using qualitative interview data, the study examines how lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender employees navigate workplace entry, interpersonal relationships, identity management, and organizational inclusion. The findings highlight recurring experiences of concealment, self-monitoring, uncertainty about acceptance, exclusion from informal networks, and limited access to supportive colleagues or role models. At the same time, supportive interpersonal relationships and inclusive workplace practices were associated with greater psychological safety and belonging. The study contributes to organizational socialization research by highlighting how sexual and gender identity shape employees' adjustment experiences within the Pakistani workplace and emphasizes the need for more inclusive organizational policies and practices.

I. INTRODUCTION

Organizational socialization refers to the process through which newcomers acquire the knowledge, values, norms, behaviors, and interpersonal skills necessary to become effective members of an organization. It begins before formal entry into the workplace and continues as employees learn organizational expectations, develop relationships, and construct a sense of belonging. Organizational socialization is traditionally understood through three phases: **anticipatory socialization, encounter, and change and acquisition** (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The anticipatory phase involves employees' expectations and perceptions of an organization before entry; the encounter phase begins when employees experience the actual workplace and compare organizational reality with their prior expectations; and the change and acquisition phase involves developing role competence, social relationships, and greater familiarity with organizational practices. Although these stages provide a useful framework, socialization is increasingly viewed as an ongoing process in which employees continually negotiate their roles and identities within changing organizational environments (Gupta & Prashar, 2026).

For **LGBT employees**, organizational socialization can be more complex because workplace adjustment may involve not only learning organizational roles but also negotiating sexual orientation or gender identity. LGBT

employees may assess whether their workplace is safe, inclusive, and supportive before deciding how openly to express their identities. Research indicates that discrimination, identity concealment, exclusion, and inadequate organizational support remain important concerns for LGBT workers despite growing attention to workplace diversity and inclusion (Ho et al., 2023; Maji et al., 2024; Lacatena et al., 2024). Consequently, LGBT employees may engage in self-monitoring, selective disclosure, identity management, and cautious relationship-building during organizational entry and adjustment.

This issue is particularly important in **Pakistan**, where the organizational experiences of LGBT employees are shaped by broader sociocultural, legal, and institutional conditions. LGBT employees may enter organizations with concerns regarding acceptance, discrimination, confidentiality, and interpersonal safety. The limited empirical literature from Pakistan suggests that sexual- and gender-minority individuals can encounter discrimination and barriers to meaningful employment participation. The experiences of transgender employees are especially significant, with research documenting unequal employment opportunities, workplace discrimination, harassment, and violence (Waqar et al., 2022; Arslan et al., 2023). The wider legal and social environment may also influence employees' willingness to disclose their identities and participate openly in workplace relationships. Therefore, organizational socialization in Pakistan should be understood not only as a process of occupational adjustment but also as a process of identity negotiation, safety assessment, and belonging.

The experiences of **lesbian employees** may involve fear of rejection, stereotyping, sexualization, and non-acceptance, particularly during recruitment and organizational entry. Lesbian employees may strategically manage their language, appearance, and personal disclosures to avoid unwanted disclosure of their sexual orientation. Heteronormative conversations, workplace humor, informal social activities, and the absence of visible lesbian role models can further complicate social integration. Such experiences may contribute to emotional exhaustion, social isolation, and difficulty developing authentic workplace relationships. Recent evidence confirms that lesbian and gay workers continue to experience discrimination and inequalities in workplace well-being despite broader organizational commitments to diversity (Lacatena et al., 2024).

Similarly, **gay employees** may encounter homophobia, negative stereotypes, social exclusion, and pressure to conform to heteronormative or masculine workplace expectations. Decisions concerning whether to disclose a same-sex relationship or personal identity may become an important component of organizational socialization. Concealment may provide protection from anticipated discrimination but can simultaneously create emotional strain and limit authentic interpersonal relationships. Workplace allies, supportive managers, and inclusive organizational practices can therefore play an important role in reducing psychological distress and facilitating social integration among LGBT employees (Ho et al., 2023).

Bisexual employees may experience additional challenges associated with invisibility and identity invalidation. Their sexual orientation may be misunderstood, questioned, or interpreted according to their current relationship, leading to assumptions that they are heterosexual, lesbian, or gay. Evidence indicates that bisexual employees may be less likely to be open about their sexual orientation at work, while those who disclose can experience workplace discrimination comparable to that experienced by gay and lesbian employees (Mallory et al., 2022). Biphobic stereotypes and the perception that bisexuality is temporary or indecisive can further undermine employees' sense of legitimacy and belonging (Blais et al., 2024). Thus, bisexual organizational socialization may involve distinctive forms of concealment, explanation, and identity negotiation.

