PROTECTIVE MASK OR GLASS CLOSET?: CONCEALING A STIGMATIZED INVISIBLE IDENTITY AT WORK

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Abstract - This research examines experiences with hegemonic social norms that may affect decisions made by employees with an invisible stigma to disclose that stigma or attempt to conceal it. More specifically, it reports analysis of in-depth interviews focused on the the role of heterosexism in Millennial gay males' decisions to conceal their sexuality in the workplace. In keeping with past research, results suggest that heterosexism can explicitly influence concealment decisions but, more surprisingly, results also suggest that internalized heterosexism might elicit a default of "conceal" for some that short-circuits the cost-benefit analysis otherwise presumed to underlie these decisions.

Index Terms - Identity Management, Invisible Stigma, Sexual Orientation, Workplace Discrimination.

I. INTRODUCTION

I think we can sometimes end up falling into the trap of our own disguises or masks … So much happens on a subconscious level; we are so ingrained with patterns that we don't always realize or take time to really consider things.– Study participant Casey, on concealing his sexuality in the workplace

Ever-increasing diversity within the workplace underscores the importance of understanding the effects of stigmatization on employees, and as the quote above illustrates, the effects of stigmatization may be more expansive than even stigmatized employees themselves realize. Organizational scholarship on workplace diversity has focused primarily on the visible markers that employees use to classify themselves and others into social categories, such as race, gender, or age [1],[2]. Recently, organizational scholars have advanced research involving less obvious markers such as chronic illness, ambiguous multiracial identity, sexuality, or religions that greater society might see as flawed [3]-[5]. The number of employees affected by such invisible stigmas or "flawed" [4] social identities is significant [1].

For example, the proportion of the workforce affected by just one invisible stigma, non-heterosexuality, is significant. Although, precise estimates are difficult (because, as will be outlined below, members of this category sometimes do not self-identify as such), at least 4% of the US population and upwards of 7% of those born between 1980 and 1998 identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) [6]; according to some estimates, the proportion of all adults who are not exclusively heterosexual may actually be as high as one-in-ten [7].

Employees with invisible stigmas must "make decisions about whether and how to reveal [their stigmas] over and over again across many social interactions" [1]:81, choosing between either attempting to pass for members of a non-stigmatized group ("concealing" or "passing") and making their stigmas known ("revealing"), to one degree or another. To reveal oneself as a member of a stigmatized group is to invite a host of aggressive behaviors, ostracism, and social exclusion, as well as economic losses and even job loss; choosing "to lie" [4]:42 on the other hand, can be associated with feelings of in authenticity and being unseen, lower job satisfaction and productivity, and heightened anxiety and work/life conflict [8]-[12]. Given these serious implications, the decision between passing and revealing can be surrounded by fear and turmoil for affected employees [10] and warrants more extensive examination by organizational scholars.

The purpose of the current research is to augment the existent literature on disclosure decisions by exploring the concealment decisions of one group of employees with an invisible stigma—gay men—using an in-depth, interview-based methodology. Specifically, I consider heterosexism as a deciding factor in male employees' decisions about being transparent about their sexuality at work. Heterosexism is "an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or identity" [13]:316.

This research posits that, as a hegemonic ideology, heterosexism impacts employees' disclosure decisions on two different levels. As a macro-level process, society communicates to gay workers that they can expect negative outcomes for violating norms—i.e., revealing themselves as non-heterosexual—often tilting gay employees' cost-benefit analyses toward concealing their stigma, consistent with [1],[5],[10]. As a micro-process, heterosexism can become differentially internalized, e.g., [14],[15], by members of the stigmatized group, which may result in largely subconscious, automatic, normalized decision making, c.f. [16].

