



Experiences of LGBT Youth in the Irish Workforce

*A Qualitative investigation into the experiences of
LGBT people working in Ireland today and the
changes they would like to see.*

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Terms

LGBT- stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.

Trans- Umbrella term, originated from Transgender (see below). Used to denote the increasingly wide spectrum of identities within the gender variant spectrum.

Transgender- An umbrella term describing a diverse community of people whose gender identity differs from that which they were designated at birth;

Lesbian- Term used to describe female identified people attracted romantically, sexually, and/or emotionally to other female identified people.

Gay- Term used to refer to homosexual / same gender loving communities as a whole, or as an individual identity label for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual;

Bisexual- A person emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to males/men and females/women. This attraction does not have to be equally split between genders, and there may be a preference for one gender over others.

Cisgender: a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.

Abstract

This study is an qualitative examination of the experiences of the workforce of young LGBT people from the age of 18-25 in Ireland, with a focus on the effect of diversity policies on their desire to work for a particular organisation. This study was conducted through semi-structured interviews with members of the LGBT community between the ages of 18-25 who had worked in a job for more then 6 months. It is hoped that this study will provide some guidance to HR professionals on the expectations and experiences of young people in the Irish workforce across a wide variety of sectors. The results of this study showed that strong anti-bullying policies, as well as LGBT-specific policies are something that young LGBT people want, as well as working for a company that is perceived as being accepting, open and diverse. As young people move around jobs, and employers struggle to retain their young staff members, a companies reputation is incredibly important as they seek to become an ‘employer of choice’.

Declaration

The work being submitted for examination is wholly tmy own work and that all materials consulted and ideas garnered in the process of researching the dissertation have been properly and accurately acknowledged

Introduction

In this dissertation, the subject that will be examined is the varied and multi-faceted experience of young LGBT people working in Ireland. There has been a lot of change in Ireland recently with the passing of the Marriage Equality referendum and signing into law of the Gender Recognition Act, but LGBT people still face negative reactions and experiences in public, in school and in the workplace. The experiences of LGBT young people in school has been well-documented in Ireland and the UK, but there has not been a lot of focus on young people aged 18-25 as they leave college and enter the workforce, or get their first job while in college. The majority of the study done on the LGBT experience has been in the area of mental health with studies such as “Minority stress and health: Implications for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) young people” (Kelleher, 2009) and "Survey of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people e's experiences of mental health services in Ireland: LGBT and Mental Health Services", (McCann, 2014). The culture that LGBT people live in is described as oppressive and the need for a societal change to a more accepting place. (Kelleher, 2009)

As a guide in preparing for this study, GLEN’s “Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Diversity in the Workplace” provides much food for thought. They speak about the importance of being able to attract talent to organizations, and many people wish to work for an organization whose ideals and values align with their own. It is believed that companies that have an acceptance of LGBT people have a culture of acceptance and openness to all their employees. This kind of branding is very important for employers in today's recruitment market. The four motivations that are given in this guide for employers creating a more diverse environment are productivity, recruitment and retention, reputation and risk mitigation. (GLEN, 2011).

This study aims to discover what the young members of the LGBT community in Ireland want from their workplaces in terms of supports and services, what their experiences are in employment currently, if they research a company LGBT related policies before applying for a job in a particular organisation and how they would like to see their concerns with regards to working conditions addressed.

This study will be a qualitative study, done through the use of semi-structured interviews followed by transcribing and thematic analysing of the data.

This study is intended to begin to filling a gap in the LGBT research regarding young peoples experience in the workplace. While it will not be a representative study of young Irish LGBT people, it will provide a useful starting point for further and hopefully a conversation amongst HR professionals regarding the need for an open and inclusive environment in their organisations and how that can be achieved.

Certain things are shown as important for an LGBT person to have career satisfaction, such as support from top level management, anti-discrimination policies shown to lead to better job satisfaction. There are other pressures on companies to bring in these policies, such as a company's own LGBT employee network, legal cases, pressure from shareholders, and public boycotts against companies that show themselves to be anti-LGBT (Raeburn, 2004). "Onus lies with the HRD practitioner, as one of the organization's primary sources of teaching and guidance, to aid both their LGBT and heterosexual colleagues in expelling negative attitudes (and self-attitudes) about diversity in the workplace." (McFadden, 2015, p. 152)

Sexuality orientation is one of the 9 grounds under the Employment Equality Act, 1998. Discrimination is defined in the Act as "one person is treated less favourably than another is, has been or would be treated." (Employment Equality Act, 1998). Companies wishing to avoid legal cases should ensure that their organisations have the right policies in place to encourage an open and inclusive environment.

This study will be structured as follows

- Abstract
- Introduction
- Literature review
- Research question
- Methodology
- Findings

While this study is merely a drop in the ocean in the research required for this topic, it is hoped that it will provide useful information for HR professionals and other interested parties who are working to improve their company's diversity and equality. It is hoped that the results of this study will encourage employers to be more aware of their LGBT staff members and new graduates, provide support for them and that it will go some way to filling the knowledge gap in the HR world with regards to LGBT students

[Literature Review](#)

[Introduction](#)

The purpose of this literature review is to examine literature written in Ireland and other countries regarding the experiences of young LGBT people. This will be a contextual examination of the literature in these countries, comparing the research done in the US and the UK with the research done in Ireland and discussing gaps in knowledge. While there are significant differences in these countries of size and population, the similarities in terms of

being Western, majority English speaking and classed as first world countries allows for them to be compared and contrasted.

The main purpose of this literature review is to examine the research conducted in this field of young and adult LGBT people, with a focus on the workplace, diversity policies and key issues facing HR departments as they seek to be more open and inclusive to members of the LGBT communities. This review will be divided up into three sections, the first section will examine research done in the US, followed by the UK and then Ireland. The research will then be compared and contrasted.

Main

It is clear in the researchers search for sources for this literature review that the area of LGBT experiences, especially in the workplace is not something that has been written about extensively. The vast majority of the literature that has been written on the subject of young LGBT experiences concerns bullying, harassment in schools, and mental health. While these are incredibly important subjects and very worthy of research, it made sourcing articles for this review difficult and it was necessary to broaden the field of focus in order to gain a better understand of the general LGBT experience in these countries. This can then be applied to the workplace, as workplaces tend to mirror the societies in which they are based.

