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# The Australian Corporate Closet, why it's still so full: Investigating the relationship between sexual orientation (disclosure and concealment) and Heterosexism and how this affects GLBT employee well-being

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**Description**

There is minimal research on the effects of 'outness' (sexual orientation disclosure) on the work experiences of GLBT employees. Few international empirically sound studies from the literature have compared the variable of outness, its effect on workplace heterosexism, and job satisfaction. To date, no Australian studies have compared the variables of workplace heterosexism, the psychological well-being of GLBT employees and their general life and job satisfaction. Due to the stigmatised status of sexual minority members in our society, GLBT employees hold varied attitudes and value systems regarding their sexual identity. Evidence suggests that GLBT employees apply sexual identity management strategies to manage the stress involved in disclosing ones sexual orientation. This study intends to examine hypothesised relationships of sexual orientation disclosure and concealment; heterosexism (workplace discrimination) and these effects on psychological wellbeing, with regard to psychological well-being, mental health, job satisfaction and satisfaction with life.

**Location**

Innovation Campus, Building 233, Rm G12

# The Australian Corporate Closet, why it's still so full: Investigating the relationship between sexual orientation (disclosure and concealment) and Heterosexism and how this affects GLBT employee well-being.

Ian Smith (#3978680)

## **ABSTRACT:**

There is minimal research on the effects of 'outness' (sexual orientation disclosure) on the work experiences of GLBT employees. Few international empirically sound studies from the literature have compared the variable of outness, its effect on workplace heterosexism, and job satisfaction. To date, no Australian studies have compared the variables of workplace heterosexism, the psychological well-being of GLBT employees and their general life and job satisfaction. Due to the stigmatised status of sexual minority members in our society, GLBT employees hold varied attitudes and value systems regarding their sexual identity. Evidence suggests that GLBT employees apply sexual identity management strategies to manage the stress involved in disclosing ones sexual orientation. This study intends to examine hypothesised relationships of sexual orientation disclosure and concealment; heterosexism (workplace discrimination) and these effects on psychological well-being, with regard to psychological well-being, mental health, job satisfaction and satisfaction with life.

## **INTRODUCTION**

An average adult spends about a third of their life at work (Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2002) and as much as a fifth to a quarter of the variation in adult life satisfaction can be accounted for by satisfaction with work place health and well-being (Campbell, Converse & Rodgers, 1976; Judge & Watanabe, 1993). The workplace is therefore a significant part of an employee's life which affects not only their lives, but the lives of their families and also the community at large (Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2002). Moreover, employee's work and personal lives are not separate entities but instead interrelated domains having a reciprocal effect on each other (Zedeck & Mosier, 1990). The nature of work, its everyday pattern and complexity has been linked causally to an employee's sense of control and depression (Kohn & Schooler, 1982). Some estimates place common mental health problems in the workplace affecting one in six adults with conditions such as depression, anxiety and stress related issues (Seymour, 2010). Therefore, the ability of the workplace to prevent mental illness and to promote health and well-being is of great interest to employers who spend substantial resources hiring employees and trying to generate productivity and therefore profitability (Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2002).

It is clear that there is an increase in the growing research related to health and well-being in the workplace with the largest area of research addressing work related stress (for example Baker & Landrigan, 1990; French, Caplan & Van Harrison, , 1982; Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991; Smith, Kaminstein & Makadok, 1995 Spurgeon, Gompertz & Harrington, 1996; Stellman & Snow, 1986; Williamson, 1994). Prior research has indicated that the relationships between work settings and health and well-being are complex. The simple consideration of potential physical hazards as was previously the case is inadequate, with widespread agreement that any model of occupational health must account for physical and psychological factors in the environment and their interaction.

Numerous studies have revealed potential risk factors on the level of the job, the team and the organisation. Various studies have linked poor health and well-being in the workplace to job characteristics such as low autonomy (Einarsen, Raknes & Matthiesen, 1994; O'Moore, Lynch, & Daéid, 2003; Vartia, 1996; Zapf, Knorz, & Kulla, 1996), role conflict (Einarsen et al., 1994; Hauge, Skogstad & Einarsen, 2007; Notelaers & De Witte, 2003; Neyens, Baillien, De Witte, & Notelaers, 2007), role ambiguity (Leymann, 1996; Fils & Notelaers, 2003; Vartia, 1996), job insecurity (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Hoel & Salin, 2003; Neyens et al., 2007; Notelaers & De Witte, 2003), high workload (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Vartia, 1996; Zapf, 1999), low skill utilisation (Einarsen et al., 1994) and lack of feedback (Hubert & Van Veldhoven, 2001; Zapf & Einarsen, 2003). Negative workplace actions have also been linked with various physical characteristics such as high temperatures (Bell, 1992), crowdedness (Lawrence & Leather, 1999) and noisy work environments (Hoel & Salin, 2003). Moreover, poor health and well-being in the workplace appears to be encouraged by high co-worker interdependence (Zapf et al., 1996), especially when combined with a competitive wage policy (Collinson, 1988; Hoel & Salin, 2003).

Finally, the relationship to psychological health and well-being in the workplace in men and women has also been investigated with regard to occupational complexity, control, sexual harassment and personal income (Adelman, 1987) and the differences between gender within the workplace (Bergman, 2003; Bulan, Erickson & Wharton, 1997; Cassirer & Reskin, 2000; Evans & Steptoe, 2002; Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Melton, 2004; Moen & Yu, 2000; Peterson, 2004; Van Emmerik, 2002). The potential importance of these constructs and their associated research is quite evident, given the implication of workplace dimensions that interact with individual factors affecting workers experiences of work and life. What is clear however is that few studies have compared the variable of sexual orientation, with regard to gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender employees on health and well-being in the workplace (Button, 2001; Nawyn, Richman, Rospenda & Hughes, 2000; Phelps, 1972). These limited studies focus on workplace harassment, sexual harassment and 'minority distaste' (Aigner & Cain, 1977; Arrow, 1973; D'Augelli, 1989; Norris, 1991; Schneider, 1982) and coming out or deciding to pass as straight (Day & Schoenrade, 1997; Griffin, 1991; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; Ragins, Singh & Cornwell, 2007; Sandfort & Bos, 1998; Woods, 1993) and on variation in income (Berg & Lien, 2002; Drydakis, 2008) where non-heterosexual men earn 22% less than heterosexual men. Due to the stigmatised status of sexual minority members in our society, gay and lesbian individuals hold varied attitudes and value systems regarding their sexual identity (Button, 2001) and diversity research should push these issues further to provide evidence for causal connection within the workplace, given that up to 17% of the workforce constitute gay and lesbian employees (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). These studies indicate positive relationships between heterosexism and workplace distress due to self-disclosure, but reveal important deficits for further empirical exploration.

