

LGB In the Workplace

April 30, 2023

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SOCL 325 Final Paper

Introduction

The topic that I have been investigating is how people who are lesbian, gay, and bisexual are treated within the workplace. Through the research that I was looking through, I found that there is a ton of discrimination against queer people in the workplace. Still, we don't have many statistics on this discrimination because the victims fear the repercussions if they report it. This topic is important to study because the issue of discrimination against LGB members in the workplace is just as big and detrimental as racism within the workplace, discrimination against religion, ethnicity, and many more issues. This topic needs to be discussed more so that the vast majority of society is aware of the discrimination in the workplace against queer people. Hopefully, someday this will result in penalizing the coworkers and people in charge who have played a role in the discrimination by them having repercussions for their actions. Discrimination within the workplace against LGB members is nothing new, it has been an issue from the beginning, and this paper will go into detail about what this looks like and if the discrimination has lessened or has increased worse over time. The following articles that were used to help the research found for this paper are scholarly articles, they were written by educated scholars who conducted their own research on these topics. The articles were chosen based on the topic of this paper and what I thought could be beneficial when conducting my own research on this paper. Since I was interested in how LGB people are treated in the workplace, I wanted to take a look at how these individuals were treated a while back to examine if the discrimination since then has lessened or gotten worse. I found articles that were a bit older and articles from recent times to compare.

Literature Review

The literature found for this paper is organized in a way that talks about how LGB people were treated in the workplace many many years ago, to more recent times. The author of the article wanted to explore the way these individuals were treated in the workplace in the 1990s and more recently to see if things have become more equal or not. After having taken this class, Gender and Society, I have become aware that different cultures treat and value homosexuals differently than we do in the United States. Some cultures value those who identify as homosexuals and they are given specific roles in society, whereas in the United States, we do not have anything like this. This article will explore a bit on that as well to compare to how homosexuals are treated here. Whilst gathering research for this paper, there were two common themes found in all of the articles used for this literature review: homophobia and discrimination. The discrimination against lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals is a big issue in the United States, especially in the workplace. Throughout this paper, I will touch on discrimination against LGB members and talk about why this is such a big issue. The topic that I have been investigating is how people who are lesbian, gay, and bisexual people are treated in the workplace. Through the research that I was looking through, I found that there is a ton of discrimination against queer people in the workplace, which we do not have many statistics on because they are afraid of the repercussions if they report it. This topic is important to study because the problem of discrimination against LGB members in the workplace is just as big and detrimental to individuals as racism, discrimination against religion, ethnicity, and many more issues. This topic needs to be talked about more so the vast majority of societies are aware of the discrimination against queer people and will hopefully people will be penalized and have repercussions for their actions.

Homophobia

In three out of the seven research articles I found, homophobia was stated to play a major factor in why discrimination existed in the workplace. One of the scholarly articles used when conducting this research is titled *Gay Issues In The Workplace* by Brian McNaught, this article was written in 1995 and it discusses the issues that queer people have to experience in the workplace. In the introduction of this book, McNaught talks about how individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual are acknowledging publicly who they are and what they need from their employers to be a productive member of the workplace alongside the rest of the workers (McNaught, 1995, p. 11). McNaught states that employers are then asking themselves questions like: “Why are gay people coming out?”, “What do gay people want from us in the workplace?”, “If corporations need to address this issue, how can they do so efficiently?”, and “How can we talk about this issue with their fellow heterosexual co-workers in a way that will make them allies?” (McNaught, 1995, p. 11). He states on the same page, that addressing and understanding the issues that lesbian, gay, and bisexual employees have to go through in the workplace is just as important as addressing and understanding the issues of African Americans, women, the disabled, etc. All of the issues that these individuals go through are real and one should not go unaddressed when the others are. In chapter six, McNaught states that all queer employees want is equal and fair treatment in the workplace, being queer does not affect their ability to do their job efficiently (McNaught, 1995, p. 65). Being that discrimination against queer employees was so prominent, there was a “systematic plan for eliminating discrimination against gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees” that would require seven different things: an employment policy that prohibits discrimination against sexual orientation, a homophobic-free safe work environment, education about gay issues within the workplace, equitable benefits program, a support group for

LGB members, opportunity for all employees to participate in all aspects in corporate life no matter sexual orientation, and public support of all gay issues (McNaught, 1995, p. 66).

Discrimination in the workplace exists because of the homophobia that heterosexual co-workers have against their queer employees.

The next article *Working Class Masculinity: Keeping Gay Men and Lesbians out of the Workplace*, written in 2007, suggests that while it seems as if lesbian and gay rights are becoming more relevant, research shows that a large amount of discrimination in the workplace against LGB members still exists. In the introduction of this article, the author states White working-class males have remained in positions of authority and therefore have maintained a “place of privilege in the race, gender, and sexual identity hierarchy (Du Bois 1903/1986; Fine et al. 1997; Marusza 1997; MacIntosh 1998; Roediger 1999)” (Embrick et al., 2007, introduction). The authors have come up with the idea that since the majority of authority in workplaces is in the hands of White working-class men, racism, sexism, and homophobia still remain in the large of society. White male solidarity is the steady cycle of working-class White men continuing to obtain authority. Research has proven that White men hold more negativity towards gay people than women do, men are more likely to commit verbal assault and violence towards those of the LBG community (Embrick et al., 2007, introduction).