Ireland

A large number of the studies done in Ireland that focus on young LGBT people are focused on bullying and the effects that this has on young people, as well as giving suggestions on solutions. Young people who experience this kind of bullying in school will carry the mental scars of this treatment into the workplace and may be particularly vulnerable to workplace bullying as a result. In “An Exploratory survey of the experiences of homophobic bullying among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered young people in Ireland”, this exploratory study examines 123 LGBT students of secondary school age. In this study the author’s discuss that the use of homophobic slurs in boy’s schools is very common, and is used not only against those who are known to be gay but anyone who steps outside the mould of what is considered masculine. (Tuck, 2008). This type of behaviour can lead to a huge amount of anxiety and stress for closeted young people, as they see how those who are perceived as gay/LGBT are treated. There is seen to be a similarity in the behaviour of young boys in Ireland and in the UK. In this study, they address the issue of heteronormative bullying, which is bullying of anyone who steps outside, or is seen to step outside of the heteronormative spectrum. This type of bullying is often unchallenged by teachers, and leads to further feelings of isolation when added into the taboo around discussing homosexuality which is common in most Ireland schools. The second type of homophobic

bullying put forward is direct bullying of those known to be LGBT. This type of bullying is experienced by the vast majority of those young people who are 'out' when they are in school. (Tuck, 2008).

Those who took part in this survey were self-selecting, which means that it can't be viewed as a general overview of all LGBT bullying in Ireland, but it can give a very useful starting point into this under researched topic. This survey was completed using a paper survey and an online survey.

In the survey, verbal abuse is cited as the most common form of bullying experienced by the respondents, with comments from the respondents describing how things had gotten easier when they had moved into college, and that the kind of verbal bullying that they suffered wasn't as common in a college setting. Very few respondents to this survey (17.5%) received or were offered support regarding their sexual orientation while in school. (Tuck, 2008). This is something that the researcher believes is important for young LGBT to receive, particularly as they enter the workplace, where they should be protected from this kind of bullying behaviour. While this survey does not claim to be representative, it does give good claim to the idea that LGBT young people are much more vulnerable to bullying than heterosexual young people.

This vulnerability does not go away once these students begin work, they are still vulnerable to bullying and discrimination from work colleagues, customers and the people they interact with on a daily basis. It is important for employers to be aware of this.

Another study examining homophobia in schools is "Still Catching up: Schools, Sexual Orientation and Homophobia in Ireland" (O'Higgins-Norman, 2009). This study was interview based, and used semi-structured interviews and observations. This study acknowledges a similar issue to the one previously, that schools lack of acknowledgment of LGBT-specific bullying as an issue that needs to be addressed, does harm to its LGBT students. This study is a useful item of research as it examines the experiences and ideas around of homophobic bullying not just from student's perspective, but also teachers, parents and school management. This study was extensive, involving 100 interviews in five schools around Dublin. The researcher selected randomly 5 students, 5 parents, 5 teachers and 5 managers from each school.

While the advantage of this is the broad spectrum of opinions that will be heard, it is also possible that the majority of those interviewees would be heterosexual and unable to offer the nuanced opinions on the experiences of being LGBT in schools. However, the choice to interview parents, teachers and managers was a good choice, as it gives a well-rounded look at how homophobic bullying and homosexuality is understood by those work work in the

education system. The researcher in this case identified 6 themes that were reoccurring in the interviews. These themes were ‘Being normal means being Heterosexual & clearly masculine or feminine’, ‘Fear of all things homosexual’, ‘Limits and negative stereotypes of gay men & lesbians’, ‘Name calling and the minimising of its significance’, ‘Religious influence on teachers morals and behaviours’ and ‘Non-recognition of Bisexuality or fluidity of sexual orientation’ (O’Higgins-Norman, 2009). These are themes that will be kept in mind when examining the results of the interviews for this research study, to see if there is any overlap between the themes of discrimination seen here and the ones spoken about by the interviewees for this research study. Will there be evidence of similar notions regarding homosexuality continue in the workplace, or do things get better for LGBT people once they leave education?

It was difficult to source studies done on the Irish workplace. The vast majority of LGBT related studies done in Ireland focus on young people who are still in primary and post-primary school. One study that focused specifically on the workplace was Declan Fahie’s “Spectacularly exposed and vulnerable’ – how Irish equality legislation subverted the personal and professional security of lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers”. This study concerns the fact that schools were allowed to discriminate against staff who they felt went against the religious ethos of the school. Since this study was completed, Section 37(1) of the Employment Equality Acts has been changed and organisations that are paid with public money are no longer allowed to discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation (Fahie, 2016) but this study still serves an important purpose in showing the experiences of teachers at a time when they could be legally discriminated against. This is a subject that should be revisited, to examine if these teachers working lives have improved since the change in the law.

A common theme in any examination of the LGBT experience is the concept of minority stress. Minority stress is the ill-effects being a member of a minority can have on a person’s mental and physical health. Being stigmatised and living in a society that clearly values heterosexual behaviour as the ‘norm’ can have a huge effect on young people growing up. This perception of ‘difference’ or ‘abnormality’ and the negative experiences that come from this stigmatization are linked to high levels of depression, anxiety and suicide among young LGBT people. (Kelleher, 2009)

Kelleher’s study was done via a online questionnaire, which gained 301 responses from self-identified LGBT people. Her questionnaire covered many aspects of the experience of prejudice and discrimination that LGBT face, as well as the internalised homophobia, expectations of rejection and mental distress. The aim was to examine the combined impact of each aspect on a person’s mental health. (Kelleher, 2009) This study found a link between

minority stress and mental distress. It also found that LGBT young people have a high expectation of rejection from their peers and those around them. This is something that HR professionals should be aware of when creating LGBT friendly policies in their organisations, as they seek to reassure their LGBT employees and ensure that they do not feel that they have to conceal their identity in the workplace for fear of rejection from peers.

In “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Careers and Human Resource Development: A Systematic Literature Review” Ciarán McFadden examines literature regarding the development of LGBT individuals in organizations. It is shown that HR development staff are often very concerned with increasing shareholder value and are not eager to bring in anything that is going to cost money or effect the bottom line. However, putting LGBT friendly policies in place can have wide-reaching effects on the business, with benefits shown to be increased productivity amongst LGBT workers, a better brand image for the organization and better recruitment (McFadden, 2015). This should encourage organizations to be more socially conscious and aware. This study also gives a good insight into the issues with previous studies, citing a lack of focus on transgender issues, as well as bisexual people, instead focusing mostly on gay men. (McFadden, 2015)

“Working It Out: Driving Business Excellence by understanding Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Workplace Experiences” was one of the few documents available that focused on the workplace experience in the Irish context. It focuses on the negative impact that a non-inclusive work environment’s can have on its employees, with examples from workers of good and bad moments from their working life. It covers examples of subtle harassment, the stress of non-disclosure, the impact on retention. It is summed up best here “The employer can definitely influence what we term ‘the workplace climate’ – a combination of the formal apparatus of an organization’s policies and the more informal perception of an organization’s culture” (GLEN, 2014, p. 12). It is clear from this document that there is still a lot work to be done in the area of LGBT acceptance as the many personal stories of anti-LGBT comments in the workplace discourages people from coming out and forces them to hide who they are in the workplace. Workplace culture is seen to be very important in encouraging disclosure, as well as line manager’s attitude in creating the kind of environment where they feel safe.