The socialization experiences of **transgender employees** differ in important ways because gender identity may intersect directly with names, pronouns, appearance, dress, documentation, and access to gender-appropriate facilities. Transgender employees may experience discrimination during recruitment, misgendering, inappropriate questioning, harassment, exclusion, and concerns about physical and psychological safety. In Pakistan, transgender employees face substantial barriers to employment and workplace inclusion, including unequal opportunities and experiences of discrimination and violence (Waqar et al., 2022; Arslan et al., 2023). These conditions can make organizational entry and social integration particularly challenging and may require transgender employees to continually negotiate visibility, safety, authenticity, and professional identity.

Overall, organizational socialization among LGBT employees is a multidimensional process involving **role learning, identity management, interpersonal relationships, and the development of belonging**. Although lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender employees share concerns related to discrimination and inclusion, their experiences are not identical. Differences in visibility, disclosure, stereotypes, gender expression, and organizational responses can shape how each group experiences the anticipatory, encounter, and change-and-acquisition phases. Despite growing international research, comparatively limited attention has been given to how LGBT employees experience these socialization processes within the Pakistani workplace. Examining these experiences through qualitative analysis and **Natural Language Processing (NLP)** can help identify recurring linguistic patterns and underlying themes in employees' narratives, providing a more nuanced understanding of workplace identity negotiation, inclusion, exclusion, and belonging. Such an approach can contribute to both organizational socialization scholarship and the development of more inclusive workplace practices for LGBT employees in Pakistan.

METHOD

Participants

The study was based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of the interview transcriptions of sexual minorities. Research participants included employees belonging to sexual minorities ($N = 32$) further divided into four equal parts each representing a segment of LGBT including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. The sample was taken through snowball sampling technique in which one member from each sexual minority was identified to approach other members through a chain of individuals.

In-Depth Interviews

Questions for conducting interviews with the employee representatives of sexual minorities were generated through literature reviews and consultation with the experts in gender psychology and organizational psychology. A list of questions was compiled and then given to Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) to review the interview questions. With few changes, a final list of open-ended questions was prepared for in-depth interviews. The interview questions covered all areas of the organizational socialisation of employees belonging to sexual minorities.

Procedure

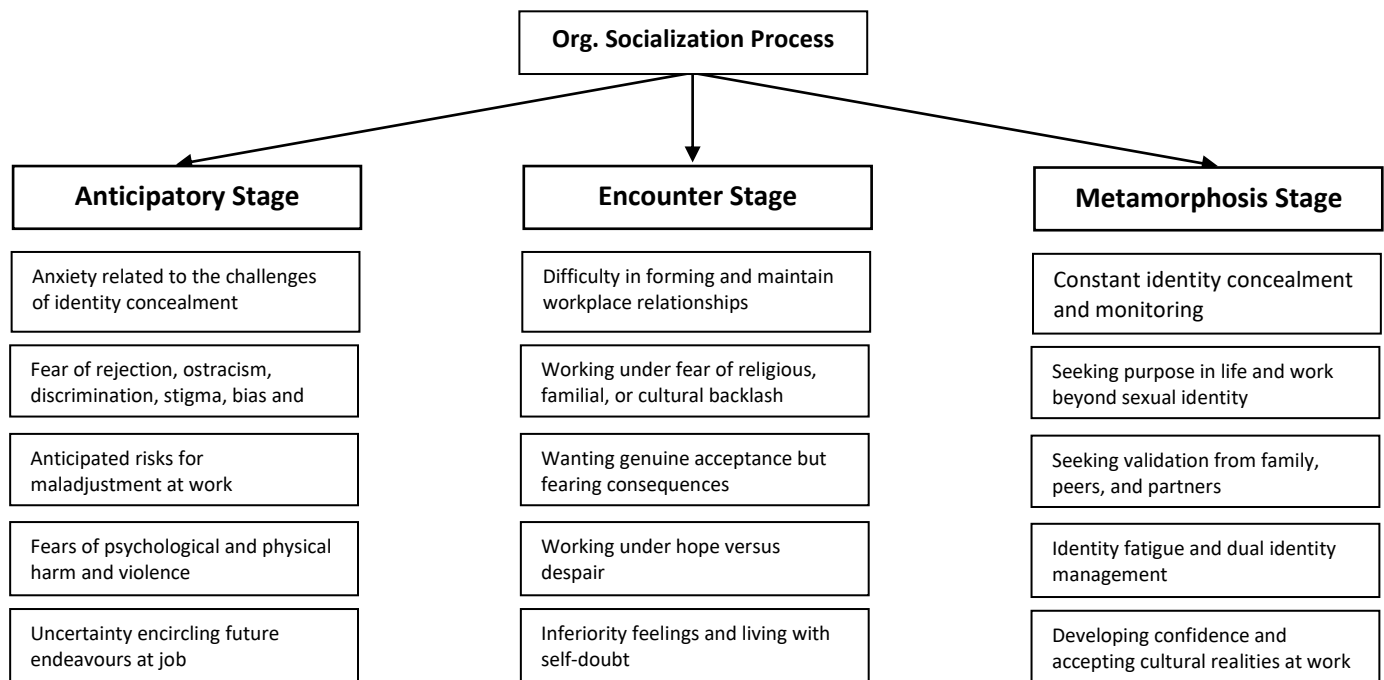
The employees belonging to sexual minorities were approached using multiple platforms through their online communities, social media platforms and groups in the community supporting sexual minorities. It was also ensured that their minimum job experience was six months. Certain hardships were faced in the data collection due to the masked identity of sexual minorities in Pakistan as they usually camouflage themselves under mainstream genders in Pakistan.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted by considering certain important ethical considerations as the sample of culturally sensitive, facing identity crisis in Pakistan due to legal and cultural restrictions. However, informed consent was taken, right to withdrawal of information was offered to sexual minority representative employees, and anonymity of the identity of participants was ensured along with the confidentiality of the information.

