



Does Identity Distancing Beget Work-Life Boundary Segmentation? An Examination of Lesbian, gay & Bisexual Employees

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Abstract

Though all workers must consider how to best manage boundaries between work and life spheres, employees facing workplace prejudice grounded in invisible identity standing may face additional considerations; to the extent that bringing one's home life to the office exposes an employee to stigma at work, that employee may prefer to segment (versus integrate) life aspects to avoid such prejudice. Via a time-lagged survey of 216 lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) employees, we found that identity distancing was indirectly related to enacted work-life boundaries through boundary management preferences, with identity distancing at least partially determined by perceptions of organizational diversity climate. Accordingly, we advance theory related to boundary enactment via the identification of individual and environmental circumstances related to boundary preferences. Practically, we highlight the pervasiveness of stigma as informative to the core relationships employees form between work and life spheres, underscoring the benefits of a positive organizational diversity climate.

Keywords Boundary management · Identity · Stigma · Sexual orientation

“Where I work isn't accepting of alternative lifestyles, so I don't talk about family other than my children. I don't talk about my partner except with a few people I trust (Participant 35 of Sawyer et al., 2017).”

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Work-life boundary management has been conceptualized as the degree to which one segments (i.e., keeps separate) or integrates (i.e., brings together) their work and non-work spheres (Nippert-Eng, 1996). While all employees are faced with the consideration of how and to what degree to integrate these spheres, it becomes apparent that some workers face greater barriers than others. As exhibited in the above quote, to the extent that bringing one's home life to the office exposes an employee to stigma at work, that employee may prefer to avoid integrating non-work life aspects. In the present research we argue that individuals of invisible stigmatized identities (minority sexual orientation, in the present case) face an additional constraint to the way they are able to manage their work and non-work boundaries, beyond the constraints faced by those without such identities.¹ That is, the extent to which an individual distances from their invisible, potentially stigmatized, social identity at work may inform the way they prefer to separate or blur boundaries between their work and non-work spheres, as well as the extent to which they actually are able to maintain boundaries as they wish.

This research contributes to the work-life and stigmatization literatures in a number of manners. First, we extend theory and research on boundary management by integrating the social identity management strategy of identity distancing as a potential influence on boundary segmentation preferences and behaviors. That is, for certain groups, environmental influences may lead to changes in preferences for managing boundaries in a particular setting. Second, we illustrate how climate perceptions, specifically diversity climate perceptions, can have an indirect influence on boundary segmentation through their impact on social identity management. Finally, by focusing on work-life processes as relevant to sexual minority employees, we respond to calls for diversification of populations used to understand the work/non-work interface (Aycan, 2008), and contribute to conversations regarding LGBTQ+-specific work-life processes (Murphy et al., 2021).

Prior to discussing the boundary management of LGB employees, we discuss how the workplace environment influences how individuals manage their LGB identity, with a particular focus on whether one feels one must distance from that identity. We follow this with an overview of boundary management research and the rationale as to why the press to distance from one's LGB identity may influence boundary management preferences and behaviors.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Distancing from a Stigmatized Social Identity

Individuals of particular social identities (i.e., race, religion, sexual orientation) face societal stigma; one question that follows is how such individuals manage this

¹ While parent and spouse/partner are role identities that individuals may take on, our use of the term identity here is about the management of an invisible social identity rather than management of one's role identities.

stigma within their working lives. These circumstances may be further complicated for those with invisible (rather than visible) stigmatized identities, as the decision of how to manage one's identity is predicated on the decision of whether to make this identity externally known (i.e. "coming out" at work; Griffith & Hebl, 2002). Given the costs associated with potential prejudice, people with stigmatized invisible identities are likely to strategically consider whether, when, and how to reveal their characteristic (Ragins, 2008), a process known as identity management.

Multiple researchers have attempted to understand the characteristics of identity management for individuals of such invisible, stigmatized identities, proposing various frameworks in categorizing potential management approaches available to workers (e.g. Anderson et al., 2001; Button, 2004; Clair et al., 2005; Lyons et al., 2014). At the broadest level, these varying identity management conceptualizations converge on differing tendencies to "affirm" or "distance" oneself from the identity in question. Those closer to the "affirming" spectrum end openly disclose and discuss their identity with coworkers (Anderson et al., 2001; Button, 2004) even publicly promoting the positive aspects with which that identity is associated (Lyons et al., 2017). In contrast, those engaging in identity "distancing" deemphasize the salience of their identity within a given context (Shih et al., 2013), perhaps actively concealing their identity standing (Clair et al., 2005), attempting to "pass" as a member of the non-stigmatized majority-group to avoid experiencing consequences of stigma (Anderson et al., 2001), or not discussing that identity. The extent to which one distances from their sexual orientation identity at work is the focus of the present research, given our supposition that identity distancing may be particularly relevant to work-life boundary management processes for sexual minority employees.