#### *Self-disclosure*

Self-disclosure, the act of revealing personal information about oneself often involves unexpected information, one of these is revealing to coworkers that one is gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered or intersex. Largely unexamined, especially in the Australia workplace, is the attempt to understand the decision to reveal ones sexual orientation (SO) and the sexual identity management strategies involved in this process, particularly with regard to the use of valid and reliable measures such as the

Workplace Sexual Identity Management Measure-Revised (WSIMM-R) (Anderson, Croteau, Chung, and DiStefano, 2001; Lance, Anderson and Croteau, 2010), and the Workplace Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (WSEQ) (Waldo, 1999). The WSIMM-R is used to capture the breadth of heterosexist experiences GLBTIQ employees' encounter and the WSEQ which has been shown to be positively related to psychological distress, health problems, organisational climate and the perception that the individual's workplace environment is tolerant of heterosexism.

Heterosexism is defined by Herek (1990) as an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, relationship, or community. It also incorporates antigay attitudes, prejudice, and discriminatory behavior (Sears & Williams, 1997) and refers to the cultural ideology that maintains social prejudice against sexual minorities (Herek, 2004). Moreover, it has also been referred to as a belief system that posits the superiority of heterosexuality over homosexuality (Alden & Parker, 2005). The construct also takes into consideration the minimising of alternate sexual orientation (GLBT) and the unsupportive responses which lead to non-heterosexuals feeling 'invisible' (Smith & Ingram, 2004) in numerous settings, one of those being the workplace, where it is indicated that the level of openness is a trade-off between disclosure and possible discrimination (Badgett, 1996).

Sexual orientation disclosure and concealment have been conceptualised as strategies that GLBT employees use to manage their identities in the face of cultural and organisational stigma against GLBTIQ identities (Croteau, 1996; Fassinger, 1996; Woods & Harbeck, 1992). Disclosing one's SO is one of the toughest issues that GLBTIQ employees face because it involves considerable turmoil and a fear of retaliation, rejection (Bohan, 1996; Ellis & Riggle, 1995) and stigmatization. At the same time, employees who remain in the corporate closet report lower levels of psychological well-being and life satisfaction as a result of covering up their stigmatizing identity (Ellis & Riggle, 1995). Empirical evidence is suggesting that heterosexism is a particularly strong and persistent cause of these problems, with a need to further address these deleterious outcomes.

#### *Theoretical Paradigms*

There is a lack of theory on heterosexism in the workplace with the result that related theoretical perspectives on discrimination have to date provided a limited foundation for exploring this new research area. Stigma theory was initially used to understand the decision to disclose ones sexual orientation at work (Cain, 1991, Herek, 1998,). The Theory of Work Adjustment (Dawis, England & Lofquist, 1964; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) which refers to how employees form a direct relation between the person and the environment and their fit perceptions with the culture of the organisation, has also been used as a theoretical paradigm. Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 1995) the most contemporary theoretical paradigm, has been used to indicate the significant impact minority stress has had on a variety of mental health measures for GLTBIQ employees.

Minority Stress Theory asserts that socially marginalized groups including sexual minorities can experience mental and physical health problems resulting from negative social environments created by stigma, prejudice and discrimination (Fisher and Shaw, 1999; Gee, 2002, Meyer, 2003). Here minority stressors are conceptualised as internalised heterosexism. This relates to GLBTIQ members'

direction of societal negative attitudes toward the self, stigma, which relates to expectations of rejection and discrimination and actual experiences of discrimination and violence. Meyer (1995) refers to an environment whereby an individual experiences a minority stress where there is a conflict between the minority member and the dominant social environment. For GLBTIQ individuals, this conflict is expressed in discordant values and norms regarding sexuality, intimacy and more generally human existence and purpose or psychological well-being. Meyer defines these stress processes as internalised homophobia (which has now become known as internalised heterosexism, see review by Smith, Oades & McCarthy, 2012), where the expectations of rejection and discrimination and actual events of antigay violence and discrimination. The theory of minority Stress has only recently (in the last decade) been tested in the workplace and more recently on GLBT employees for studying heterosexism as a form of job stress for workplaces dominated by heterosexuals as has been chosen as the theoretical paradigm for this study.

Internalised heterosexism is now seen as the most insidious of the minority processes where GLBTIQ individuals direct the negative social attitudes towards the self, leading to a devaluation of the self and resultant internal conflicts and poor self-regard results. This coupled with the deleterious nature of heterosexism necessitates a need to better understand minorities working in a majority context and the impact this has on their psychological well-being, especially when research indicates that self-disclosure is a necessary prerequisite for psychological wellness (Cain, 1991). There is a clear need to conduct Australian research in this area to fully understand the complex nature of SO discrimination in the workplace and to locate this in an appropriate theoretical paradigm.

#### *Research Question*

The main aim of the present study is to investigate the relationship between GLBT sexual orientation (disclosure/concealment) and heterosexism and how these affect well-being in the Australian labour market?

#### *Specific aims:*

- a) *Is reported sexual orientation disclosure associated with positive direct heterosexism, reduced psychological well-being, poor mental health poor job satisfaction and poor satisfaction with life?*
- b) *Is reported sexual orientation concealment associated with positive indirect heterosexism, reduced psychological well-being, poor mental health, poor job satisfaction and poor satisfaction with life?*
- c) *Are organisations with EEO policies and practices in place associated with negative heterosexism, positive psychological well-being and mental health, higher job satisfaction and positive satisfaction with life?*

#### *Primary Significance of the study*

The rationale for the study; firstly is to address the gaps in Australian research where there is no empirical data using valid and reliable measures examining the prevalence and incidence rates of heterosexism in the Australian labour market. Additionally, the aim is to further raise the importance of intervention at the organisational level to reduce antigay attitude and prejudice and at the individual level within the organisation to provide non-heterosexual employees a safe workplace where their sexual identities are respected. Furthermore, the study aims to highlight the negative health effects of heterosexist behaviour in the workplace with regard to poor well-being, with specific reference to psychological well-being and

mental health, where non heterosexuality itself is not indicative of mental health problems, but rather, the stress related to being a sexual minority contributes to emotional difficulties based on society's attitudes towards these minority groups. Finally, the study plans to add to the international literature so that there is a greater understanding of the prevalence of heterosexism and the deleterious effects on GLBT employees.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

