

## Occupational stressors for LGB people in a large Midwestern city: Results from an empirical study

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Employment discrimination against lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people is a significant occupational health and social welfare problem. The Williams Institute, a think tank on sexual orientation law and public policy, estimates that between 16 to 68% of LGB people report experiencing employment discrimination (Badgett, Lau, Sears, & Ho, 2007). There are repeated anecdotal examples of how the workplace is currently unsafe for LGB people. For example, LGB workers have been subjected to anti-gay bullying, name-calling, and physical harassment by their co-workers and bosses, accused of spreading their "homosexual agendas" when talking about their lives, and arbitrarily fired because they are different (American Civil Liberties Union, 2007).

However, not all employment discrimination experiences against LGB people are the same. This Internet-based descriptive study examined the experiences of LGB people in the workplace. In particular, the study explored the extent to which LGB people living and/or working in a large metropolitan city in the Midwest experience sexual orientation-based harassment and discrimination in the workplace, the extent to which the experience of sexual orientation-based harassment differs by certain characteristics, the extent to which LGB people experience stigma consciousness, the extent to which the experience of stigma consciousness differs by certain characteristics, and the relationship between sexual orientation-based harassment and discrimination and stigma consciousness.

A convenience sample (N = 215) of LGB workers, aged 18 to 64, living and/or working in a large metropolitan city in the Midwest was recruited using various social networking sites, Internet and print advertisements and paper flyers at several Chicago-area agencies serving LGB people. Participants were given an anonymous survey examining workplace stigma-related experiences. Several existing measures were used, including Waldo's (1999) Workplace Heterosexist Experiences Questionnaire, Pinel's (1999) Stigma Consciousness Questionnaire for Gay Men and Lesbians, and Mohr and Fassinger's (2000) Outness Inventory, which highlighted some of the differences in LGB workplace experiences. Major findings of the study were that LGB workers' stigma-related experiences differed by social identity, that outness may positively impact the workplace, and that formal legal protections do not necessarily prevent workplace stigma experiences.

Findings of the study have relevance for education, practice, and policy. Work is an important part of our lives, yet many LGB workers are prevented from full participation in the workplace because of their stigma-related experiences. Practitioners are likely to encounter LGB workers affected by stigma-related experiences, and have a responsibility to affect change, both with that individual client and with broader social welfare policy systems.

### Biography

Trevor G. Gates, PhD Assistant Professor Department of Social Work SUNY-College, NY, University of Illinois at Chicago. Trevor's direct practice as a clinical social worker has focused on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. His research is on the occupational experiences of LGB workers in the Midwest.

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