

**Facultad de Psicología**  
**Departamento de Psicología Social**



**WORKPLACE INCIVILITY AND THE NEGOTIATION OF BOUNDARIES:  
THE EXPERIENCE OF SPANISH LGB EMPLOYEES**

Tesis presentada para optar al grado de Doctora por Dña. Donatella Di Marco, dirigida por los/as profesores/as doctores/as Dña. Lourdes Munduate (Universidad de Sevilla), Dña. Alicia Arenas (Universidad de Sevilla) y D. Helge Hoel (University of Manchester).

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**Los/as directores/as**

Dra. Lourdes Munduate

*Universidad de Sevilla*

Dra. Alicia Arenas

*Universidad de Sevilla*

Dr. Helge Hoel

*University of Manchester*

**La doctoranda**

Dña. Donatella Di Marco

*Universidad de Sevilla*

*“We work and worry, pray and play, love and hate;  
and all the time we are telling stories about our pasts,  
our presents and our futures. We are constantly doing  
things together – no person is an island: even when  
alone, there is an awareness of others”.*

*Ken Plummer*

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## **Contents**

Introducción (Introduction)	<b>9</b>
Los colectivos LGB (LGB people)	<b>13</b>
Estructura de la tesis doctoral (Structure of doctoral thesis)	<b>16</b>
Chapter 1. El estado del arte (State of the art)	<b>18</b>
1. El contexto socio-cultural español y su influencia en las experiencias de las personas LGB en el trabajo	<b>19</b>
2. Las dinámicas de <i>disclosure</i> de los/as trabajadores/as LGB	<b>22</b>
2.1 <i>Las estrategias de disclosure</i>	<b>23</b>
2.2 <i>Los modelos de disclosure</i>	<b>26</b>
2.3 <i>La Boundary Theory y el proceso de disclosure</i>	<b>31</b>
3. La discriminación de los colectivos LGB	<b>34</b>
3.1 <i>Los comportamientos incívicos en el trabajo</i>	<b>36</b>
3.2 <i>La discriminación moderna y los colectivos LGB</i>	<b>38</b>
Chapter 2. Objetivos de la investigación (Research aims)	<b>41</b>
1. Objetivos	<b>42</b>
Chapter 3. Articles	<b>47</b>
1. The invisibility of sexual orientation in Spain and its manifestations in the workplace	<b>48</b>
2. Estrategias de coming out de personas lesbianas y gays en el trabajo (Strategies of coming out of lesbians and gays at work)	<b>77</b>
3. Negotiating boundaries: Disclosure dynamics in Spanish workplaces	<b>109</b>
4. Workplace incivility as modern sexual prejudice	<b>150</b>
Chapter 4. Main findings	<b>198</b>
1. Summary of main findings	<b>199</b>
Chapter 5. General discussion and conclusion	<b>206</b>

1. General discussion	207
<i>1.1 Theoretical and practical implication</i>	209
<i>1.2 Limitations</i>	210
2. Conclusion	211
References	213

## **List of tables**

### Chapter 2

Objetivos de la tesis y de los artículos que la componen (Research aims)	46
--	----

### Chapter 3

Ejemplo de citas por códigos (Example of quotations and codes)	102
--	-----

Participants' socio-demographic data	163-164
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## **List of figures**

### Chapter 3

Disclosure at work and integration segmentation process	118
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Disclosure dynamics outcomes matrix	136
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**Introduction**

*Introducción*

En las últimas décadas, la gestión de la diversidad se ha convertido en un tema prioritario dentro de las agendas de las organizaciones (Githens, 2011). Éstas se han transformado en contextos multivariados, donde trabajadores/as pertenecientes a una o más categorías sociales (e.g., sexo, identidad de género, orientación sexual, discapacidad, etnia, edad) se encuentran para convivir en un espacio común, compartiendo recursos para alcanzar las metas organizacionales (Van Knippenberg y Schippers, 2007). Distintas categorías sociales, en ocasiones, se cruzan entre ellas en la misma persona, dando lugar a situaciones de interseccionalidad que necesitan ser gestionadas desde diferentes perspectivas (Bowleg, 2008; Cole, 2009; Syde, 2010).

Son numerosas las investigaciones desarrolladas en los últimos años con el objetivo de identificar las consecuencias, positivas y negativas, a nivel personal, grupal y organizacional de un entorno laboral diverso, en términos de bienestar, satisfacción, percepción de discriminación, desempeño, trabajo en equipo, conflicto, intención de dejar el puesto de trabajo, calidad de servicio, etc. (e.g., Avery, McKay y Wilson, 2008; Chrobot-Mason y Aramovich, 2013; Gates y Mark, 2012; Liebermann, Wegge, Jungmann, y Schmidt, 2013; Pelled, Eisenhardt, y Xin, 1999; Van Knippenberg y Schippers, 2007). Aunque se ha llegado a conclusiones a veces contradictorias sobre los efectos producidos por la diversidad en los contextos laborales, es incuestionable la creciente necesidad de gestionar los contextos de trabajo diversos para garantizar resultados positivos tanto para el bienestar de los trabajadores como para la efectividad y buen funcionamiento de las organizaciones.

La presencia de políticas y medidas de gestión de la diversidad en los contextos organizacionales es fruto de un largo proceso desarrollado primariamente a nivel institucional y social por distintos países occidentales, sobre todo para poner fin a los casos de discriminación que afectaban, y siguen afectado, a las personas pertenecientes a grupos sociales minoritarios o que se encuentran en una situación de desventaja. En Europa, especialmente en los últimos quince años, varios instrumentos legislativos han emanado en defensa de la igualdad<sup>1</sup> que, a su vez, han sido transferidos a nivel nacional. En España, la igualdad de trato y el rechazo a cualquier tipo de discriminación están tutelados por la Carta Constitucional (art. 14) y por distintos actos normativos<sup>2</sup> promulgados a nivel estatal.

Sin embargo, a pesar de las medidas legislativas creadas y la acomodación producida en el discurso social de rechazo a cualquier tipo de discriminación, los datos del último Eurobarómetro (European Commission, 2012) revelan que la población europea percibe que la discriminación está muy difundida. Los colectivos más afectados

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<sup>1</sup> Directiva 2000/78/CE del Consejo de 27 de noviembre de 2000 relativa al establecimiento de un marco general para la igualdad de trato en el empleo y la ocupación.

Directiva 2000/43/CE del Consejo de 29 de junio de 2000 relativa a la aplicación del principio de igualdad de trato de las personas independientemente de su origen racial o étnico.

Directiva del Consejo 2004/113/CE de 13 de diciembre de 2004 por la que se aplica el principio de igualdad de trato entre hombres y mujeres al acceso a bienes y servicios y su suministro.

Directiva 2006/54/CE del Parlamento Europeo y del Consejo de 5 de julio de 2006 relativa a la aplicación del principio de igualdad de oportunidades e igualdad de trato entre hombres y mujeres en asuntos de empleo y ocupación (refundición).

Directiva 2010/41/UE del Parlamento Europeo y del Consejo de 7 de julio de 2010 sobre la aplicación del principio de igualdad de trato entre hombres y mujeres que ejercen una actividad autónoma, y por la que se deroga la Directiva 86/613/CEE del Consejo.

Carta de los Derechos Fundamentales de la Unión Europea (2010/C 83/02).

<sup>2</sup> Ley 19/2007, de 11 de julio, contra la violencia, el racismo, la xenofobia y la intolerancia en el deporte.

Ley Orgánica 3/2007, de 22 de marzo, para la igualdad efectiva de mujeres y hombres.

Ley 62/2003, de 30 de diciembre, de medidas fiscales, administrativas y del orden social.

Estatuto de los Trabajadores (Real Decreto Legislativo 1/1995, de 24 de marzo).

Ley 51/2003, de 2 de diciembre, de igualdad de oportunidades, no discriminación y accesibilidad universal de las personas con discapacidad.

Ley 13/2005, de 1 de julio, por la que se modifica el Código Civil en materia de derecho a contraer matrimonio.

Ley 3/2007, de 15 de marzo, reguladora de la rectificación registral de la mención relativa al sexo de las personas.

son las personas de origen étnico distinto al del grupo mayoritario del país (56%), las personas discapacitadas (46%) y las personas lesbianas, gays, transexuales y bisexuales (LGTB) (46%). Los datos relativos a la población española no se alejan demasiado de la media europea, siendo en algunos casos más altos que ésta, como en el caso de la percepción de discriminación por origen étnico (58%). Estos datos se han visto agravados por la crisis económica de los últimos años. Más de la mitad de los/as ciudadanos/as europeos/as (54%) considera que las políticas de igualdad se han visto afectadas negativamente por la crisis económica, dato aún más alto en España (67%). Este resultado se ve confirmado por el Foro Económico Mundial (World Economic Forum, 2013) que, en su último informe sobre el distancia de género, reveló un empeoramiento del posicionamiento de España en el ranking mundial tras la crisis económica, pasando a ocupar la posición número 30 en el 2013 desde la posición 11 que ocupaba en el 2006.

Estos datos nos hacen reflexionar sobre la precariedad de las políticas de igualdad a nivel nacional, sobre todo en tiempos de austeridad (e.g., Munduate, Di Marco, Martínez-Corts, Arenas y Gamero, 2014). Varios/as estudiosos/as han puesto de manifiesto cómo el cambio de prioridades en las agendas políticas de un país pueda convertir las medidas en temas de igualdad en “asuntos de lujo”, recuperando viejas ideologías conservadoras, en temas de género, por ejemplo (Gonzalez y Segales, 2014; Briskin, 2014), y llegando a cuestionar las conquistas adquiridas a través de años de reivindicaciones y lucha social.

### Los colectivos LGB<sup>3</sup>

Durante muchos años, las personas lesbianas, gays y bisexuales (LGB) han sido víctimas de un proceso de estigmatización, llevado a cabo por parte de la sociedad en su conjunto, por no alinearse con los modelos afectivos heterosexuales y por salirse de lo que se ha denominado Heteronormatividad (Losert, 2008; Warner, 1991). Este concepto hace referencia a aquel conjunto de normas sociales que establece la heterosexualidad como la norma a seguir. Ser LGB no sólo era perseguido por parte de la sociedad, sino también por parte de la comunidad científica y sólo en 1975 la Asociación Americana de Psicología (APA – American Psychological Association) eliminó la homosexualidad del “Manual de Diagnóstico de los trastornos mentales” (DSM), mientras que se tendrá que esperar hasta el 1990 para que la Organización Mundial de la Sanidad (OMS) deje de etiquetar las orientaciones sexuales no heterosexuales dentro de las enfermedades psíquicas.

Desde entonces han transcurrido casi tres décadas y se han sucedido numerosos cambios a nivel legislativo y social en muchos países occidentales, entre ellos, España. El reconocimiento del matrimonio entre parejas del mismo sexo y la posibilidad de adoptar niños/as (Ley 13/2005), tras numerosos años de lucha de los movimientos LGTB, ha representado una etapa fundamental para el reconocimiento de los derechos de dichos colectivos. Sin embargo, este importante cambio ha encontrado las resistencias provenientes de algunas franjas conservadoras de la sociedad, que tras la aprobación de la Ley 13/2005 presentaron un recurso sobre la constitucionalidad de

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<sup>3</sup> Esta investigación no incluye la experiencia de las personas transexuales ni bisexuales dado que trabajos anteriores han demostrado que las personas heterosexuales perciben estos colectivos de forma diferente que a los colectivos homosexuales y que, por esta razón, puede desencadenar distintos (Williams et al., 2009; Worthen, 2013). No obstante, en los casos en que se puedan extender los resultados, se hará referencia a los colectivos de personas bisexuales.

dicha ley. Después de varios años de incertidumbre en los que vivieron las parejas LGB que habían contraído matrimonio, en 2012 la Asamblea Constituyente se pronunció favorablemente sobre la validez del matrimonio entre las parejas del mismo sexo.

Los cambios legislativos, por un lado, son el resultado de una reflexión que se produce a nivel social y, por otro lado, de un diálogo entre las instituciones y la sociedad. La modificación del marco normativo nació en respuesta a las reivindicaciones de los colectivos LGTB, pero también como consecuencia del cambio de actitudes por parte de la sociedad hacia dichos colectivos. Hoy en día, la discriminación por orientación sexual es considerada inaceptable en España y en muchos países occidentales. Este cambio en las actitudes de la gente ha permitido la desaparición de muchas formas de discriminación, sobre todo las de carácter explícito. Despidos irregulares, agresiones físicas o insultos se han convertido en hechos menos comunes, aunque sigan existiendo brotes discriminatorios por parte de algunas franjas de la sociedad. Por otro lado, investigaciones anteriores nos revelan que el proceso de eliminación de las actitudes negativas hacia un determinado colectivo a nivel individual requiere tiempo y que éstas pueden volverse implícitas de forma inconsciente, afectando las respuestas comportamentales de los individuos (Dovidio, 2001; Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami y Hodson, 2002; Jones, Peddie, Gilrane, King y Gray, 2013). Aunque se haya avanzado mucho en términos de derechos adquiridos por parte de las personas LGTB, los prejuicios y estereotipos negativos hacia dichos colectivos podrían estar afectando su vida personal y laboral de forma muy sutil (e.g., a través de comportamientos incívicos en el trabajo).

Teniendo en cuenta el escenario previamente dibujado, la presente tesis doctoral tiene como objetivo analizar la experiencia de las personas LGB en los contextos

laborales españoles, considerando, a su vez, las peculiaridades del contexto socio-cultural en el que nos encontramos.