Diversity Climate as a Contextual Influence

An individual's need to engage in identity management tactics such as identity distancing is strongly impacted by whether they perceive they will experience stigmatization in the workplace. Thus, we considered the role of perceived organizational diversity climate both as a determinant of identity distancing, as well as an antecedent of work-relevant outcomes for employees of concealable, stigmatized identities. Broadly, diversity climate perceptions are understood as individual views of an organization's value for diversity, as well as perceptions concerning that organization's approach to diversity management (Roberson, 2012). Past work supports the notion that individuals manage stigmatized identities differently depending on how accepting their organization is perceived (Button, 2001; Chrobot-Mason et al., 2001; Clair et al., 2005; King et al., 2008). Specifically, strong diversity climates communicate that worker disclosure will not be reacted to negatively (i.e., identity safety), and therefore employees perceive fewer costs associated with affirming their identity as compared to individuals perceiving weaker diversity climates, who may anticipate greater risk (Clair et al., 2005). Consequently, we hypothesized a relationship between individual perceptions of diversity climate and subsequent identity management:

H1: Diversity climate perceptions will significantly and negatively relate to engagement in distancing from one's orientation identity at work.

Beyond affecting identity distancing, we suggest that perceived diversity climate can directly impact individual work-relevant attitudes, including subjective well-being, work withdrawal, and job satisfaction. Past relationships between diversity climate perceptions and individual-level outcomes (e.g. Mor Barak et al., 2016 for a meta-analysis; McKay et al., 2007 ; Stewart et al., 2011) are often explained via psychological contract or person-fit perspectives (Kristof-Brown et al., 2002; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994), such that individuals (particularly of stigmatized identities) should experience better fit with organizations when diversity climate perceptions are high rather than low, given perceptions that they are valued by the organization. Alternatively, when stigmatized employees perceive weak diversity climates, they have demonstrated greater turnover intentions (Stewart et al., 2011; McKay et al., 2007), lower job satisfaction (Driscoll et al., 1996; Madera et al., 2013), and greater occupational stress (Driscoll et al., 1996), likely due to perceived misfit, feelings of exclusion, and organizational mistrust (Mor Barak et al., 2016). We hypothesized similar associations within the present study:

H2: Diversity climate perceptions will significantly and (a) positively predict subjective well-being, (b) negatively predict withdrawal, and (c) positively predict job satisfaction.

We next turn to the core of our theorizing with a discussion of boundary management preferences and enactment, specifically considering how these constructs may be impacted by the relationship between diversity climate and identity distancing discussed thus far.

Boundary Management

Workers must manage their life roles inside and outside of the workplace. Ashforth et al.' (2000) discussion of boundary theory recognizes that individuals occupy multiple roles reflecting various aspects of one's life (e.g., team leader, father), and accordingly are tasked with transitioning between such roles daily. Clark (2000) presents similar ideas within her work-family border theory, suggesting the degree of interaction between work and life domains depends on the strength of the border between them. Both theories support the notion that when managing boundaries or borders between various life spheres, people fall somewhere on a continuum between poles of segmentation and integration (Nippert-Eng, 1996).

At one end of this continuum, *role segmentation* represents the extent to which roles and their respective contexts are completely separated in nature, as a function of one's inflexible and impermeable role boundaries. Ashforth et al. (2000) posit that individuals engaging in role segmentation can reduce blurring between roles (allowing for clarity regarding when one is occupying which role within a given moment), compartmentalize roles psychologically, and face fewer cross-role interruptions. At

the same time, segmentation poses greater barriers for cross-role transitions, as the roles in question are often both psychologically and physically differentiated from one another.

Conversely, *role integration* is denoted by roles that are weakly differentiated, not strictly tied to physical and temporal circumstances, and easily facilitate cross-role interruptions. Highly integrated (rather than segmented) roles often feature increased similarity across roles, and physical role location overlap. Given the similarity between spheres, one would expect individuals of integrated roles to jump from one role to another with greater ease than those occupying segmented roles. However, role integration is concurrently associated with fuzzy role boundaries such that roles themselves are blurred, potentially causing anxiety from lack of clarity and inhibition of full role disengagement.

In considering how one's standing on the segmentation-integration continuum is determined, Clark (2000) argues for an active conceptualization of work-life boundary management, noting that individuals take intentional steps to proactively shape their spheres toward their individual preference of balance. This contrasts with the notion that individuals' boundary management is wholly determined as a consequence of given and static role boundaries. Research has considered a nuanced view of individual management of boundaries. For example, a number of studies have focused on profiles or boundary management styles to provide descriptions of the varied ways by which individuals manage boundaries (e.g., Bulger et al., 2007; Kinunen et al., 2016; Kossek et al., 2012; Urbanaviciute et al., 2023). Thus, variability in enacted boundary management is well documented.

Preferred Versus Enacted Boundary Segmentation

Acknowledging that achieving one's ideal work/non-work boundaries may not always be possible, the literature differentiates "boundary preferences" (i.e. the ideal boundaries individuals wish to create between differing life spheres) from "enacted boundaries" (i.e. the actual demarcations created by individuals between their respective life domains; Ammons, 2013). As suggested by both boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) and border theory (Clark, 2000), individuals vary in the extent they segment/integrate work and non-work roles (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Clark's (2000) active conceptualization suggests that individuals intentionally shape roles in line with preferences toward their personal definition of work-life balance, a notion broadly in line with the overall philosophy of differential psychology. Boundary management research has focused on the concept of fit between what is preferred and what is enacted (e.g., Boegaerts et al., 2018; Chambel et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2009; De Gieter et al., 2022). While these studies yield mixed evidence for fit being necessary for outcomes, they do provide evidence for the value of considering preference and enactment as distinct concepts. As previous works have demonstrated a link between boundary management preferences and enacted boundaries (e.g. Carlson et al., 2016; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010), we hypothesized a link specifically for preference and enactment of segmentation:

H3: Preferences for boundary segmentation will significantly and positively relate to enacted segmentation.

