University of Wollongong

Research Online

2013

The Australian corporate closet, why it's still so full: a review of incidence rates for sexual orientation discrimination gender identity discrimination in the workplace

Ian Smith
University of Wollongong, ips043@uowmail.edu.au

Lindsay G. Oades
University of Wollongong, loades@uow.edu.au

Grace McCarthy
University of Wollongong, gracemc@uow.edu.au

Recommended Citation

The Australian corporate closet, why it's still so full: a review of incidence rates for sexual orientation discrimination gender identity discrimination in the workplace

Abstract

The paper reviews the extant Australian literature on sexual orientation (SO) discrimination within the Australian workplace. In the research, there is variation in organisational workplace and a bias towards health and educational sectors as a research setting, which raises some methodological considerations such as poor generalisability to other organisational contexts. The small body of Australian research into SO discrimination encompasses; (i) varied methodological and theoretical approaches, (ii) disparate authors selecting a varied range of aspects of discrimination thus absenting a unifying framework to guide research and lacking as yet seminal authorship providing focus, iii) limited sampling of participants making comparisons difficult and further indicating the absence of a unifying framework with which to focus the research and iv) limited studies exclusively investigating workplace discrimination. In this paper, the Australian literature is presented chronologically, and where possible, it has linked studies together to indicate the commensurate nature of the studies to illustrate the incidence rates of SO discrimination in the Australian labour market as a rationale for GLBTIQ employees remaining in the corporate closet.

Keywords

Disciplines

Business

Publication Details

THE AUSTRALIAN CORPORATE CLOSET, WHY IT'S STILL SO FULL: A REVIEW OF INCIDENCE RATES FOR SEXUAL ORIENTATION DISCRIMINATION AND GENDER IDENTITY DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE

IAN PATRICK SMITH, LINDSAY OADES & GRACE MCCARTHY

Abstract

The paper reviews the extant Australian literature on sexual orientation (SO) discrimination within the Australian workplace. In the research, there is variation in organisational workplace and a bias towards health and educational sectors as a research setting, which raises some methodological considerations such as poor generalisability to other organisational contexts. The small body of Australian research into SO discrimination encompasses; (i) varied methodological and theoretical approaches, (ii) disparate authors selecting a varied range of aspects of discrimination thus absenting a unifying framework to guide research and lacking as yet seminal authorship providing focus, iii) limited sampling of participants making comparisons difficult and further indicating the absence of a unifying framework with which to focus the research and iv) limited studies exclusively investigating workplace discrimination. In this paper, the Australian literature is presented chronologically, and where possible, it has linked studies together to indicate the commensurate nature of the studies to illustrate the incidence rates of SO discrimination in the Australian labour market as a rationale for GLBTIQ employees remaining in the corporate closet.

Key words: heterosexism; sexual orientation disclosure/concealment

Introduction

Self-disclosure - the act of revealing personal information about oneself - often involves unexpected information. One of these is revealing to co-workers that one is gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, intersex or questioning (GLBTIQ). It is estimated that between 4 and 17% of the workforce (Gonsiorek & Weinrich, 1999) are gay and lesbian and make up the largest minority group (Lubensky, Holland, Wiethoff & Crosby, 2004). Estimates in other US studies reveal 10 to 14% of the US workforce is composed of non-heterosexual workers (Powers, 1996). Numbers are expected to be much higher than this due to the complex nature of this phenomenon where many GLBTIQ individuals stay in the corporate closet and therefore conceal their sexual orientation (SO) due to the stigmatisation and discrimination associated with disclosure, with individuals more likely to conceal their SO when they have witnessed or experienced workplace discrimination (Morrow & Gill, 2003). Sexual orientation disclosure and concealment have thus been conceptualised as strategies that GLBTIQ employees use to manage their identities in the face of cultural and organisational stigma against non-heterosexuality (Croteau, 1996; Fassinger, 1996; Woods & Harbeck, 1992). Disclosing one's SO is one of the toughest issues that GLBTIQ employees face because it involves considerable turmoil and a fear of retaliation, rejection (Bohan, 1996; Ellis & Riggle, 1995) and stigmatisation (Button, 2001). At the same time, employees who remain in the corporate closet report lower levels of psychological well-being and life satisfaction as a result of covering up their stigmatizing identity (Button, 2001; Ellis & Riggle, 1995; Ragins & Cornwall, 2001). Empirical evidence suggests that

heterosexism is a particularly strong and persistent cause of these problems, with a need to further address these deleterious outcomes as they occur in minority groups such as GLBTIQ employees.