UK

In the UK, there is a much stronger focus in the articles written and the research done on the workplace, and LGBT employee’s place in the workplace. There is a considerable amount of research done on bullying in the education setting, similar to Ireland, but the articles

concerning the workplace are more useful for this study as they relate to the main research theme of young people's experience in the workplace.

In "Equality and diversity in the public services: moving forward on lesbian, gay and bisexual equality?" (McKearney, 2009) this article is a discussion of the changes that came into effect in the UK in 2003 with the 'The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations' which made it illegal for companies to discriminate against employees on the grounds of sexual orientation. This change was brought in to as a response to Employment Equality Directive issued by the European Union. While this is an older article, it has its merits in giving examples of the changes that companies brought in in their HR policies to adhere to this change.

The public sector is shown to have been the first ones to push for LGBT equality within their organisations, helped by LGBT groups and trade unions. (McKearney, 2009). Equality in the UK has been severely effected by decades of Conservative governments, which has prevented the changing of legislation to prevent discrimination. The government became aware that in order to serve the diverse population of the UK, they needed a public workforce that was representative of them. "As public services modernise, the rhetoric envisages that equality/diversity policy and practice will require organisational HR policies to recruit and retain the appropriate people from a diverse labour market, maximise employee potential and tap into the insights a diverse workforce may bring in order to provide appropriate services to a diversity community." (McKearney, 2009, p. 284). It will be interesting in this research study, to examine if LGBT young people working in public service roles feel that they are more supported then the LBGT young people who work in private sector or retail roles.

This study found that LGBT people feel more confident at work when they are protected in law. It was found that this new law in the UK played a big part in shaping LGBT positive policies in companies, however there was an issue with policies not being acted on or actively used within organisations to create more accepting environments. (McKearney, 2009) This aspect of an increased feeling of safety for people in the UK can be shown in comparison with the recent situation in Ireland with the passing of the marriage equality referendum.

An interesting study done by Mirka Koro-Ljungberg , Angelo Benozzo, Maria Chiara Pizzorno and Huw Bell and concerned the various ways in which gay men come out in the work environment and how it affects them to have to keep repeatedly come out and be viewed as an 'other' or 'different' in their work environment. Heteronormativity is the

concept that heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships are the ideal and that anything that deviates from this is not 'normal'.

It discusses the concept that requiring a gay person to come out of the closet reinforces the idea that homosexuality deviates from the 'norm', that it is something different and strange. The concept of "coming out of the closet", requires there to be a closet there in the first place. (Koro-Ljungberg, 2015). While a lot of organisations want to make their organisations into safe places for LGBT to come out and be open and themselves, there needs to be an acknowledgement of the fact that the norm is to consider most people to be straight, unless they fit into the stereotypical idea of an LGBT person seen in the media and are easy to identify.

One study that specifically addresses the needs of young LGBT people is "What do you say to them? Investigating and supporting the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and question (LGBTQ) young people" (Giambrone, 2011). This research was done in a rural area of the UK, with 11 LGBT young people and 18 adults who worked with young people in the area, with semi-structured interviews used as the data collection method. This study discusses the isolation young people can experience while they are growing up LGBT, and the rejection from family and peers can have a damaging effect on them. From the adults who worked with the young people, a fear of backlash from parents prevented them from being as supportive as they would like, or being open about their own sexuality. (Giambrone, 2011) The importance of training is spoken about by a lot of the participants in the study, explaining that a lack of training to deal with homophobic behaviours and other bullying leads to anxiety amongst those working with young people that they cannot handle a situation appropriately. They also requested real-life examples and training that helped them with their confidence in speaking with young people about sexuality, bullying etc.

This anxiety is common in workplace settings also, where managers feel that they have not been given correct training or knowledge in order to deal with issues related to LGBT staff. Skills mentioned in this study are things such as "not being presumptuous, listening, showing respect, and being open and sympathetic" (Giambrone, 2011, p. 950). These are skills that can be brought into diversity training, which usually focuses on issues around race, disability and religion, but neglect LGBT issues.

Something that is repeated through a lot of these studies is that fact that young LGBT people are more prone to being bullied in school, and the scars from bullying often continue to effect people as they move into adulthood and into the workforce. In some instances, it can lead to withdrawing from the workforce, it can effect productivity, confidence and can lead to victims of bullying suffering from anxiety or depression, which can effect their ability to

work. “Bullying at school and labour market outcomes” (Drydakis, 2014) uses the “Retrospective Bullying Questionnaire” to examine the long-term effects of bullying on adults and how they are able to function in society. The study suggests that bullying in childhood has an effect on many things such as participation in the workforce, lower academic scores, poor mental health and commitment to work and productivity. (Drydakis, 2014). Bullying often leads to children or young people withdrawing from school and suffering academically as a result, this can lead to lower grades and achievements, effecting their college and job prospects. While bullying is not the only thing that can lead to a difference in employment, education and mental health skills also play a role, these three are very intertwined. This study could not say that they found a direct connection between bullying and poor performance in the labour market. They found that other issues had a larger negative effect, such as ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation.

“Homosexuals and immigrants are also more negatively affected by bullying in terms of labour force participation, employment probability and wages than heterosexuals and natives, respectively” (Drydakis, 2014, p. 1198)

US

In this researcher’s examination of the studies and articles written around LGBT issues in the workplace, the US proved to be the most fruitful, with a large number of studies done on workplace LGBT issues. Similarly, to the UK and Ireland, very few of these focus on young peoples specifically, but they are important reading nonetheless. One such article focuses on the importance of bringing LGBT issues in the conversation when speaking about Human Resource Management. Human resource professionals have a responsibility towards those who work in their organization to work free from discrimination and bullying, in an environment which allows them to flourish.

The two main issues, are homophobia, defined as “a fear or hostility towards homosexuals or individuals perceived to be LGBT” (Gates, 2015, p. 73) and heterosexism “the societal bias that privileges heterosexual behaviors, identities, and norms while discrediting the behaviors, identities, and norms of LGB individuals” (Gates, 2015, p. 73). The concept of homosexuality being different or deviant from the norm, is a common one in America, even amongst those who would not consider themselves homophobic. America is different from the UK and Ireland in that they do laws which protect certain minorities from discrimination in the workplace, those laws do not apply to LGBT people. Examples of discriminatory policies include the military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”. In 29 states in the US, it is legal to discriminate against LGB workers, and there are even less protections available for transgender workers. However, many companies do offer protection for their LGBT

employees with anti-discrimination and bullying policies. (Gates, 2015).

In federal STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) agencies, LGBT employees are shown to have more unfavorable working experience than their heterosexual colleagues (Pham, 2017). This study acknowledges the many studies already done which show the disadvantages that women and those of ethnic minorities face when trying to build a career in the STEM field. Companies that are dominated by a masculine culture and management style tend to have more deeply rooted ideals on gender roles, relationships and what is 'normal'. (Pham, 2017). This study also puts forward the idea that certain types of organizations attract certain types of people, for example in the federal sectors that have a regulatory role they may attract a more liberal kind of worker is would be more inclusive towards their work colleagues.