La relevancia de esta tesis nace, en primer lugar, de una carencia de investigaciones sobre las personas LGB en el contexto de trabajo español. Estudios anteriores desarrollados en España se han centrado en ámbitos de vida distintos al laboral, como el contexto familiar (Gonzalez, Díez, López, Martínez y Morgado, 2013; González, López y Gómez, 2010; Pichardo, 2011), enfocando la atención en los prejuicios hacia los colectivos LGB (Quiles del Castillo, Betancor, Rodríguez, Rodríguez y Coello, 2003) y en los estereotipos (Guasch, 2011). Además, varias investigaciones han analizado de qué manera las personas LGB se han visto afectadas en su vida cotidiana por las normativas vigentes desde la dictadura franquista (Olmeda, 2004; Osborne, 2012). En segundo lugar, a pesar de la laguna detectada en este sentido, los datos proporcionados por las encuestas europeas sugieren la necesidad de reflexionar sobre el posible desajuste existente entre la realidad cotidiana y el marco normativo remodelado en los últimos años. En tercer lugar, hay que tener en cuenta que los tiempos de austeridad en los que estamos viviendo podrían representar el punto de partida del retroceso en cuestiones de derechos e igualdad. Se ha observado que los tiempos de crisis y de incertidumbre fomentan comportamientos autoritarios, baja tolerancia y adopción de puntos de vistas dogmáticos (Merolla, Ramos y Zechmeister, 2012). El reciente cuestionamiento en España de determinados derechos adquiridos, como el aborto, requieren reflexionar y analizar la posible precariedad de los logros civiles y legales.

## Estructura de la tesis doctoral

La tesis doctoral que se presenta se articula en cinco partes. En el primer capítulo se introducirá el estado actual del campo de estudio sobre el tema de los colectivos LGB en su entorno laboral. En el segundo capítulo, se resumirán los objetivos generales y específicos del presente trabajo. Posteriormente, en el tercer capítulo, se presentarán las cuatro publicaciones que forman parte de la tesis doctoral. El primer artículo (*The invisibility of sexual orientation in Spain and its manifestations in the workplace*) trata de contextualizar la experiencia de las personas LGB en el trabajo, explorando las peculiaridades del contexto español, de su reciente historia y modelos socio-culturales. Aunque investigaciones llevadas a cabo en otros países han explorado la experiencia de las personas LGB en los contextos de trabajo, la casi totalidad de ellas ha tenido en cuenta el contexto en términos de entorno organizacional, sin considerar los valores y las creencias típicas de un determinado país. La dictadura Franquista, el papel que la religión católica ha jugado, y sigue jugando, en la educación de muchas generaciones, la atribución de significado al espacio público y privado en función de los roles de género, son algunos de los elementos que tendremos en consideración a la hora de interpretar la experiencia presente de los/as trabajadores/as LGB.

La segunda publicación (*Estrategias de coming out de personas lesbianas y gays en el trabajo*) se orienta a identificar las estrategias de coming out o disclosure más habituales por parte de las personas lesbianas y gays en el contexto de trabajo, subrayando las consecuencias a las que las estrategias más utilizadas pueden dar lugar, a nivel personal, grupal y organizacional. Los resultados del estudio recogidos en esta



segunda publicación, permitieron ajustar algunas temáticas que se desarrollaron en el tercer artículo (*Negotiating boundaries: Disclosure dynamics in Spanish workplaces*). Este trabajo explora el proceso a través del cual los/as trabajadores/as revelan su orientación sexual a sus compañeros/as, introduciendo la Boundary Theory para identificar el rol que terceras partes (e.g., compañeros/as, supervisores/as) juegan durante este proceso, facilitando u obstaculizando “las elecciones” de las personas LGB con respecto a revelar o no su orientación sexual en el trabajo. A través de este estudio se hizo patente la importancia del papel desempeñado por los/as compañeros/as y los/as supervisores/as durante toda la interacción con las personas LGB, subrayando los aspectos a veces discriminatorios de dicho proceso. De acuerdo con lo previamente expuesto, la cuarta publicación (*Workplace incivility as modern sexual prejudice*) se centra en los actos incívicos en el trabajo hacia las personas LGB. En este artículo se analiza en qué medida estos actos podrían ser expresión de prejuicios y estereotipos implícitos, dando lugar a lo que se define como discriminación moderna.

Tras la presentación de las publicaciones se mostrarán los resultados globales de esta investigación (capítulo IV). La discusión y las conclusiones serán tratadas al final de la tesis (capítulos V y VI, respectivamente).

## Chapter 1. State of the art

*El estado del arte*

## **1. El contexto socio-cultural español y su influencia en las experiencias de las personas LGB en el trabajo**

En los últimos cuarenta años, España ha sido protagonista de numerosos cambios a nivel político y social. El fin del régimen Franquista (1939-1975) y la transición a la democracia representó un punto de ruptura que dio vida a un cambio difícil de parar, aunque con sus contradicciones, sus momentos de aceleración y de frenada. Durante los cuarenta años anteriores, el régimen entró en las casas de los/as españoles/as imponiéndose con su estricta ideología y limitando poco a poco las libertades y los derechos de las personas (Munduate, 1993). Fueron años en los que el Nacional-Catolicismo, que identificó el estado con los valores propios de la religión católica (Calvo y Pichardo, 2011; Pichardo, 2004; 2011), se convirtió en la ideología dominante siendo transmitida a través de las instituciones de socialización primaria y secundaria y convirtiéndose en la base del sistema educativo. En poco tiempo, todos los derechos alcanzados durante la Segunda República, como por ejemplo en cuestiones de divorcio y de aborto, fueron revocados, situando en una condición de desventaja a algunos colectivos de la sociedad, entre ellos, las mujeres, cuyo rol en la sociedad fue redimensionado (Olmeda, 2004). Los roles de género tradicionales fueron reforzados y fueron reiterados también a nivel simbólico con una clara distinción entre espacios público y privado y sus protagonistas. Durante el régimen se modelaron valores, creencias, actitudes y estereotipos fomentados por la más conservadora ideología católica (e.g., la culpabilidad, la vergüenza, el concepto de pecado asociado con las libertades sexuales, etc.), la confesión que, a día de hoy, sigue siendo la más difundida

en España. Estos valores, junto con aquellos que se perpetuaron a nivel político, penetraron en profundidad en el substrato de la sociedad española, moldeando unos esquemas culturales difíciles de modificar o eliminar.

Las personas LGB no estuvieron exentas de este proceso de opresión. Dichos colectivos fueron víctimas de una persecución que se llevó a cabo a nivel legal y social. Dos leyes fueron emanadas para reprimir y castigar a las personas LGB: en el 1954 la homosexualidad se incorporó a la *Ley de Vagos y Maleantes*, que consideraba como peligrosas personas como mendigos, enfermos mentales y otras categorías de excluidos socialmente. En el 1970 la “peligrosidad” de las personas LGB se volvió a reiterar a través de la *Ley de Peligrosidad y Rehabilitación Social* (Pichardo, 2004; Valiente, 2002), donde también se establecían las medidas de rehabilitación para estos colectivos y todas las demás categorías sociales incluidas en dicha ley. A nivel social, ser gay, lesbiana o bisexual venía considerado una forma de delincuencia y de depravación moral, más que una enfermedad (Olmeda, 2004). Dichos colectivos iban en contra de los ideales de masculinidad y feminidad modelados por el régimen y aquellos/as que no se ajustaban a este ideal sufrían la hostilidad de la mayoría de la sociedad (Olmeda, 2004).

Hoy en día, el contexto político, social y cultural español es totalmente distinto. Tras el fin de la dictadura y gracias a la lucha de los movimientos en defensa de los derechos de las personas LGBT, no sólo se ha modificado el marco normativo, despenalizando el pertenecer a dichos colectivos, sino también se han modificado aquellas normas que entran en el ámbito del derecho familiar, abriendo la posibilidad de casarse y adoptar niños/as a las parejas del mismo sexo.

No sólo el marco político se ha visto modificado, sino también las actitudes de la mayoría de la sociedad hacia estos colectivos. Hoy en día, la discriminación explícita por orientación sexual se considera socialmente inaceptable. No obstante, las personas LGB siguen percibiendo actos discriminatorios en el mundo laboral, como apuntan los datos de las últimas encuestas llevadas a cabo en España (López, Generelo y Arroyo, 2013). Estos datos podrían estar sugiriendo que los valores, las creencias y los estereotipos modelados en los años de la dictadura podrían seguir estando presentes en la sociedad actual, de forma consciente o inconsciente. Aunque el panorama actual es totalmente distinto al que se ha dibujado en las páginas anteriores, los valores arraigados durante la dictadura podrían estar todavía perpetuándose de forma sutil y difuminada.

La razón de la persistencia, a veces, a nivel inconsciente, de los valores y las creencias mayoritariamente aceptadas en aquella época ha de identificarse en los procesos cognitivos de las personas. Como se explicará más adelante, actitudes, estereotipos y prejuicios hacia un colectivo pueden ser rechazados a nivel explícito y trasladarse a un nivel implícito de forma inconsciente pero afectando aún al comportamiento de los individuos (Dovidio, 2001; Dovidio et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2013). Así pues, los modelos mentales que las personas utilizan hoy en día -que hacen referencia al conocimiento que permite a las personas describir, explicar y predecir sus comportamientos y que son el resultado de cómo ellas perciben la realidad (Lim y Kleim, 2006)- podrían seguir estando afectados por aquellos valores y creencias moldeadas durante los años de la dictadura. Estos procesos cognitivos darían lugar a lo que ha sido definida como "tolerancia retórica" (Villamil, 2004) que caracterizaría las actitudes y comportamientos de aquellas personas que no defienden abiertamente

posturas discriminatorias, pero que, sin embargo, evidencian un trato diferencial hacia la otra parte.

Las razones expuestas anteriormente, junto con la falta de estudios previos sobre la experiencia de las personas LGB en los contextos de trabajo españoles, nos llevan a tener en cuenta los aspectos socio-culturales como elementos que podrían estar afectando la vivencia de estos colectivos en el trabajo. Así pues, se hace necesaria una reconsideración de la experiencia de los/as trabajadores/as LGB a través del prisma cultural propio de cada país. Investigaciones pasadas han estudiado los principales procesos que involucran a las personas LGB en el mundo laboral, como por ejemplo el proceso de *disclosure*, sin tener en cuenta este aspecto. De la misma forma, los estudios sobre discriminación, patente y sutil, han de tener en cuenta las peculiaridades de un determinado contexto socio-cultural y cómo las personas atribuyen significado a sus comportamientos.

Teniendo en cuenta este panorama, esta investigación se propone explorar uno de los procesos más importantes que las personas LGB viven en el trabajo, el proceso de *disclosure*. También se analizarán aquellos comportamientos, llevados a cabo por compañeros/as y supervisores/as que podrían ser el resultado de un proceso de discriminación sutil o "discriminación moderna".

## **2. Las dinámicas de *disclosure* de los/as trabajadores/as LGB**

En los últimos años, numerosos estudios, en el contexto internacional, han analizado cómo las personas LGB manejan su identidad sexual en el trabajo, centrándose sobre todo en el proceso de *disclosure*. Este término hace referencia al

proceso con el que las personas LGB hacen pública o visibilizan su orientación sexual a terceras partes. A nivel internacional, los/as investigadores/as han dirigido sus esfuerzos a estudiar las normas que regulan este proceso en distintos contextos, entre ellos, en el lugar de trabajo. Las estrategias utilizadas para modificar la presunción de heterosexualidad (Anderson, Croteau, Chung y Di Stefano, 2001; Button, 2004; Griffin, 1992; Shallenberger, 1994; Woods, 1993) y los antecedentes y consecuencias desencadenados a distintos niveles –personal, grupal y organizacional- (Beals, Peplau, y Gable, 2009; Bowen y Blackmon, 2003; Day y Schoenrade, 1997; Griffith y Hebl, 2002; King, Mohr, Peddie, Jones y Kendra, 2014; Meyer, 2003; Ragins, 2004; Ragins, Singh y Cornwell, 2007) han sido los enfoques mayoritariamente contemplados por los/as académicos/as. Sólo recientemente se ha intentado organizar el conocimiento alcanzado por investigaciones previas en modelos estructurados (e.g., Clair, Beatty y MacLean, 2005; Lidderdale, Croteau, Anderson y Tovar-Murray y Davis, 2007; Ragins, 2008) que, partiendo de marcos teóricos distintos –la Teoría del Estigma (Goffman, 1963) y el modelo Cognitivo Social del Desarrollo de la Carrera (Lent, Brown y Hackett, 2002)- contemplan factores personales y contextuales que dan lugar a las *elecciones/decisiones* de las personas LGB con respecto al manejo de la identidad sexual en el trabajo. A continuación, se hará una breve reseña de los principales estudios llevados a cabo sobre las estrategias y los modelos de *disclosure*.

### ***2.1 Las estrategias de disclosure***

A partir de los años noventa, se han desarrollado diversas investigaciones con el objetivo de explorar el proceso de *disclosure* en los contextos laborales. Una de las

primeras etapas en el estudio de este proceso consistió en identificar las estrategias que los/as trabajadores/as LGB emplean. En 1992 Griffin describió cómo las/os profesoras/es lesbianas y gays (LG) encubren o revelan su orientación sexual en el trabajo. Según los resultados de su investigación, las personas LG pueden optar por adoptar una orientación heterosexual en el trabajo (*passing*), eliminando todas aquellas dudas acerca de su orientación sexual en los/as compañeros/as; o pueden encubrir (*covering*) su orientación, evitando todas aquellas situaciones sociales que requieren un intercambio de información sobre la vida personal, como cenas, eventos extra-laborales, etc. Según Griffin, las personas que revelan ser LG lo hacen de forma implícita (*implicitly out*), dando información sobre su vida personal a través de la cual los/as compañeros/as puedan deducir su orientación sexual; o de forma explícita (*explicitly out*), hablando abiertamente de su orientación sexual.

En un estudio cualitativo publicado poco después, Woods (1993) identificó tres estrategias de manejo de la identidad sexual empleada por las personas gays en el trabajo: la estrategia de falsificación (*counterfeiting*) que, de acuerdo con la estrategia de adopción incluye actividades dirigidas a crear una vida heterosexual ficticia; la estrategia de evitación (*avoidance*) que, en línea con las estrategia de encubrimiento, incluye la creación de barreras entre la vida laboral y personal, evitando situaciones y conversaciones donde es necesario compartir información sobre la vida personal; y, por último, la estrategia de integración (*integration*) que representa el punto de unión entre las estrategias de *disclosure* implícita y explícita identificadas por Griffin (1992).