Minority Stress Theory has been used to indicate the significant impact minority stress has on minority groups such as GLTBIQ employees (Meyer, 1995). Minority Stress Theory asserts that socially marginalised groups including sexual minorities can experience mental and physical health problems resulting from negative social environments created by stigma, prejudice and discrimination (for example: Fisher and Shaw, 1999; Gee, 2002, Meyer, 2003). For GLBTIQ employees, minority stressors are conceptualised as internalised heterosexism. This relates to GLBTIQ members direction of societal negative attitudes toward the self, which relates to both expectations of rejection and discrimination and actual experiences of discrimination and violence. Following on from Brooks (1981), Meyer (1995) refers to an environment whereby an individual experiences minority stress where there is conflict between the minority member and the dominant social environment. For GLBTIQ individuals, this conflict is expressed in discordant values and norms regarding sexuality, intimacy and more generally human existence and purpose (psychological well-being). Meyer defines these stress processes as internalised homophobia which has now become known as internalised heterosexism (see conceptual review on heterosexism versus homophobia by Smith, Oades & McCarthy, 2012). Here the expectations of rejection and discrimination and actual events of antigay violence are internalised and experienced as a form of self-discrimination. Internalised heterosexism is now seen as the most insidious of the minority process whereby GLBTIQ individuals direct the negative social attitudes towards the self, leading to a devaluation of the self, resulting in internal conflicts and poor self-regard. The combined effects of minority stress experienced both directly and indirectly force GLBTIQ employees to stay in the corporate closet.

Yet despite a now considerable body of research on sexual orientation disclosure in the workplace, little Australian research has examined how individuals decide to reveal their sexual orientation (SO) or gender identity, and the sexual identity management strategies involved in this process. Whilst measures such as the Workplace Sexual Identity Management Measure-Revised (WSIMM-R) Lance, Anderson and Croteau, 2010), and the Workplace Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (WSEQ) (Waldo, 1999) exist, there has been little application of them in Australia. The small body of Australian research into SO discrimination that does exist encompasses; (i) varied methodological approaches, (ii) disparate authors selecting a varied range of aspects of discrimination thus absenting a unifying framework to guide research and lacking as yet seminal authorship providing focus, iii) limited sampling of participants which while eventually contributing to construct validity, at this stage makes comparisons difficult and further indicates the absence of a unifying framework with which to focus the research and iv) limited studies exclusively investigating workplace discrimination. The following literature review presents existing Australian research in chronological order, and where possible, links studies together to indicate the commensurate nature of the studies.

Literature

Hillier, Dempsey, Harrison, Beale, Matthews and Rosenthal (1998) conducted a telephone survey of Australian women aged between 16 and 59 years randomly selected from all states. Out of the 9134 women interviewed, .8% identified as gay, 1.4% as bisexual and 15.1% reported same sex attraction. This suggests a sum of 17.3% engaging in GLB activities. Moreover, Smith, Russell, Richters, Grulkich and De Visser (2003) found in their Australian study of health and relationships - which interviewed 20 000 people - that when

a definition of sexuality includes the three domains of identity, attraction and experience, that up to 15% of the respondents had experienced same sex attraction. Moreover, a study by the National Centre in HIV Social research (La Trobe University) revealed that between 8-11% of young people are not unequivocally heterosexual (Hillier, Warr & Haste, 1996). This is an important finding as their earlier results suggested that only 2% identified as non-heterosexual, suggesting higher numbers for this gay and bisexual group. Additionally, Hillier, Warr and Haste (1996) found in a study of 1200 rural youth in Tasmania, Victoria and Queensland that 11% were non-heterosexual. Hass (1979) reported that 11% of young women and 14% of young men aged 15-18 have had at least some homosexual experience, whether or not they associate this with being homosexual. Often young people feel embarrassed about what meanings hold regarding their sexual identity and thus do not disclose their sexual orientation. This adds support to the view that a fear of discrimination may prevent a component of these individuals from identifying as non-heterosexual. These studies indicate that there are a large number of non-heterosexual employees and future employees in the Australian population who make up GLBTIQ sexual minorities. It is emphasised that these numbers are thought to be conservative due to the sensitive nature of this issue and the fear of being a target for discrimination either directly or indirectly.

Hillier, Dempsey, Harrison, Beale, Matthews and Rosenthal (Writing Themselves In, The National Report, 1998) in a study attempting to chart the baseline figures about young non-heterosexual people, also documented the experiences of verbal and physical discrimination and abuse of the 14-21 year old age group. The main findings in this regard were that nearly one third believed they had been discriminated against due to their SO, 46% had been verbally abused, and that males were more likely higher targets than females. Moreover, 13% had been physically abused, with 70% having being abused at school. Finally, with regard to disclosure, 20% had never spoken to anyone about their sexuality outside of the study. Limitations of the study were that the sample was not randomly selected, and therefore no claims can be made where results can be generalized to the broader population of young people. This, however, is a common limitation in studies of minority groups where, due to the exploratory nature of the research and the difficulties in reaching a potentially stigmatized and emotionally vulnerable population, it is considered ethical that participants self-select, thereby sacrificing the non-random selection sampling process. Although this study was not limited specifically to workplace experiences of sexual orientation discrimination, the results do indicate the presence of SO discrimination for individuals up to 21 years of age, and a large number of Australian youth enter the workforce at an early age.