It is estimated that between 4% and 17% of the workforce (Gonsiorek & Weinrich, 1999) are gay and lesbian and make up the largest minority group (Lubensky, Holland, Wiethoff & Crosby, 2004). Estimates in other US studies reveal 10% to 14% of the US workforce is composed of non-heterosexual workers (Powers, 1996). Numbers are expected to be much higher than this due to the complex nature of this phenomenon where many GLBTIQ individuals stay in the closet and therefore conceal their SO due to the stigmatization and discrimination associated with disclosure. Moreover, individuals are more likely to conceal their SO when they have witnessed or experienced workplace discrimination. There is a need to better understand minorities working in a majority context and the impact this has on their psychological well-being, especially when research indicates that self-disclosure is a necessary prerequisite for psychological wellness (Cain, 1991).

Psychological well-being is described by Ryan and Deci (2000, 2001) as including specific supports and 'nutriments' from one's social environment. These nutriments are conceptualised within Self Determination Theory (SDT) as basic psychological needs. These are defined as those supports and satisfactions that are essential and necessary for psychological growth, integrity, and wellness. Within SDT there are three basic psychological needs, namely those for autonomy, relatedness and competence. When these three needs are supported and satisfied within a social context, such as the workplace, people experience more vitality, self-motivation, and well-being. Therefore, when employees experience these in their workplace, they would be more likely to disclose their sexual orientation. Conversely, the obstruction of these basic needs may lead to diminished self-motivation and poor well-being; leading employees to conceal their SO (Lane & Wegner, 1995), which has been shown to result in the aetiology of many forms of psychopathology (Ryan, Deci, Grolnic, & LaGuardia, 2006). The literature indicates that sexual orientation disclosure and concealment and perceived heterosexism are linked with these negative outcomes for GLBT employees (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Moradi, 2009) resulting in poor psychological well-being and poor mental health outcomes (D'Augelli, Grossman, Hershberger & O'Connell, 2001; Bostwick, Boyd, Hughes & McCabe, 2009; Vincke, & Van Heeringen, 2002).

### *International literature*

During the 1980's and 1990's a limited number of studies focused exclusively on the workplace experiences of gay, lesbian and bisexual employees (excluding BTI employees). From the extant literature, only nine empirical studies were located which examined sexual orientation discrimination within the workplace, and the employee's degree of outness (see appendix 1). Three out of the nine studies were quantitative and six were qualitative in regard to the methodology used.

All nine empirical studies indicate from the reports of gay men, lesbians and bisexual employees, that discrimination is pervasive in the workplace. It was also indicated,

that these negative actions toward these employees was due to their sexual orientation disclosure. Three of the studies asked participants directly if they had ever been discriminated against in employment (Croteau & Lark, 1995; Croteau & von Destinon, 1994; Levine & Leonard, 1984) and these studies found that from 25 – 66% of participants reported employment discrimination.

Three of these studies reported even higher percentages of respondents who reported discrimination for workers who were more, rather than less; open about their sexual identity at work (Croteau & Lark, 1995; Croteau & von Destinon, 1994; Levine & Leonard, 1984). Furthermore, all three qualitative studies that inquired about work experiences in an open-ended manner (Griffin, 1992; Hall, 1986; Woods & Harbeck, 1992) found that participants either experienced or anticipated experiencing discrimination because of their sexual orientation. True estimates of discrimination cannot be assessed from the data due to the unverified self-report nature of the measurement and due to the sampling problems discussed later. Nevertheless, the data does establish that heterosexism is experienced as pervasive by gay men, lesbians and bisexual employees.

Discrimination against gay men, lesbians and bisexual employees appears to involve a wide range of actions that can be categorised as formal and informal. Qualitative descriptions of actual and anticipated discrimination were found in all six of the qualitative studies and in the illustrations of quantitative data in the study by Levine and Leonard (1984). In the narrative of participants from the qualitative studies, formal discrimination most often involved employer decisions to fire or not hire someone due to their sexual orientation. Other formal discriminatory actions described by participants included being passed over for promotions, raises, or increased job responsibilities. Participant comments about policies that excluded same-sex partners from employment benefits (e.g., insurance, family leave) could also be classified as formal discrimination. Informal discrimination as described in these studies included “harassment and other unofficial actions taken by supervisors or co-workers” (p. 706). Participant’s descriptions of informal discrimination included examples of verbal harassment and property violence. Levine and Leonard’s (1984) early study of formal and informal discrimination gives a sense of the quality and range of adverse and discriminatory practices faced by GLBT minority groups in the workplace.

Fear or anticipation of discrimination also appears pervasive and is often reported to be an important consideration in how employees manage their gay, lesbian and bisexual identities within the workplace. Levine and Leonard (1984) found that over 60% of lesbian employees in various occupations anticipated discrimination at work if their sexual orientation became known. Croteau and Lark (1995) found that 44% of lesbian, gay, or bisexual college student-affairs professionals anticipated job discrimination in their future. Fear of discrimination, especially if sexual orientation is disclosed or discovered, is a primary feature of the subjective accounts of participants’ experiences at work. The fear or anticipation of discrimination presents as a major factor in employees hiding lesbian, gay, or bisexual identities and is an important factor in deciding to disclose one’s sexual orientation in the workplace.

Badgett et al (2009) found that 10 - 43% of sexual orientation minorities reported experiences of sexual orientation discrimination in the US. Leung (2006) found that in a study of 150 gay men and lesbians that 50% reported workplace discrimination.

Silvershantz, Cortine, Konik and Magley, (2007) found that 58% of sexual minorities in their study experienced heterosexist harassment in the academia field. D'Augelli and Grossman (2001) found in their study among lesbian, gay and bisexual older adults that 19% had experienced discrimination or harassment in the workplace. Levine and Leonard (1984) found that out of 203 lesbians, nearly one quarter perceived job discrimination and 3/5 of the women expected discrimination if their SO was discovered. Moreover, 75% of this cohort anticipated problems with their immediate supervisors and two thirds expected their position to be terminated because of their SO and 13% experienced workplace harassment. As a consequence of these expectations, 77% of the respondents limited their disclosure at work.