While enacted boundary management is influenced by boundary management preferences (Clark, 2000), context further impacts how one manages their work/non-work boundaries. Most research on contextual influences focuses on boundary permeability and flexibility in work arrangements (see Allen et al., 2014 for a summary). For example, a worker hoping to fully segment work and life roles may find herself unable to do so when childcare plans fall through, now unexpectedly needing to address family concerns while at work. Indeed, Nippert-Eng (1996) highlights the social constraints of work and family as inhibiting individual discretion, effectively narrowing the range of potential boundary management options available to an individual (Ammons, 2013). As another example, research on boundary management during the COVID-19 pandemic focused on how forced work from home aligned with, interfered with, or changed preferences (e.g., Allen et al., 2021; Shockley et al., 2021; Urbanaviciute et al., 2023). Another recent research focus has been on how a partner's boundary management affects one's ability to enact preferences (Junker & van Dick, 2020; Russo et al., 2018; Shirmohammadi et al., 2023). These examples align with Clark's (2000) conceptualization of boundary management, arguing that though individuals do seek to actively construct borders in line with preferences, they are only able to do so as the context allows. In the next section we discuss how one's management of a stigmatized social identity through identity distancing might inform this process.

Linking Identity Distancing and Boundary Segmentation

Powell and Greenhaus (2012) proposed that when individuals face work decisions, their family role influences what are seen as favorable courses of action (e.g., parents considering the impact on children and/or partners of working late). Regardless of one's family demands, employees with stigmatized social identities may have additional factors that influence preferences to enact boundaries between the work and non-work interface. To the extent that employing integrative boundary management tactics may expose themselves to stigma at work, workers of such social identities may prefer to segment (or separate) their respective life spheres. That is, for those whose sexual orientation may result in bias in a particular work context, the decision to keep that identity distant or more invisible at work will directly impact preferences for boundary management (i.e., if I am not revealing my orientation at work (distancing) because of a negative diversity climate, my preference will be to keep that aspect of my identity and my life outside of work separate). Conversely, in a work environment where distancing is not needed, one's personal preferences for integration and segmentation may vary more.

It is important to conceptually differentiate the key constructs at play to underscore the premise of the present argument. *Identity distancing* is conceptualized as the extent to which one creates distance from or even outright denies standing on a particular identity at work; one can theoretically distance from (or conversely,

affirm) any identity within their workplace (e.g. gender, race/ethnicity, religious affiliation, though sexual orientation is of focus in the current study). Factors contributing to one's engagement in distancing can range from individual differences (e.g. identity development, Chrobot-Mason et al., 2001) to environmental characteristics (e.g. institutional support, Ragins, 2008). Indeed, Sabat et al. (2020) conducted a meta-analysis that illustrated the complexity behind decisions to express a stigmatized identity, and particularly a less visible identity, at work. In contrast, *boundary management* concerns the overall relationship one constructs between their work and home lives, traditionally ranging from segmentation to integration. Distinct factors may contribute to one's preferences for and actual enactment of work-life boundaries (e.g., personality, work characteristics; Gardner et al., 2021). Here we position stigmatized identity distancing as a previously unexamined antecedent particularly relevant for those of invisible identities requiring disclosure (as does sexual orientation). As identity distancing concerns one's presentation of a singular, particular identity at work, it provides a unique influence on preferences for boundary management and subsequent enactment that differs from the preference/enactment fit perspective prevalent in the literature, as the fit perspective is based on a presumption of not having to navigate potential stigmatization at work related to one's orientation and life outside of work.

As identity distancing concerns the degree individuals make their stigmatized identity known and salient, the extent that boundary-relevant behaviors openly reflect one's standing on a stigmatized characteristic may inform which behaviors one prefers to engage in. Given that integration and increased boundary crossover can be associated with information from one sphere being revealed or becoming increasingly salient to individuals of another sphere (e.g. talking to coworkers about your weekend, talking to your significant other about your boss; Desrochers et al., 2012; Sawyer et al., 2017), it follows that individuals of stigmatized identities may differentially prefer to adopt boundary strategies depending on the degree they seek to make their stigmatized identity known at work (Sabat et al., 2020).

As integration of work and life spheres would theoretically allow for ample crossover between work and life domains (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000), perhaps then an individual seeking to keep characteristics associated with their stigmatized identity (e.g., sexual orientation) concealed or less salient from coworkers would prefer to avoid such boundary management tactics to maintain privacy and reduce opportunity for discrimination. Workers with a minority sexual orientation may feel more inclined to segment their non-work from their work lives than others. For example, Sabat et al. (2017) demonstrated that decisions to reveal sexual orientation at work relate to whether LGB people feel others will be receptive to the disclosure. Indeed, Sawyer et al. (2017) note that even LGB employees who are "out" at work may hesitate to bring partners to work events as influenced by the potential of encountering stigma, specifically by avoiding discussion surrounding family vacations and other family-oriented topics at their workplace. As such examples dictate, sexual minority employees may seek to control the degree to which non-work life infiltrates the work role with potential for experienced prejudice in mind. Therefore, we predict one's identity-relevant behaviors may inform one's preferences for

work-life boundary management: to the extent that an individual engages in identity distancing strategies at work, so too may they prefer to segment their work and life spheres to reinforce their identity concealment or downplaying.