Irwin (1999) in a study on the workplace experiences of 900 gay men, lesbians and transgendered employees found that harassment and prejudicial treatment on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity was widespread with 59% of her respondents experiencing heterosexism in their workplace. Irwin further found in her study that 50% of the respondents had been ridiculed in front of colleagues based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. For 97%, this was not a single incident but was ongoing and affected the way they felt about themselves, their workplace and their colleagues. Heterosexism experiences included sexual and physical assault, verbal harassment and abuse, destruction of property, ridicule, belittling and homophobic jokes. Prejudicial treatment in the workplace included unfair rosters, unreasonable work expectations, sabotaging and undermining of work and restrictions to career. Forty one percent of the participants considered they had been dismissed from their most recent job because of their homosexuality. Several participants also reported that they had been denied workplace entitlements which were available to other heterosexual colleagues, such as partner travel. In this study heterosexist harassment and prejudicial treatment spanned all occupations,

industries and types of sizes of the employing organisation. However, discrimination was more likely to happen in traditionally male dominated occupations and industries such as mining. Transgender participants were more likely to experience heterosexism (75%) compared with gay men and lesbians. Just over 67% of lesbians and 57% of gay men experienced discrimination or harassment in their workplaces. The result of this heterosexism was increased stress, depression, loss of self-confidence, increased alcohol and drug usage and attempted suicide. Additionally, workplace performance was also negatively affected by presenteeism due to a preoccupation with internalised heterosexism and a fear of heterosexism. Many participants were out selectively because they felt unsafe to be entirely open about their SO or gender identity. The major limitation of this study, which is similar to that of other GLBTIQ studies, is the non-probability sampling technique due to the self selected nature of this cohort and the need for confidentiality and the absence of bisexual employees. Despite these limitations, it is one of the larger Australian studies (N=900) on GLT employees, adding empirical support for the presence of heterosexist and transphobic discrimination.

In 2003, the Department of Health and Human Services in Tasmania commissioned a study on GLBT health and well-being needs, as research at the time indicated that health issues faced by GLBT people included higher rates of suicide, alcohol and drug use than the general (heterosexual) population. Additionally, research suggested that the health and well-being issues were an outcome of heterosexist harassment and SO discrimination or gender identity discrimination. Out of 131 gay men, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered employees, 40 % reported that they had suffered with depression. Additionally, the study found that only 31% of gay men, 71% of lesbians, 33% of bisexuals, 27% of transgendered and none of employees identifying as queer would disclose their sexual identity in the workplace for fear of heterosexist behaviours.

The Victorian Gay and Lesbian rights Lobby (VGLRL, 2000) reported that at least 23% of a sample of gay men, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people in Victoria have experienced discrimination when seeking health care. Pitts, Smith, Mitchell and Patel (2006) found that people fear and avoid disclosing their sexuality to health providers for fear of sexual orientation discrimination or negative responses. Bowers, Plummer, McCann, McConaghy and Irwin (2006) found in a study on health service delivery in the NSW metro area that nursing and medical staff make derogatory comments about gay men, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered patients and that same sex partners of patients were ignored by medical staff and not informed of their partner's condition and faced exclusion from participation in decision making about their partner's case. Bowers et al. (2006) also noted that health care workers, as a result of this discrimination, do not disclose their own SO for fear of discrimination, harassment and rejection from colleagues and that these actions impact negatively on their career and job prospects (Rose, 1994). Pitts, Smith, Mitchell and Patel (2006) found in their study that the fear of heterosexism caused 67% of GLBTI employees to modify their daily activities. Pitts et al. (2006) also indicated that one in eight GLBTI respondents had been physically assaulted (direct heterosexist discrimination) and 10% had been refused employment or promotion due to their sexual orientation. These findings are consistent with a finding in the Health in Men (HIM-) study which was conducted by the National centre for HIV Epidemiology and Clinical research at the University of NSW, the Australian Federation of AIDSA Organisations and ACON which found that around one in twelve men had been refused service or denied a job due to their sexuality (Prestage, Grulich, Van de Ven P & Kippax, 2002). Bowers, Plummer, McCann, McConaghy and Irwin (2006) carried out a qualitative study and found that the attitudes and behaviours of newly qualified clinicians (nurses) are influenced by attitudes and behaviours of more experienced clinicians and managers. Although qualitative in nature, the study highlights the effects of managers in an organisation and the role they play in

modelling behaviour with regard to SO discrimination.

Irwin (2002), in her study on discrimination against gay men, lesbians and transgender teachers, academics and educators, found that just over 60% of the GLT teachers, academics and educators identified experiencing homophobic behavior, harassment and discrimination and/or prejudicial treatment. Homophobic behavior included being a target of jokes was reported at 35%, being asked unwelcome questions around their SO was noted as 31%. Twenty seven percent reported being outed, 23% reported being socially excluded, 18% reported being ridiculed, 16% being sexually harassed, 11% threatened with physical violence and 5% having property damaged. One respondent was sexually assaulted, and it was noted that perpetrators were more likely to be work colleagues employed at a similar or senior level. For school teachers, perpetrators included students and their parents. Many teachers, academics and educators also experienced prejudicial treatment in the form of: undermining and sabotaging of work 21.6%, unreasonable work expectations (15%), limited opportunities for career development (15%), threat of loss of promotion (13.3%). 17.5% stated they had been denied partner rights to superannuation. 9.1% had been denied entitlements available to heterosexual staff. Some teachers reported that staying in the corporate closet had prevented them from experiencing homophobic or prejudicial behavior. 8% reported not being open to anyone at work, 35% reported being open to everyone at work. Teachers who were employed at religious institutions reported concerns about being out and the risk this posed for their continuing employment. Some reported being closeted due to past homophobic experiences. Participants reported that the fear of becoming a target of harassment affected the way they behaved. Furthermore, the participants reported a belief that the effects of discrimination caused problems with both physical and emotional health. Ninety percent identified an increase in anxiety and stress, 80% had suffered depression, 63% has experienced a loss of confidence, and 59% reported that the discrimination had a negative effect on their personal relationships. Sixteen percent had contemplated suicide and one person had attempted suicide. As a result of ongoing heterosexist discrimination 34% had attended counseling and 34% had medical treatment. Fifty nine percent reported that heterosexism had resulted in them achieving less at work, referred to as Presenteeism. Thirty eight percent had resigned, 46% had taken sick leave, 49% had decided on a career change and 18% reported that they had been fired. Outing oneself was dependent upon how committed the institution appeared to be to the promotion of diversity. Irwin (2002) reported that less than half of the participants (45%) chose to take action against the perpetrators.