Olsen (1987) found that 52% of their participants (gay teachers) reported that their sexual orientation played a role in their decision to leave their profession, due to the stress associated with leading a double life and having to deal with prejudicial attitudes and discrimination. Matthews and Adams (2009) in their study on an approach to prevent mental health consequences of heterosexism found that 19% of lesbians, 15% of bisexual women, and 28% of gay men and 27% of bisexual men reported victimization as a result of their sexual orientation during adulthood. A large number of these incidents were experienced in the workplace.

Woods (1994) in a study of 70 gay men in five US metro cities found that 97% reported that their SO had at some time cost them a promotion, a raise or a relationship with a potential mentor. Furthermore, 21% did not disclose at work as they 'passed' as heterosexual. However, many reported that they had to leave their organisation within 24 months because of the pressure associated with this 'passing' and 'counterfeiting' (strategies used to manage sexual orientation disclosure). This pressure is a result of employee's experiences of internalised heterosexism.

Friskopp and Silversten (1995) in a study of 67 Harvard Business School graduates found that 37% of the respondents reported that their careers had been damaged because colleagues knew or suspected that they were gay and 12 % reported being blackmailed or threatened with blackmail regarding their SO. Martinez (1993), found that 66% of surveyed CEO's reported being reluctant to include a homosexual on their management committee. The National Defense Research Institute in the US, (1993) found that heterosexual Americans when confronted with issues of working with homosexuals, 27% reported that they would prefer not to and 25% reported that if they had to, they would strongly object. In a study carried out in Hong Kong, 38.9% of the respondents reported that homosexuality 'contradicts the morals of the community' (HL Home Affairs Bureau, 2006). Moradi (2009) found in her study that 28% of military personnel who were certain of the presence of a GLBT person in their unit believed the presence had a negative impact on their personal morale because of negative perceptions about GLBT individuals. It is evident that individuals still hold discriminatory views on non-heterosexual colleagues.

Chan (2005) found in a study on 693 respondents, that 10.8% experienced workplace heterosexism, 5% knowing or suspected that they were dismissed from work because of their SO. Additionally, 4.9 % percent reported being discriminated against during job applications and 15.4% reported a suspicion of being discriminated against during job applications. Badgett (1996) found that gay and bisexual workers also earned significantly less than their heterosexual counterparts.

Pitts et al (2006) found that 10.3% of respondents reported being refused employment or promotion based on their SO.

Myers (2000) carried out a study on heterosexuals and he found from 71570 service members from 38 bases and 11 naval vessels that 80% (57256) had heard offensive speech, derogatory names, jokes or remarks about gay individuals in the past year. Furthermore, 37% had witnessed or experienced an incident of harassment based on perceived homosexuality. More than half of these incidents involved threats, unfair discipline or discrimination in training or career opportunities. D'Augelli & Grossman (2001) found out of a study of 416 gay men and lesbians, that 75% reported being attacked or physically threatened as a result of disclosing their sexual identity. D'Augelli and Grossman, (2001) in their study on disclosure of sexual orientation victimization and mental health on 416 GLB that 19% of their cohort had experienced discrimination or harassment. Croteau (1996) reports in his study that up to one third of GLB employees chose not to disclose their sexual orientation identity at work because of these heterosexist treats.

Hebl, Foster, Mannix & Dovidio (2002), found that employers engaged in more nonverbal discrimination with gays and lesbians than heterosexual applicants. Indicating that heterosexism in the workplace also manifests itself in many subtle ways. It has been indicated that gay employees with gay supervisors will perceive less workplace heterosexism compared with those gay employees with heterosexual supervisors (Ragins and Cornwall, 2001). Additionally, gay employees with a greater proportion of gay coworkers will perceive less workplace discrimination than gay employees with work groups that are primarily heterosexual (Ragins and Cornwall, 2001). Moreover, gay employees in organisations governed by protective legislation will perceive less workplace discrimination than gay employees in organisations lacking protective legislation. GLBT employees who report working in an organisation whose EEO policy includes a statement of nondiscrimination based on SO have more positive work attitudes, including higher organisational commitment, higher job satisfaction, lower job stress and lower conflict between work and home (Day & Schoenrade, 2000).

Results of existing research have been shown to yield mixed support for the theory based propositions. Consistent with the posited association of concealment and nondisclosure of sexual orientation with negative work outcomes, a series of studies have linked sexual orientation concealment with lower job satisfaction and poor psychological well-being and sexual orientation disclosure with higher job satisfaction and positive psychological well-being (Button, 2001; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Ragins & Cornwall, 2001). Disparate research indicates that disclosure of sexual orientation at work has also been linked with poor psychological well-being because of the pressure associated with managing the degree of disclosure (Ragins, 2004). The problem is that most gay and lesbian employees do not fully disclose their sexual orientation at work (Badgett, 1996; Driscoll, Kelley & Fassinger, 1996) and SO is not readily observable where direct discrimination requires knowledge or suspicion of an employee's sexual orientation. Disclosure is therefore not an all or nothing phenomenon. In fact, Kinsey and his colleagues (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Wardell, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953) estimated that only about 1 in 7 gay males and 1 in 20 lesbians are recognizable as such to the general public. Extant research suggests that GLBT employees engage in varying degrees of disclosure and concealment of their So and identity to manage the deleterious effects

on their psychological well-being (Anderson et al, 2001). The research makes it clear that the fear of negative consequences of 'being out at work' therefore has a greater impact on employees than the actual act of disclosure itself.

From the above discussion on the international literature, it is evident that heterosexism is prevalent and that GLBT employees engage in various degrees of disclosure and concealment to manage heterosexist behaviours experienced within their workplace to try and minimize the deleterious effects on their well-being.

#### *Australian Literature*

The Australian studies reviewed in this section carry the central theme of SO discrimination within the workplace. In the research, there is variation in organisational workplace and a bias towards the health industry as a research setting, which raises some methodological considerations such as poor generalisability to other organisational contexts. The small body of Australian research into SO discrimination encompasses; (i) varied methodological approaches, (ii) disparate authors selecting a varied range of aspects of discrimination thus absenting a unifying framework to guide research and lacking as yet seminal authorship providing focus, iii) limited sampling of participants which while eventually contributing to construct validity, at this stage makes comparisons difficult and further indicates the absence of a unifying framework with which to focus the research. As a result of these issues, the Australian literature on workplace sexual orientation discrimination has been organised in chronological order, and where possible, it has linked studies together to indicate the commensurate nature of the studies.

