

2021-2022 Outstanding Thesis Award Winner Raeven Jones Sanchez



Raeven Jones Sanchez is driven by curiosity. A first-generation college student, that curiosity put her on a path to academia, leading first to the pursuit of an undergraduate degree in psychology, then a research position in an honors program, and finally, to a Master of Science in Industrial and Organizational Psychology. At the culmination of her graduate program, her academic excellence landed her the 2022-2023 Outstanding Thesis Award in the Humanities, Education, and Social Sciences category.

Sanchez's timely thesis, *Authenticity, Support, and Identity Management in the Workplace for Transgender Employees*, delves into the experiences of transgender individuals as they navigate obstacles to being their authentic selves in the workplace. A better understanding of what it means to be transgender at work, barriers to authenticity, and the identity management strategies transgender employees undertake can help organizations build more inclusive workplaces and improve employee experiences.

Through interviews and online surveys, Sanchez collected data on the personal experiences of 10 individuals who identify as transgender, exploring such topics as social support, discrimination, and workplace policies. After extensive coding and analysis, certain themes emerged, including: the effect of openness and transphobia on workplace identity management; the power of mindful coworker support; and degrees of authenticity.

Her study found that support from individual coworkers and allies played a key role in creating a more positive work experience and acted as a buffer against negative experiences and transphobia. However, organizations need to do more to create a safe, inclusive environment. Many organizations have policies and procedures in place to protect transgender employees, but they are not always followed. Sanchez's thesis provides insight into the challenges that transgender individuals face at work, as well as recommendations for policies and resources that support an inclusive workplace environment where all employees can thrive.

Sanchez decided to focus her study on transgender individuals due to a lack of literature on that population. "I'm always interested in learning different aspects of diversity," she said. "Most literature focuses on the LGB community but not other identities. I chose transgender employees because I wanted to focus on one group that there was less literature on and let them have the limelight."

Although her intent was to amplify the needs of a marginalized group, Sanchez said she was surprised by the intensity of her participants' desire to be acknowledged and understood. "What was impressed upon me was the degree that people don't feel heard at work. They don't feel like they have a voice and they were giving me their all because they want to see something done. It made me feel good about doing my study because I am giving them a voice."

Sanchez is currently serving as an academic advisor at CSUSB and hopes to pursue a research career in the future. She credits her mentor, Dr. Kottke, as instrumental in her decision to attend graduate school. "I'm a first-generation college student and would not have gone to graduate school without Dr. Kottke's mentorship in both the undergraduate honors program and beyond. Dr. Kottke took me under her wing and did everything she could to help me thrive."

At CSUSB, we are lucky to have Sanchez serving our diverse student body, but it is likely that her love of research and her driving curiosity will take her on new academic journeys before long. She has much to offer in the field of organizational and industrial psychology as demonstrated by her excellent thesis.