Commensurate with Irwin's empirical and exploratory study are Goody and de Vries's findings (2001), which indicate that anecdotal evidence suggests that heterosexist behaviour and offensive comments and gestures with respect to sexual orientation occur in Australian universities despite anti-discrimination clauses and legislation being present. Irwin's study adds support to, and deepens, the understanding of the existence of heterosexist behaviours in the Australian labour market, with particular emphasis on the education sector. In this sector previous research has demonstrated that higher education generally leads to greater acceptance of minority groups. There is a clear need to conduct further research in this area to fully understand the complex nature of SO discrimination in the workplace and to locate this in an appropriate theoretical paradigm. Irwin's study, although one of the largest in this area to date (with 900 participants and using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies), does not embed itself in a theoretical paradigm to account for the effects the harassment has on employees.

Further, Goody and de Vries (2002) explored the climate for GLBT people in the workplace of faculty employees of the University of Western Australia (UWA), and describe two

projects which aimed to make the UWA a safer and a more productive and positive work and study experience for GLBT staff and students (The Rainbow Project). A survey was used with limited statistical data being reported (mainly percentage answered by respondents for variables), with 754 participants (92.4% heterosexual). The survey indicated a significant majority of students with homophobic attitudes and high levels of discomfort in regard to GLBT people. There was also an apparent ignorance of harassment issues on the part of the majority of students who held more positive attitudes. Findings were commensurate with those found in the Irwin (1999) study, where university employees reported experiencing UWA as an unsafe place to be out and they experienced difficulty in attending GLBT group meetings for fear of being seen and targeted and having their SO made public against their will. Some employees reported 'invisibility', while others experienced direct anti-gay comments in faculty settings which resulted in GLBT employees feeling increasingly uncomfortable. The survey further pointed out that 85% highlighted that they knew someone who had made derogatory comments about gay people, 10% knew someone who had damaged the property of a gay person and 15.7 % of staff reported saying 'I avoid gay men' and 8.3% reported saying 'I avoid lesbians' (questions posed in the survey). Also, 39.8% reported that it bothered them to see two gay men being affectionate in public and 14% thought homosexuality was immoral. While Goody and de Vries (2002) do not explicitly embed their research in a theoretical paradigm, they use constructs such as stigmatisation, where an assumption is made that the study is based on stigma theory. They do however raise the important issue of challenging homophobia (heterosexism), making the invisible visible and initiating awareness to take steps in making universities a place where GLBT employees and students can strive. This is significant as GLBT employee's careers (and lives) become characterised by a preoccupation with self-disclosure and skill in the management of sexual identity. Invisibility and isolation in the workplace become common manifestations of these difficulties which can lead to the aetiology of various pathologies.

In the *You Shouldn't Have to Hide to be Safe* report on homophobic hostilities and violence against gay men and lesbians in NSW (2003), it was found that 56% of the respondents had experienced one or more forms of homophobic abuse, harassment or violence in the past 12 months. Eighty five percent had at some time experienced such abuse, harassment or violence. Although the study focused specifically on homophobic abuse and violence aimed at GLBT individuals in general and in multiple settings, it found that three quarters of the respondents were employed and that one of the most common locations of the abuse/harassment/violence was at or near work or the place of study of the participants. Workplace abuse was reported by 13% of the respondents. It was also reported that relatively more lesbians (20%) than gay men (9%) identified the at/near work or place of study as the location of the most recent abuse. Furthermore, 3% of respondents described the abuser as being a co-worker and a further 3% their abuser as a customer or client. This study has some methodological differences to other studies and hence no direct comparisons can be made. Although the study was not aimed specifically at investigating work place sexual orientation discrimination, it does highlight the fact that 82% of the respondents reported that they had experienced homophobic verbal abuse, in any location, at some point in time.