Hillier, Dempsey, Harrison, Beale, Matthews and Rosenthal (1998) conducted a telephone survey of Australian women aged between 16 and 59 years randomly selected from all states. Out of the 9134 women interviewed, .8% identified as gay, 1.4% as bisexual and 15.1% reported same sex attraction. This suggests a sum of 17.3% fitting a minority group identity which is commensurate with international literature. Moreover, Smith, Russell, Richters, Grulkich and De Visser (2003) found in their Australian Study of health and relationships, which interviewed 20 000 people that when a definition of sexuality includes the three domains of identity, attraction and experience that up to 15% of the respondents had experienced same sex attraction. A study by the National Centre in HIV Social research (La Trobe University) revealed that between 8-11% of young people are not unequivocally heterosexual (Hillier, Warr & Haste, 1996). Hass (1979) reported that 11% of young women and 14% of young men aged 15-18 have had at least some homosexual experience, whether or not they associate this with being homosexual. These studies indicate that there are a large number of non-heterosexual employees and future employees in the Australian population who make up the GLBTIQ sexual minorities. It is emphasised that these numbers are thought to be conservative due to the sensitive nature of this issue and the fear of being a target for discrimination either directly or indirectly.

Byron-Smith (1993) in an exploratory study found that 57% of their respondents, psychiatric nurses exhibited moderate homophobic and 20% severe homophobic attitudes. Although the study was limited to one organization, it adds to the literature by suggesting that this could reflect the attitudes of heterosexuals in other organisations. Rose (1994) in a small, but useful qualitative study also supports the

Byron-Smith (1993) study where she found further evidence to support the existence of negative attitudes of members of the medical profession towards homosexual employees and clients.

Irwin (1999) in a study on the workplace experiences of 900 gay men, lesbians and transgendered employees found that harassment and prejudicial treatment on the basis of sexual orientation was widespread with 59% of her respondents experiencing heterosexism in their workplace. Irwin further found in her study that 50% of the respondents had been ridiculed in front of colleagues based on their sexual orientation. For 97%, this was not a single incident but was ongoing and affected the way they felt about themselves, their workplace and their colleagues. Heterosexist harassment and prejudicial treatment spanned all occupations, industries and types of sizes of the employing organisation. However, discrimination was more likely to happen in traditionally male dominated occupations and industries such as the mining industry. Transgender participants were more likely to experience heterosexism (75%) compared with gay men (57%) and lesbians (67%). The result of this heterosexism was increased stress, depression, loss of self-confidence, increased alcohol and drug usage and attempted suicide. Additionally, workplace performance was also negatively affected by presenteeism due to a preoccupation with internalized heterosexism and a fear of heterosexism. Many participants were out selectively because they felt unsafe to be entirely open about their SO. The major limitation of this study, which is similar to that of other GLBTIQ studies, is the non-probability sampling technique due to the self-selected nature of this cohort and the need for confidentiality and the absence of bisexual employees. Despite these limitations, it is one of the larger studies (N=900) on GLT employees adding empirical support for the presence of heterosexist discrimination.

In 2003, the Department of Health and Human Services in Tasmania commissioned a study on GLBT health and well-being needs as research at the time indicated that health issues faced by GLBT people included higher rates of suicide, alcohol and drug use than the greater (heterosexual) population. Additionally, research suggested that the health and well-being issues were an outcome of heterosexist harassment and discrimination. Out of 131 gay men, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered employees, 40 % reported that they had suffered with depression. Additionally, the study found that only 31% of gay men would disclose their sexual identity in the workplace for fear of heterosexist behaviours.

Bowers, Plummer, McCann, McConaghy and Irwin (2006) found in a study on health service delivery in the NSW metro area that nursing and medical staff make derogatory comments about gay men, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered patients and that same sex partners' of patients were ignored by medical staff and not informed of their partner's condition. Furthermore, they also faced exclusion from participating in decision making about their partner's case. Bowers et al. (2006) also noted that health care workers as a result of this discrimination do not disclose their own SO for fear of discrimination, harassment and rejection from colleagues and that these actions impact negatively on their career and job prospects (Rose, 1994). Pitts, Smith, Mitchell and Patel (2006) found in their study that the fear of heterosexism caused 67% of GLBTI employees to modify their daily activities. Pitts et al. (2006) also indicated that one in eight GLBTI respondents had been physically assaulted (direct heterosexist discrimination) and 10% had been refused employment or promotion due to their sexual orientation. These findings are consistent with a finding

in the Health in Men (HIM) study which was conducted by the National centre for HIV Epidemiology and Clinical research at the University of NSW, the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations and ACON which found that around one in twelve men had been refused service or denied a job due to their sexuality.

Irwin (2002) in her study on discrimination against gay men, lesbians and transgender teachers, academics and educators found that just over 60% of the GLT teachers, academics and educators identified experiencing homophobic behavior, harassment and discrimination and/or prejudicial treatment. Homophobic behavior included being a target of jokes (35%), being asked unwelcome questions around their SO 31%. Twenty seven percent reported being outed, 23% reported being socially excluded, 18% reported being ridiculed, 16% being sexually harassed, 11% threatened with physical violence and 5% having property damaged. One respondent was sexually assaulted and it was noted that perpetrators were more likely to be work colleagues employed at a similar or senior level. For school teachers perpetrators included students and their parents.

Many teachers, academics and educators also experienced prejudicial treatment in the form of undermining and sabotaging of work (1.6%), unreasonable work expectations (15%), limited opportunities for career development (15%), threat of loss of promotion (13.3%). Seventeen percent stated they had been denied partner rights to superannuation. Nine percent had been denied entitlements available to heterosexual staff. Some teachers reported that staying in the corporate closet had prevented them from experiencing homophobic or prejudicial behavior. Eight percent reported not being open to anyone at work and 35% reported being open to everyone at work. Teachers who were employed at religious institutions reported concerns about being out and the risk this posed for their continuing employment. Some reported being closeted due to past homophobic experiences. Participants reported that the fear of becoming a target of harassment affected the way they behaved.