Más tarde, Clair et al. (2005) en su modelo sobre *disclosure*, identificaron 6 tácticas similares a las previamente descritas. Las personas que no revelan su orientación sexual en el trabajo pueden inventar una orientación heterosexual



(*fabrication*); esconder las informaciones relativas a su orientación sexual (*concealment*); o evitar todas las conversaciones, situaciones sociales donde se requiere informar sobre la vida personal (*distancing*). Entre las tácticas de *disclosure* encontramos aquellas que conllevan el envío de señales indirectas (*signaling*); el intento de normalizar su orientación sexual a los ojos de los/as demás (*normalizing*); o aquellos comportamientos dirigidos a diferenciar la orientación homosexual y bisexual de otras (*differentiating*).

Estos estudios confirmaron que revelar la orientación sexual es un proceso más complejo que una elección dicotómica entre estar dentro o fuera del armario (Button, 2004), que el *disclosure* es el resultado de elecciones diarias (Lidderdale et al., 2007) y que las personas pueden emplear, paralelamente, distintas estrategias con personas diversas (Button, 2004). Las estrategias se encuentran posicionadas a lo largo de un continuum (Griffin, 1992; Ragins, 2004) y la decisión de utilizar una estrategia de adopción o de encubrimiento dependería del miedo a ser víctima de consecuencias negativas (Griffin, 1992; Ragins, 2004, 2008; Rumens, 2008), como perder el puesto de trabajo. El empleo de estrategias de encubrimiento llevaría a las personas LGB a aislarse de los/as compañeros/as para no ser identificados/as como LGB, creando una barrera muy fuerte entre vida personal y laboral.

En los últimos 15 años, los/as investigadores/as han intentado articular los resultados obtenidos por estudios previos en modelos estructurados y comprensivos de factores antecedentes y resultados del proceso de *disclosure* (ver Croteau, Anderson y VanderWal, 2008). En el siguiente apartado se hará un breve resumen de los tres principales modelos de gestión de la identidad sexual en el trabajo, dos de ellos (Clair et al., 2005; Ragins, 2008) basados en la Teoría del Estigma de Goffman (1963) y uno

(Lidderdale et al., 2007) basado en la Teoría Cognitiva Social del Desarrollo de la Carrera (Lent et al., 2002).

## ***2.2 Los modelos de disclosure***

Según la Teoría del Estigma (Goffman, 1963; Quinn y Chaudoir, 2009) las personas pueden ser estigmatizadas porque son portadoras de atributos que no se alinean con las normas mayoritariamente aceptadas en la sociedad. Los estigmas pueden ser visibles y desacreditar de inmediato a la persona que es portadora; o pueden ser invisibles, característica que hace del estigma un elemento desacreditador sólo en potencia. Los atributos estigmatizables son el resultado de una construcción social y varían según el contexto y el momento histórico. Las orientaciones no heterosexuales, por ejemplo, a lo largo de la historia han sido estigmatizadas y siguen siéndolo en algunas sociedades. La posibilidad de esconderlas hace que muchas personas LGB no revelen su orientación sexual por miedo a ser rechazados/as.

La Teoría del Estigma constituye el marco teórico de dos de los modelos de *disclosure* desarrollados en los últimos diez años. El primero de ellos (Clair et al., 2005) considera la gestión de la identidad sexual en el trabajo fruto de dos grupos de variables: por un lado, las de tipo individual y, por otro lado, las de tipo contextual.

Según este modelo, el proceso de disclosure es más ágil en aquellas personas con una mayor propensión al riesgo y con un bajo nivel de auto-observación (*self-monitoring*), es decir, la falta de necesidad de cumplir con las expectativas de los/as demás. Además, si la persona se encuentra en una fase avanzada de desarrollo de su identidad y siempre que no sea portadora de otros estigmas visibles, es más probable

que lleve a cabo el proceso de *disclosure*. Según Clair y colaboradores, junto con las variables individuales hay que tener en cuenta los elementos de carácter interpersonal y contextual. El clima de trabajo con respecto a la orientación sexual, en términos de apoyo de los/as supervisores/as y compañeros/as, la presencia de políticas de gestión de la diversidad a nivel organizacional, trabajar en sectores donde no se fomenta el conformarse a la mayoría, la presencia de un marco normativo de tutela de las personas LGB a nivel estatal y la presencia de una red de compañeros/as de trabajo LGB favorecerán la elección de hacer visible la orientación sexual.

Todos estos elementos en conjunto con las experiencias anteriores de *disclosure* y las consecuencias a las que han dado pie determinarán la “elección” de las personas LGB de revelar o no su orientación sexual en el trabajo.

El segundo modelo que se enmarca dentro de la Teoría del Estigma es el desarrollado por Ragins (2008). La autora considera el proceso de *disclosure* una “decisión” que nace a partir de tres grupos de antecedentes: el análisis costes/beneficios, los factores psicológicos internos del individuo y los factores contextuales. El primero de ellos se refiere al balance de las consecuencias positivas y negativas que revelar la orientación sexual en el trabajo puede suponer: por un lado, beneficios como la reducción del estrés de rol (Clair et al., 2005; Ragins, 2008) y del conflicto de rol; por otro lado, los costes en términos de discriminación, aislamiento por parte de los/as compañeros/as, pérdida de estatus dentro de la organización, etc. (e.g., Herek, 1988; Ragins, 2004, 2008).

Costes y beneficios se ven afectados por la peculiaridades intrínsecas del estigma: el grado de control que se le atribuye a la persona estigmatizada sobre su estigma; la percepción de la sociedad sobre el grado de peligrosidad del mismo; el nivel

de interferencia del estigma dentro de la interacción social; y el decurso del estigma, es decir, su nivel de aceptación por parte de la persona afectada (Jones et al., 1984).

El segundo grupo de antecedentes contempla las variables relativas a las características psicológicas internas de cada individuo: el nivel de auto-verificación (*Teoría de auto-verificación*, Swann, 1987), que hace referencia a la necesidad de ajustar la imagen que los/as demás construyen con la que las personas LGB tienen de sí mismas; y la centralidad de la orientación sexual en la identidad del individuo (cuanto más central tanto más las personas querrán ser identificadas como LGB) (Clair et al., 2005).

En el tercer grupo entran las variables contextuales. La presencia de otros/as compañeros/as LGB con experiencias positivas tras su proceso de *disclosure*, así como la existencia de aliados/as, es decir, de personas que no comparten el mismo estigma pero apoyan la causa y, por último, el apoyo a nivel institucional (e.g., financiación para actividades organizadas en el día del orgullo gay, presencia de políticas de tutela de los colectivos LGB, etc.) favorecerán la decisión de revelar la orientación sexual en el trabajo.

Todos los antecedentes previamente presentados determinarán la “decisión” de *disclosure* en el trabajo, que podrán ajustarse o ser distintas a las que se adoptan en el ámbito personal: revelar la orientación sexual en el trabajo y en la vida personal dará lugar a un caso de integración (*identity integration*); al contrario, no revelar la orientación sexual en ambos ámbitos creará una situación de rechazo de la identidad (*identity denial*); por último, revelar la orientación sexual en distintos grados en el ámbito personal y en el ámbito laboral dará pie a una desconexión de la identidad (*identity disconnects*).

Para finalizar, el tercer modelo se enmarca dentro de la Teoría Social Cognitiva del Desarrollo de la Carrera (Lent et al., 2002), cuyo objetivo es comprender cómo las características personales, las experiencias anteriores en el trabajo y el contexto en general interactúan para modelar los intereses, los objetivos y las elecciones relativas a la carrera profesional. Lidderdale y colaboradores (2007) utilizaron este marco teórico para crear un modelo que ayudara a determinar cómo los elementos comportamentales, cognitivos y el contexto social afectan a las elecciones relativas a la gestión de la identidad sexual en el trabajo.

El elemento básico de este modelo es representado por los aspectos cognitivos del individuo que determinan su comportamiento, en este caso, la elección sobre el proceso de *disclosure* en el trabajo (Croteau et al., 2008). Cuatro grupos de variables interactúan en el modelo de Lidderdale et al. (2007). El primer grupo contempla los factores que han determinado la experiencia de aprendizaje de las personas LGB con respecto a la gestión de la identidad sexual en el pasado, entre ellos las características personales (e.g., edad, etnia, etc.); las influencias familiares o culturales sobre las orientaciones sexuales no normativas, las oportunidades económicas, el nivel de educación y el grado de contacto con los colectivos LGB. Todos estos elementos determinarán la construcción de la orientación sexual de las personas en relación a su experiencia pasada. Una mayor exposición a un mensaje positivo relativo a la orientación sexual favorecerá el desarrollo de unas creencias positivas con respecto a la auto-eficacia y a las expectativas sobre los resultados derivados del proceso de *disclosure*, variables que entran en el segundo grupo de factores presentes en el modelo. Específicamente se hace referencia a las creencias que la persona posee sobre sus habilidades en emplear una estrategia de *disclosure* u otra y a los resultados que ella

espera a partir del empleo de una estrategia en vez de otra. Estos dos elementos determinarán el abanico de estrategias que la persona LGB se percibirá ser capaz de emplear en el trabajo. El tercer grupo de elementos hace referencia a los elementos contextuales, como el contexto laboral, el clima de trabajo acerca las personas LGB, el rol laboral desempeñado y el contexto más amplio donde la persona LGB vive todos los días. Estos elementos determinarán la estrategia de *disclosure* finalmente empleada. El cuarto y último grupo recoge los resultados obtenidos tras el empleo de una estrategia en vez de otra y la evaluación de estos resultados que, a su vez, afectarán las futuras elecciones de *disclosure*.

Los tres modelos presentados constituyen un avance muy importante en la literatura sobre el proceso de *disclosure* de las personas LGB en los contextos laborales. No obstante, el rol que estos modelos asignan al contexto socio-cultural, en términos de creencias y valores típicos de un país es reducido o casi nulo, limitándose a analizar las características del entorno organizacional y la presencia de políticas que contemplen a las personas LGB.

Aún más relevante es el aspecto compartido por los tres modelos que define el proceso de *disclosure* fruto de una "decisión", "elección", únicamente dependiente de las personas LGB, sin considerar el rol jugado por terceras partes (e.g., compañeros/as y supervisores/as) y cómo ellos/as afectan día tras día las preferencias de las personas LGB en cuestiones como integrar o segmentar su orientación sexual en el trabajo.

### ***2.3 La Boundary Theory y el proceso de disclosure***

En la vida cotidiana las personas están acostumbradas a llevar a cabo distintos roles acordes con la situación social en la que se encuentran. El desempeño de distintos papeles, a veces contradictorios, puede dar lugar a situaciones de estrés para las personas involucradas, pero también puede favorecer la acumulación de recursos para una gestión óptima de los distintos roles (Goode, 1960; Sieber, 1974).

Investigaciones anteriores han demostrado que para reducir la complejidad del mundo, las personas fabrican fronteras (*boundaries*) entre distintos ámbitos de la vida en los que tienen que actuar cotidianamente (e.g., el trabajo y la vida personal) (Ashforth, Kreiner y Fugate, 2000; Kreiner, Hollensbe y Sheep, 2009; Nippert-Eng, 1996), de carácter físico, temporal, comportamental o psicológico. Por ejemplo, dedicar las mismas franjas horarias al trabajo, delimita temporalmente los roles asociados con la vida laboral. Asimismo, trabajar sólo en un espacio concreto, por ejemplo la oficina, delimita los roles laborales a aquel espacio determinado. Estudios previos enmarcados dentro de la Boundary Theory (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009; Nippert-Eng, 1996) han sido enfocados desde la perspectiva de cómo las personas gestionan las prácticas y los "rituales" de transición de un ámbito a otro. Además, han explorado los efectos, positivos, en términos de enriquecimiento (Boz, Martínez y Munduate, 2009; Chen, Powell y Greenhaus., 2009; Powell y Greenhaus, 2010) y, negativos, en términos de conflicto entre distintos ámbitos (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux y Brinley, 2005; Goode, 1960; Greenhaus y Beutell, 1985; Wu, Kwan, Liu y Resick, 2012), que toman forma cuando una esfera de vida interfiere con otra.

De acuerdo con la Boundary Theory, las preferencias de las personas a la hora de crear fronteras entre ámbitos de su vida pueden ser distintas. Así pues, habrá personas que decidirán crear fronteras muy marcadas entre un ámbito y otro, segmentando netamente dichas esferas de la vida, y personas que preferirán crear barreras débiles entre distintos ámbitos, de forma que el rol que suelen desempeñar en uno de ellos pueda integrarse también en el otro. Las personas se posicionarán a lo largo de un continuum donde en un extremo encontraremos los/as segmentadores/as y en el otro los/as integradores/as (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009; Nippert-Eng, 1996).

La creación de fronteras fuertes o débiles dependerá también del grado de permeabilidad y flexibilidad de los distintos roles: cuanto más un rol no esté vinculado a un ámbito específico y se pueda desarrollar en un contexto físico donde, en teoría, se debería desarrollar un rol distinto, tanto más dicho rol se definirá como flexible y permeable (Chen et al., 2009).

En todo momento, las elecciones de las personas se realizan en un contexto interaccional (Kreiner et al., 2009). Esto determina que los demás actores involucrados en el proceso de segmentación/integración jueguen un papel importante a la hora de hacer efectivas las preferencias de las personas. Por ejemplo, las personas podrían elegir segmentar su vida personal y laboral, decidiendo desempeñar los roles laborales sólo en las horas y en los espacios asignados al trabajo. Sin embargo, los/as compañeros/as y/o supervisores/as podrían no respetar esta elección, interfiriendo en su vida personal con asuntos de trabajo. A la inversa, las personas que forman parte de su vida personal podrían interferir en la vida laboral, a través de llamadas, visitas, etc. Lo mismo podría pasar con aquellas personas que deciden integrar distintos ámbitos de su vida (el



familiar en el laboral y/o al revés) y que encuentran barreras levantadas por terceras partes. Las preferencias de las personas serían, en ambos casos, violadas (Kreiner et al., 2009) creando situaciones de intromisión o de distancia no deseadas. En definitiva, se puede afirmar que los procesos de segmentación/integración son el resultado de una negociación diaria entre distintos actores y no el mero resultado de las preferencias de las personas de forma individual (Kreiner et al., 2009).