This study included 6 federal agencies, and it found that there were inequalities and discrimination across the agencies, and the experience was for similar for LGBT men and LGBT women, that younger workers do not have a more positive experience then older workers. They also found that being in a higher role in the organization hierarchy did not protect the workers from negative experiences. (Pham, 2017). This is an interesting finding as it would be thought that being in a higher-up or supervisory role would allow workers to feel more secure. This links into the importance of organizations pushing for a diverse and accepting culture within their workplace, something that is repeated in many of the other studies examined here.

Going through all these studies, it is clear that there are major issues regarding the treatment of LGBT people, in school and the workplace. What can be done about this?

In "Supporting a diverse workforce: What type of support is most meaningful for gay and lesbian employees" (King, 2008). The concept of minority stress is brought up in this article, defined here as "Minority stress, that results from the discordance between their values, culture, and experiences and those of the dominant culture" (King, 2008, p. 238). In this study they discovered that support from immediate supervisors was more important to to employees then support from the organisation at large or from their co-workers. They also found that for LGBT people, support was closely linked with job satisfaction and life satisfaction.

One common issue that this researcher came across when reading and searching for documents, is that a lot of the studies leave out transgender people, preferring to focus on cis-gendered gay, bisexual and lesbian people. While there are certain issues specific to transgender people in the workplace, they should be included in these studies as they are part of the LGBT community and historically are more vulnerable to bullying and

mistreatment then their cis-gendered counterparts. In Michael J. Robinson's "Bringing Transgender Issues Into Management Education: A Call to Action", the authors address the need for education of managers in dealing with transgender employees in the correct way, in order to avoid costly law suits, and to ensure that transgender employees are treated with respect and dignity, regardless of what stage of their transition they are at. They believe that simply creating policies is not enough, that HR and line managers must actively work and engage with the policy. (Robinson, 2017) Transgender people face many obstacles in the workplace, especially if they are transitioning while still in the same workplace. In "Effectively Facilitating Gender Transition in the Workplace" (Sompayrac, 2011), this document gives practical advice and guidance to organisations who wish to set up policies and procedures to allow management and HR to provide support to transgender members of staff. Things such as a transition plan, where there is a specific person, be it a manager or a member of the HR team who is trained and who employees should go to if they are considering beginning to transition. This could also be a member of a diversity team. Training should be given by a trainer with specific experience in transgender issues, with refresher courses for any teams or groups of employees who are affected by employees transition. (Sompayrac, 2011)

In relation to transgender issues as an important part of the LGBT community, it is clear from "The Problem of Transgender Marginalization and Exclusion: Critical Actions for Human Resource Development" that this is a common problem in many organizations where they are unaware and unprepared to support trans* employees, and there is a lack of research in the area also. It makes propositions on what organizations can do to include trans* employees in their LGBT policies, such as bringing in a zero tolerance policy for discriminatory language, ensuring that there are gender neutral bathrooms available, ensure that development opportunities are available for trans individuals and educate employees on correct behavior and language when interacting with trans people. There should be a focus on not singling them out as "different", and ensuring that promotion and education opportunities are given out based on competency and skill. (Mathis, 2015)

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are significant differences in the research and literature available in Ireland, the UK and the US. The UK and the US can be used as examples by Ireland for the kind of research that is still needed. In both Ireland and the UK, there is a clear need for more studies and articles written on the topic of LGBT people in the workforce, in particular for transgender individuals, how to include them and ensure equality and acceptance for all members of the LGBT community in their workplaces. Most of the articles written focus on

the areas of mental health, which are very important and should be part of the conversation that HR professionals and managers have, but there is a need for practical solutions and suggestions for organisations wishing to improve.

Research Question

The research question of this study concerns the experiences of young LGBT people in the Irish workforce, to address the knowledge gap in the study of LGBT people in Ireland.

The aims and objectives of this study are to investigate and discover more information on the experiences that young LGBT have when they enter the workforce, either in college or after college as they enter their preferred field. Companies are fighting to hire graduates straight from college, or get them into their graduate programmes and many employers speak of wanting to become “an employer of choice”. The aim is to provide HR professionals with some guidance on what these new entrants to the workplace expect from their employers in terms of supports and policies, and what employers need to do to attract young LGBT people to their organisations.

Methodology

Introduction

Following on from the literature review, this section will discuss and defend the research methodology used in this dissertation. The chosen research method will be described, followed by reasoning and there will be a discussion of how this method aligns with the research problem and its purpose, comparing and contrasting with other similar research projects on a similar topic.

Paradigm

The approach that will be used in this research will be a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is focused on words and experiences of people, and it can be subjective and inductive while quantitative approaches are used to gather numerical objective data. This research will be interpretivist and set within a social constructivist and epistemological framework. Epistemology is based on the idea that there is more than one source of knowledge. Some of these sources can be intuitive, logical, empirical or authoritative. All four of these sources will be used in this research project. Qualitative research is all about

the experiences and perceptions an individual has of the social world and that the perspective of those experiences is interpreted differently by each individual, based on many factors. (Quinlan, 2011). Qualitative research is considered useful for collecting information that cannot be measured in statistical data, things such as beliefs and feelings, values and motivations of the people involved in the study (Mayer, 2015). It is possible by using this method, to get more descriptive data, which is harder to analyze but can give a better understanding of situations and cultures within organisations.

This paradigm is appropriate for this research project as this project is focused on the experiences of young LGBT people in the workforce in Ireland. This study aims to discover what the young members of the LGBT community in Ireland want from their workplaces in terms of supports and services, what their experiences are in employment currently, if they research a company LGBT related policies before applying for a job in a particular organisation and how they would like to see their concerns with regards to working conditions addressed. From examining other studies concerning Irish LGBT and LGBT young people, the qualitative approach seems to be the most commonly used.

In “Still Catching Up: Schools, Sexual Orientation and Homophobia in Ireland” (O’Higgins-Norman, 2006), the researcher used semi-structured interviews and observations in order to collect their data. In “Spectacularly Exposed and Vulnerable- How Irish equality legislation subverted the personal and professional security of lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers” (Fahie, 2016), the researcher used semi-structured, in depth interviews with 23 LGB teachers in order to gain more understanding of their experiences and feelings surrounding the issues with schools being allowed to discriminate against them if they claimed it was ‘protecting their religious ethos’.

Research design

The research design of this project will be narrative research design, which follows the belief that the stories that people tell are important and that the way that people making meaning out of stories can tell us a lot about the society that we live, they are considered to be products of the social environment that we all inhabit. This kind of research design is not concerned with facts, it is concerned the way that a person tells their story and what knowledge can be gleaned from that. “The objective of causal or explanatory research is to set up causal relationships between variables so as to explain the relationship between them.” (Saunders, 2009)

For this reason, the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews will be used. These interviews will be one-to-one, to allow comfortable communication between the researcher

and interviewee. This method will give the interviewee the time and space to give their own individual opinions and perspectives on the questions being asked. (Quinlan, 2011). The disadvantages of one-to-one interviews are that they are time consuming and there is a possibility for bias from the researcher in their replies which maybe influence the interviewee. Doing a focus group was considered, however due to difficulty in sourcing participants for this study, one-to-one interviews were chosen as the method that would be most useful in collecting knowledge and data. The interviews will be transcribed and examined for common themes and issues and this will be further discussed in the discussion section of this project.