H4: Engagement in distancing from one's orientation identity at work will significantly and positively relate to preferences for boundary segmentation.

To the extent that segmentation preferences are informed by an individual's identity processes, identity distancing will influence enacted boundary management. That is, because of distancing from one's orientation at work, individuals will seek to keep their non-work life separate from work, and will enact behaviors in line with that preference. We predict the following indirect relationship between identity distancing and enacted segmentation through segmentation preferences:

H5: Distancing from one's orientation identity at work will be indirectly and positively related to enacted boundary segmentation through its relationship with preferences for boundary segmentation.

Acknowledging demonstrated consequences associated with identity concealment (e.g. Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Ragins et al., 2007), we too anticipate that boundary segmentation as influenced by identity distancing will be associated with worsened work-relevant attitudes. Ragins (2008) discusses the consequences of disconnects between disclosure levels across life domains, suggesting those who are differentially "out" between their home and work lives may experience psychological stress and role conflict, amplified further when the identity in question is central to the individual's self-schema. These stressors are often attributed to one's implicit desire toward congruent identity expression across life domains, in line with self-verification theory's assertion that people prefer for others to perceive them as they perceive themselves (Swann Jr., 2011). In support of such thinking, Lindsey and colleagues (2019) found evidence of worsened life satisfaction in circumstances in which LGB employees were open about their identity within their non-work, but not their work, lives.

In the broader literature on boundary management, some suggest that segmentation is no worse or better than integration, but it is the fit between preference and enactment that matters (e.g., Chen et al., 2009). Indeed, several studies have found that actual segmentation is associated with more positive outcomes in terms of work-family conflict and balance (e.g., Kossek et al., 2012; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). This research, however, focuses on the outcome of work-family conflict rather than other work outcomes. In this case, we are arguing that preference and enactment alignment on segmentation is because individuals are concerned about stigmatization, and that remains the key driver of outcomes. To the extent that one's boundary segmentation is influenced and motivated by identity distancing, self-verification theory and Ragins' (2008) model of identity disconnects implies the likelihood of negative consequences for the individual in question. Accordingly, we predict the following relationship between enacted boundary segmentation and work-relevant attitudes:

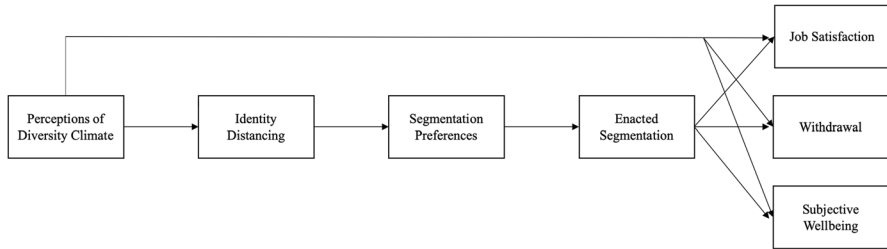


Fig. 1 Theoretical model linking diversity climate, identity distancing, and boundary management variables to outcomes

H6: Enacted segmentation will significantly and negatively predict (a) subjective wellbeing, (b) positively predict withdrawal, and (c) negatively predict job satisfaction.

Method

To test our theoretical model (Fig. 1), we conducted a survey effort spanning two time points. At Time 1, participants completed measures of identity distancing at work, preferred and enacted boundary segmentation, and perceived diversity climate. At Time 2, participants provided responses to outcome scales of subjective wellbeing, job satisfaction, and withdrawal.

Participants

A total of 494 participants were recruited through the Qualtrics Panel Service to complete the Time 1 survey. Inclusionary criteria were identification as either gay, lesbian, or bisexual, employment at least part-time in non-self-employed circumstances, United States residence, and correct responses to two attention checks. Participants providing non-sensical qualitative responses ($N=12$, 2.4%) were removed, leaving a final Time 1 sample of 482 participants. Each of the 482 Time 1 participants were invited to complete the Time 2 survey one week later, of which 225 participated (46.7%). Those reporting sexual orientation at Time 2 differing from that reported at Time 1 were removed ($N=9$, 4.0%), leaving a final two-time-point sample of 216 LGB workers. Of this final sample, 53.7% identified as gay, 31.5% as bisexual, and 14.8% as lesbian.

Participant gender breakdown was 69.0% men, 30.6% women and 0.5% non-binary. Participants were on average 50.01 years old ($SD=14.08$), working on average 37.93 hours per week ($SD=11.56$), and employed at their current organization on average 12.87 years ($SD=11.04$). Participants primarily worked outside the home (57.4%), with 42.3% working remotely (data was collected in January/February 2021 of the COVID-19 pandemic). Racial/ethnic breakdown for this sample was the following (participants could self-identify as multiple options): 87.5% White, 6.0% Black/African American, 3.2% East Asian, 3.2% Latinx, 2.3% South Asian,

0.5% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 0.5% American Indian/Alaska Native, and 1.4% “Other racial identity.” Participants were compensated monetarily directly via Qualtrics panels, with participant acquisition costs of \$5.50 per completed survey and participants compensated after completing surveys at each time point.