In essence, I posit that not only does heterosexism normalize heterosexuality and subjugate homosexuality through direct threat but also through internalization among some members of the subjugated group—in essence, heterosexism may cause some people to conceal being gay by default, thus trapping them in "glass closets" without them being explicitly considering that they are putting themselves there. Below, I present the theoretical underpinning for this study and describe the anti-gay sentiment in North America that serves as the context for participants' decisions to conceal their sexuality at work. Subsequently, I describe the methods used in this study, describe participants and present samples of their experiences and perceptions, and present key findings, which contribute to literatures on invisible stigma disclosure decisions, LGBT workplace issues, and heterosexism.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Social identity theory has shown that people form social groups based on perceived similarities. Once groups have been formed (especially when the bases for identification are fundamental similarities), members act vigorously to maintain their standing in the group and to maintain distinction between the in-group ("us") and the out-group ("them") [17],[18]. The relative power of a dominant group over other groups allows the dominant group to maintain its standing by withholding resources. Moreover, members of the dominant group may threaten violence or, in some cases, actually do physical harm to others in order to maintain distinction and relative ordering among the groups [19]-[21].

In many instances, however, overt displays of power are not socially sanctioned. In these instances, more obscured forms of control may be substituted. These more veiled forms of control are most often aimed at individual members of the subordinated group and may take the form of stigmatization, ostracism, verbal abuse, physical treats, discriminatory behavior, and similar forms of interpersonal mistreatment. Combined with the aforementioned overt controls, these individual-level abuses function to keep subordinated groups and the members of those groups in their place [19]-[22].

Since more powerful groups most often control the institutions of a society, they can both establish behavioral norms and establish institutionalized support mechanisms to propagate their power. These behavioral norms are, in turn, likely the strongest mechanism for protecting group power—members of more dominant groups police the less powerful groups and members of less powerful groups police one another. Importantly, and somewhat ironically, once behavioral norms have been established, members of less powerful groups may even police their own behaviors [23]-[25].

When social groups are formed based on sexuality, the dominant group in virtually all societies is comprised of heterosexuals, and group discrimination efforts take the form of heterosexism, see [26]. Heterosexism is defined as "an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community" [13]:316. In contrast to the more pervasive but narrower term homophobia, which carries a psycho (patho)logical connotation, heterosexism is more sociological in nature [27].

Rooted in the privilege of heterosexuals over those who are not heterosexual [28], heterosexism is manifested at a cultural level through social institutions—the family, the legal system, the church, and even science—and is reinforced by the coopted heterosexist attitudes and actions of individual heterosexuals [13].

Despite recent progress, in some areas, heterosexism still thrives. In some areas of the United States, governments still protect "the American family"—one man, one woman, and their progeny—with regulations that, for example, allow businesses to discriminate against LGBT customers for 'religious reasons.' Federal law does not expressly prohibit discrimination based on sexuality or gender-identity in decisions about housing, employment, and service access. And, less than fifty percent of the states offer such protections [29]. Indeed, homosexuals have been positioned as enemies of the state in the US since the Reformation [30]. In Canada, attitudes are more favorable toward LGBT people in general, but they remain far from universally accepted.

Those opposing non-heterosexuals being treated equally frequently call upon religious doctrines to legitimize their efforts. Many religious leaders denounce the "sin" of homosexuality, c.f., [31], and, at the extreme, some religious leaders go to great lengths to denigrate, harass, and intimidate non-heterosexuals, rallying followers with a widely publicized "God hates fags" motto [32]. Moreover, homosexuality was an official mental illness in need of a cure until 1973 [33]. Although the "scientific research" that linked homosexuality to psychopathologies in the decades leading up to the 1970s has since been debunked, the notion that those who are not heterosexual are mentally ill persisted [34].

At an individual level, bias against gay people has been "like the air we breathe; it is so ubiquitous that it is hardly noticeable, especially to those who have it" [35]:22. A variety of research has demonstrated that heterosexuals have strong, negative affective reactions toward homosexuality and that discriminatory opinions and actions toward gay men, lesbians, and bisexual people is extremely common and well

publicized [36],[37]. Although attitudes are improving, a sizable majority of North Americans still hold negative views on LGBT people, and even many of those who favor formal rights for sexual minorities are less keen on those people having informal privileges, such as being able to openly hold hands in public [38].