Data Collection

For this study, one-to-one interviews will be held. The participants will be selecting using a number of sampling methods in order to get a sample that is representative of the young LGBT population in Ireland, taking into consideration time constraints and access to participants. The sampling methods used will be a mixture of judgmental or purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Judgmental sampling is use due to the need for participants from a particular area of society to take part in this study. The researcher requires members of the LGBT community between the ages of 18 and 25, who have worked for over 6 months.

This is a very specific section of the population and for that reason judgmental sampling is used. Snowball sampling is used due to the difficulty in accessing members of this section of population. This is a common problem seen in other research studies that contain potentially sensitive topics and subject matter.

Snowball sampling is a method of sampling where participants in the study are asked to recommend other participants who fit the criteria for inclusion. The LGBT community in Ireland is very close knit, and for an outsider it can be difficult to gain access to those willing to speak about their experiences. For this reason, using the recommendation of a previous participant in the study will be helpful. The researcher hopes that these sampling methods will find participants from all parts of the LGBT community, including transgender people who are often left out of these kinds of studies due to difficulty in accessing them.

Emails will be sent to the LGBT/Equality societies in NCI, DCU, UCD, Trinity and other colleges in Ireland. Posts will be put in several LGBT groups on Facebook and Boards.ie containing the same information as the email, as well as an extra line requesting them to

pass on the message to anyone that they think would be interested in taking part. The researchers email would be given. Once a potential participant contacted to express their interest in taking part

Basic information will be requested from them regarding age, sexual and gender identity and type of area they have worked in previous. This will allow the researcher to select a broad spectrum of participants This could limit the results of the study if there is not broad representation from all sides, as different members of the community may have different issues particular to them.

A consent form will be signed by all participants, detailed how the information will be used, where it will be stored, how long it will be stored for and where the thesis will be published. The participant's names and workplaces will not be published in the study. In creating this consent form, the template was from the World Health Organisation Informed consent for Qualitative Studies template. (WHO, 2017) The interview will be scheduled for 45 minutes with the flexibility to continue if needed.

The researcher will be the instrument, asking the questions. The participants will not be asked to write anything down, however they will be sent the questions in advance to give them time to consider their answers.

The interview will be recorded and transcribed at a later time. The recordings will be held on a password protected cloud server by the researcher for 6 months after the final research project has been submitted and then deleted completely.

A similar method of data collection was successfully used in “Spectacularly Exposed and Vulnerable- How Irish equality legislation subverted the personal and professional security of lesbian, gay and bisexual teacher” (Fahie, 2016). In this study, the researcher used snowball and purposeful sampling due the sensitive nature of the research topic, as well as personal contacts which the author had within the community they were trying to study. While there were similar issues in that study with representationally, it was felt that the data gathered was still transferable. This method was also used in “Mastering Wellness: LGBT peoples understanding of wellbeing through interest sharing” which focused on young LGBT people. In this study, the interviewer uses the concept of a ‘conversational partner’ which is a concept coined by Rubin and Rubin. (HJ Rubin, 2005)

Ethics

The proposal for this research study has been reviewed and approved by NCI Ethics Committee, which acts as a sub-committee of the Research Committee. It is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm

Validity and reliability of data

In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected, a number of pilot interviews were held in advance. 3 pilot interviews were held, recording and the participants were asked for their feedback on the questions and the interview itself. This provided very useful feedback and allowed the researcher to change the number of questions, as the pilot interviewees felt that there were too many, and not enough scope for open discussion. During the research interviews the researcher was mindful of potential bias.

Findings

The research objective of this study was to examine the experiences of young Irish LGBT people in the Irish workforce, to identify key issues for that community and make recommendations and provide guidance on changes that HR professionals could bring to their workplace to support diversity and inclusion in their organisations, creating a culture that allows young LGBT people to work in safety and comfort is essential in retention of these staff. We shall also examine if LGBT people do research into companies LGBT-friendly policies, if they have awareness or knowledge of these policies, and what effect this has on their desire to apply for a role in that organisation.

Findings/Analysis

The data in this section will be presented in the order of the questions that were asked. For this study, 7 members of the LGBT community were interviewed in a semi-structured interview setting. The researcher attempted to interview at least one representative from each section of the LGBT community, however we were unable to find an interviewee who identified as bisexual or a transgender female. All interviewees were required to be between the ages of 18-25, have worked in a job for over 6 months and be a member of the LGBT community.

In the interest of the interviewee’s privacy, we will not be using their names to discuss these findings, please see the below table for reference when we refer to them in the findings.

Interviewee	Age	Gender identity	Sexual orientation	Job
A	22	Cisgender Male	Gay	Hotel staff
B	24	Cisgender Male	Gay	Retail store
C	23	Cisgender female	Pansexual	Youth worker
D	24	Transgender male	Pansexual	Retail store
E	25	Cisgender female	Lesbian	Office Manager
F	18	Transgender male	Gay	Retail store
G	25	Cisgender female	Lesbian	Office worker

In these interviews, the interviewer used 5 questions as the basis for the conversation, but the interviewee was allowed to steer the conversation in any direction they saw fit, as long as it remained relevant to the main research question of young LGBT peoples experience in the workforce. Experience can be a very broad subject so the interviewer used these questions to try to focus the discussion around particular themes.

This data will be organised thematically, presenting the findings and then major recurring themes that appeared upon studying the transcripts of the interviews.

[Themes](#)

1. Feeling the need to keep their sexuality a secret in the workplace.
2. Most of those interviewed had experienced some form of discrimination or bullying in their workplace
3. The need for policies related specifically to LGBT people, particularly transgender people.
4. The majority of those interviewed have not/do not research a company's policies in advance of applying for a position.
5. Organisations need to find ways to get the word out that they are accepting of LGBT people, most LGBT people assume that organisations, or rather the people working in them, are not accepting.
6. What organisations need to do in order to attract them to work for them.

Feeling the need to keep their sexuality a secret in the workplace

Out of the 7 participants, 6 said that they have kept their sexuality a secret in the workplace. One interesting aspect of this discussion is that they would all keep their sexuality a secret in the beginning of working in a new role, but most of them would eventually reveal to their co-workers that they were LGBT. The 1 participant E who said that she did continuously keep her identity a secret gave the reason that her home country is not LGBT friendly, and it would not have been good for her career to reveal that she was a lesbian. However, she did say that she did not feel the need to keep it a secret here in Ireland.