McNair and Thomacos (2005) found in their study of 652 participants (GLBQIT- 90% Gay & Lesbian and 5.5% Bisexual) mainly from the Melbourne metropolitan area, that 75% had publicly concealed their same sex relationships at some time to avoid discrimination. Moreover, 81.5% of lesbians and 79.4% of gay men were aware of public insults and had experienced equal levels of verbal abuse because of their SO. In total, 71.5% had been harassed in a public space. Fifty nine percent of bisexual participants had been verbally abused and 68% had felt indirect insults. Thirteen percent of bisexual respondents had

been sexually assaulted. Over 80.7% had felt publicly insulted due to indirect negative public statements about same sex relationships and this did not differ according to age, sexual identity, gender or ethnicity. Almost 20% had received explicit threats and 13% had been physically assaulted, with more men than women experiencing these levels of harassment. McNair and Thomacos (2005) also found unacceptable high and at times increasing levels of indirect public insult, verbal and physical harassment and discrimination within health and legal systems (20%). It was noted that the effect of these attitudes and behaviors was to force concealment of the same sex relationship in public by making GLBTI people feel vulnerable, which ultimately accentuates social inequality. With regard to disclosure, 54.7% had disclosed their SO to everyone, 34.6% had told almost everyone, .8% had told no one. Also, 75% had concealed their relationship at some time with friends and colleagues. Bisexual respondents were noted as having the highest concealment at 92%, suggesting a higher level of stigmatisation and fear of sexual orientation discrimination. A weakness of the study, however, is that this concealment may also be due to other personal factors unrelated to discrimination. Limitations of the study were that it did not cover specific questions around harassment, transgender issues were not specifically addressed, and that intersex participants comprised only 1% of the participants. The study was also conducted only in Victoria and mainly in the metropolitan city of Melbourne, making it difficult to generalise findings. Research indicates that rural minorities have different experiences to urban minorities. Anecdotal discussions make reference to these figures being much higher in rural localities due to ignorance around sexual orientation diversity and a lack of awareness of protective legislation. Moreover, rural GLBTIQ individuals themselves feel isolated and face a more severe information deficit than do their urban peers. There is an absence of the sense of 'us' which is the essence of group identity afforded by other minorities. This absence of 'us' results in sexual minorities being socialized into values and beliefs discordant with their self-identity and this ultimately may result in internalized heterosexism. International and Australian literature now points to the mental health of individuals who find themselves in this situation, which ultimate results in these minorities turning to alcohol and drugs to alleviate this pain (Sanford, 1989). More serious, is that mounting evidence now indicates a strong link between homosexuality and suicide, particularly among young men (Bagley and Tremblay, 1997; Ramafedi, 1997).

Willis (2009), in his small qualitative study (N = 34) on the strategies young GLBQ employees use to resist and refute homonegative practices in Australian workplaces, found three prevalent forms of homonegativity encountered and described by this group of employees in their workplace. These are referred to as: symbolic practices, material practices and discriminatory practices. With regard to symbolic practices, 20% of respondents witnessed comments by heterosexuals reinforcing and consolidating heterosexual norms, 10% reported witnessing expressing of discomfort and disapproval towards GLBQ identities, 13.3% had been assumed to be straight by colleagues and service users. His study also showed that 20% of respondents had their sexual identity questioned by colleagues and service users, 20% had experienced expressions of homonegative humour to a group audience and 66.6% had witnessed homonegative expressions and espoused beliefs. With regard to material practices, one employee reported being physically assaulted and bullied by colleagues, 30% reported verbal abuse and harassment, 3.3% reported public vilification in local media and 6.6% reported sexual harassment from members of management. Finally, with regard to discriminatory practices, 6.6 % reported repeated criticism of work performance because of their SO, 10% reported unfair dismissal and 3.3% reported refusal of leave provisions based on their sexual orientation. Willis' findings from his qualitative study are limited in scope and generalisability and therefore are not transferrable to other organisational contexts. Moreover, as occurs in other research of this nature (mentioned earlier), the sample is

comprised of self-selected GLBQ participants. The organisational sectors are also limited in that there are no trade industries represented. Nevertheless, the findings highlight the challenges young GLBQ employees encounter when entering the Australian labour market as a result of their sexual orientation.

A study carried out by Robinson and Berman (2010) found that 53% of their respondents (GLBTI) had been harassed or abused within the last two years on the basis of their sexual orientation. The five most prominent forms of abuse experienced were: verbal abuse, spitting and offensive gestures, threats of physical violence, written threats and abuse and physical attack or assault (without a weapon). Of note, is that the major threats were in the form of blatant direct discrimination. Furthermore, 12% of the respondents counted their workplace as their most recent experience of abuse, harassment or violence and hence of direct sexual orientation discrimination. Robinson and Berman also found that 62% reported that fear was a major factor in concealing their sexual orientation at work, which is consistent with international literature as described earlier. Despite Robinson and Berman's study being reported as one of the most comprehensive within Queensland and Australia to date, 80% of the respondents were employed and 9% of the perpetrators of homophobic or transphobic abuse were found in the Queensland workplace. Little is therefore known about the heterosexist experiences of GLBTIQ employees across Australian states. Consequently, this 2010 study illustrates that despite legislation in Queensland having been around for seventeen years; sexual orientation discrimination in the Australian workplace is still prevalent.

In the 2010 *Writing Themselves in-again* study (Hillier et al.), 61% of same sex attracted youth reported that they had been exposed to extreme levels of verbal and physical abuse, which was up from 42% in 2004. This study also indicates that as a result of heterosexist discrimination, self-harming behaviour in Same Sex Attracted Youth (SSAY) is increasing along with alcohol and other drug usage, including heroin (7%). The study indicates that 64% of the SSAY had thought about suicide as a result of the SO discrimination they faced. Camilleri (2010) cites figures for gay male suicide as four times that of heterosexual males (20.8% vs. 5.4%). Although this is with same sex attracted youth (SSAY), it is evidence for the presence of discrimination and the stigmatisation of GLBTIQ individuals as a result of heterosexism.