El proceso de *disclosure* podría ser interpretado como el intento de las personas de crear o eliminar barreras entre distintos ámbitos de su vida, en este caso, el personal y el laboral. Como se ha visto previamente, muchas personas deciden llevar a cabo este proceso de forma indirecta, hablando de su vida diaria en el trabajo, de las personas y de las actividades que protagonizan su vida personal. Por otro lado, las personas que no revelan su orientación sexual en el trabajo evitan todas aquellas situaciones donde es preciso transmitir información sobre su vida personal. Si es cierto que los procesos de integración/segmentación entre distintos ámbitos son el resultado de la negociación entre más actores, también podríamos afirmar que las preferencias de las personas LGB con respecto a revelar y, en consecuencia, integrar su orientación sexual en el trabajo, o encubrir, es decir, segmentar su condición sexual, se verían afectadas por las dinámicas de interacción con compañeros/as y supervisores/as. Así pues, la efectividad de las estrategias de *disclosure* elegidas en cada situación por los/as trabajadores/as LGB podría depender también del papel jugado por las terceras partes.

Estas terceras partes juegan un papel importante durante toda la interacción, no sólo durante el proceso de *disclosure*, moldeando las percepciones de las personas LGB con respecto a su entorno de trabajo, en términos de confianza con la que pueden hablar abiertamente de su vida personal sin ser víctimas de actos de negativos (Capell, 2013).

Como comentábamos previamente, estos actos hoy en día han cambiado su aspecto, siendo ahora mismo más difíciles de identificar. Viejos prejuicios y estereotipos sobre los colectivos LGB podrían estar operando a nivel inconsciente, dando vida a formas de discriminación moderna (Cortina, 2008).

### **3. La discriminación de los colectivos LGB**

La discriminación de los colectivos LGB se puede entender a partir de dos conceptos clásicos que, muchas veces, son erróneamente utilizados como sinónimos: el heterosexismo y la homofobia.

El heterosexismo hace referencia a las actitudes, los prejuicios y los comportamientos discriminatorios hacia las personas LGB apoyados por un sistema ideológico arraigado en la sociedad que denigra a las comunidades no heterosexuales (Herek, 1990; Ragins, 2004). Por otro lado, la homofobia, definida por primera vez por Weinberg en 1972 (en Ragins, 2004), se refiere al miedo, aversión y hostilidad hacia los colectivos LGB, un miedo muchas veces irracional e inconsciente. Aunque el concepto de homofobia haya sido muy utilizado dentro de la literatura sobre LGB, explicar la aversión hacia dichos colectivos como una fobia, podría ser peligroso en la medida en que se considere únicamente el miedo en la base de los comportamientos negativos hacia las personas LGB cuando, en realidad, otras emociones prevalecen, como la rabia o el desagrado (Herek y McLemore, 2013); además, el miedo se considera irracional, y por esto justificable, mientras que las actitudes negativas hacia las personas LGB son generadas, muchas veces, por aspectos racionales (Herek et al., 2013). Por las razones expuestas anteriormente, estos dos términos han sido sustituidos por algunos autores

con el término “estigma sexual” (Herek, Gillis y Cogan, 2009; et al., 2013) que hace referencia a la condición de inferioridad, en términos de estatus y de respetabilidad, que la sociedad en su conjunto atribuye a las personas no heterosexuales. El estigma sexual es una construcción cultural porque es compartida por la mayoría de la sociedad y no un proceso psicológico (Herek et al., 2013).

Herek y colaboradores (2009) identificaron tres tipos de estigma sexual: el estigma sexual activo (*enacted sexual stigma*), que hace referencia a aquellos comportamientos que manifiestan abiertamente actitudes negativas hacia las personas LGB, como actos violentos, discriminación patente, ostracismo, etc.; el estigma experimentado (*felt sexual stigma*), que hace referencia a los ajustes que las personas LGB y heterosexuales aplican a su conducta para alinearse o alejarse de las expectativas compartidas por la sociedad a propósito de los comportamientos llevados a cabo por las personas LGB; por último, el estigma internalizado (*internalized stigma*) que hace referencia a la aceptación personal por parte de las personas LGB y heterosexuales del estigma sexual como parte integrante de su sistema de valores (las personas heterosexuales lo manifestarán a través de actitudes negativas hacia las personas LGB y éstos/as a través del prejuicio hacia sí mismos/as).

Como se comentaba anteriormente, hoy en día y en la mayoría de las sociedades occidentales, explicitar cualquier forma de prejuicio o actitudes negativas hacia las personas LGB se considera socialmente inaceptable. No obstante, los datos europeos y nacionales revelan que dichos colectivos se siguen percibiendo víctimas de actos negativos en el trabajo (European Commission, 2012; López et al., 2013). El rechazo hacia las formas de discriminación “tradicionales” podría haber dejado espacio a nuevas formas de discriminación sutiles (Dovidio, 2001), difíciles de identificar, cuyas

consecuencias para las personas que las padecen y las organizaciones donde trabajan pueden ser de la misma magnitud que la de la discriminación patente (Jones et al., 2013). Entre los actos discriminatorios sutiles que podrían estar afectando a dichos colectivos encontramos los comportamientos incívicos en el trabajo.

### ***3.1 Los comportamientos incívicos en el trabajo***

Los comportamientos incívicos en el trabajo fueron definidos por primera vez por Andersson y Pearson en 1999. En su artículo, las autoras definen como incívicos todos aquellos actos menores que no tienen en cuenta las normas de respeto mutuo establecidas en un contexto dado, concretamente, en el trabajo. Contestar de forma poco educada, levantar el volumen de la voz, esperar impaciente en frente de la mesa de trabajo de un/a compañero/a mientras está ocupado/a en una conversación telefónica: todas estas conductas se pueden etiquetar como incívicas y son dañinas para la organización en la medida en que pueden dar lugar a un escalamiento del conflicto (Andersson et al., 1999; Pearson, Andersson y Wegner, 2001). Los comportamientos incívicos, además, no son hechos puntuales, sino cadenas de eventos que se repiten dada su naturaleza interaccional y que pueden dar lugar a un deseo de venganza hacia la misma persona que los realiza o hacia terceras partes (Andersson et al., 1999; Cortina, Magley, Williams y Langhout, 2001; Pearson et al., 2001; Pearson, Adersson y Porath, 2000).

Las conductas incívicas en el trabajo tienen dos peculiaridades: son actos “menores”, que no llegan a ser definidos como violentos ni agresivos; y ambiguos, en la medida en que el/ la perpetrador/a puede fácilmente justificar su conducta atribuyendo

la culpa a otras causas, como el estrés, la carga de trabajo, etc. De la misma forma, las personas víctimas de estos actos difícilmente consiguen identificar estos tipos de comportamientos como hostiles y, por esto, es difícil reaccionar ante ellos (Andersson et al., 1999; Pearson et al., 2001). Sin embargo, estos comportamientos dan lugar a consecuencias negativas para las víctimas, como baja motivación, deseo de abandonar el puesto de trabajo, empeoramiento de las relaciones, deseo de venganza, malestar o bajos niveles de satisfacción con el trabajo (Cortina et al., 2001; Lim, Cortina y Magley, 2008; Pearson et al., 2001; Porath y Pearson, 2010).

Las peculiaridades de esta forma de maltrato, ambigüedad y baja carga agresiva, pueden dar pie a que se utilice de forma discriminatoria hacia algunos colectivos minoritarios o en situación de desventaja. Los estudios sobre los comportamientos incívicos “selectivos” en los lugares de trabajo, tradicionalmente se han dedicado a explorar las diferencias en las percepciones de conductas incívicas entre distintos colectivos, como las mujeres y las personas de color (e.g., Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Leskinen, Huerta y Magley, 2013; Cortina et al., 2001), demostrando que ser parte de dichos grupos puede aumentar las posibilidades de ser víctima de conductas incívicas. Dada la dificultad en ser identificadas como voluntariamente hostiles, los comportamientos incívicos pueden ser llevados a cabo como una forma de discriminación sutil -no prohibida por ley- sustituyendo a la discriminación patente (Hebl, Bigazzi, Mannix y Dovidio, 2002; Jones et al., 2013).

Los comportamientos incívicos selectivos en el trabajo estarían en la base de lo que se ha definido como “discriminación moderna” (Cortina, 2008), que representaría el polo opuesto a la discriminación patente dentro de un continuum de conductas discriminatorias. Como se comentaba anteriormente, los comportamientos incívicos

selectivos en los contextos laborales y la discriminación moderna se han estudiado con respecto a algunos colectivos, como las mujeres, las personas que pertenecen a una etnia minoritaria y las personas mayores, pero ningún estudio se ha centrado en los colectivos de personas LGB.

### **3.2 *La discriminación moderna y los colectivos LGB***

El concepto de discriminación moderna hace referencia a todos aquellos actos discriminatorios perpetrados de forma sutil por personas que quieren seguir manteniendo una imagen igualitaria ante los ojos de los/as demás y de sí mismas y que por eso actúan de forma discriminatoria sólo cuando existe otra razón que puede ser utilizada para justificar su comportamiento (Cortina, 2008). Llevar a cabo conductas incívicas en el trabajo entraría dentro de esta definición si estos comportamientos están basados en actitudes, prejuicios y estereotipos negativos, conscientes o inconscientes, hacia un determinado colectivo.

La discriminación moderna tiene un componente cognitivo, afectivo y contextual (Cortina, 2008).

A nivel cognitivo, el proceso involucrado en la discriminación moderna es el de categorización social (Tajfel y Turner, 1986): las personas, para simplificar el mundo en el que viven etiquetan a los/as demás a través de categorías sociales, cómo género, etnia, profesión, etc. Cada categoría está asociada a unas creencias y valores, mayoritariamente compartidas por la sociedad. Los estereotipos pueden ser positivos y negativos, pero también conscientes e inconscientes. Estos últimos están involucrados en el proceso de discriminación moderna. A nivel afectivo, encontramos los prejuicios

que hacen referencia a la respuesta afectiva que acompaña cada categoría social. Los prejuicios, cuando son rechazados socialmente, pueden trasladarse a un nivel inconsciente, dando pie a actos discriminatorios sutiles, difícilmente controlables (que se expresan a través del tono de voz, las expresiones faciales, etc.) (e.g., Cortina, 2008; Dovidio, 2001; Dovidio et al., 2002; Dovidio y Gaertner, 2004). Por último, a nivel contextual encontramos todas aquellas normas establecidas a nivel social y organizacional que pueden fomentar u obstaculizar la expresión de conductas discriminatorias y que afectan a cómo éstas se manifiestan, si sutil o abiertamente (Cortina, 2008).

Estudios sobre el racismo ya habían identificado los procesos y los mecanismos que conducen a formas sutiles de discriminación: en distintos experimentos se demostró la existencia de prejuicios y estereotipos hacia las personas de color a nivel implícito (Dovidio y Gaertner, 2000; Gaertner y Dovidio, 1977; Hodson, Dovidio y Gaertner, 2002). Dada la dificultad de modificar estereotipos y prejuicios y, a la vez, el rechazo de los mismos por parte de la mayoría de la sociedad, éstos se convierten en implícitos y siguen afectando y determinando el comportamiento de los individuos (Dovidio, 2001), dando lugar a conductas discriminatorias sutiles, que están más difundidas que aquellas patentes (Jones et al., 2013).

Los estudios sobre discriminación moderna todavía no contemplan los colectivos LGB (Cortina, 2008), aunque otros estudios han demostrado la existencia de actos discriminatorios sutiles hacia estos colectivos (Hebl et al., 2002). Por ejemplo, los datos sobre discriminación percibida (European Commission, 2012; López et al., 2013) podrían sugerir que el estigma sexual sigue existiendo y afectando la experiencia de los/as trabajadores/as LGB. Como recordábamos anteriormente, los valores socio-

culturales vigentes durante la dictadura han promovido la difusión de estereotipos y prejuicios hacia las personas LGB y dada la dificultad con la que estos se modifican, podrían haberse convertido en implícitos y estar afectando a estos colectivos en los contextos laborales españoles.



## Chapter 2. Research aims

### *Objetivos de la investigación*

## 1. Objetivos

Tras la revisión del estado del arte, presentado anteriormente, se proponen los objetivos generales y específicos del presente trabajo.