Far too often, prejudice against gay people is enacted through extreme violence: People have been brutally beaten, shot, slashed with knives, burned with cigarettes, drenched with acid, and even dragged to death because of their sexuality. In fact, "homosexuals are probably the most frequent victims" of bias-elicited crimes in modern history [39]:2, and, far from improving, the murder rate of LGBT people in the United States soared nearly ninety percent in 2017 [40]. In short, some people have proven themselves willing to go to extreme lengths to punish gay people for deviating from the heterosexual norm. For all these reasons, heterosexism is a well-established and well-communicated source of social conformity pressure.

III. METHOD

Underlying this research is the assumption that "behavior in most social situations [is] a function of both internal and external social pressures" [15]:58. Also underlying it is the notion that although hegemonic norms can be internalized by the minorities they target and subsequently affect information processing and action [16],[41], not all members of the subordinated group in question internalize norms that support heterosexism to the same degree [15]. Thus, internalized heterosexism is not expected to be exhibited equally or in the same manner across employees.

I expect that employees with strongly internalized heterosexism will, at least in some cases, bypass doing the cost-benefit coming out decision analysis described in the literature and, instead, rely on a default of not being open about their sexuality unless uniquely receptive situations or uniquely encouraging stimuli present themselves, c.f., [42]. Conversely, weakly internalized heterosexism may lead to a default of being open about one's homosexuality unless uniquely unresponsive or hostile situations present themselves, given the known benefits of being open about one's sexuality [8]-[10].

Qualitative approaches are especially appropriate, and are thus often used by organizational researchers, in the study of organization members' constructions and accounts of their experiences [43]. Thus, I drew on data collected through in-depth interviews of a small sample of gay millennial men working in a variety of industries and in a variety of locations in the United States and Canada to better understand the role of heterosexism in work lives of this "invisibly" stigmatized group in two areas of the world with somewhat similar attitudes toward LGBT people. I paid particular attention to these men's decisions about concealing their stigmatized identity. And, I considered their general beliefs about how gay people are viewed by broader society in order to better understand the influence of heterosexism on those decisions.

A. Interview Sample

Purposive (vs. random) samples are appropriate when attempting to build theory through qualitative inquiry [44], and I used such a sample in this study. I sought to maximize the diversity of employees' past general experiences and current work experiences to the greatest extent possible with a small sample size while also keep participants' fundamental sexual identity (i.e., homosexual male) constant. Therefore, I interviewed gay men each currently employed in a different industry in locations in the Southern and Midwestern USA and Eastern and Western Canada. Because attitudes toward homosexuality are most favorable among members of younger generations and members of that generation are more likely to self-identify as gay than members of older generations, I chose only millennials as my sample. This I did to ensure that any results are not just an artifact of a time when social attitudes toward LGBT people were worse.

To recruit participants, I posted an announcement to Facebook, an online networking website of which I am a member. The announcement was visible to roughly 600 contacts on that website, many of whom are gay men. The recruitment notice stated simply that I was doing a study of gay men's experiences in the workplace and was in need of a few volunteers to participate in interviews that would last up to one hour. Six people responded and, in aggregate, those six people met the purposive framework I had established. Participation was strictly voluntary; participants were given the option of withdrawing from the study at any time and received no financial compensation for participating.

The interviewees ranged in age from early twenties to early thirties. Five identified as Caucasian, and one identified as Asian. All six self-identified as gay. They were an attorney in a Southern US town; a man working three jobs (debate coach, server, and non-profit worker) in a Midwestern US town; a marketing manager in an Eastern Canadian city; an engineering technologist in a Western Canadian city; a bank teller in a Western Canadian city; and a stage manager in a Western Canadian city.