Barrett, Lewis and Dwyer (2011), in their quantitative study on the effects of disclosure of sexual orientation at work for 152 GLBTI employees in Queensland, found that 36% of their respondents had experienced sexual orientation discrimination at one workplace and 34% at two workplaces based on their sexual identity. They found that the most frequent types of discrimination based on sexual identity were remarks (27%), ridicule (27%) and jokes (25%). Where more than one co-worker was present discrimination took the form of remarks (59%), ridicule (56%) and jokes (58%). With regard to single co-workers discrimination was evident in the form of written threats of physical abuse (100%). Where respondents had experienced discrimination in their current workplace more than three times, the types of discrimination were; death threats (80%), threats of physical abuse via telephone (67%), property damage (33%) verbal threats of sexual abuse (30%), verbal threats of physical abuse (29%) and verbal threats of sexual abuse via telephone (25%). Despite this quantitative study having a relatively low sample number and the common sampling problem found in GLBT research (non-random) and no even distribution with regard to the various sub categories, the research is based in a theoretical paradigm relevant to issues around discrimination placing it well to contextualise the findings. The study importantly raises relevant issues around GLBTI employees and discrimination. Important concerns raised are how respondents, who experienced discrimination more than three times, faced severe forms of discrimination. The threat of personal injury as a

result of revealing ones sexual orientation is therefore extremely high. More importantly, the study confirms that in Australia 2010, discrimination is still directed at GLBTI employees in Queensland workplaces, despite ethical considerations and potential legal ramifications. Finally, as a result of sexual orientation disclosure, GLBTI employees are experiencing more sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace, despite anti-discrimination policies being in place. Due to the fact that sexual orientation is not readily observable, direct discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation requires knowledge or suspicion of an employee's orientation. Therefore, the potential for discrimination is seen to be higher when GLBTIQ individuals disclose their sexual orientation.

The studies discussed above provide insight into the extent and incidence of reported workplace sexual orientation discrimination and gender identity discrimination in the form of heterosexism. The challenge is that despite the presence of legislation at both federal and state level, organisational heterosexism needs to be addressed to respect the rights of all employees and to determine whether the present legislation is indeed having an impact in our current work environment. Furthermore, research needs to fully investigate the relationship between sexual orientation disclosure/concealment and the effect this has on the psychological wellbeing, job satisfaction, mental health and satisfaction with life of sexual minority employees, and across all states and with multiple organisations. These studies then provide clear evidence for why the Australian corporate closet is still so full.

Conclusion

Psychological poor health is associated with SO disclosure at work (Ragins & Wiethoff, 2005; Welle & Button, 2004) and employees who have experienced heterosexism report less positive job attitudes (Day & Schoenrade, 1997), receive fewer promotions (Irwin, 2002) and less compensation (Irwin, 1999). However, the present research both internationally and in Australia is anomalous, and further more rigorous research needs to take place to better understand the working experiences of GLBTIQ employees. Coercing sexual orientation minorities to conceal their SO is a specific form of discrimination associated with psychological distress and SO discrimination correlates with reduced mental health (Cochran, 2001; Warner et al., 2004). GLBTIQ employees engage in sexual identity management strategies in the company of heterosexual employees to try and manage the consequences of heterosexism in the workplace, but often end up leaving their place of employment because of the stress encountered. Recent studies seem to indicate that the decision to come out of the corporate closet depends highly on the organisational context.

The studies discussed above confirm that workplace discrimination against GLBTIQ employees still exists in Australian workplaces, and that these limited studies indicate positive relationships between heterosexism and workplace distress due to outness. Some studies indicating up to as high as 75% of participants experiencing workplace heterosexism (Irwin, 1999). Existing reports (for example, Day & Schoenrade, 2000; Moradi, 2009; Waldo, 1999) suggest conservative estimates of discrimination in the workplace due to GLBT employees not fully disclosing their sexual orientation at work due to the complexities involved. It has been indicated that greater reported disclosure of sexual orientation is associated with positive direct heterosexism. Respondents who conceal their sexual orientation have been least likely to experience sexual orientation discrimination but have higher levels of reduced psychological health and well-being outcomes.

Further research needs to empirically test these findings so that organisations can bring about required action to support sexual minority employees. Implications are that there

are costs to organisations in the shape of absenteeism and presenteeism, for GLBTIQ employees in an environment which is discriminatory. Moreover, there is a need to investigate organisational compliance with workplace legislation. While national and state anti-discrimination laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity at work, many non-heterosexuals still experience both direct and indirect discrimination in the international and Australian workplace. The research indicates that this discrimination is more evident than is suggested by the incident rates present in the literature and by the numbers of formal complaints lodged with Gay and lesbian Lobby Groups in Australia. Finally, these studies have been limited to primarily gay men and lesbians, and often have not included bisexual, transsexual, intersex and questioning employees as these groups are difficult to research due to the sensitive nature of sexual orientation disclosure. There is therefore a need to better understand minorities working in a majority context and the impact this has on their psychological well-being, especially when research indicates that self disclosure is a necessary prerequisite for psychological wellness or well-being (Cain, 1991). To conclude, there is clearly little doubt of the need for further empirical research using valid and reliable measures to improve the understandings and experiences of GLBITQ employees to overcome heterosexist behaviours and to enhance the workplace lives of sexual minority employees such as gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender, intersex and questioning individuals so that they no longer have to hide in the corporate closet.