Measures (Time 1)

Identity Distancing Participant engagement in distancing identity management was assessed via Button’s (2004) six-item “Avoiding” subscale ($\alpha = .87$). Captured using a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 7 = “Strongly Agree”) an example item is “I avoid situations where heterosexual coworkers are likely to ask me personal questions.”

Boundary Segmentation (Preferred and Enacted) The most widely used measure to assess segmentation preferences is Kreiner’s (2006) four-item scale (example item: “I prefer to keep work life at work”), while Powell and Greenhaus (2010) present an adapted measure of Kreiner’s which assesses actual enacted segmentation (example item: “I keep work life at work”). However, as both of these measures solely examine the management of work to non-work contexts, we added an additional four items to each scale to more fully capture the full spectrum of segmentation preferences via the recognition of non-work to work boundary management (example added preference item: “I prefer to keep my non-work life outside of work;” example added enacted item: “I keep my non-work life outside of work”). Accordingly, the final measures were each comprised of eight items, and were assessed via seven-point Likert-type scales (1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 7 = “Strongly Agree”). Both scales demonstrated strong internal consistency (segmentation preferences: $\alpha = .88$; enacted segmentation: $\alpha = .93$).

Diversity Climate Perceptions Participant perceptions of their organization’s diversity climate was captured via McKay et al.’ (2008) four-item measure. Assessed via a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 5 = “Strongly Agree”; $\alpha = .89$), an example item is, “My work unit/team maintains a diversity-friendly work environment.”

Measures (Time 2)

Subjective Wellbeing Subjective wellbeing was measured via Diener et al.’ (1985) Satisfaction with Life Scale. This five-item measure was assessed using a seven-point Likert-type scale, (1 = “Strongly Disagree,” to 7 = “Strongly Agree; $\alpha = .92$), and an example item is, “In most ways, my life is close to ideal.”

Withdrawal Participants completed a 13-item measure from Hanisch and Hulin (1990), in which they indicated the frequency with which they engage in each of the 13 behaviors on a five-point, Likert-type scale (1 = “Never” to 5 = “Always”). An example item is, “Wanted to leave work early” ($\alpha = .91$).

Job Satisfaction Participant job satisfaction was assessed via the three-item Overall Job Satisfaction scale (Cammann et al., 1983). An example item is, “In general, I like working at my job.” The measure was captured via a seven-point, Likert-type scale (1 = “Strongly Disagree,” to 7 = “Strongly Agree”; $\alpha = .92$).

Results

Hypotheses were evaluated using a structural equations model in MPlus (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). A primary examination of the measurement model displayed fit below conventional cutoffs (χ^2 (1018) = 2059.72, $p < .001$, CFI = .87, TLI = .86, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .09), though removal of three withdrawal items demonstrating significant cross-loadings with the job satisfaction factor produced a model of acceptable fit (χ^2 (887) = 1546.22, $p < .001$, CFI = .905, TLI = .898, RMSEA = .058, SRMR = .076); thus, hypotheses were evaluated using this model with the modified withdrawal scale to ensure discriminant validity between outcome constructs.

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations between study variables and participant demographics. Standardized regression coefficients and standard errors from the evaluated structural model are displayed in Table 2. In examining Table 1, we find that in line with expectations, identity distancing was positively correlated both with preferred and enacted segmentation. Further, diversity climate was significantly correlated with each work-relevant attitudinal outcome in the respective hypothesized direction. Participant demographics were largely uncorrelated with focal study variables, though White participants reported higher identity distancing than did non-White participants; additionally, age correlated with study outcomes, with older workers reporting higher job satisfaction, higher subjective wellbeing, and lower withdrawal, consistent with meta-analytic evidence linking age and job attitudes (Ng & Feldman, 2010); as no demographic variables were correlated with both study predictors and study outcomes, we present a model without controls with an aim toward parsimony and preservation of power to assess the hypothesized model.

First, we examined the role of perceived diversity climate as related to identity distancing (Hypothesis 1) and outcomes of job satisfaction, withdrawal, and subjective wellbeing (Hypothesis 2). Supporting Hypothesis 1, the regression of identity distancing on diversity climate was negative and significant ($\beta = -.15$, $SE = .07$, $p = .047$), suggesting those in more positive diversity climates engaged in less identity distancing. Regarding Hypothesis 2, our model showed diversity climate significantly predicted job satisfaction ($\beta = .51$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$), and subjective wellbeing ($\beta = .34$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$) as expected, though the predicted negative association between withdrawal and diversity climate was not significant ($\beta = -.09$, $SE = .08$, $p = .228$), leaving Hypothesis 2 with partial but not full support.

Hypothesis 3 was supported, as the association between segmentation preferences and enacted segmentation was significant ($\beta = .48$, $SE = .12$, $p < .001$). Hypothesis 4 suggested a positive relationship between identity distancing and preferences for segmentation, such that those engaging in greater identity distancing would in turn

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, scale reliabilities and intercorrelations for assessed study variables and participant demographics