A spoke about the difficulty of knowing when to bring up his sexuality with his work colleagues. In his first job, he had only come out as gay 2 years previously and the thought of telling his work colleagues was scary to him

"I still wasn't telling people in my personal life, so why would I tell people that I work with"

A similar story emerged from G;

"Whenever I start in a new job, I always keep quiet in the beginning about my sexuality. Its like I am trying to figure out if anyone in the office is homophobic before I mention that I am gay, it makes me pretty anxious, it is not a nice feeling"

For C, it was a particular manager's behaviour that lead to her keeping her identity a secret.

"I had a manager who would flirt with me and make me feel very uncomfortable and it got to a point where I didn't want to tell him that I was interested in women. I felt like he would have a bad reaction to it"

Even for someone who had a good experience in his job, and spoke about how open his work environment is, B still kept his sexuality a secret in the beginning of his job.

“A bit at the start, it was my first job and I didn’t know how to tell people or just nonchalantly bring it up”

Discrimination and bullying

Discrimination was something that was not experienced by all the participants but almost all the participants had a story of micro-aggression against them, or blatant homophobic behaviour that affecting their enjoyment of their working life.

In terms of seriousness of the incidents, the women and the 2 transgender men appeared to have had the worst experience with discrimination.

For C, she described being judged for the type of clothing she wore and asked why she wasn’t dressing a more stereotypical feminine style.

“Sometimes it felt like it wasn’t my actual identity that people had an issue, it was the way I expressed it. But I didn’t express it to the fullest extent, I didn’t go singing it from the rooftops”

In F’s experience in his first job, which was in a retail store with a predominately older workforce, he had multiple issues, first with his sexual orientation as a gay man and secondly the fact that he was transgender. F did not come out as gay in his workplace until 5 months in, and he only told one person about being trans. This interaction was not a pleasant one, as the person reacted with confusion and was not supportive in the beginning. Comments on his sexual life were common, often through pointing out a male customer in the shop and asking if F would sleep with him.

“There was one specific person in my last job, who I really didn’t like and she knew that it bothered me, but she thought it would be funny to call me a tranny”

In D’s case, he spoke of being accused of “changing his gender for attention”, as well as multiple instances of misgendering where he didn’t feel safe enough in his environment to correct the person. He works in a retail store in rural Ireland, and cited this as the reason for his lack of feeling of safety. This

For G, there were no big moments of discriminations, but she felt that there were clear micro-aggressions against her, sometimes without the person even realising what they were saying

“One day in work, one of the girls I work with wrote something on a post-it, and said to me ‘Oh I wrote that really queer’. It was such a small thing, but to hear queer used as an insult, as something bad was pretty jarring”

For the two cisgender gay men, A and B, neither of them mentioned any specific discrimination in their workplace, with B suggesting that the reason for that is that he works in retail

“I feel like retail is a much more accepting sector to work in, it needs to be progressive because there are a lot of LGTB people who go into retail as their first job. And the straight people who work in retail tend to be more accepting.”

Specific LGBT policies

With regards to the specific LGBT policies, all the participants felt that companies should have policies relating to LGBT people specifically, not just a general diversity or equality policy. They spoke about the needs for awareness regarding respecting LGBT peoples boundaries, name/pronoun preference, a focus on LGBT specific bullying, an open door policy with HR staff for LGBT people to seek advice. Despite the advances that Ireland has made with marriage and gender equality, young LGBT people are still all too aware of the the possibility of working with someone who could hold discriminatory view

B said

“I think it is very needed, within Ireland. Even now, we have marriage and gay people are becoming more visible and people aren’t okay with it still.”

Companies Policies

For the participants, the decision to research a company’s policies depended on what type of role they were applying for. As most of the participants work in retail, they said that they would not look up policies in advance, but they would be aware of a companies reputation before applying. According to G, who works in a professional office environment, any bad press that a company had regarding treatment of LGBT employees would immediately put her off applying, even if the press was from years ago and the company seemed to have enacted changes since.

“I would be really wary of going into a company that had any kind of reputation for not treating gay people well. Whenever I am going for an interview, I always google a company and any news articles relating to them always pop up first. If something came up about mistreatment of people like me, I don’t think I would attend that interview”

One participant F said that he would definitely always look up if a company was LGBT friendly and had LGBT friendly policies, citing a policy on name/pronoun preference as the most important one he would be looking for.

“I do not think that managers should ask directly, because there is a worry of forcing someone to come out when they are not ready, but to include a simple “Preferred name” for the purposes of name badges, desk labels etc. would be a great start”

Organisational outreach

The importance of organisations reaching out to LGBT communities and making them aware that they are safe places for them to work was brought up by multiple participants. If they are not aware of companies being specifically LGBT friendly, they assume that they are not. Things such as having information clearly available on their website and mentioning the company’s openness and diversity in the interview would go a long way in soothing a young LGBT person’s worries about being accepted in their new role.

For A, it was something he felt very strongly about.

“I think when you are going through the hiring process, and a conversation is brought up, with everyone, not just the people that they assume are LGBT. They have the conversation where they say ‘We do not tolerate racism, bullying, LGBT discrimination and that’s just how it is”

Attracting Young LGBT people to work for their organisation

A contentious issue within the LGBT community is concerning the commercialisation of LGBT culture by companies in their advertisements. 3 participants brought up the use of a company advertising as letting them know if a company was LGBT friendly or not.

D spoke of an advertisement by a particular Irish bank which included a gay couple as particularly effective. The sponsoring of a float at Pride, or a company walking in the Pride parade was brought up as positive by B, as well as mentioning a company’s support of LGBT issues in their blurb when applying for a job. They believed that this kind of advertising would not only attract LGBT people to work there, but also help to normalise LGBT relationships to the general public by putting them in advertisements on the same level as a heterosexual couple.

However, not all participants felt the same way about LGBT being used in advertising. They were wary of companies simply using them for profit and not making a genuine effort to help the community or those LGBT people who already work for them.

As G said :

“Its like they realised that gay people have money and they can exploit us and get us to buy their products by putting a gay couple in their ad like they are so open and understanding. Most of these companies just want to sell things, they don’t actually care about us”

For F, while he was unsure about the ethics of using LGBT people to promote a companies image, he felt that it could be done in a sensitive way with input from LGBT people on its appropriateness.

“In terms of advertisements I think there is a tactful way of going about it. I think you can support a community without merchandising it”

Discussion

In terms of new information, this study brought up a number of interesting points. There has been a significant gap in the LGBT literature in Ireland regarding young LGBT people in the workforce. While this study can not hope to fill the gap completely, it is hoped that it will begin the conversation and the research in the experience of young LGBT people as they leave college and enter the workforce.

Much has changed in Ireland over the past 20 years since decriminalisation with the recognition of civil partnerships in 2010, the referendum in May 2015 on marriage equality and signing into law of the Gender Recognition Act in June 2015. Ireland is a much more welcoming place for LGBT people and young LGBT people work in a variety of different workplaces, such as retail, hospitality, manufacturing and service providing industries. It is clear that the workplace, the next big step that young LGBT will take in their lives after college, must be a safe and inclusive place for them to be. For employers, having healthy and happy employees is in their best interest.