Author Notes

Ian Smith is a Clinical Psychologist in private practice, the Director of Allied Health at SJOGHC and is a doctoral candidate at the University of Wollongong. Email: ian.smith@sjog.org.au

Lindsay Oades (PhD.) is a clinical psychologist and the Director of the Australian Institute of Business well-being, Sydney Business School, the University of Wollongong.

Grace McCarthy (PhD.) is the Program Director of the Masters of Business Coaching, Sydney Business School, the University of Wollongong.

References

Australian Human Rights Commission (2011). *Addressing sexual orientation and sex and/or gender identity discrimination*: Consultation report.

Attorney general's Department of NSW (2003). *You shouldn't have to hide to be safe; a report on homophobic hostilities and violence against gay men and lesbians in NSW,* Sydney.

Badgett, L. (1996). Employment and sexual orientation: Disclosure and discrimination in the workplace. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services, 4*, 29–52.

Bagley, C., & Tremblay, P. (1997). Suicidal behaviours in homosexual and bisexual males. *The Journal of Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention,* Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 24-34.

Barrett, N., Lewis, J., & Dwyer, A. (2011). Effects of disclosure of sexual identity at work for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GLBTI) employees in Queensland. *Anzam*, 1-15.

Berg, N., & Lien, D. (2002). Measuring the effect of sexual orientation on income: Evidence of discrimination? *Contemporary Economic Policy*, Vol. 20, No. 4, 394-414.

Bohan, J. S. (1996). *Psychology and sexual orientation: Coming to terms*. New York: Routledge.

Bostwick, W. B., Boyd, C. J., Hughes, T. L., & McCabe, S. E. (2009). Dimensions of Sexual orientation and the prevalence of mood and anxiety disorders in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health*, 99, 10 pg. 1-10.

Bowers, R., Plummer, D., McCann, P., McConaghy, C., & Irwin, L. (2006). *How we manage sexual and gender diversity in the public health system.* University of New England and Northern Sydney Central Coast.

Button, S. B. (2001). Organizational efforts to affirm sexual diversity: A cross-level examination. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86, 17-28.

Cain, R. (1991). Stigma management and gay identity management. *Social Work, 36*, 67-73.

Couch, M., Pitts, M., Mulcare, H., Croy, S., Mitchell, A., & Patel. (2007).*TranZnation: A report on the health and wellbeing of transgender people in Australia and New Zealand*, Australian Research Centre in Sex, health and Society, la Trobe University Melbourne.

Croteau, J. M. (1996). Research on the work Experiences of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People: An integrative Review of Methodology and Findings. *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, vol. 48, pp195-209.

D'Augelli, A.R., Grossman, A. H., Hershberger, S. L., & O'Connell, T. S. (2001). Aspects of mental health among older lesbian, gay and bisexual adults. *Aging and Mental health,* 5(2), 149-158.

Day, N. E., & Schoenrade, P. (2000). The relationship among reported disclosure of sexual orientation, anti-discrimination policies, top management support and work attitudes of gay and lesbian employees, *Personnel review, 29*(3), 346-363.

Ellis, A. L., & Riggle, E. D. B. (1995). The relation of job satisfaction and degree of openness about one's sexual orientation for lesbians and gay men. *Journal of Homosexuality, 30*, 75–85.

Fassinger, R. E. (1996). Notes from the margins: Integrating lesbian experience into the vocational psychology of women. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 48*, 160–175.

Fisher, A. R., & Shaw, C. M. (1999). African Americans' mental health and perceptions of racist discrimination: The moderating effects of racial socialization experiences and self esteem. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 46, 395-407.

Gee, G. C. (2002). A multilevel analysis of the relationship between institutional and individual racial discrimination and health status. *American Journal of Public Health,* 92, 615-623.

Gonsiorek, J. C., & Weinrich, J. D. (1991). The definition and scope of sexual orientation. In J. C.

Gonsiorek & J. D. Weinrich (Eds.), *Homosexuality: research implications for public policy* (pp. 1-12). Newbury Park. CA: Sage.

Goody, A. E., & de Vries, J. (2002). *Straight talk about Queer issues, in Quality Conversations,* Proceedings of the 25th HERDSA Annual Conference, Perth, Western Australia, 7-10 July 20220: pp 274.

Griffith, K. H., & Hebl, M.R. (2002). The disclosure Dilemma for Gay men and Lesbians: "Coming Out" at work, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 87, pp1191-1199.

Herek, G. M. (1990). The context of anti-gay violence: Notes on cultural and psychological heterosexism. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence,* 5, 316-333.

Hillier, L., Dempsey, D., Harrisen, L., Beale, L., Mathews, L., & Rosenthal, D. (1998). Writing themselves In, *A National Report on the sexuality, health and Wellbeing of the Same sex Attracted Young peopl*e. Melbourne: Australian Research Centre in sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University.