B. Data Collection

My strategy for this study was to ask broad, somewhat general questions, rely on the views of participants, and amass data consisting largely of the words of

participants [45]. To do this, I used semi-structured interviews guided by an interview protocol rather than more formal, fully structured interviews in order to maintain consistency but also allow for a degree of flexibility [46],[47] since the nature of participants' perceptions and experiences were unknowable a priori. The interviews focused on participants' beliefs about how they and other gay men are perceived in the workplace and how open they are about their sexuality with others at work—coworkers, direct reports, supervisors, and clients/customers.

Perhaps because the participants each knew that I too had experiences as a gay man in the workplace, the interviews had a decidedly candid tone. In most cases, interviews were conducted via VOIP; one participant was situated near me and preferred to be interviewed in person. All interviews lasted between 30 and 75 minutes each and were digitally recorded (with participants' consents) and then transcribed verbatim. In sum, over one hundred pages of single-spaced text were generated.

C. Data Analysis

Because the nature of this study was exploratory and descriptive, I first read and reread the transcripts until I had a feeling of what was being said [48]: this is described as a gestalt moment in which the essence of the interviews becomes clear, even if it was never explicitly stated [49]. To help facilitate this process, I wrote memos; memos are sense making tools for researchers that aid in making connections and articulating initial insights [50].

Subsequently, in keeping with other interpretative, qualitative research [31],[51], I engaged in an iterative, multi-step induction process [52]. Using the qualitative data analysis software hyper RESEARCH, I analyzed each transcript individually and assigned representative codes to segments of text. In doing this, I utilized the open coding with constant comparisons method advocated by [53] in the seminal work on grounded theory construction. In this process, each prospective new code was compared to existing codes in order to minimize redundancy and to maintain focused clarity. After the initial coding of all transcripts had been completed, I reviewed the code list to identify potentially redundant codes, reanalyzed the associated text blocks, and modified my coding, as applicable [46]. Related codes were then grouped into themes [45]. With the data thus organized, I reviewed the text associated with each theme and underlying code, as well as the overall structure of the findings, to ensure logical fit [49].

The goal of this multi-step process was to identify and classify (1) participants' perceptions and experiences of heterosexist attitudes and behaviors from others and (2) manifestations of internalized heterosexism. In order to identify instances of internalized heterosexism, in some cases I had to look beyond the surface of what participants said to the perceptions and realities their statements reflected. Such an approach was germane because people are largely unaware when their actions are being guided by internalized norms and are hard-pressed to describe those theories explicitly but are able to provide general descriptions of them when describing their behavior [16].

IV. RESULTS

Before relaying to the results of this study, I want to explicitly note that, as I alluded to above, I am not a disinterested (i.e., purely objective) observer in this research. My own immersion in the study context—having been a gay man working in four different industries myself, having grown up in the Southern US, and having lived in Western Canada and the Western US—gives me perspective researchers without such a background might lack [54]. My status as a known member of this hidden stigmatized group aided me in framing the conversation in a way that participants could easily understand, created a psychologically safe environment in which participants could share their stories openly, and may have enabled me to identify underlying meaning too nuanced or understated for someone without similar experience to identify. That said, my past experiences almost certainly also flavored my interpretation of participants' words, the codes which I assigned their words, and the themes I constructed from those codes. Despite my concerted effort to remain clinical and despite having a research assistant subsequent review my coding, some of my own perspective is surely manifested in this study's findings.

Participants' descriptions of their experiences supported the premise that heterosexism and the accompanying assumption that all people are heterosexual encouraged participants to conceal their sexuality at work whereas they otherwise might not have. Leo's experience at his first job is particularly illustrative of the effects of the presupposition that all members of the workforce are heterosexual:

My boss and my coworkers had very, um, interesting perceptions of who I was and who I should be. They were asking about marriage and whether I would get married and I said, "Well, I don't know, maybe," and whether or not I would have kids, and it made me very conscious that they had an image of who I am and should be in the future and it made me a bit uncomfortable. They thought I was a straight guy that was going to marry a girl, have kids, and bunker down and have a family, and that is not me on any level… It was just an assumption on their part. I don't think it was anything I did or said that led them to think that. But I think it was just and assumption of theirs that there isn't anything else. Straight is it. This image

they had of me and them constantly going at it made me just like put on a mask of someone that I am not. – Study participant Leo

Leo did not feel comfortable disclosing his true self at work because of how his coworkers framed the discussion from the outset. And, as one might expect, each of the other interviewees reported similar experiences.