The fact that 6 out of 7 participants said that they felt the need to hide their sexual identity is not surprising, as this is a common theme in other surveys done of LGBT people in Ireland and around the world. A fear of backlash from their managers and co-workers leads many people to go ‘stealth’ when they first begin working’ before coming to the decision to come out. It is something that was always on the minds of the participants whenever they start a new role, wondering how others would react to them and what they would do if it was a negative reaction. Workplace backlash tends to be more low-key in the form of micro-aggressions such as exclusion and other indirect forms of discrimination. Violence and aggression is rare, as seen in Glen’s ‘Supporting LGBT Lives’ study which examined Irish LGBT lives across many fields such as schools and the workplace. (Kitching, 2009). This study focused on mental health, but had some very interesting insights into LGBT peoples lives in Ireland.

For the participants in this survey, the idea that being LGBT is somehow ‘different’ or ‘not normal’ has lead many of them to conceal this part of themselves in the workplace, especially in the beginning. This can lead to stress which can affect both their health and their ability to do their job. Heteronormativity in the workplace can hugely effect LGBT

worker's abilities to discuss their personal lives and engage socially with their work colleagues. Minority stress is a common issue with LGBT people generally, and young people are no different. This perception of 'difference' or 'abnormality' and the negative experiences that come from this stigmatization are linked to high levels of depression, anxiety and suicide among young LGBT people. (Kelleher, 2009) This can lead to absences or withdrawals from work, decrease in productivity, issues with retention of those staff members which are all problems that HR will want to prevent or reduce.

The fact that most of the participants had experienced direct or in-direct discrimination in their workplaces, examples such as the transgender man being called a 'tranny' by a co-worker, and feeling that he had to leave that job, or the woman who felt the need to hide her sexuality to avoid lewd comments from her manager, shows that Ireland still has a long way to go in promoting equality and protecting its LGBT employees from discrimination.

With regards to policies within organizations, there is a clear need for LGBT specific policies in organizations, specifically with regards to transgender people who are traditionally more at risk of violence and discrimination. As said by one of the participants in this study;

“An openness to speak about LGBT individuals as co-workers and friends instead of not addressing it would be a huge step forward for every workplace”

It is expected from young LGBT people that companies put in the effort to engage with them and create a safe and welcoming environment. Organisations that do not do this will not be able to retain their staff. HR departments who do will be making their environments more inclusive and welcoming to members of the LGBT community, as well as retaining their existing staff. Doing this will also allow them to avoid and costly legal cases or bad publicity.

From this study, it is clear that young LGBT people do not research if a company has these kind policies before they apply for a job. However, they are very active and aware of a company's reputation, good or bad and this is something that organisations would do well not to ignore. These young people have preconceived ideas about what kind of organisations they would not be welcome in, and if these organisations wish to attract young LGBT people they will need to put changes in place to tackle this.

One example of this was the Defence Forces launching their LGBT network Defend with Pride to act as a resource for staff, to work to educate the Defence Forces on LGBT issues and to encourage more LGBT to apply. While many would think of the Defence Forces as a hyper masculine working environment that would be unwelcoming to anyone who did not fit into a strict heteronormative mould, the launching of this group shows a clear effort on

their part to change the public's perception of the Defence Forces and to welcome LGBT people into their organisation.

Companies are currently fighting to hire graduates and encourage soon-to-be graduates to apply for their graduate programs. It is clear from this study that young people are very aware of the kind of advertising that companies do, and the inclusion of gay couples in advertising was seen by some participants as a positive thing as it normalising LGBT relationships to the general public. However, some participants were very wary of what they saw as the commercialising of LGBT culture in order to sell products or services. They spoke of the need for companies to be sensitive and aware of the issues when seeking to put LGBT people into their advertisements or promote themselves as LGBT friendly organisations.

It is clear that bullying is still the issue to the forefront of young LGBT people's minds who are entering the workforce. If they have not experienced it themselves, they have friends who have or have heard stories about people who have been discriminated against, be it directly or indirectly. This is something that must be directly addressed. The participants require their managers to be aware of the kinds of issues they will be going through, and to have an open mind and to be supportive. Managers need to be trained in order to give this kind of support, especially regards to trans issues which is a new subject for a lot of managers.

From the two transgender participants, it was clear that they are well aware of the kind of supports they require. These supports are mentioned in studies such as "Effectively Facilitating Gender Transition in the Workplace" (Sompayrac, 2011) give many suggestions such as a transition plan, having a specific member of staff who is a resource for transgender employees, ease of name/pronoun changes. Most of these were echoed in the interviews with F and D. Transgender people are very capable of self-advocacy but they require the support from management to create a working environment that they feel comfortable in, as well as a strict policy on bullying which prevents them from being disadvantaged as they transition or when co-workers find out that they are transgender. Management and HR professionals should be advocates for the more vulnerable within their organisations.

Location of the job is also an issue, as brought up by F, who said they he was uncomfortable correcting people who misgendered him as it was a rural area and he was unsure as to how people would react and he received no support from his management in these situations. This feeling of fear and lack of safety for LGBT people is echoed in Giambrone's study, which was done in rural UK. This study was done with LGBT young people, as well as the adults who worked with them, teachers and youth workers. The importance of training is spoken about by a lot of the participants in the study, explaining that a lack of training to

deal with homophobic behaviours and other bullying leads to anxiety amongst those working with young people that they cannot handle a situation appropriately. (Giambrone, 2011)

Personal learning statement

If more time and resources had been available, this study would have included many more participants as the study is limited by the few participants. It was very difficult to find individuals willing to be interviewed for this study, but if there was more time and resources the researcher could have reached out to more groups and organisations in the hope of getting more participants.

There was no representation in the interviews of a transgender woman or a bisexual person. As people from these parts of the LGBT community have unique story to tell, it would have been preferable to have that representation. However, as we were dependent on people volunteering themselves to take part, we were unable to interview them.

The researcher would have liked to have the opportunity to interview LGBT young people in the UK in order to compare and contrast the experience of young people in a very similar Western country to those of the young LGBT people here, however this was beyond the scope of this study as it seeks to be a guide to employers and management on what young LGBT people experience in the workplace and what they expect in terms of supports.

Recommendations

This researcher recommends that organisations follow the follow recommendations in order to improve their organisations for their LGBT workers, as well as improving their reputation as an inclusive place to work.

1. To begin with, the organisation should have a clear equality and diversity policy that explicitly prohibits discrimination. This should be heavily promoted within the organisation and on any social media that the organisation has such as LinkedIn/Facebook etc. New staff should be given training on equality and diversity within the organisation and this training should specifically mention homophobic bullying.
2. Organisations should get set up LGBT resource groups to allow LGBT employees and allies to work together to communicate the changes needed to management, as well as work as a support network within the organisation for LGBT employees.