Hillier, L., Turner, A., & Mitchell, A. (2005). *Writing themselves in again – six years on: the second national report on sexuality, health and well-being of same sex attracted young people*, Australian Research Centre in sex health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne.

Hillier, L., Warr, D. & Haste, B. (1996). *The rural mural: Sexuality and diversity in rural youth,* Centre for the study of Sexually transmissible Diseases, National Centre in HIV Social Research, La Trobe University, Melbourne.

Irwin, J. (1999). The pink ceiling is too low: *Workplace experiences of lesbians, gay men and transgender people.* Sydney, NSW: The University of Sydney, Australian Centre for Lesbian and Gay research.

Irwin, J. (2002). Discrimination against gay men, lesbians and transgender people working in education, *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services,* Vol. 14, No. 2, 65-77.

Lane, J. D., & Wegner, D. M. (1995). The cognitive consequences of secrecy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69,* 237-253.

McNair, R. & Thomas, N. (2005) *Not yet equal- Report of the VGRL same sex relationships survey 2005,* Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, Melbourne.

Meyer, I. H. (1995). Minority stress and mental health in gay men. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 36,* 38-56.

Moradi, B. (2009). 'Sexual orientation Disclosure, Concealment, Harassment, and Military Cohesion: Perceptions of LGBT Military Veterans', *Military Psychology*, vol. 21 pp513-533.

Morrow, R. G., & Gill, D.L., 2003. Perceptions of homophobia and heterosexism in Physical Education, *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport,* 74, 2, pp204 – 214.

Pitts, M., Smith, A., Mitchell, A., & Patel, S. (2006). *Private lives: a report on the health and wellbeing of GLBTI Australians*, Australian research Centre in Sex, health and Society.

Powers, B. (1996). The impact of gay, lesbian and bisexual workplace issues on productivity. In A. L. Ellis & E. D. B. Riggle (Eds.), *Sexual Identity on the job: Issues and services*. New York, NY: Harrington Park Press.

Prestage GP, Grulich AE, Van de Ven P, Kippax S, (2002). Sexual health among men in the Health in Men (HIM) cohort. Health in Difference 4 Conference, Sydney

Ragins, B. R., & Cornwell, J. M. (2001). Pink triangles: Antecedents and consequences of perceived workplace discrimination against gay and lesbian employees. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 86*, 1244–1261.

Remafedi, G., French, S., Story, M., Resnick, M. & Blum, R. (1997). The relationship between suicide risk and sexual orientation: Results of a population based study'. *American Journal of Public Health,* Vol. 87, No. 8, pp. 104.

Robinson, S., & Berman, A. (2010). *Speaking out: Stopping homophobic and transphobic abuse in Queensland.* Brisbane: Australian Academic Press.

Rose, L. (1994). Homophobia amongst doctors. *British Medical Journal,* 308(6928): 586-587.

Ryan, R.M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development and well-being, *American Psychologist* 55, pp. 68-78.

Ryan, R.M., & Deci, E.L. (2001). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, pp141-166.

Ryan, R. M., Deci, E. L., Grolnick, W. S., & LaGuardia, J. G. (2006). The significance of autonomy and autonomy support in psychological development and psychopathology. In D. Cicchetti & D. Cohen (Eds.) *Developmental Psychopathology*: Volume 1, Theory and Methods (2nd Edition, pp. 295 849). New York: John Wiley & Sons

Smith, A., Agius, P., Dysin, S., Mitchell, A., & Pitts, M. (2003). *Secondary students and Sexual Health 2002: Results of the third national survey of Australian secondary students, HIV/AIDS and sexual health*. Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, Melbourne.

Smith, N. G., & Ingram, K. M. (2004). Workplace heterosexism and adjustment among lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals: The role of unsupportive social interactions. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 51*, 57–67.

Smith, A. M. A., Rissel, C. E., Richters, J., Grulich, A. E., & de Visser, R. O. (2003)., Sex in Australia: sexual identity, sexual attraction and sexual experience in a representative sample of adults. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health,* vol. 27, no. 2, pp. 138-145.

University of Western Australia, *The (2000).Working Life Survey* (Report no. 01/10). Crawley, WA: The University of Western Australia, Institutional research Unit.

Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby (2000) *Enough is Enough: A report on discrimination and Abuse experienced by Lesbians, Gay men, Bisexuals and Transgendered people in Victoria*.

Vincke, J., & Van Heeringen, K. (2002). Confidant support and the Mental Wellbeing of lesbian and gay young adults: AS longitudinal study. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology,* 12, 181-193.

Waldo, C. R. (1999). Working in a majority Context: A structural Model of heterosexism as Minority Stress in the Workplace, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, Vol. 46, no. 1 pp218-232.

Willis, P. (2009). It really is water off our backs': Young LGBQ people's strategies for resisting and refuting homonegative practices in *Australian workplaces. Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology review*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2009.

Woods, S. E., & Harbeck, K. M. (1992). Living in two worlds: The identity management strategies used by lesbian physical educators. In K. M, Harbeck (Ed.), *Coming out of the classroom closet: Gay and lesbian students, teachers, and curricula* (pp. 141-166). Binghamton, NY: Harrington Park Press.