Dada la falta de estudios sobre las experiencias de los colectivos LG en el contexto laboral español, y la posible dicotomía entre el marco legal y las vivencias detectadas en dicho colectivo, el objetivo general será:

- *Analizar las experiencias de las personas LGB en los contextos laborales españoles.*

Los datos de las encuestas europeas y nacionales sobre discriminación por orientación sexual en España revelan que los colectivos LGB siguen sintiéndose tratados de forma injusta en el contexto laboral español (European Commission, 2012; López et al., 2013). Estas percepciones podrían inhibir el proceso de *disclosure* de las personas LGB, considerado como uno de los momentos más importante en la vida de la mayoría de estos/as trabajadores/as. Aunque el marco normativo español es uno de los más avanzados en términos de tutela de los derechos de las personas LGB, algunos factores socio-culturales podrían estar creando situaciones discriminatorias. La revisión del estado del arte sobre los colectivos LGB en el trabajo, especialmente con relación al proceso de *disclosure*, han mostrado que la investigación desarrollada hasta ahora no considera el contexto socio-cultural específico de un país, limitándose a evaluar factores presentes a nivel organizacional, como las políticas de apoyo a estos colectivos, la presencia de redes institucionalizadas de compañeros/as LGB y factores presentes a

nivel estatal, como el marco normativo en defensa de las personas LGB (Clair et al., 2005). Por las razones presentadas anteriormente, esta tesis doctoral tendrá como objetivo analizar los procesos de *disclosure* en los que las personas LGB están implicadas, teniendo en cuenta los valores y las creencias que son típicas del contexto español. La necesidad de evaluar este aspecto se hace aún más patente si se considera que los logros a nivel de libertades y derechos adquiridos, pueden verse perjudicados por momentos de crisis, como los que estamos viviendo, momentos que podrían fomentar brotes de ideologías conservadoras hacia dichos colectivos (Merolla et al., 2012). El primer objetivo específico será entonces:

- *Identificar las peculiaridades del contexto socio-cultural español que afectan a las experiencias de los/as trabajadores/as LGB en el contexto laboral.*

Los valores y las creencias típicas del contexto español podrían estar afectando a la vida de los/as trabajadores/as LGB en distintos aspectos. Como se comentaba anteriormente, uno de los procesos que más podría verse afectado por ellos, es el proceso de *disclosure* de las personas LGB en los contextos laborales españoles. Dada la falta de estudios previos sobre los/as trabajadores/as LGB en España y la importancia que estudios llevados a cabo a nivel internacional han atribuido a este proceso, objetivos específicos adicionales serán:

- *Identificar las estrategias de disclosure empleadas por los/as trabajadores/as LG en el contexto laboral español.*

- *Identificar las consecuencias que el proceso de disclosure en el trabajo produce a nivel personal, grupal y organizacional.*

Los primeros datos de la tesis doctoral han permitido arrojar luz sobre algunas preguntas de investigación que la literatura previa dejaba sin respuesta. Entre estas contribuciones destaca el rol jugado por las personas con las que se interactúa en el proceso de *disclosure* y el peso que la cultura juega a la hora de plasmar las dinámicas de *disclosure*. Por ello dos de los objetivos específicos adicionales de la tesis serán:

- *Identificar las dinámicas de interacción entre los/as trabajadores/as LG y terceras partes (e.g., compañeros/as, supervisores/as) que se llevan a cabo durante el proceso de disclosure.*
- *Analizar la influencia de los factores socio-culturales españoles en las dinámicas de disclosure.*

Por último, esta tesis doctoral se propone analizar la vivencia de los/as trabajadores/as LGB con respecto a la experiencia de discriminación que pueden haber vivido en el contexto laboral. Dado el cambio sociocultural que ha ocurrido en las últimas décadas en términos de aceptación de los colectivos de personas LGB y el rechazo sobrevenido hacia todas las formas explícitas de discriminación de estos colectivos, la tesis se propone explorar si se producen formas sutiles de discriminación, en términos de actos incívicos en el trabajo y si estos pueden ser la manifestación de formas de discriminación moderna. Así pues, los últimos objetivos específicos de la tesis se proponen:

- *Identificar aquellos actos incívicos de los que son víctimas las personas LG en el trabajo.*
- *Contrastar si los actos incívicos que se desarrollan en el trabajo pueden ser la manifestación sutil de discriminación moderna hacia las personas LG.*

Todos los artículos que se compilan para la presente tesis doctoral tendrán en cuenta las peculiaridades del contexto socio-cultural español a la hora de alcanzar los objetivos planteados más arriba.

En la tabla 1 se resumen cómo se plasman los objetivos específicos en los artículos que componen esta tesis doctoral:

Tabla 1. Objetivos de la tesis y de los artículos que la componen.

<b>Artículo</b>	<b>Objetivos específicos</b>
<i>1. The invisibility of sexual orientation in Spain and its manifestations in the workplace</i>	<i>Identificar las peculiaridades del contexto socio-cultural español que afectan a las experiencias de las personas LGB en el contexto laboral.</i>
<i>2. Estrategias de coming out de personas lesbianas y gays en el trabajo</i>	<i>Identificar las estrategias de disclosure empleadas por los/as trabajadores/as LG en el contexto laboral español.</i>  <i>Identificar las consecuencias que el proceso de disclosure en el trabajo produce a nivel personal, grupal y organizacional.</i>
<i>3. Negotiating boundaries: Disclosure dynamics in Spanish workplaces</i>	<i>Identificar las estrategias de disclosure empleadas por los/as trabajadores/as LG en el contexto laboral español.</i>  <i>Identificar las dinámicas de interacción entre los/as trabajadores/as LG y terceras partes (e.g., compañeros/as, supervisores/as) que se llevan a cabo durante el proceso de disclosure.</i>  <i>Analizar la influencia de los factores socio-culturales españoles en las dinámicas de disclosure.</i>
<i>4. Workplace incivility as modern sexual prejudice</i>	<i>Identificar aquellos actos incívicos de los que son víctimas las personas LG en el trabajo.</i>  <i>Contrastar si los actos incívicos que se desarrollan en el trabajo pueden ser la manifestación sutil de discriminación moderna hacia las personas LG.</i>

## Chapter 3. Articles<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> References has been redacted according to rules established by each journals.

**Article 1:**  
**The invisibility of sexual orientation in Spain and its  
manifestations in the workplace<sup>5</sup>**

**Donatella Di Marco**

*Universidad de Sevilla*

**Lourdes Munduate**

*Universidad de Sevilla*

**Alicia Arenas**

*Universidad de Sevilla*

**Helge Hoel**

*Universidad de Manchester*

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<sup>5</sup> Article accepted by Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology





miércoles, 12 de marzo de 2014

Dear Donatella di Marco.

It is a pleasure for me to inform you that the paper title "The invisibility of sexual orientation in Spain and its manifestations in the workplace" (ref. JWOP-D-14-00041), has been accepted for publication in the Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology. Thanks for submit the findings our your research for publication in the JWOP.

Francisco J. Medina  
Dpto. de Psicología Social  
Universidad de Sevilla  
fjmedina@us.es  
phone: 34-954557872  
skype: fjmd1970  
twitter: @fjmedinadiaz

web: <http://grupo.us.es/grupoindrho/>

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Francisco Medina  
Associate editor

## **Workplace as microcosms of society: The case of Spanish LGB employees**

### **Abstract**

The workplace might be considered a microcosm of society, a mirror of socio-cultural values and beliefs. Such factors shape the discourse about Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) employees and represent a key issue in understanding their daily work experiences. With regard to Spain, General Franco's 40-year dictatorship and the imposition of National-Catholicism, an ideology closely intertwined with Spanish Roman Catholicism, reinforced and threw into even sharper relief traditional gender roles, further shaping the concepts of masculinity and femininity, without any scope and opportunity for other interpretations and expressions not in line with the dominant construction of gender roles. At the same time, a clear line was drawn between public and private spaces establishing "appropriate" behaviours, roles and issues for each space. The aim of this paper is to investigate how and to what extent traditional Spanish socio-cultural factors reinvigorated and strengthened under Franco's regime still affect the daily experience of LGB people at work.

*Keywords: LGB, Franco's regime, Gender roles, Public and private space, Workplace.*

Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB<sup>1</sup>) people's rights in Spain has led to several important breakthroughs in recent years at both legislative and social levels. The movement campaigning for LGB rights, which started gathering momentum in the 1970s (Calvo and Trujillo, 2011; Valiente, 2002), was instrumental in winning the right of same sex couples to the guardianship of minors, the right to get married or adopt children (Law 13/2005, 1 July). It also played a prominent role in changing the way society regarded the diversity of sexual orientation, one which was far removed from the traditional view in Spain. The political and civil advances made during the Second Republic (1933-1936) were obliterated by Franco's dictatorship and its strict religious education. The regime imposed traditional gender roles, constructing and embedding traditional views of masculinity and femininity, leaving no room for interpretations or forms of expression that clashed with these roles (Osborne, 2012; Platero, 2012). The political transition which commenced at the end of the 1970s saw an authoritarian and conservative regime be replaced by a democracy where questions related to social exclusion for reasons of gender, sexual orientation, race or religion were a priority for public policymakers (Meseguer Gancedo, 2006).

In recent years, LGB people have become more visible socially and much progress has been made concerning their civil rights and open discrimination towards them by Spanish society is now rejected (Guasch, 2011). However, LGB people do still perceive subtle homophobia and prejudice because of their sexual orientation (Herek and McLemore, 2013). The results of the Eurobarometer survey on discrimination in the European Union (2012) revealed that nearly half of the Spaniards interviewed (44%) considered discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation to be widespread or very widespread in Spain. Furthermore, a recent report on discrimination perceived by

Lesbian, Gay, Transsexual and Bisexual (LGTB) people in different areas of life (such as the workplace, school, health or administration) showed that 31% of LGTB people have felt discriminated against at some point in their working lives (López, Generelo and Arroyo, 2013). In turn, the serious international financial crisis which hit Spain in 2008 has led to a regression in terms of social inclusion (*Estudios y Análisis Económicos* La Caixa, 2013; Gartzia and López-Zafra, 2014). According to the report by the World Economic Forum (2013) which quantifies gender equality by country, Spain was number 10 out of 136 countries just before the crisis but had dropped down to number 30 when the report was updated in 2013. Some authors have pointed out (Elgoibar, Munduate, Medina & Euwema, 2014) that the introduction of social inclusion policies may have been too recent to take root in some sectors of the Spanish population, so in times of difficulty the risk of regression still remains. Hence, Spain is now seeing a struggle between a long tradition of stigmatization of LGB people - accentuated in the 1980s by the discourse built around AIDS (Olmeda, 2004)-, and the legal, formal and “politically correct” discourse which had the upper hand until the financial crisis. There is a lack of synchronization between the evident progress made in the rights of and social permissiveness towards LGB people, and more subtle social and occupational manifestations, linked to traditional values of shame, guilt, and/or the illness of homosexual and bisexual orientations, which prevent LGB people in the workplace from developing to their full potential.

As a result, at a personal level, *disclosure* at work, understood as the process by which LGB people reveal their sexual orientation, continues to be a "dilemma" (e.g., Griffith and Hebl, 2002), because it can produce both positive and negative consequences, depending on the degree of acceptance of the social setting in which this

orientation is disclosed. The positive consequences are that disclosure may generate greater commitment and satisfaction in the workplace for the LGB person involved (e.g., Day and Schoenrade, 1997). However, it may also lead to negative consequences such as anxiety and depression if it takes place in a discriminatory context and this could affect the professional career of the employee (see Ragins, 2004). These daily experiences of subtle discrimination in the workplace may be exacerbated by the important personal and professional consequences arising from the difficulties in strengthening ties with colleagues at work, together with difficulties related to their career prospects (Di Marco, Arenas, Munduate & Hoel, in press).

Despite the importance of the personal, occupational and social implications of experiences of discrimination, very little has been written about this anachronism affecting LGB people in Spain in studies on work and organizations. This article analyses certain historical and cultural elements which are inherent to Spanish society and which may help to understand the daily experience of LGB people in the workplace, particularly at a time of hardship and cutbacks. Taking a historical-cultural perspective of the evolution of the concept of homosexuality and bisexuality in Spain, we will look at how the construction of gender roles, the different levels of visibility of LGB people in recent years and the definition of public and private spaces have affected LGB people in their workplaces, and continue to do so.

### **The period under Franco's regime**

The situation of LGB people in Spain and their contextualization in the workplace cannot be understood without considering the influence of the socio-

historical background which has shaped the social construction of gender roles and their social visibility. Spain's recent history has been marked by a dictatorship which lasted forty years (1936-1975) and brought about a political and social involution (Munduate, 1993). Its legacy was still felt during the period of transition to democracy and undoubtedly influenced the social construction of gender roles. In the early years of democracy, old and new political and ideological tendencies lived side by side and this is probably still true in certain sectors of society. This coexistence of ideologies would explain the resistance shown by part of society towards the progress made in the rights of LGB people and which, under the banner of certain political and religious tendencies (Villaamil, 2004), led them to present an appeal of unconstitutionality against the law which gave same sex couples the right to get married and adopt children. The decision of the Constitutional Court in 2012 to uphold the constitutionality of this law was a sign that the trend to bring the rights of LGB people into line with their heterosexual counterparts was unstoppable in Spain<sup>2</sup>.

To explain this resistance to LGB rights in Spain, we need to take a closer look at how Franco's regime influenced society's perception of LGB people. Like all 20th Century authoritarian regimes, the dictatorship brought with it the loss of liberties and pluralism. However, an added ingredient in Spain was that it had the full backing of the Catholic Church which had been seriously threatened by the threat of secularization during the Second Republic (1933-1936) (Casanova, 2001, 2002; Osborne, 2011). Thus, the suppression of liberties by the Franco regime came as a considerable relief to the Church. The state identified itself with the values and morality of Catholicism (Calvo and Pichardo, 2011; Pichardo, 2004, 2011), and National-Catholicism became the

dominant ideology in Spain, with primary and secondary socialization institutions being used to shape the values and beliefs of most people's lives.

Through an intricate system of socialization, the regime's ideology permeated all areas of Spanish people's lives. The regime came into people's homes, regulating family relations and organizing leisure time in the name of public decency and those who did not comply would be committing a sin (Abella, 1996). The *Caudillo*, as Franco was known, became the guiding light, an example to be followed in public life and a model father in his private life, a staunch defender of Catholic morality inside and outside the home. The state showed little restraint when it came to enforcing this morality. The years under the Franco regime were ones of censorship, violence and repression in all areas of society which resisted the dictatorship, including those who became trapped by the web of accusers and informers which the system had woven to control society. The loyal people in this network were rewarded and they became an active part of the system of repression (Casanova, 2002).

The traditional family, whose primary function was that of procreation, became the pillar of society (Abella, 1996; Olmeda, 2004) and the ideal breeding ground for the values and ideals of the regime. At state level, economic measures were introduced to encourage and reward families with many children, while women, who were stripped of all the rights won during the Second Republic, were educated to be "perfect housewives" (Abella, 1996). At school, girls and boys received a socializing education with clearly differentiated gender roles: girls were educated to look after the private space while boys were prepared to enter the workplace, *the* public space. As a consequence, when women got married and had to give up their jobs, they were "rewarded" with the Marriage Prize (Abella, 1996).

Some previous studies (Abella, 1996; Guereña, 2012; Mir, 2002; Olmeda, 2004) have highlighted the presence of a double morality in that puritanical Spain. The permissiveness shown towards the proliferation of brothels was an example of this contradiction although, in general, sexuality became a taboo subject. Regarding sexuality, the regime acted with the support of the Church which was assigned the area of education, and this institution exercised strict control on morality, activating mechanisms of guilt and shame. The concept of sin was often compared to that of crime, particularly when it involved women as in the case of adultery which was defined as immoral and considered a criminal offense (Mir, 2002).