A. Perceived Heterosexism

Through iterative engagement with the data in this study, I examined if the heterosexism found at the cultural level [13] was reflected in the perceptions and experiences of gay men in the workplace. I identified fifteen distinct heterosexist perceptions among participants' descriptions of their work experiences and expectancies and subsequently combined those fifteen first-order constructs into four overarching themes. These themes were (1) Being gay means that you, as a person, are not as you should be; (2) Being gay is not acceptable to broader society; (3) Being gay is not for the "professional" workplace; and (4) Being gay means you will be punished. The first-order constructs comprising each of these categories, as well as exemplary quotes gathered from the data and illustrating each of those first-order constructs are reported in Table 1.

Decisions about passing or revealing one's sexuality at work are believed to often take the form of ad hoc cost-benefit analyses [55]. Reference [1] contends, for example, that "people with invisible social identities are aware of the risks, costs, and benefits associated with revealing their stigmatizing difference [and] engage in a type of cost-benefit analysis in deciding whether to pass or reveal" (:89). Casey provides an apt metaphor in support of that assertion: "If you get close to that coming out in a work environment moment, you kind of like, almost feel like an animal with your ears up, like in the woods, trying to sense out if it is a safe space and how this is going to go, you know."

When these cost-benefit analyses do occur, stigmatized employees' perceptions of heterosexism appear to play a direct role. For instance, Mitch provides an example of the effects of heterosexism enacted through social ostracism: "It may be, you know, illogical when the best thing to do is be open about who you are, but it all comes down to acceptance when you have to hide things about yourself; what will people think of you..."

B. Internalized Heterosexism

Given the potential implications of deviating from the heterosexual norm, decisions about revealing the invisible stigma can be surrounded by high levels of fear and turmoil for non-heterosexual employees [10]. A constant series of such high-stakes decisions would likely tax the cognitive capacities and psychological reserves of those with invisible stigmas significantly, however [56],[57]. One way in which those with such an invisible stigma might deal with these potential overloads is to eschew actively processing social information to a large extent when making revealing and passing decisions and rely instead on implicit theories of social interaction informed by past experiences and prevailing social dynamics [16],[41],[58]. This appeared to have played out for some participants.

PERCEPTION	ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES
Being gay means that you, as a person, are not as you should be	
You are not normal	• I have found when interacting with my clients, so to speak, try to be as normal as possible • Hiding my sexuality… the whole trick is to blend in and look normal
You are defective	• …assumption that as a gay person…there is something mentally wrong with you • My PE teacher was a lesbian, so she could teach boys, but girls…she was not even allowed in the locker room. She couldn't coach them, the girls. A male coach could, but not a lesbian
You are not representative of your gender	• I feel like I need to be as masculine as possible • Generally, gay people are pretty feminine • I don't have a lisp or a limp wrist…
Being gay is not acceptable to broader society	
It is offensive	• There is still a taboo so there is like a hesitation to talk about stuff like that • People are going to be uncomfortable with it… so, in a work environment, it seems easier not to bring up being gay • I don't like to start drama • I get the sense they are uncomfortable with gay people, like totally uncomfortable
It is disrespectful to my elders	• Working with people who are, you know, more adult than I am age-wise… I'm not sure I should tell them you know, one of them, "Oh, yeah, my boyfriend and I went on a date this weekend" • I am a little younger than the people I work with, so they are a little older… that is part of it