The next article where homophobia seems to be a common theme is *Sexual orientation discrimination: Exploring the Experiences of Lesbian, gay, and bisexual employees in Turkey*. I wanted to explore how homosexual employees are treated in other countries to see if it differed from how they are treated in the United States. This article talks about the discrimination against LGB members at workplaces in Turkey. This research was conducted through personal interviews with twenty individuals who have experienced this discrimination firsthand (Ozturk,

2011, p. 1099). Most of the discrimination that the interviewees explained started with homophobia and ended in bullying and physical violence against the LGB members (Ozturk, 2011, p. 1100). They were also made fun of in the workplace and some even resulted in job termination and threats of violence (Ozturk, 2011, p. 1100).

Discrimination

All seven of the articles that I found talked about discrimination but four of them really stuck out. The first article I found on this theme was written in 1995 and it is titled, *Sexual Orientation in the Workplace: Gay Men, Lesbians, Bisexuals, and Heterosexuals Working Together*. This article wanted to take a look and focus on who makes up the workplace in regard to gender and sexual orientation. Oftentimes, sexual orientation is a hard topic to talk about, especially in the workplace. There are very few laws today regarding sexual orientation in the workplace while there are many laws that address race and disabilities (Zuckerman & Simmons, 1995). This is controversial because one of the main workplace issues in today's society is sexual orientation. In order for there to be a positive work environment it is stated that people of all sexual orientations, whether that is gay people or straight people, need to work together without any sort of bias. Gay people go to work constantly worried about facing discrimination for who they are and this makes the work environment even more stressful which causes disruption in satisfaction. The authors of this article suggest that since this is such a sensitive topic, there are some facts that should underly a conversation like this (Zuckerman & Simmons, 1995, p. 2). The facts that should be taken into consideration are: the percentage of individuals that make up your organization, queer people exist in every country and every religion, there are no strict criteria on how to tell if someone is straight or queer so listen to what the individual says, addressing sexual orientation is both personal and organizational responsibility in order to prevent discrimination,

and there are little to no policies set in place to prevent the discrimination against queer groups like there in policies in place to prevent discrimination against race, etc (Zuckerman & Simmons, 1995, p. 3). One of the main factors as to why discrimination within the workplace exists is because of the lack of responsibility and policies set in place to protect individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

The next articles that I want to focus on when discussing discrimination are *Heterosexism in the Workplace: Do Race and Gender Matter?* and *Sexual Orientation Discrimination in the Workplace: A Systematic Review of Literature*. The following article, *Heterosexism in the Workplace: Do Race and Gender Matter?*, discusses how many lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals make up the workforce, how many disclose their sexual orientation, and how many LGB individuals face discrimination in the workplace. The article states that since is such a small percentage of gay employees that come out to their place of work, there are not very many statistics on this; Sexual orientation is most of the time excluded from empirical research (Ragins et al., 2003, p. 46). Employees who happen to be LGB or even appear to be is legal in a vast majority of workplaces. Statistics have documented that about 50% of gay employees report discrimination (Ragins et al., 2003, p. 46). A majority of LGB members do not report their sexual orientation for fear of discrimination (Ragins et al., 2003, page 46). Because of the lack of statistics on this issue, it is believed that the statistics that we do have are very conservative to the actual percentage of workplace discrimination. The article, *Sexual Orientation Discrimination in the Workplace: A Systematic Review of Literature*, talks about how LGB members are one of the biggest minority groups but yet they are one of the least studied. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) employees constitute one of the largest, but least studied minority groups in the workforce” (Ozerren 2014). According to the article, sexual

orientation is considered the last acceptable trait regarding race, ethnicity, and religion. People who are in the LGB community within the workforce face tons of discrimination; They are oftentimes forced to remain in the closet so higher companies and others don't know because it could ruin their reputation. Researchers and governments are aware that sexual orientation discrimination occurs very frequently in the workplace even if it is not reported, therefore they want policymakers to create laws against discrimination as they have for discrimination against race, religion, and many more. There used to be no laws against discrimination against gays but since then some have been established but not many.

The last article I found that constitutes to the theme of discrimination is *LGBT People's Experiences of Workplace Discrimination and Harassment*. In *Experiences of Workplace Discrimination and Harassment*, it is stated that over 8 million workers in the United States identify as LGB or queer. Employment discrimination consists of many different things: bullying, harassment whether it's physical or verbal, job termination, etc. Discrimination against LGB members negatively impacts the individual's mental health and overall well-being. The research done in this article was conducted through a survey that 935 LGB members took (Mallory et al., 2021, p. 1). 40% of employees reported having experienced some sort of discrimination because of their sexual orientation, this consists of not being hired, being fired from their job, or being harassed. 35% of the 40% have experienced discrimination within the last 5 years and 57% (over half) reported it (Mallory et al., 2021, p. 1). 8.9% reported that they were outright fired because of their sexual orientation (Mallory et al., 2021, p. 1). The employees even went as far as hiding their sexual orientation to avoid discrimination, LGB members who are also of color were more discriminated against than white LGB members.

Conclusion

Throughout conducting the research on this topic, I have found that I was correct in my thesis when I assumed that discrimination against LGB members in the workplace is a much bigger issue than it seems to be. The main findings that I found through reading the research articles are that LGB members in the workplace have been discriminated against for quite some time, the discrimination goes far underreported so we do not know the true amount of discrimination that happens, and that in order for this discrimination to end, there needs to be policies set in place to protect our LGB employees. The overall inquiry question of this paper was to find out how LGB members in the workplace are treated and if they are treated poorly, if it has gotten any better. The research proved that LGB employees are discriminated against much more than statistics say, the discrimination goes unreported because of the fears LGB members have of what could happen after. I believe that topics like this should be studied much more, this is a big issue and people need to become aware of it. Discrimination against LGB members is just as detrimental and important as discrimination against race or religion and it happens just as much, in order for change to occur people need to become aware.

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