Furthermore, the participants reported a belief that the effects of discrimination caused problems with both physical and emotional health. Ninety percent identified an increase in anxiety and stress, 80% had suffered depression, 63% has experienced a loss of confidence, and 59% reported that the discrimination had a negative effect on their personal relationships. Sixteen percent had contemplated suicide and one person had attempted suicide. As a result of ongoing heterosexist discrimination 34% had attended counseling and 34% had medical treatment. Fifty nine percent reported that heterosexism had resulted in them achieving less at work (presenteeism). Thirty eight percent had resigned, 46% had taken sick leave, 49% had decided on a career change and 18% reported that they had been fired. Outing oneself was dependent upon how committed the institution appeared to be to the promotion of diversity. Irwin (2002) reported that less than half of the participants (45%) chose to take action against the perpetrators. Commensurate with Irwin's empirical and exploratory study are Goody and de Vries's findings (2001) which indicate that anecdotal evidence suggests that heterosexist behaviour and offensive comments and gestures with respect to sexual orientation occur in Australian universities despite anti-discrimination clauses and legislation being present and that not many formal reports are laid.

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

describe two projects which aimed to make the UWA a safer and a more productive and positive work and study experience for GLBT staff and students (The Rainbow Project). A survey was used with limited statistical data being reported (mainly percentage answered by respondents for variables), with 754 participants (92.4% heterosexual). The survey indicated a significant majority of students with homophobic attitudes and high levels of discomfort in regard to GLBT people. There was also an apparent ignorance of harassment issues on the part of the majority of students who held more positive attitudes. Findings were commensurate with those found in the Irwin (1999) study where university employees reported experiencing UWA as an unsafe place to be out and they experienced difficulty in attending GLBT group meetings for fear of being seen and targeted and having their SO made public against their will. Some employees reported 'invisibility', while others experienced direct anti-gay comments in faculty settings which resulted in GLBT employees feeling increasingly uncomfortable.

While Goody and de Vries (2002) do not explicitly embed their research in a theoretical paradigm, they use constructs such as stigmatisation, where an assumption is made that the study is based on stigma theory. They do however raise the important issue of challenging homophobia, making the invisible visible and initiating awareness to take steps in making universities a place where GLBT employees and students can thrive. This is significant as GLBT employee's careers become characterised by a preoccupation with self-disclosure and skill in the management of sexual identity. Invisibility and isolation in the workplace become common manifestations of these difficulties which can lead to the aetiology of various pathologies.

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

McNair and Thomacos (2005) found in their study on 652 participants (GLBQIT- 90% GL and 5.5% B) mainly from the Melbourne metropolitan area that 75% had publicly concealed their same sex relationships at some time to avoid discrimination. Moreover, 81.5% of lesbians and 79.4% of gay men were aware of public insults and had experienced equal levels of verbal abuse because of their SO. In total, 71.5% had been harassed in a public space, 59.1% of bisexual participants had been verbally abused and 68% had felt indirect insults. Thirteen percent of bisexual respondents had been sexually assaulted and over 80.7% had felt publicly insulted due to indirect negative public statements about same sex relationships and this did

not differ according to age, sexual identity, gender or ethnicity. Almost 20% had received explicit threats and 13% had been physically assaulted, with more men than women experiencing these levels of harassment. McNair and Thomacos also found unacceptable high and at times increasing levels of indirect public insult, verbal and physical harassment and discrimination within health and legal systems (20%). It was noted that the effect of these attitudes and behaviors was to force concealment of the same sex relationship in public by making GLBTI people feel vulnerable, which ultimately accentuates social inequality. With regard to disclosure, 54.7% had disclosed their SO to everyone, 34.6% had told almost everyone, .8% had told no one. Bisexual respondents were noted as having the highest concealment at 92%, suggesting a higher level of stigmatization and fear of sexual orientation discrimination.

Limitations of the study were that it did not cover specific questions around harassment and intersex participants comprised only 1% of the sample. The study was also conducted only in Victoria and mainly in the metropolitan city of Melbourne, making it difficult to generalise findings. Research indicates that rural minorities have different experiences to urban minorities. Anecdotal discussions make reference to these figures being much higher in rural localities due to ignorance around sexual orientation diversity and a lack of awareness of protective legislation. Moreover, rural GLBTIQ employees feel isolated and face a more severe information deficit than do their urban peers. There is an absence of the sense of 'us' which is the essence of group identity afforded by other minorities. This absence of 'us' results in sexual minorities being socialised into values and beliefs discordant with their self-identity and this ultimately often results in internalized heterosexism. International and Australian literature now points to the mental health of individuals who find themselves in this situation, which ultimately results in these minorities turning to alcohol and drugs to alleviate this pain (Sanford, 1989). More serious, is that mounting evidence now indicates a strong link between homosexuality, heterosexism and suicide, particularly among young men (Bagley and Tremblay, 1997; Ramafedi, 1997).

Willis (2009), in a small qualitative study (N = 34) on the strategies young GLBQ employees use to resist and refute homonegative practices in Australian workplaces, found three prevalent forms of homonegativity encountered and described by this group of employees in their workplace. These are referred to as; symbolic practices, material practices and discriminatory practices. With regard to symbolic practices, 20% of respondents witnessed comments by heterosexuals reinforcing and consolidating heterosexual norms, 10% reported witnessing expressing of discomfort and disapproval towards GLBQ identities, 13.3% had been assumed to be straight by colleagues and service users. His study also showed that 20% of respondents had their sexual identity questioned by colleagues and service users, 20% had experienced expressions of homonegative humour to a group audience and 66.6% had witnessed homonegative expressions and espoused beliefs. With regard to material practices, one employee reported being physically assaulted and bullied by colleagues, 30% reported verbal abuse and harassment, 3.3% reported public vilification in local media and 6.6% reported sexual harassment from members of management. Finally, with regard to discriminatory practices, 6.6 % reported repeated criticism of work performance because of their SO, 10% reported unfair dismissal and 3.3% reported refusal of leave provisions based on their sexual orientation. Willis' (2009) findings from his qualitative study are limited in scope and

generalisability and therefore are not transferrable to other organisational contexts. Moreover, as occurs in other research of this nature (mentioned earlier) the sample is comprised of self-selected GLBQ participants. The organisational sectors are also limited in that there are no trade industries represented. Nevertheless, the findings highlight the challenges young GLBQ employees encounter when entering the Australian labour market as a result of their sexual orientation.