II. RESULTS

Figure I: Themes on Three Phases of Organizational Socialization, Derived from the Transcriptions of Interviews



III. DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that organizational socialization for sexual minority employees in Pakistan is not a straightforward process of learning organizational norms but rather a continuous negotiation between professional integration and identity management. During the **anticipatory stage**, participants entered organizations with considerable anxiety, anticipating rejection, discrimination, stigma, and even psychological or physical harm. These concerns suggest that employees' expectations were shaped by broader societal attitudes toward sexual minorities, causing them to begin their organizational journey with uncertainty rather than optimism. Such findings support previous research indicating that LGBTQ+ individuals often anticipate workplace discrimination before entering employment, leading to heightened stress and cautious behavior (Pereira & Costa, 2016; Clark et al., 2022). In the **encounter stage**, participants struggled to establish authentic workplace relationships while simultaneously fearing religious, cultural, and familial backlash if their identities became known. Their desire for acceptance was frequently overshadowed by concerns about potential negative consequences, resulting in feelings of self-doubt and emotional conflict. This demonstrates that socialization extends beyond understanding organizational roles and includes managing interpersonal risks in environments where heteronormative expectations dominate. Finally, the **metamorphosis stage** illustrates that although participants gradually developed confidence and adapted to workplace realities, their adjustment was accompanied by continuous identity concealment, self-monitoring, and identity fatigue. Rather than experiencing complete organizational integration, many participants accepted concealment as a long-term strategy for maintaining employment and social harmony. This finding aligns with recent studies showing that LGBTQ+ employees often engage in continuous identity management to protect themselves from discrimination, despite the psychological costs associated with such strategies (Perales, 2022; Pereira et al., 2022). Overall, these findings suggest that organizational socialization among sexual minority employees in Pakistan is characterized by resilience and adaptation, yet it remains constrained by social stigma, limited workplace inclusion, and the persistent need to negotiate identity throughout the employment journey.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that organizational socialization among sexual minority employees in Pakistan extends beyond learning workplace roles and norms to include continuous negotiation of identity, acceptance, safety, and psychological well-being. Across the anticipatory, encounter, and metamorphosis phases, participants reported anxiety, fear of rejection, identity concealment, self-monitoring, difficulties in forming authentic workplace relationships, and the emotional burden of reconciling personal identity with organizational expectations. Although many participants developed coping strategies and gradually adapted to their workplaces, adjustment was often achieved through identity management rather than genuine inclusion. The findings extend organizational socialization literature by highlighting the limitations of traditional models in culturally conservative contexts and demonstrating how societal stigma and workplace heteronormativity shape the experiences of LGBT employees. The study underscores the need for inclusive organizational policies, supportive leadership, confidential support systems, diversity awareness, and effective anti-discrimination practices that foster psychological safety and equal participation. While the findings are context-specific and not statistically generalizable, they provide valuable insight into an under-researched population and highlight the need for future longitudinal, mixed-method, and cross-cultural research. Ultimately, meaningful organizational socialization requires workplaces where sexual minority employees can contribute and develop professionally without compromising their identity, dignity, or sense of belonging.

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