There is no doubt that the dictatorship brought about a regression in the rights and liberties of society as a whole. However, some groups were affected, stigmatized and persecuted to a greater extent by the regime, as is the case of LGB people (Pichardo, 2004).

If sexuality was a taboo subject for society which conformed to the ideals imposed by Franco's regime, then those people who did not fit this heteronormativity (Losert, 2008; Warner, 1991) represented even more of a problem. Legislative tools were designed to punish and hide LGB people. In 1954, homosexuality was added to the Vagrancy Act, which included all categories of the socially excluded, and in 1970 their dangerousness was reaffirmed in the Law on Dangerousness and Social Rehabilitation (Pichardo, 2004; Valiente, 2002). Legislative texts, however, only referred to male homosexuality, while other sexual orientations were not even contemplated, although they were punished (Juliano, 2012). The two above-mentioned laws included measures to rehabilitate homosexual people, including their isolation through internment in agricultural colonies or work camps for periods ranging from



three months to three years. Homosexuality was considered a crime and an illness. For that reason, the person committing the criminal act needed to be re-educated and rehabilitated to prevent him/her from being a danger to society as a whole (Olmeda, 2004). This legislative situation remained unchanged until 1979 with the repeal of the articles in the Law of Dangerousness and Social Rehabilitation referring to homosexuals. The law was repealed in its entirety in the 1990s (Valiente, 2002).

### **Gender roles and visibility**

The years under Franco's regime have left a deep imprint in Spain's history, culture and civil society. The dismantling of the regime's system did not lead to the abandonment overnight of a system of values which was deeply rooted and anchored in educational and religious beliefs, although it gradually faded as Spain opened up to the influence of other European countries.

Through education in primary and secondary institutions, Franco's regime erected a powerful discourse on gender roles, and it was one which was diametrically opposed to the discourse laid down during the Second Republic. It constructed the image of the good woman whose docility and high moral character would one day allow her to play the role of wife and mother (Juliano, 2012; Osborne, 2012). At the same time, the male role model was typically strong and virile (Guereña, 2012; Platero, 2009). The sphere of action for each was clearly delimited: private and with little visibility for her and public for him. Thus, the dictatorship modelled the concepts of the ideal man and woman, of femininity and masculinity, and with them a series of social

and aesthetic values and norms. In recent years these concepts have become the focus of research interest.

Research into cultural values (e.g., Hofstede, 1997, 2001; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman & Gupta, 2004; Schwartz, 1999) has traditionally used the dimension of masculinity/femininity, amongst others, to define the culture of a country. According to Hofstede (1997, 2001), a society is masculine if values associated to competitiveness, assertiveness and the accumulation of wealth prevail; in contrast, societies are defined as feminine when values such as cooperation or caring for others prevail. Societies which are higher in masculinity also present a marked difference in gender roles, something which is not observed in societies with high levels of femininity. Hofstede (1997) observed relatively high levels of femininity in Spain, which can be attributed to the importance of matriarchy within private spaces (Munduate, Ganaza, Alcaide & Peiró, 1994). However, indicators in some recent studies (Silván-Ferrero and Bustillos, 2007) have pointed to the persistence in public spaces of values linked to masculinity, such as traditional gender roles, which are still observed in young people. These studies also show that levels of masculinity/femininity are affected by age and educational level (Calvo-Salguero, García-Martínez and Monteoliva, 2008). On the one hand, young men and young women are more masculine and feminine, respectively, while at the same time, low levels of education reinforce traditional gender roles. On the other, women with high levels of education adopt alternative gender roles, closer to those which have traditionally been considered as masculine, although the opposite does not occur with men with similar educational levels. They continue to maintain masculine gender roles which are probably more effective for them (Calvo-Salguero et al., 2008).

The scenario we are describing –gender roles, the delimitation of women to the private sphere, the masculinity/femininity binary- continued to affect LGB people who were expected to develop traditional gender roles, in line with the masculinity/femininity of the time. As we mentioned earlier, being more visible male homosexuality was defined as a crime and considered an illness. Homosexual practices went against the ideal of virility constructed by the regime and was one reason why they had to be marginalized (Olmeda, 2004). The situation was not very different at an international level, if one considers that it was not until 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association eliminated homosexuality from its Diagnosis and Statistics Manual for Mental Disorders (DMS). Lesbianism was simply ignored, made invisible (Juliano, 2012; Olmeda, 2004; Robbins, 2003) and, when it was taken into consideration, it was always seen as the result of a lack of morality (Sánchez, 2012) which was far from the ideal of the woman and mother constructed by the regime. This did not mean that lesbianism went unpunished, although it is true that the regime's laws for "rehabilitating" homosexuals were rarely applied to lesbian people (Olmeda, 2004). The existence of other institutions with punitive power –such as the Church and the health system-, even at a social level, was enough to repress female homosexuality (Platero, 2009).

The differences which have been shaped in Spain between gays and lesbians in terms of visibility have persisted up until recent times and manifest themselves in, for example, the lack of academic interest towards the study of the experience of lesbian people (Robbins, 2003). It is important to emphasize that this disparity in the visibility of gays and lesbians can also be seen in other countries (Bowring and Brewis, 2009), although the invisibility of lesbians is quite accentuated in Spain.

There are indicators that the presence of traditional gender roles in Spanish society continue to affect the lives of LGB people today (Juliano, 2012). Lesbian women state that there is increasing acceptance of their sexual orientation by heterosexuals as long as they reproduce traditional gender roles, such as marrying their same-sex partner, being a good mother and adopting heteronormal physical and aesthetic norms, aligning themselves with the prevailing image of femininity (Di Marco, Hoel, Arenas & Munduate, 2014). This is in contrast to the situation in other countries where an image which does not fit society's stereotypical image of a lesbian could give rise to unwelcome questions, or even discriminatory treatment (Bowring et al., 2009). The situation is different for homosexual men who, both in Spain (Di Marco et al., 2014) and other countries (Bowring et al., 2009; Ward & Winstanley, 2005), have to conform to the masculine image prevailing in society, without manifesting their sexual orientation at a physical, bodily or behavioural level.

### **Public space and private space**

The evolution of gender roles has laid down not just a set of social behaviours and norms defined as appropriate within Spanish society, but has also delimited the spaces considered adequate for the people who fulfil these roles.

The public space/private space binary was mirrored in the man/woman binary (Velez-Pellegrini, 2008). The expectations of Spanish youth were shaped in childhood, a period which clearly defined the limits of the spaces which they were to occupy as adults: the private space for women and the public space for men (Berná, 2012; Platero, 2009; 2012; Sánchez, 2012). The public space was considered dangerous for women

and their morality (Berná, 2012) and when they did occupy this space it cost them their reputation because it was the space of those who exercised prostitution (Juliano, 2012), and they were stigmatized for their loose morals.

Under the dictatorship, the distinction between public space/private space was not just connected to the man/woman binary, instead it also marked the behaviours and the subjects which could be dealt with in each, according to the prevailing morality which censored in the public domain while being more permissive in the private one (Abella, 1996). Everything which revolved around personal life was confined to the private space, even if it was not directly connected to sexual life. However, with the passage of time, we have witnessed the desexualization of the personal life of heterosexual people (Herek, 1996; Velez-Pellegrini, 2008). Today, the personal sphere has split in two: one, which can still be defined as personal, whose content has entered into daily and public conversations –such as discourses about activities which are related to free time, with one’s partner or with the family-; and another, which can be defined as private, and which refers to the more intimate and private aspects of heterosexual people’s lives and which do not normally enter public discourse.

In contrast, for LGB people, for a long time the line between the public and personal sphere has been almost imperceptible, while the distinction between the personal and private setting has hardly existed (Di Marco et al., 2014). In other words, while Spanish society has progressed in many areas, eliminating certain forms of blatant discrimination towards LGB people, there is still acceptance of some discriminatory attitudes which are manifested, perhaps unconsciously, by the way heterosexual people attribute meaning to and delimit public and private spaces. In some contexts, the definition of behaviours and subjects of discussion which are appropriate for the public

sphere still persist for LGB people (Di Marco et al., 2014; Herek, 1996). Thus, if LGB people talk about their partner or their free time this involuntarily evokes all those aspects of their personal life which heterosexual people confine to the private sphere, because of the way heterosexuals sexualize the personal lives of LGB people (Herek, 1996).

The clear distinction between the public and private space and the sexualization of the personal sphere of LGB people is related to what Villaamil (2004) labels “rhetorical tolerance”. This refers to the attitudes and behaviours of people who do not openly defend discriminatory postures, but who do, however, treat the other party in a different way. Tacitly, they make an “invitation to non-existence, which is the polite way of saying closet” (Villaamil, 2004, p. 27); and this translates into and, at the same time, encourages power hierarchies dominated by masculinity/femininity and dominant gender roles. It also gives rise to the aversion towards “*la pluma*” or mannerisms (Villaamil, 2004); in other words, the aversion towards any type of manifestation of masculinity or femininity which does not align with the dominant ones which, in turn, reflect traditional gender roles.

After the Second Republic, the appropriation of the public space by men, together with the strong influence of the Church in the home, created a screen which steadily rendered women more invisible, particularly in cases where there was an intersection between gender and sexual orientation (Bowleg, 2008; Cole, 2009).

The distinction between public and private space was more marked in smaller towns and villages. In rural areas, the line between these two spheres was as important as it was easy to violate. As Olmeda (2004) recalls, in the villages the figure of “*el mariquita*” or the “puff” (p. 113) has always existed; this was somebody who was

highly visible due to his effeminate manners and he was ridiculed by others and there were certain expectations about the role he had to perform. However, beyond this model, there were also people who did not conform to this way of expressing their sexuality and who kept their orientation hidden, due to the intricate network of relationships existing in the smaller towns and villages. The fear of being stigmatized and the feeling of guilt, rooted in the transmission of Catholic values, did not allow the sexual orientation of LGB people to be made visible (Olmeda, 2004).

### **Workplace contexts: microcosms of society**

The general picture described above gives us an impression of the socio-cultural context which has been characteristic and, in some cases still is characteristic of Spain. We intend to draw on this impression to understand the experience of LGB people in the workplace, bearing in mind that each workplace is, to a certain extent, a reflection of today's society. It is a small microcosm where people take their values, beliefs and attitudes which are characteristic of their daily lives.

The transition to democracy represented a transformation for society as a whole, in terms of progress in civil rights. There has also been a new process of secularization, both at a contextual level (regarding the relation between the State and the Church) and at an individual level. However, one has to remember that the decrease in credibility and in the influence of the ecclesiastical institution in public life has not necessarily been mirrored by a decrease in religiousness and associated beliefs and values (Pérez-Agote, 2012), and people take these beliefs and values with them in all social contexts, including the workplace. Previous studies in Spain have shown that the Catholic

religion –traditionally by far the largest congregation in Spain- encourages inequality between men and women, preserving traditional gender roles (Glick, Lameiras & Rodríguez, 2002). The workplace cannot be considered immune from the values associated to these gender roles. Their influence on the masculinization or feminization of certain industrial sectors is a reflection of the beliefs associated to the typical models of man and woman in each society (López-Sáez, Morales & Lisbona, 2008). A clear example can be found in the armed forces, where until recently women were denied access not just because they were not thought to have the physical qualities required to do the job, but also because they did not possess the moral qualities, in terms of audacity and bravery, to work in this sector (Hombrado, Olmeda & Del Val, 2007). In turn, some sectors have experienced feminization, particularly those associated to caring or attending to other people, such as nursing or customer services. In these cases, the characteristics which are normally associated to women –such as the ability to listen and have empathy, etc. - are the ones which make them right for the job. However, indicators have shown that, over the years, levels of masculinity in women have risen, coming close to those of men, while the levels of femininity in men continue to be low (Echebarría & González, 1999; López-Sáez et al., 2008). Although formal restrictions are now less widespread in the occupational world because of the legal guarantees in place to prevent discrimination, certain unwritten rules still remain so that when men enter a traditionally feminine sector or women enter a masculine one, questions are raised about their sexuality. These doubts increase if the physical image does not correspond to society's masculine/feminine ideal. The masculinization/feminization of occupational sectors which still exists is a problem affecting homosexuals, bisexuals and heterosexuals, because if they decide to enter an “inappropriate” sector in terms of



sexual orientation it breaks the expectations of heterosexuals about fulfilling their gender role (Di Marco et al., 2014).

In the previous section we commented on the process of sexualization of the personal lives of LGB people (Herek, 1996; Velez-Pellegrini, 2008). The overlapping which heterosexual people make between the personal and private lives of LGB people, makes it more difficult for the latter to share experiences of their personal lives in the public space and, as a consequence, it prevents them from forging stronger ties with their work colleagues. In turn, the process of *disclosure* may be obstructed by the lack of trust in the people who form part of their working environment (Di Marco et al., in press).

Although Spanish society rejects any type of open discrimination towards LGB groups, subtle forms of discrimination still persist under the guise of political correctness. New forms of discrimination, similar to what Villaamil (2004) defined as rhetorical tolerance, have appeared in Spanish workplaces. This is the case of modern discrimination (Cortina, 2008), which refers to all those negative acts perpetrated, sometimes unconsciously, by people who wish to maintain an egalitarian identity with themselves and with other people and who only act when there is an organizational reason which justifies their behaviour. In this sense, according to a recent study conducted in Spain (Di Marco et al., in press), the perception of discrimination, even if it is very subtle, could inhibit the process of *disclosure* in the workplace, and this, in turn, has consequences at a personal and organizational level. Not revealing sexual orientation at work does not just affect relations at work, it also has repercussions on motivation and well-being, due to the incoherence it generates between personal and occupational life domains. In turn, another type of problem emerges at an organizational

level which, according to those participating in the same study, refers to the fact that cooperation and teamwork suffer substantially in discriminatory work climates, fuelling the intentions of those affected to leave their jobs (Di Marco et al., in press).