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

Barrett, Lewis and Dwyer (2011) in their quantitative study on the effects of disclosure of sexual orientation at work for 152 GLBTI employees in Queensland, found that 36% of their respondents had experienced sexual orientation discrimination at one workplace and 34% at two workplaces based on their sexual identity. They found that the most frequent types of discrimination based on sexual identity were remarks (27%), ridicule (27%) and jokes (25%). Where more than one co-worker was present discrimination took the form of remarks (59%), ridicule (56%) and jokes (58%). With regard to single co-workers discrimination was evident in the form of written threats of physical abuse (100%). Where respondents had experienced discrimination in their current workplace more than three times, the types of discrimination were; death threats (80%), threats of physical abuse via telephone (67%), property damage (33%) verbal threats of sexual abuse (30%), verbal threats of physical abuse (29%) and verbal threats of sexual abuse via telephone (25%). Despite this quantitative study having a relatively low sample number and the common sampling problem found in GLBT research (non-random) and no even distribution with regard to the various sub categories, the research is based in a theoretical paradigm relevant to issues around discrimination placing it well to contextualize the findings. The study importantly raises relevant issues around GLBTI employees and discrimination. Important concerns raised are how respondents, who experienced discrimination more than three times, faced severe forms of discrimination. The threat of personal injury as a result of revealing ones sexual orientation is therefore extremely high. More importantly, the study confirms that in Australia 2010, discrimination is still directed at GLBTI employees in Queensland workplaces, despite ethical considerations and potential legal ramifications. Finally, as a result of sexual orientation disclosure, GLBTI employees

are experiencing more sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace, despite anti-discrimination policies being in place. Due to the fact that sexual orientation is not readily observable, direct discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation requires knowledge or suspicion of an employee's orientation. Therefore, the potential for discrimination is seen to be higher when GLBTIQ individuals disclose their sexual orientation.

## **CONCLUSION**

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

Moreover, the studies confirm that workplace discrimination against GLBTIQ employees still exists in Australian workplaces and that these limited studies indicate positive relationships between heterosexism and workplace distress due to outness. International studies indicating up to as high as 66% of participants experiencing workplace heterosexism (Croteau, 1996). Existing reports suggest these are conservative estimates of discrimination in the workplace due to GLBT employees not fully disclosing their sexual orientation at work due to the complexities involved and to avoid discrimination. Further research needs to empirically test these findings so that organisations can bring about required action to support sexual minority employees. Implications are that there are costs to organisations due to absenteeism and presenteeism and therefore loss of productivity and profitability, ultimately due to discriminatory workplace environments. Moreover, there is a need to investigate organisation's compliance with workplace legislation. While national and state anti-discrimination laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity at work, many non-heterosexuals still experience both direct and indirect discrimination in the international and Australian workplace. Research strongly indicates that this discrimination is more evident than is suggested by the incident rates present in the literature and by the numbers of formal complaints lodged with the Gay and Lesbian Lobby Groups in Australia. There is clearly little doubt for further empirical research using valid and reliable measures to improve the understandings and experiences of GLBTIQ employees to overcome heterosexist behaviours and to enhance the workplace lives of sexual minority employees such as gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender, intersex and questioning Australian employees so that they do not have to hide in the corporate closet.

## **RESEARCH POSITIONING:**

This question is based in previous empirical work and grounded in the theoretical paradigm of Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 1995).

*It is hypothesized that:*

- H1: Greater reported disclosure of sexual orientation will be associated with positive direct heterosexism, reduced psychological health, mental health and well-being, poor job satisfaction and poor general satisfaction with life.*
- H2: Less reported disclosure of sexual orientation will be associated with positive indirect heterosexism, reduced psychological health mental health and well-being, poor job satisfaction and poor general satisfaction with life*
- H3: No reported disclosure of sexual orientation will be associated with reduced psychological health and well-being and lower life satisfaction due to internal heterosexism, poor job satisfaction and poor general satisfaction with life.*
- H4: Respondents who conceal their sexual orientation would be least likely to experience direct sexual orientation discrimination but would have high levels of life dissatisfaction and reduced psychological health and well-being outcomes.*
- H5: Participant's age, sex and education will be associated with rates of discrimination.*
- H6: Youngest GLBT employees will be the most vulnerable to workplace discrimination (heterosexism).*
- H7: Respondents with the least amount of education will be the most vulnerable to workplace discrimination.*

## **METHODOLOGY:**

### *Design and Methodology*

A cross sectional design will include an online questionnaire and convenience sampling (Non-probability) with a combination of; snowball sampling, respondent driven sampling, quota sampling, time space sampling with self-identified and within group distinctions. Structural equation modeling (quantitative statistical analyses) will be used as a model of best fit to prove hypotheses (see discussion below for why LVSEM).

### *Sample Size.*

A large sample size is important for any SEM analysis (Kline, 2005; Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). Sample sizes that are too small are likely to result in extremely high  $\chi^2$  values during SEM analysis causing the researcher to falsely assess a model as having poor fit. Kline (2005) has suggested a 20:1 ratio of test subjects per free parameter, with a 10:1 minimum ratio. Free parameters represent proposed direct effects of one variable on another. Model complexity suggests 87 free parameters, and as such, a sample of 870 – 1740 would be adequate. The population for this study includes GLBT self-identified individuals. The study is aimed at N = 600 for all groups (GLBT), with a target of 150 per category. However, due to the building up of the model via single factor congeneric models, the sample size for individual sub-groups may be as low as 90 (9 variables x 10 participants) due to means being used which limits the number of free parameters to one per variable. This will permit comparisons between identity groups to be made viz. gay men, lesbians, bisexual and transgender employees to determine differences amongst the groups.