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Distancing	3.82	1.45	(.87)									
2 Segmentation Preferences	5.55	1.04	.30	(.88)								
3 Enacted Segmentation	4.52	1.45	.22	.53	(.93)							
4 Diversity Climate	4.15	0.73	-.17	-.07	.15	(.89)						
5 Job Satisfaction	5.23	1.46	-.17	-.13	.03	.46	(.92)					
6 SWB	3.26	0.97	-.09	-.03	.14	.29	.60	(.92)				
7 Withdrawal	1.93	0.67	.14	.07	-.11	-.20	-.49	-.38	(.91)			
8 Gender	1.31	0.46	-.02	.13	-.10	-.01	-.09	-.17	.15	//		
9 Race	0.88	0.33	-.17	-.08	-.02	.10	.12	.13	-.09	-.08	//	
10 Age	50.01	14.08	-.06	-.12	.12	.01	.19	.24	-.39	-.41	.22	//

Cronbach's alpha listed on diagonal. “//” indicated for variables that do not have reliabilities. Bolded values are significant at $p < .05$. SWB = “Subjective Wellbeing.” Gender coded as 1 = “Male,” 2 = “Female.” Race coded as 0 = “Non-White,” 1 = “White”

Table 2 Standardized coefficients and standard errors for evaluated hypothesized model

Outcome	Predictor	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Distancing	Diversity Climate	-0.15	0.07	0.047
Segmentation Preferences	Diversity Climate	-0.04	0.06	0.467
	Distancing	0.24	0.08	0.004
Enacted Segmentation	Diversity Climate	0.19	0.06	0.001
	Distancing	0.15	0.07	0.022
	Segmentation Preferences	0.48	0.12	<.001
Subjective Wellbeing	Diversity Climate	0.34	0.07	<.001
	Distancing	-0.04	0.07	0.576
	Segmentation Preferences	0.01	0.06	0.929
	Enacted Segmentation	0.04	0.07	0.56
Withdrawal	Diversity Climate	-0.09	0.08	0.228
	Distancing	0.12	0.08	0.132
	Segmentation Preferences	-0.04	0.07	0.598
	Enacted Segmentation	-0.20	0.08	0.009
Job Satisfaction	Diversity Climate	0.51	0.06	<.001
	Distancing	-0.09	0.07	0.198
	Segmentation Preferences	0.08	0.06	0.162
	Enacted Segmentation	-0.06	0.07	0.381

prefer greater segmentation between work and life spheres. Looking to Table 2, this notion was supported given the significant regression of segmentation preferences on identity distancing ($\beta = .24$, $SE = .08$, $p = .004$). Further, the indirect effect of identity distancing on enacted segmentation through segmentation preferences was significant ($\beta = .15$, $SE = .06$, $p = .015$; Table 3), supporting Hypothesis 5.

Hypothesis 6 suggested that enacted segmentation would negatively predict subjective wellbeing and job satisfaction, and positively predict withdrawal. None of these predictions were supported, as no significant associations were found between enacted segmentation and subjective wellbeing ($\beta = .04$, $SE = .07$, $p = .560$) and job satisfaction ($\beta = -.06$, $SE = .07$, $p = .381$), though a significant negative association was found between enacted segmentation and withdrawal ($\beta = -.20$, $SE = .08$, $p = .009$). This finding suggests that contrary to expectations, those enacting greater segmentation between their work and home lives were less likely to engage in withdrawal behaviors from work as compared to those integrating work and life spheres.

Alternative Models

In addition to our hypothesized model, we examined multiple alternative models to consider additional perspectives within the context of our research questions. Theoretically, a fit-based perspective would suggest an interaction between preferences and enactment as predictive of study outcomes. Accordingly, we examined a model (Table 4) examining such a notion, finding that the latent interaction term

Table 3 Total indirect effects of model predictors and outcomes in evaluated hypothesized model

Predictor	Outcome	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Diversity Climate	Segmentation Preferences	-0.04	0.02	0.086
Diversity Climate	Enacted Segmentation	-0.02	0.02	0.12
Distancing	Enacted Segmentation	0.15	0.06	0.015
Diversity Climate	Job Satisfaction	0.001	0.001	0.58
Distancing	Job Satisfaction	-0.005	0.01	0.567
Segmentation Preferences	Job Satisfaction	-0.02	0.03	0.56
Diversity Climate	Withdrawal	0.004	0.003	0.191
Distancing	Withdrawal	-0.03	0.02	0.087
Segmentation Preferences	Withdrawal	-0.11	0.04	0.016
Diversity Climate	Subjective Wellbeing	-0.001	0.002	0.58
Distancing	Subjective Wellbeing	0.01	0.01	0.565
Segmentation Preferences	Subjective Wellbeing	0.02	0.04	0.549

Table 4 Standardized coefficients and standard errors for alternative model examining interaction between segmentation preferences and enacted segmentation

Outcome	Predictor	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Distancing	Diversity Climate	-0.14	0.08	0.074
Segmentation Preferences	Distancing	0.404	0.11	<.001
Subjective Wellbeing	Diversity Climate	0.32	0.09	<.001
	Segmentation Preferences	-0.03	0.15	0.829
	Enacted Segmentation	0.08	0.17	0.634
	Pref X Enacted Segmentation	0.07	0.10	0.501
Withdrawal	Diversity Climate	-0.04	0.09	0.675
	Segmentation Preferences	0.18	0.12	0.124
	Enacted Segmentation	-0.29	0.12	0.021
	Pref X Enacted Segmentation	-0.13	0.08	0.675
Job Satisfaction	Diversity Climate	0.49	0.08	<.001
	Segmentation Preferences	-0.15	0.11	0.156
	Enacted Segmentation	0.02	0.248	0.804
	Pref X Enacted Segmentation	0.01	0.08	0.865

Model fit information: AIC = 27,125.330; BIC = 27,651.410. "Pref" refers to Segmentation Preferences

created via the product of segmentation preferences and enacted segmentation constructs did not significantly predict subjective wellbeing ($\beta = .07$, $SE = .10$, $p = .501$), withdrawal ($\beta = -.13$, $SE = .08$, $p = .675$), nor job satisfaction ($\beta = .01$, $SE = .08$, $p = .865$); based on this, our data does not support a fit-based perspective on boundary management.