It violates valued traditions	• A number of people I work with in this company, they are traditional thinking, so I don't know how they would react • Religion plays a big part, and a lot of people frown on homosexuality and all its manifestations
It is socially inferior	• Maybe we don't deserve to have, um, personal fulfillment in that regard. You know, I can't be who I am at all times • The school had a reputation for elite kids, so telling anyone you are gay would be inappropriate
Being gay is not for the "professional" workplace	
It means you are unprofessional	• I wouldn't necessarily bring it up… just because there's like a level of professionalism… • There are certain environments that are less, um, inviting of people who are gay… you know, I want to be an engineer, not a barista or a stylist • It doesn't seem appropriate to breach the topic of my sexuality with clients because it is a professional relationship, and that is a whole other can of worms
It means you are not driven	• If I were more stereotypically gay, I don't know if I would have the same drive as I have now • Being more gay might mean I wouldn't have the same goals
It means you are weak	• There is a stigma about gay people that they are weak • …that a gay person is weak • They would think…I don't have a backbone, that I am not…that I can't be strong willed
It means you are incompetent	• It is something they would consider before hiring me… • I have to appear knowledgeable, competent
Being gay means you will be punished	
You can be "detected"	• Telecommuting instead of a central office makes it easier for me to separate out my sexuality • If I was working with someone and always talking about men or pop culture… it would be "ding, ding, ding, homo over here!" • You have to be constantly vigilant not to slip up somehow
	• I haven't told anyone at work, but they may be on to me
You will be physically or verbally assaulted	• I felt that if I told them, they would do something bad to me… hurt me physically • I was afraid of what might happen • They saw students outside the LGBT offices and were like, "Fuck you guys" and other harsh stuff
You will be socially punished	• At the last company, the president found out about me. Nothing was said but the next time there was a function, the invitation no longer said spouses or partners were welcome… cut it out completely • The one reaction they have is avoidance • What will happen to our friends or community or work environment? It is easier not to stand out
You will suffer negative work outcomes	• If you come out, maybe you lose your job • Some guys think, I have a great job. I've got a good pays slip. You know it's all good. I'm just hiding a little bit of myself; I can live with that • As a lawyer, it might mean people won't hire me • She said, "you know, we all know why you can't get a job there," and just sort of left it like dot dot dot

Table 1: Participant's Perceptions of Heterosexism

The assumption is that you're not gay, that you're heterosexual, and there's no mechanism to deal with, you know, coming out at work. It's just—you just got to do it yourself sort of thing… so you are always coming out—wherever you work—you're always having to come out, and I think in some instances, people just decide, 'I just don't need to deal with this,' you know, 'why should I?' sort of thing. – Study participant Mitch

Manny, a forensics coach, concurs: "It would be really arduous I think to come out every year to a new group of students." As these quotes illustrate, heterosexist perceptions are at times internalized resulting in a default "passing" decision.

Any of the first-order constructs of heterosexism could likely be internalized, depending on individuals' unique exposures and experiences [15]. Table 2 reflects examples of internalized heterosexism among study participants. Below I highlight some of these internalized effects more explicitly in a brief case study.

C. Internalized Heterosexism: An Exemplar Case

Jerry is in his late 20s. He is Caucasian and lives in a small metropolitan area in the Southern United States. He has worked as an attorney for the past three years and is an associate at a small law firm. The firm has two partners; one wanted to hire Jerry and the other did not. Jerry officially reports to the partner who wanted to bring him on board, and his compensation is a combination of salary paid directly by that partner and a percentage of the income he brings into the firm through billings. Jerry describes his work as very self-directed with little oversight from his supervising partner and virtually no contact with the second partner. He has full discretion in choosing clients and setting billing rates. In short, his compensation and daily tasks rely little on his supervisors.