### *Measures*

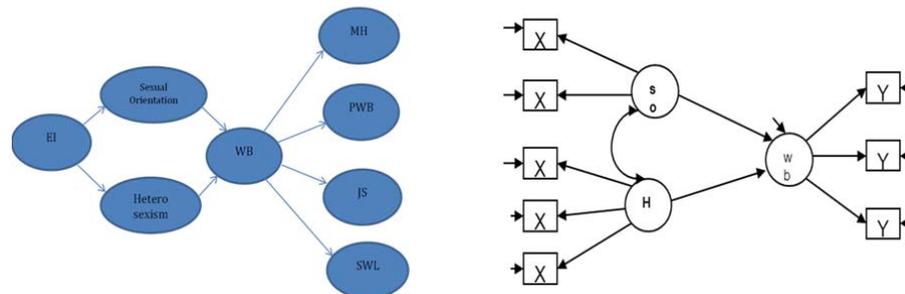
Eight measures of interest (in addition to a demographic profile) will be completed by the research participants. All measures are well described and defined in the literature: (1) The Workplace Heterosexist Experience Questionnaire (WHEQ), (2) The Workplace Sexual Identity Management Scale (WSIMM), (3) The Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS), (4) The Degree of Disclosure Scale (DODS), (5) The Workplace Equality Index (WEI), (6) Psychological Well-being Scale, (7) Job Satisfaction Scale (JSS) and (8) The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS). These scales have been used in the development of a questionnaire for the present study. The questionnaire will be placed on the internet using survey monkey and attached to numerous online social GLBT networks for potential research participants to access.

### *Statistical Analyses*

Structural equation modelling (SEM) consists of a measurement model to define hypothetical latent constructs in terms of measured variables, and a structural model to depict relationships among latent constructs. SEM is a multivariate method combining aspects of factor analysis and multiple regressions in analyzing a set of interrelated relationships among manifest and latent variables simultaneously. SEM aims to minimize differences between observed and expected covariance matrices. In other words, SEM, based on the covariance statistic, attempts “to understand patterns of correlations among a set of variables and to explain as much of their variances” (Kline, 1998, pp. 10-11). SEM is useful in this study firstly, as covariance statistics convey more information than a correlation. Secondly, SEM allows researchers to assess measurement error in the model estimation process and by distinguishing a structural model from a measurement model, SEM can examine the relationship among constructs that are not influenced by measurement errors (Newcomb & Bentler, 1988). Thirdly, SEM allows incorporation of latent variables into the analyses unlike conventional analysis, which focuses solely on observed variables. Moreover, because SEM is not limited to relations among observed variables, it gives researchers more flexibility to study any combination of relations (path analysis [only observed variables], CFA [only latent variables], and hybrid models [some observed and some latent variables]). Finally, SEM allows researchers to estimate very complicated multivariate relationships, permitting an examination of a series of dependent relationships simultaneously. The present study aims at examining the relationship between the three latent variables of SO, heterosexism and well-being and therefore SEM is of extreme use in this study when investigating the relationship between multi-variables. Also, SEM has been used in more recent studies when examining GLBT populations in international studies. From the developed conceptual model, utilising LVSEM a measurement model was created for each of the scales in order to test the construct validity (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Based in the known theoretical literature for each construct, confirmatory factor analysis will be utilised to develop the initial model (Byrne, 2001). Adequacy of the measurement model will be utilised for the three criteria. Firstly, all latent variable regression weights will be tested for both statistical and practical significance. While statistical significance will be assessed at  $\alpha = .01$ , practical significance for each standardized regression will be met. Secondly, the overall fit of the measurement model will be evaluated utilising a number of indices, namely, the chi squared and degrees of freedom, the Comparative Fit index (CFI), the Root mean Square of approximation (RMSEA), The RMSEA will assess the degree of error associated with

covariation estimates where values less than .08 are considered adequate, with values less than .05 considered a close fit (Schumacker and Lomax, 2004). The final fit index considered is the Consistent Akaike's Information Criterion (CAIC) which assesses parsimony in the model of fit in relationship to sample size (Bozdogan, 1987). AMOS 18 will be used for all structured equation modeling in this study. PASW 17.0 (formerly SPSS) to compute reliability coefficients.

### Overall Conceptual Model    Latent Variable SEM Path Diagram



### IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research is intending to address the gaps in both international and Australian research by: (i) creating an awareness of heterosexism against GLBT employees and the effect this has on their well-being, (ii) highlighting the link between heterosexism and employees' level of outness, (iii) indicating the importance of intervention at the organisational level to reduce heterosexism, (iv) creating an awareness of the deleterious nature of heterosexism (poor mental health issues) at a state and national level and the effects this has on productivity due to mental health issues.

### LIMITATIONS:

The cross-sectional nature of the data precludes definitive answers about the causal sequencing in the models, suggesting the need for longitudinal research. Future studies would be enhanced by the inclusion of intersex and more transgender, more racial and ethnic minority participants because it would be interesting to examine the potential effects of being a double or triple minority. Relatedly, even though effort was made to word WHEQ items so that respondents reported only experiences of bias toward them that was related to their sexual orientation, it is possible that some respondents in the sample may have interpreted certain experiences as heterosexism when they may have been motivated by racism, sexism, or something else. Another factor to consider when studying heterosexism is occupational context because it has been shown that GLB people make occupational choices on the basis of the perceived tolerance that they will experience (Badgett, 1996). Although it is difficult to assess this variable, occupational context matters: A gay male interior designer would certainly have different experiences of heterosexism than, say, a professional football player. There are two further potentially methodological limitations of this study. These concern the dispersion of participants

across organizations and the self-report nature of the data. It is possible that the study could have been strengthened by limiting participants from a single organization, because organizational characteristics could have been assessed more reliably. Other studies however, have had difficulty identifying large numbers of GLB employees within a single workplace (e.g., Day & Schonrade, 1997), and even if a single such organization existed, the minority stress theory would be compromised, thus substantially altering its organizational dynamics. With respect to the self-report nature of the data, the most serious problem concerns the possibility that the results may be due to method variance or a generalized tendency to respond negatively. It could be, for example, as Fitzgerald et al. (1997) have discussed for sexual harassment, that the relationship between organisational climate and heterosexism can be explained better by the “whiner” and method variance hypotheses. The former argument refers to the tendency of employees who are overly sensitive to endorse both WHEQ items and to rate their organization as more tolerant of heterosexism. The health related outcomes could be improved by obtaining actual medical records rather than relying on symptom checklists, because such self-report health measures have been found to be less than optimally accurate. The Polices EEI construct was also measured through participants self-report, it may be helpful to assess this variable more objectively, that is through actual company policies (albeit difficult to do this). Moreover, it may be helpful if respondents rate the perceived effectiveness of the policies and resources or the degree to which they think management enforces them instead of just whether they exist.

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