We also considered a model in which identity distancing directly predicted enacted segmentation, absent of an effect on segmentation preferences (i.e., presuming preferences are stable and not impacted by environmental influences). The

Table 5 Standardized coefficients and standard errors for alternate model examining direct relationship between identity distancing and enacted segmentation, absent of segmentation preferences

Outcome	Predictor	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Distancing	Diversity Climate	-0.15	0.07	0.048
	Enacted Segmentation	0.26	0.07	<.001
Subjective Wellbeing	Diversity Climate	0.32	0.07	<.001
	Distancing	-0.06	0.08	0.423
	Enacted Segmentation	0.10	0.08	0.229
Withdrawal	Diversity Climate	-0.07	0.08	0.373
	Distancing	0.14	0.08	0.087
	Enacted Segmentation	-0.25	0.08	0.002
Job Satisfaction	Diversity Climate	0.51	0.06	<.001
	Distancing	-0.08	0.07	0.281
	Enacted Segmentation	-0.02	0.07	0.751

Model fit information: $\chi^2(577) = 965.522$, $p < .001$, CFI = .931, TLI = .925, RMSEA = .055, SRMR = .058)

pattern of findings from this model largely mirrored what was found within our hypothesized model with respect to Hypothesis 1 (significant relationship between diversity climate and identity distancing), Hypothesis 2 (diversity climate predicting job satisfaction and subjective wellbeing, but not withdrawal) and Hypothesis 6 (enacted segmentation only negatively predicting withdrawal, of examined outcomes), seemingly affirming a fair number of conclusions drawn from our primary results. This alternative model did demonstrate strong model fit, though it cannot be compared directly to the fit of the hypothesized model as they are not nested within one another (Table 5).

Discussion

Though boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000) and border theory (Clark, 2000) explain how employees are tasked with constructing and enacting boundaries between work and non-work spheres, those theories are presently limited in considering how stigmatized identity expression at work may impact such boundary processes. To expand theory, the present study investigated whether identity distancing is related to enacted work/non-work segmentation through segmentation preferences via a sample of LGB employees, largely finding support for hypotheses. In line with expectations, identity distancing was indirectly related to enacted boundary management through boundary management preferences, with identity distancing itself at least partially related to perceptions of the organization's diversity climate.

Of principal contribution is the association between identity distancing and enacted segmentation, suggesting that employees' own identity presentation concerns relate to how employees allow their work and non-work spheres to overlap.

Though our present methodology makes it difficult to disprove the potential re-ordered effect of enacted work-life segmentation on identity management, alternative positioning is unlikely as social categorization theories (Perdue et al., 1990) position demographic identities as particularly salient to one's self-concept and subsequent interpretation of the world. That is, it is likely that identity-relevant processes psychologically precede more specified and context-dependent processes such as work-life boundary management, though future research can verify that supposition.

Though most of our hypotheses were supported in the present study, the predicted relationships between enacted segmentation and work-relevant attitudinal outcomes (H6) were left unsupported. One possibility suggested by theory on boundary management and fit (e.g., Boegaerts et al., 2018; Chambel et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2009; De Gieter et al., 2022) is that enacted integration or segmentation can equally predict outcomes such as job satisfaction and wellbeing when boundaries are aligned with an employee's own preferences. However, our test of an alternative model including the interaction between preferences and enactment did not fit the data either. A more likely possibility explaining our lack of effects of segmentation with respect to job satisfaction and subjective wellbeing is that the magnitude of the relationships between perceived diversity climate and outcomes obscured more subtle associations from detection; indeed, diversity climate perceptions emerged as a strong direct and indirect predictor of these constructs, underscoring the variable's importance. Future research employing polynomial regression techniques in operationalizing fit between preferences and enactment (Edwards, 1994) may be useful in more clearly assessing the potential value of a fit-based perspective in explaining the examined phenomena, as would more fine-grained examinations of the specific directionality of segmentation variables (Methot & LePine, 2016) given the present global treatment of constructs.

Interestingly and in contrast to the other examined outcomes, withdrawal was found to be significantly predicted by enacted segmentation and not diversity climate. The direction of this relationship was counter to expectations, as greater enacted segmentation was found to be predictive of lower withdrawal. One possibility to explain this finding is that boundary segmentation served as a protective act for LGB employees within their organizations; that is, perhaps the boundaries constructed between workers' work and home spheres indeed sheltered workers from experienced discrimination so as to lower their potential for eventual withdrawal, though future research exploring the mechanisms of withdrawal can confirm or reject this interpretation.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

By drawing upon both identity management and boundary management theories, the current work advances existing theory toward better understanding of work/non-work boundaries for a currently underexamined population, addressing broader critiques of the literature as most often focused on more privileged, majority-group samples (Aycan, 2008). By demonstrating the role that identity distancing plays in workers' preferred and enacted boundary management, the current findings

underscore how employees' attempts to mitigate experienced prejudice may affect central relationships between themselves and their work. Incorporation of stigma models within future investigations of work-life processes is worthwhile for more comprehensive understanding of employees' relationships with work. Further, Ryan and Briggs (2019) reviewed how a lack of consideration of intersectional identities (e.g., LGB workers who are parents or caregivers) leads to unidentified work-life policy needs, unhelpful solutions, and unresolved work-life conflicts; considering social identity more comprehensively in work-life conflict examinations would be useful both theoretically and practically.