## **Conclusion**

In this review of the work experience of LGB people in Spain, we have seen that workplaces are a reflection of values and beliefs of a given society, and the study of the dynamics of a given workplace means a consideration of the society in which it operates. Religious and political values, gender roles and expectations about the division between public and private space come together in the workplace and affect the lives of all involved. In turn, the actual culture of an organization may exacerbate or soften the values on which a society operates, as is the case of more traditional occupational sectors, where the dominant models of masculinity/femininity continue to prevail, despite these models having faded in society as a whole (Juliano, 2012).

We have seen how the culture of a society in a given country affects LGB people in the workplace, insofar as this culture influences the interaction with colleagues at work and in shaping heteronormativity (Losert, 2008; Warner, 1991), which is rooted in the expectations that heterosexual people construct around the sexual orientation of other people. The expectations of heterosexual people about the expression of masculinity/femininity of LGB people penalize the latter doubly. On the one hand, they make invisible those people who do not conform to the models of homosexuality and bisexuality –feminine and masculine- which are expected by other people, and their heterosexuality is taken for granted. On the other, they give rise to blatant or subtle

discriminatory acts if their image is aligned with the one that society has built around LGB people. This is the case for gay men who are subtly denied access to certain occupational sectors because they do not represent the required "masculine ideal". These mechanisms, together with religious values and the criteria of separation between public and private spaces for LGB people, hamper what has been defined as a process of *disclosure* in the workplace, generating adverse consequences at an individual and organizational level (Di Marco et al., in press). Although blatant manifestations of discrimination towards LGB people are gradually disappearing, subtle forms of discrimination still exist which are anchored at an unconscious level in the culture of Spanish society and which accumulate potential for dysfunctional consequences, both at a personal level and for society in general. Traditional socio-cultural values may be exacerbated by specific moments affecting a country, such as the financial crisis which Spain has been suffering since 2008. Previous studies (e.g., *Estudios y Análisis Económicos*, La Caixa, 2013) have shown that the crisis has led to a loss of wealth, but also the loss of people's rights and guarantees, an increase in poverty and the risks of social exclusion, the deterioration of social integration and an increase in inequalities (Ramos & Peiró, 2014). The danger of a generalized regression in the integration of the most vulnerable groups goes hand in hand with the fact that the uncertainty provoked by situations of crisis and danger (e.g., economic, political, social), encourages the expression of authoritarian behaviours. These may be manifested by low tolerance, moral absolutism, conformism, the adoption of "dogmatic" and traditional points of view and a low level of tolerance towards people perceived as different and who do not adhere to the standard ideals imposed by the reference group. Such behaviours may not just appear in people with a high predisposition towards authoritarianism, but also in

those who need to have a high level of control over their surroundings (Merolla, Ramos & Zechmeister, 2012). These processes help us understand why people are once again fighting to defend civil and social rights of citizens as a whole, following the outbreak of the crisis in Spain, and the importance of the upturn in studies and actions given the regression of equality policies in times of austerity.

Future studies should take into account the role that the socio-cultural values of a given country play in shaping the experience of LGB people at work, such as disclosing their sexual orientation in the workplace. The models of *disclosure* developed in previous studies (e.g., Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005; Lidderdale, Croteau, Anderson, Tovar-Murray & Davis, 2007; Ragins, 2008) help us understand the antecedents and results of such a complex process by analyzing variables like the support received in the workplace, organizational climate, normative framework, etc. However, they do not reflect the socio-cultural background that people acquire during the process of socialization. In turn, although these models have helped us explain the experience of LGB workers thus far, these studies need to explore the role played by certain socio-economic factors, such as the financial crisis or specific situations of uncertainty (political issues, employment, etc.) if we are to understand how inclusion processes may be affected in times of austerity. This would help us to identify what preventive measures are needed to ensure the effective inclusion, not just of LGB groups, but of all stigmatized groups.

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#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> We have not included transsexual people because we consider that their experience could be affected by different values and beliefs to LGB people and for that reason they should be studied separately (e.g., Worthen, 2013).

<sup>2</sup>Sentence 198/2012, of 6 November, 2012. BOE 286 (2012/11/28), 168-219.

**Article 2:**

**Estrategias de *coming out* de personas lesbianas y gays  
en el trabajo<sup>6</sup>**

**[Strategies of coming out of lesbians and gays at work]**

**Donatella Di Marco**

*Universidad de Sevilla*

**Alicia Arenas**

*Universidad de Sevilla*

**Lourdes Munduate**

*Universidad de Sevilla*

**Helge Hoel**

*Universidad de Manchester*

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## REVISTA DE PSICOLOGÍA SOCIAL

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José Manuel Sabucedo Cameselle editor de la Revista de Psicología Social  
Informa que:

El artículo: "Estrategias de coming out de personas lesbianas y gays en el trabajo", cuyos autores son: Donatella Di Marco, Alicia Arenas, Lourdes Munduate y Helge Hoel ha sido evaluado favorablemente y aceptado para su publicación en la Revista de Psicología Social.

El presente informe se emite para los efectos que la interesada estime oportunos.

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Departamento de Psicología Social, Básica e Metodoloxía.  
Facultade de Psicología. Campus Vida.  
15782 Santiago de Compostela.  
revistadepsicologiasocial@usc.es  
Tel.: 881813684

## **Estrategias de *coming out* de personas lesbianas y gays en el trabajo**

### **Resumen**

En los últimos años son numerosos los avances que, a nivel social y normativo, se han alcanzado con respecto a la lucha contra la discriminación por orientación sexual. No obstante, el proceso de *coming out* en los contextos de trabajo sigue siendo un aspecto crucial en la vida de muchas personas lesbianas y gays (LG). Este estudio se propone analizar las diferentes estrategias que LG adoptan a la hora de desvelar su orientación sexual en los contextos de trabajo españoles, identificando los factores que facilitan o dificultan este proceso. Se analizan también las consecuencias, a nivel personal y organizacional, de las estrategias adoptadas en el proceso de *coming out*. El estudio se ha llevado a cabo a través de entrevistas en profundidad con 15 LG. Los resultados demuestran que las estrategias de *coming out* varían y están afectadas por distintos factores (e.g., características de los/as compañeros/as, sector, etc.). Además, se confirma que el proceso de *coming out* (o su ausencia) puede tener consecuencias a distintos niveles (e.g., relaciones con compañeros/as, percepción de injusticia organizacional, etc.).

*Palabras claves: Discriminación moderna, Estrategias de coming out, Lesbianas y Gays, LGB, Orientación sexual*

## Strategies of coming out of lesbians and gays at work

### Abstract

In the last few years, many progresses have been achieved at social and legislative level regarding to the discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. However, the *coming out* process in the workplace is still a crucial moment in the lives of many lesbian and gay people. The goal of this study is to analyze the different strategies that Spanish Lesbians and Gays (LG) use to disclose their sexual orientation at work, identifying the factors that facilitate or hinder this process. Moreover, this study aims to shed light on the consequences, at personal and organizational level, due to implement some *coming out* strategies. We carried out 15 in-depth interviews with LGs. Results demonstrated that LG people use different strategies in order to disclose their sexual orientation at work; strategies they use depend on several factors (e.g., characteristics of colleagues, sector, etc.). Moreover, the *coming out* process produces several consequences (e.g., interpersonal relationships, perception of organizational injustice, etc.).

*Keywords: Lesbians and Gays, LGB, Modern discrimination, Sexual orientation, Strategies of coming out*



## 1. Introducción

En los últimos años España ha sido protagonista de numerosos cambios implementados en el escenario legal y normativo con el objetivo de obtener el reconocimiento de los derechos de las personas Lesbianas, Gays, Transexuales y Bisexuales (LGTB). La transición del régimen franquista -que durante décadas había perseguido al colectivo personas LGTB a nivel personal, social y legal- a la democracia, representa el punto de partida para la construcción y la difusión de un nuevo discurso social, permitiendo numerosos avances en el ámbito legislativo con el fin de reducir la distancia existente entre el contexto normativo y la realidad social (Martínez y Dodge, 2010; Munduate, 1993; Soley-Beltran y Coll-Planas, 2011). En línea con este objetivo, el Parlamento Español en 2005 reguló el matrimonio entre personas del mismo sexo y reconoció a las parejas homosexuales el derecho de adoptar niños/as (Ley 13/2005, de 1 de julio). Además, a partir del 2007 las personas transexuales pueden pedir la rectificación del sexo en el Registro Civil antes de someterse a la intervención quirúrgica para la reasignación de la identidad sexual (Ley 3/2007, de 15 de marzo). No obstante, la última Encuesta Europea sobre Discriminación (*Eurobarometer*, European Commission, 2012) ha revelado que el 44% de los/as españoles/as considera que la discriminación por orientación sexual está extendida en nuestro país. Aunque España se sitúa levemente por debajo de la media europea (46%) y se aleja de los porcentajes encontrados en otros países mediterráneos como Grecia, Italia y Francia (65%, 63% y 61%, respectivamente), estos resultados son preocupantes.

Los datos anteriormente presentados nos explican por qué el *coming out* en los contextos laborales –el proceso a través del cual las personas no heterosexuales

comunican su orientación sexual- representa un momento crucial y muestran, además, la necesidad de disminuir la brecha aún existente entre la situación ideal, delineada a través de los instrumentos normativos, y la realidad social cotidiana.

Hasta el día de hoy, las investigaciones llevadas a cabo en España se han centrado en las consecuencias sociales promovidas por los cambios legales (Pichardo, 2011; Soley-Beltran et al., 2011) y en los prejuicios contra las personas homosexuales (Quiles del Castillo, Betancor, Rodríguez, Rodríguez y Coello, 2003). Sin embargo, no conocemos estudios científicos realizados en el contexto español sobre el *coming out* en los entornos laborales.

Los estudios desarrollados en otros países revelan que el *coming out* en los contextos laborales puede llevar consigo consecuencias positivas –relacionadas, por ejemplo, con la satisfacción en el trabajo y el compromiso organizacional (Day y Schoenrade, 1997)- así como consecuencias negativas –entre otras, depresión, malestar psicológico, estrés, intención de abandono del puesto de trabajo (Button, 2001; Ragins, 2004; Ragins y Cornwell, 2001; Smith y Ingram, 2004)- por ser víctimas de actos discriminatorios directos, sutiles o que se manifiestan a través de un trato injusto (ACAS, 2007). En este sentido, investigaciones llevadas a cabo en otros países han revelado que entre el 25% y el 66% de Lesbianas y Gays (LG) experimentan alguna forma de discriminación en el trabajo (Croteau, 1996); además, entre el 22% y el 48% de los/as trabajadores/as Lesbianas, Gays y Bisexuales (LGB) son víctimas de acoso (ACAS, 2007).

En línea con investigaciones anteriores (Croteau, Anderson y VanderWal, 2008; Ragins, 2004; 2008), el objetivo del presente trabajo es detectar las dimensiones más relevantes que modelan la experiencia laboral del colectivo LG<sup>1</sup> en España durante el proceso de *coming out*. Hasta donde hemos conocido por la revisión de la literatura, este

es el primer estudio en España que analiza este proceso de *coming out* del colectivo LG. Exploraremos, concretamente, cómo las personas LG comunican su orientación sexual en su contexto laboral, rompiendo (o no) la barrera de la presunción de heterosexualidad, según las percepciones que ellos/as tienen de su entorno de trabajo. Trataremos de explorar cuáles son los elementos que entran en el proceso de análisis previo al *coming out*, como las características de los/as compañeros/as de trabajo, los valores organizacionales o el sector en el que trabajan. Finalmente, abordaremos las consecuencias producidas por la elección de una determinada estrategia de *coming out*, centrándonos en aquellos resultados directamente conectados con el bienestar y la satisfacción del/la trabajador/a y con el buen funcionamiento de la organización.

## **2. Marco teórico**

La discriminación por orientación sexual se encuentra vinculada al desarrollo de la Teoría del Estigma de Goffman (1963; Clair, Beatty y MacLean, 2005; Ragins, 2008) y al concepto de Heteronormatividad (Losert, 2008; Warner, 1991). Según Goffman, la sociedad clasifica a las personas a través de una serie de expectativas normativas. Así pues, es posible categorizar a los individuos en “normales” y “desviados”, según el momento histórico, el tipo de sociedad, las creencias, los valores, los contextos y las normas que son ampliamente aceptadas por la mayoría de las personas. El ‘estigma’ es aquel atributo que, en una determinada sociedad, se sale de las normas establecidas y que, por tanto, da lugar a un amplio descrédito de la persona que es portadora del mismo y a una tensión a la hora del contacto social. Goffman distingue dos tipos de estigma: los estigmas visibles, que generan un inmediato desprestigio de la persona

portadora, que se define “desacreditada”; y los estigmas invisibles, que se pueden esconder o camuflar y que, por tanto, son potencialmente “desacreditables”. En este último caso, la tensión social deriva del tener que manejar la información sobre el estigma, a la hora de no revelarlo, así como en el caso de que se decida comunicarlo a todos/as o sólo a unas personas determinadas.

Históricamente, las personas LG han sido víctimas de actos discriminatorios porque no se alineaban con las creencias compartidas por la mayoría de la sociedad con respecto a las normas emocionales y afectivas consideradas ideales. La heteronormatividad hace referencia al conjunto de normas que definen los modelos sentimentales heterosexuales y sus formas de expresarlos “normales” y aceptados por la mayoría. Como consecuencia directa, todos los comportamientos y los deseos que no entran en este conjunto, salen fuera de lo que una sociedad considera la norma y, por tanto, se transforman en un estigma. Siendo la orientación sexual un factor cuya visibilidad se puede, en parte, controlar, las personas LG pueden elegir esconderla a los/as demás, aunque esta elección tenga unas consecuencias adversas, como se ha demostrado en estudios anteriores (e.g., Day et al., 1997).