Others working in Jerry's office are legal secretaries who perform administrative support for the two partners. Jerry initially established a relationship with them while doing an internship at the firm before being hired on full time. Although he interacts with them at work, he typically does his own administrative activity. These "secretaries are in their 50s," Jerry reports, and "it's a small office, and they tell me everything." It was these secretaries, in fact, who "basically let [Jerry] know what was going on" while the partners discussed hiring him as his internship drew to an end. That level of openness remains now that Jerry is a fulltime associate, and he believes these ladies view him as being "very competent" and "a hard worker," as well as "funny and a good person who is thoughtful and caring." Thus, Jerry's work atmosphere appears to be warm and supportive.

Carlton	• If they are comfortable with me being gay, then I will tell them. But if they are not, then of course I shouldn't tell them.
	• For me, homosexuality and professionalism don't go together.
	• As an Asian, it would be shameful for me to tell people I am gay.
	• There is a really, really feminine professor and he told us that he was straight and married. But, like [laughing], but we assumed he is gay. He was lying.
Casey	• It is easier just not to bother. I don't like to start drama.
	• The personal life metaphor, like that is something we've been handed, and we cling onto because we don't want to say to ourselves, you know, I am too scared to say that I am gay, so we say, "Oh, well, it is not professional to bring up your personal life in the workplace."
Leo	• I may add that I was not as flamboyant as I usually am.
Mitch	• Not everyone wants to be a hairstylist or work at Starbucks. You know, some guys want to have a career where they do things where – you know, things they want.
	• 'Cause being straight is the norm, right?
	• Maybe we don't deserve to have, um, personal fulfillment in that regard. You know, I can't be who I am at all times.
Manny	• Working with people who are, you know, more adult than I am age-wise… I'm not sure I should tell them you know, one of them, "Oh, yeah, my boyfriend and I went on a date this weekend"

Table 2: Instances of Internalized Heterosexism Among Study Participants

Despite his outcomes relying little on his supervisors' opinions and despite the fact that Jerry has an otherwise open and supportive relationship with his coworkers and even despite his supervising partner being an "openly gay man who has been with his partner for years," Jerry is not out at work.

His decision does not appear to have been a result of cost-benefit calculations, however: Personally, I think you can divorce your private and professional lives—not fully because you carry the characteristics with you in your private life through your everyday life, even your professional life, but just because you are homosexual at home and every day of your life doesn't mean you have to be a flaming homosexual in your workplace. I don't discuss my sexuality at work.

When interacting with his coworkers about "personal issues," Jerry focuses on generalities about what he does in his spare time rather than with whom he spends that time: "I went to the movies, I went to a baseball game or basketball game… general things, but not who I went with." When asked if he would be so mindful of "keeping personal issues personal" by not mentioning who he spent his weekends with if he were straight, however, Jerry replied, "I don't believe so, it is basically the type of office we have… the people I work with are older."

Jerry goes on to say that he is "lucky enough to be in a situation" of not having stereotypical homosexual traits: I don't have lots of traits I'd say that you would associate with a gay man, like a lisp or like hand fling or something overtly gayish, I would say. If I were more stereotypically gay, I don't know if I would have the same drive that I have now and come to the point where I am now. I mean I don't know if I would have the same goals. My goals might be different at this point. I might be a florist. A florist or a dog groomer… Stereotypically gay people know when they do those things, that that's going to get noticed. I think that's

why they do that."

He later goes on to explain that he feels like he needs to be as "masculine as possible." These notions are very much in line with heterosexist ideology. Since stereotypical masculinity is not readily achievable for many men, gay, straight, or otherwise, males tend to define masculinity by what it is not and to feel tremendous pressure to avoid appearing non-masculine [59]. Like Jerry appeared to do in his interview, many people equate homosexuality with gender inversion, presuming that gay men are feminine and lesbian women are masculine [60]. No stronger blurring of the line between masculinity and femininity likely exists than homosexuality, seen as the antithesis of masculinity [59].

Jerry's words clearly demonstrate that internalized heterosexism can play an important role in decisions to pass or disclose one's sexuality at work – or, more aptly, the decision not to decide at all.

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