3. Organisations need to be aware of transgender people in their workplace, offer gender neutral pronouns on forms and gender-neutral bathrooms, as well as educate staff.
4. Organisations should seek to connect with LGBT organisations and consider sponsoring events such as Pride, or fundraising for LGBT charities
5. Recruit and advertise jobs through LGBT media platforms
6. Bring in systems for monitoring issues and attitudes within the organisation. This can be done through yearly surveys and focus groups within the organisation.

Implications

The vast majority of these measures would cost an organisation very little and simply require a minimal amount of effort on the part of the HR person who decided to take these on as a task.

Setting up an LGBT resource group would be very cheap for the organisation, and it would allow them to work on a LGBT specific policy. Creating this policy would take time, as it would require meetings with shareholders, management and other members of staff and legal teams.

The sponsoring of LGBT events such as Pride would cost the organisation a significant amount of money in order to get their name out there, but the good publicity would make the expense worth it.

Bringing in a system for monitoring attitudes and issues can be done very cheaply and effectively with a yearly survey, as well as employee roundtables and focus groups at company team-building events.

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Appendix 1 – Interview questions

1. Do you feel that your sexuality has ever been an issue in your workplace?
2. Have you ever kept your sexual identity secret in a workplace?
3. Do you think there needs to be specific policies in companies regarding LGBT employees?
4. Would you research if a company has these types of policies before applying for a job there?
5. What do you think organisations need to do to attract LGBT people to work for them?

Appendix 2 – Sample Transcript

I: Interviewer

S: Subject

I: The first question is, do you ever feel that your sexuality has been an issue in your workplace?

S: Less an issue with work and more of a social issue with other people in the workplace. Again, this is only my second job now, it was more of an issue in my first job. I was working with people who quite a bit older than me, the closest person to my age was 10 years older than me, after that they were 35 and it was going into 40s, 50s and 60s. I didn't talk about it or mention it at all for a while and when I did, there were some questions, some snarky comments, moments where people think they are being funny but they are just being really creepy.

People in my last job would ask me really crude things, like they would point at a guy be like "Oh I bet you would like to...do whatever" and I was like no. I don't think they were intentionally being weird, I think it was their way of being like "Oh I don't know many gay people so I am just trying to support you and support you being gay". I don't want support like that, I don't want people to talk about my sexual life.

I: Have you ever kept your identity secret in a workplace?

S: Yeah, in my first job I didn't even talk about being gay for ages, ages being about 4 or 5 months in. I never actually told anyone in my old job that I was trans. I told one person that I was, she was confused. She already had another friend over in Australia who was trans so she kind of got the gist of it, but kept misgendering her friend. I was trying to explain it to her, she is better now she knows that she can't refer to this person as something even if it's what she used to know the person by. That helped a lot.

Because, even without coming out, I was very vocal about LGBT things when they would come up in work. People would be curious as to why I knew so much. There was one specific person in my last job, who I really didn't like and she knew that it bothered me but she thought that it was funny to bother me. Like one time we were on a work night out, and she thought it would be funny to call me a tranny. It was only me and her and another person, I didn't know when anyone else was. It was only the 3 of us and I was waiting for my mam to pick me up and I wasn't going to go and stand outside by myself. She thought that was funny, I didn't.

At the moment, I haven't told anyone in my new job. I have alluded that I was away, getting a minor surgery done back in January but I'm more tentative about it. It took me 7 months to tell my closest friend in my last job that I was trans and for things like that to happen...I am definitely more tentative about it now. And I wouldn't like to not be. There are some trans people that want to go on to be completely passing, no one ever guesses that they were ever trans. And then other people, who are kind of the way I want to be which is "Yeah I am. I don't really care what you see me as, I am trans." It's part of my identity. I don't like feeling like I have to or should hide it. There is a safety and a social issue that prevents me from being as free about it as I would like to be.

I: Do you think there needs to be specific policies in companies regarding LGBT employees?

S: Absolutely. A lot of people would say no because they want LGBT to be completely integrated into the regular diversity policy but I think there needs to be something specific because even with marriage equality and gender equality, everything is getting better

but it's not completely better yet. Especially on a smaller social scale. It's outrageous the amount of bullying that can take place without people realising they are bullying other people. People are so insistent that they have to know the details about you, so if you are not straight they need to know, who you have sex with, how you have sex. Or if you are trans, they need to know what your name was before, what you were like before. It's like they are trying to test you to see if you are legit, are you a legit gay person, are you a legit trans person.

I think there needs to be certain rules about asking people and about respecting people's boundaries, if they tell you that they don't want to say.

I: If you were applying for a job would you research if a company has those kinds of policies before you started?

S: I never considering researching a companies' policies before. I would look into if a company was LGBT friendly from now on, I didn't think that it was something that was possible without just going into the company and see what it was like. I will do it from now on. The place that I work now is a multinational business, equality is a much bigger part of what they do. [Redacted] was so old-fashioned. I was really surprised that I got hired, considering that I am fairly flamboyant, you can tell I am not straight. But if people of colour hand in their CV is [redacted], their cv's get thrown out, they just don't get hired. I think they hired me because they were trying to make it a bit younger, the image. I had my hair dyed, I had piercings. It didn't change the fact that a lot of the staff that they had there were still really old-fashioned, especially in their way of thinking. I think the reason I got hired was because they thought I was a girl. When I went in for the interview, one of the managers who was interviewing me said " Oh [subjects name], that's a very unusual name, isn't it?" And I said "No". She kept getting really confused, like when I said that I went to a mixed school before I went to a different school that happens to be an all-girls school. She asked me "So that's an all-girls school yeah?" And I said "Kinda, its mostly girls." And she was getting really really confused, it was very obvious that she thought I was a girl. I was trying to be clear with her, that in the school there was me and few other boys, like me, a boy.

I: So the last question is, what do you think organisations need to do to attract LGBT people to come and work for them?

S: It's a weird question because I am not entirely sure how I feel about the commercializing of LGBT, or companies trying to use LGBT people to promote their own company image, things such as the [company name removed] ads where it was a

question about marriage equality, and it said "Yes/No, we give you the right to chose". In terms of advertisements I think there is a tactful way of going back it, I think you can support a community without merchandising it.

I: In terms of getting LGBT people to come and work for them are there specific things you would recommend they do?

S: I would love if companies and business had, even during Pride month, that each shop were given a talk on LGBT and trans issues, or even leaflets that all employees had to read. I think its very important for people to keep educating themselves and if the company wants to support the LGBT Community then they should make sure that all their employees are informed on LGBT matters. I also think it is really important to make sure that anyone in HR or anyone involved in hiring doesn't have any prejudice against LGBT people.

Sometimes it can be a prejudice that you are not aware of.

I think there should be screening and training for those who are going to be hiring or doing interviews. I think its all about being tactful and being respectful.