The present study further identifies a novel phenomenon relevant to boundary management in identity distancing. Though preferences are a demonstrated predictor of enacted work-life boundaries (Carlson et al., 2016; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010), the process through which state (versus trait) preferences evolve is more often assumed rather than directly investigated; here, we advance theory by demonstrating how personal and environmental considerations (i.e., identity distancing and diversity climate perceptions) relate to individual preferences in boundary formation. Further, the stability of preferences across work contexts deserves further scrutiny, as traditional conceptualizations position boundary preferences as individual trait-level differences (Kreiner, 2006). However, it also remains true that an individual's preference for segmentation may change dramatically when they change jobs or employers (e.g., due to workplace climate, the nature of job stressors) as well as changing when they enter different life stages and accrue various life experiences (Bulger & Hoffman, 2018). Accordingly, the current research spurs important conversation surrounding the degree of trait stability versus malleability subject to environmental shaping when considering boundary preferences.

Practically, this study highlights the plight faced by employees with invisible stigmatized identities, examined through the lens of minority sexual orientation. Though the present sample was comprised of LGB employees, it is possible that the current findings may be relevant to individuals of other marginalized invisible identities, including religious minorities and individuals with invisible disabilities, who all may face stigma within their workplace. Beyond invisible identities, the present work may have implications for those of marginalized and historically excluded visible identities, including race and gender. Though the conceptualization of identity management here is most relevant to identities warranting disclosure (i.e., invisible identities), the salience with which one underscores a visible identity such as gender or race at work (as related conceptually to both codeswitching and authenticity, Wessel et al., 2020) may still relate to one's preferred and enacted boundaries between work and life. For example, a woman feeling her gender is stigmatized at work may seek to limit the extent to which her non-work childcare responsibilities are visible to coworkers, creating rigid boundaries to avoid highlighting her gender further.

The current research further underscores the importance of diversity climate within organizations, as the variable demonstrated relationships with key work-relevant attitudes both directly and through identity management and boundary management processes. Accordingly, organizations should seek to maximize climates associated with welcoming workers of all backgrounds, creating spaces in which

individuals are free to express themselves authentically without consequence. This can be achieved through the implementation of diversity management programs or consideration of management-team demographic composition as demonstrated diversity climate antecedents (Herdman & McMillan-Capehart, 2010).

Limitations and Future Directions

Though study outcomes were temporally separated from other assessed variables, identity distancing, boundary management variables, and diversity climate perceptions were all measured at the same time point (T1), complicating causality determinations (Spector, 2019), particularly in the context of a model including serial mediation. Though we provide rationale for why other sequences of causation may be less likely and our examination of alternative models provides some increased confidence in our hypothesized associations, future studies separating variable measurement across more than two time points would more certainly confirm the present interpretation of results. Such improved measurement practices may further dissuade concerns regarding the potential shared variance amongst our boundary management constructs specifically, as it is possible that participants were unable to accurately disentangle their preferred versus enacted boundaries when completing relevant survey items in a single measurement occasion.

As our sample includes only those of LGB identities, the present results may not be fully representative of the broader LGBTQIA+ community. Further, as we examined the experiences of individuals of multiple sexual orientations grouped together, rather than focusing on the unique experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual workers individually, this methodology could potentially be missing important nuance between identity categories (Arena Jr. & Jones, 2017; Corrington et al., 2019), future research would benefit from delineation of potential experiential differences. Building upon this criticism, the current study examined sexual orientation only, missing an important intersectional perspective of how sexual orientation may interact with gender identity, race, etc. toward informing work/non-work boundaries. Future research examining how workers manage a constellation of identities will help grow understanding of the relationship between identity distancing and work-life boundary management. Finally, the present study focused on individual-level perceptions of an organization's diversity climate, rather than aggregate group-level perceptions; future research utilizing multilevel data can advance from the findings presented.

Conclusion

Though all workers consider how and to what degree to integrate work and life spheres, employees concerned about workplace discrimination may face additional considerations. The extent to which these concerns inform preferred and enacted work-life boundaries was investigated in the current research. As predicted, identity distancing was indirectly related to enacted work-life boundaries through boundary

management preferences, with identity distancing at least partially determined by perceptions of organizational diversity climate. Accordingly, we advance theory related to boundary enactment as particularly relevant for populations facing historical marginalization at work.

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Data Availability Data is available upon reasonable request from the first author.

Declarations

Ethical Approval & Consent to Participate This study obtained IRB approval from the Michigan State University Office of Research Regulatory Support (STUDY00004741). Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Human and Animal Ethics All standards with respect to ethics surrounding human participants was upheld. Considerations of animal ethics are not applicable to this study.

Consent for Publication The authors affirm that human research participants provided informed consent for the publication of findings stemming from their participation.

Competing Interests The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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