La sociedad actual, progresivamente, ha logrado limitar las consecuencias negativas del hacer visible la orientación sexual. Paralelamente, las personas LG han ido visibilizando su orientación sexual y desvelando información sobre su identidad sexual a través de un amplio espectro de actos comunicativos, que van desde el uso del lenguaje hasta diversas expresiones corporales. No obstante, a pesar del aumento de su visibilidad en todos los contextos de la vida diaria y de los avances conseguidos a nivel legislativo, así como del hecho de que la sociedad actual considere como inaceptable cualquier manifestación de discriminación hacia colectivos minoritarios, se siguen

percibiendo diversas formas de discriminación hacia este colectivo concreto. Dichas actuaciones se manifiestan sutilmente a través de comportamientos ambiguos, que a menudo asumen la apariencia de actos involuntarios. Es lo que Andersson y Pearson (1999) han definido como *workplace incivility* – actos incívicos en el lugar de trabajo-, caracterizándolos como comportamientos en los que se detecta falta de claridad en poder atribuir ‘voluntariedad’ a la persona que los perpetra y que, sin embargo, tienen como objetivo dañar a la otra parte. Estos autores describen la distinción entre este concepto y otros similares como los comportamientos antisociales, que tienen como objetivo dañar la organización y sus miembros; los comportamientos desviados, que van en contra de las normas sociales; la violencia, que hace referencia a los actos que producen un daño físico a las personas; o la agresividad, que produce un daño a nivel psicológico. A partir del trabajo de Andersson y Pearson, numerosas investigaciones han explorado las consecuencias de los comportamientos incívicos en los entornos de trabajo sobre la salud de los/as trabajadores/as y su vida privada, sobre las actitudes hacia el trabajo y, por ende, sobre la organización (Andersson et al., 1999; Cortina, Magley, Williams, y Langhout, 2001; Ferguson, 2012).

La literatura nos muestra, por tanto, que, por un lado, es difícil encontrar formas de discriminación manifiestas y, por otro lado, que cada vez es más frecuente identificar nuevas formas de discriminación conectadas con comportamientos incívicos en el trabajo. Dichos comportamientos han sido también analizados por Cortina (2008), quien los ha definido como de discriminación moderna. Cortina hace referencia a todos aquellos actos, a la vez ambiguos y dañinos, perpetrados (tal vez de forma inconsciente) por personas que intentan mantener una identidad igualitaria consigo mismas y con las demás personas de su entorno laboral, actuando, por tanto, de forma discriminatoria

sólo cuando existe una razón de origen organizacional que parece justificar su comportamiento. Por ejemplo, sería el caso de un proceso de promoción, en el que se elige a un/a candidato/a en lugar de otro/a que pertenece a un grupo minoritario, aunque tengan el mismo curriculum, aportando como justificación la ‘mayor idoneidad’ de uno/a sobre otro/a.

La discriminación moderna arraiga su existencia en los sesgos presentes a nivel cognitivo (estereotipos) y a nivel afectivo (prejuicios) en cada individuo, que a su vez interactúan con las normas, los valores y las creencias con respecto a la discriminación, presentes en un espacio social dado (la organización, por ejemplo) (Cortina, 2008). Esta forma de discriminación es, probablemente, la más difundida hoy en día y representa el caso más difícil de contrastar debido a la dificultad para ser identificada. No obstante, los comportamientos incívicos llegan a ser percibidos por parte de las personas dañadas y, como se ha indicado anteriormente, perjudican su bienestar y su forma de relacionarse con el entorno en el que trabajan. En dicho contexto, las percepciones de los colectivos LGB con respecto a estos actos puede afectar su comportamiento a la hora de desvelar su orientación sexual a los/as compañeros/as de trabajo.

### **El proceso de *coming out***

Como hemos indicado anteriormente, en España, por razones políticas y culturales, se ha adolecido de una falta de tradición en el estudio del *coming out* (o *disclosure*). Sin embargo, investigaciones realizadas en otros países han puesto de manifiesto que el *coming out* está asociado con estrés, baja autoestima, mayor ambigüedad y conflicto de rol o baja satisfacción con el trabajo (Ragins, 2004). A pesar

de que algunos/as expertos/as consideran que el *coming out* es un proceso dicotómico (“estar fuera o dentro del armario”), investigaciones previas han revelado que se puede llevar a cabo de múltiples formas y grados. Por ello, es muy difícil identificar rasgos comunes, aunque existen similitudes según el entorno social analizado, las variables sociodemográficas, los valores predominantes en un determinado contexto y otros factores, como por ejemplo el caso de las personas en las que la orientación sexual se cruza con otras identidades estigmatizadas, como el sexo o la etnia (Croteau et al., 2008). Por ello, junto con la información acerca de *coming out*, se recogerán datos sobre las estrategias de manejo de la identidad sexual en los contextos laborales. Dado que una orientación sexual no heteronormativa puede ser vista en algunos contextos como un estigma, en línea con la Teoría del Estigma de Goffman, si las personas perciben vivir o trabajar en un entorno hostil, pueden tener miedo a visibilizar aquel aspecto que a los ojos de los/as demás constituye un estigma, por temor a ser víctimas de actos de discriminación patentes o sutiles. Según Griffin (1992) las personas LG implementan diferentes estrategias con el objetivo de revelar u ocultar su orientación sexual. Griffin identifica cuatro estrategias:

- *Adopción (Passing)*: las personas no revelan su verdadera orientación sexual y adoptan o crean una vida heterosexual ficticia para no despertar dudas en los/as demás.
- *Encubrimiento (Covering)*: las personas no mienten con respecto a su orientación sexual, pero intentan evitar todas aquellas situaciones donde podría ser necesario dar explicaciones o detalles sobre su vida personal. Aquellos/as que adoptan esta estrategia suelen no tomar parte en los eventos sociales donde sea necesario dar información que va más allá de la tarea laboral desarrollada.

- *Implícitamente fuera (Implicitly out)*: las personas comunican información significativa a través de la cual los/as demás pueden deducir su orientación sexual.
- *Explícitamente fuera (Explicitly out)*: las personas revelan abierta y directamente su orientación sexual.

El objetivo de este estudio es reproducir una imagen próxima a la realidad del modo en que las personas LG manejan los límites entre las personas que conocen su orientación sexual y aquellas que no la conocen, en su entorno laboral y cómo este proceso puede conllevar consecuencias disfuncionales a nivel personal y organizacional.

### **3. Método**

Dada la sensibilidad de la temática tratada en España y con el objetivo de reconstruir el discurso social dominante acerca del proceso de *coming out* en el contexto laboral, los datos se recogieron a través de entrevistas en profundidad. En total se llevaron a cabo 15 entrevistas, en diferentes provincias de España<sup>2</sup> para intentar reflejar las diferencias según la zona geográfica de procedencia.

Debido a la dificultad de reclutar participantes, que investigaciones llevadas a cabo en otros países han encontrado, se utilizó el ‘método de la bola de nieve’ (*Snowballing Approach*, Miles y Huberman, 1994), que permite captar participantes a través de la activación de las redes sociales existentes. Este método resulta efectivo cuando la población que se quiere estudiar está ‘oculta’ o cuando se requiere un cierto grado de confianza hacia el investigador antes de participar. En línea con este objetivo, los/as investigadores/as entraron en contacto con la Federación Nacional de Lesbianas,



Gays, Transexuales y Bisexuales (FELGTB) que difundió, a través de su página web, el estudio entre sus afiliados. Una vez que se contactó con los primeros participantes, se les pidió que difundieran el estudio entre sus conocidos/as, activando, de esta forma, las redes sociales existentes y aumentando el tamaño de la muestra.

*Características de los/as participantes.* Para seleccionar a los/as participantes se utilizó el siguiente criterio: podían tomar parte en el estudio LG que trabajaban o habían estado trabajando en los últimos 6 meses. Aunque la metodología empleada no pretendía alcanzar la representatividad de la población analizada, en cada momento se intentó representar las diferencias existentes dentro del contexto español, teniendo en cuenta variables como la edad, las condiciones sociales y el sector de actividad. En total participaron 15 personas, 9 lesbianas y 6 gays con una edad media de 37 años. El nivel de educación de las personas entrevistadas es bastante elevado, dado que el 66,6% posee estudios de postgrado, el 26,6% estudios universitarios y los restantes estudios secundarios. Varios son los sectores representados: investigación, educación, construcción, financiero, administración pública, marketing, nuevas tecnologías. La antigüedad media en la organización de los/as 13 entrevistados/as que estaban trabajando cuando se les entrevistó es de 7 aproximadamente (tabla 1).

**Tabla 1. Características de los participantes**

	Número de Participantes	Edad media	Nivel de educación %			Antigüedad media en la empresa
			Estudios de postgrado	Estudios universitarios	Estudios secundarios	
Lesbianas	9	35,2	33,3	66,7	-	5,8*
Gays	6	39,5	16,7	66,7	16,7	10

\*Nota: En el cálculo de la antigüedad no se han tenido en cuenta las dos personas que en el momento de la entrevista estaban desempleadas.

A pesar de que somos conscientes de las diferencias existentes entre Lesbianas y Gays, el objetivo de este estudio no es subrayar las similitudes o diferencias entre los dos colectivos, sino dar una imagen global sus experiencias en el proceso de *coming out* en el entorno de trabajo.

### **Desarrollo de la entrevista en profundidad**

Tras manifestar su voluntad de tomar parte en el estudio, a través de los canales que estaban a su disposición (contacto email y telefónico), los/as investigadores/as contactaban con el/la participante para concertar la entrevista. Dada la sensibilidad del tema tratado y la dificultad que conlleva captar participantes y con el objetivo de anular los costes económicos para las personas entrevistadas, la entrevistadora se desplazó al lugar de residencia de cada uno/a de los/as participantes.

La entrevista en profundidad estaba compuesta de dos apartados fundamentales: el primero, que recogía informaciones sobre el contexto laboral (p.ej., características del puesto de trabajo, antigüedad, funciones desarrolladas, etc.) y que tenía el objetivo de

romper el hielo y de crear una relación de confidencialidad entre los actores involucrados; el segundo, que recogía datos sobre las experiencias de LG en los entornos laborales. En esta segunda sección se recogieron datos sobre las modalidades de *coming out*, sus condicionantes, consecuencias personales y organizacionales y personas involucradas, fundamentalmente. Cada entrevista duró aproximadamente entre 60 y 90 minutos.

### **Análisis**

Las entrevistas fueron grabadas y transcritas literalmente. En la fase de transcripción se utilizó la tabla de signos convencionales para la transcripción conversacional (D'Agostino, 2007) con el fin de reproducir todos aquellos aspectos de la comunicación que un texto escrito no es capaz de reflejar (interrupciones de palabras, entonación, pausas, etc.).

Una vez transcritas, se llevó a cabo el *Template Analysis* (King, 2004) de las entrevistas. Dicho análisis fue realizado con el software Atlas.ti 6.2 con el que se crearon códigos, a los que se asociaron fragmentos significativos de la conversación. El enfoque que se utilizó a la hora de identificar los códigos fue al mismo tiempo deductivo e inductivo. Por un lado, los códigos fueron creados *a priori* -en línea con el marco teórico y la literatura previa- y, por otro lado, se identificaron *a posteriori* todos aquellos códigos que no habían sido previstos con anterioridad y que resultaron importantes a la hora de entender el discurso general de los/as participantes sobre la experiencia laboral con respecto a su orientación sexual.

Dos investigadoras analizaron juntas las primeras entrevistas, con objeto de encontrar un nivel de acuerdo para establecer cómo codificar el texto. Tras esta primera etapa, una de las dos investigadoras siguió de forma independiente. Todos/as los/as investigadores/as estuvieron involucrados/as a lo largo de todo el proceso de análisis.

Los códigos identificados fueron organizados jerárquicamente y agrupados en temas y macrotemas. A continuación, se presentan los resultados del análisis de los temas identificados.

## **4. Resultados**

### **El proceso de coming out**

Dentro del macrotema *coming out*, fue posible identificar distintos ámbitos que fueron agrupados en: temas asociados a las principales estrategias de *coming out* utilizadas en el contexto del trabajo; temas relativos a los factores que condicionan a la hora de revelar la orientación sexual; y las consecuencias a nivel personal y organizacional del proceso de *coming out*. En la tabla 2, se presentan algunos ejemplos de temas, códigos y citas identificados.

### **Estrategias de coming out**

Una de las experiencias que se ha podido reconstruir, a través de las entrevistas, es el momento del *coming out* en el contexto laboral español. Siguiendo las estrategias identificadas por Griffin (1992), hemos observado que entre las personas que no revelan

su orientación sexual en el trabajo, la estrategia que se prefiere utilizar es la de *encubrimiento/covering*. Esto se traduce en evitar todas aquellas situaciones sociales (conversaciones, eventos extralaborales, etc.) donde es posible que surjan preguntas sobre la vida personal. Las personas que utilizan esta estrategia intentan crear barreras, no llegando nunca a estrechar relaciones que vayan más allá del ámbito profesional. En las situaciones donde es necesario dar información sobre la vida privada (para contestar a una pregunta directa, por ejemplo) las personas suelen hablar de su pareja de forma neutra, es decir, sin especificar su sexo.

En una minoría de los casos, las personas ocultan su orientación sexual sintiéndose obligadas a inventar una vida paralela heterosexual –estrategia de *adopción*. Algunos/as participantes hablan de la dificultad de manejar situaciones donde se les requiere hablar de su vida personal, como por ejemplo, el momento del desayuno con los/as compañeros/as donde los temas típicos giran en torno a la vida privada de cada uno/a. También en este caso el resultado es una menor profundización de las relaciones en el trabajo, intentando mantener totalmente separadas la vida personal y la vida laboral.

Las personas que suelen revelar su orientación sexual en el lugar de trabajo, lo hacen implícitamente, hablando con naturalidad de su vida personal y vehiculando toda aquella información significativa, gracias a la cual los/as compañeros/as de trabajo pueden deducir su orientación sexual –estrategia de *implícitamente fuera*. Por otro lado, son raros los casos de personas que revelan ser lesbiana o gay explícitamente –estrategia de *explícitamente fuera*. La elección de una estrategia explícita o similar, depende del grado de cercanía y de confianza alcanzado con el/la compañero/a de trabajo.

Un resultado importante se refiere a que la mayoría de los/as participantes revelan utilizar más de una estrategia, dependiendo de la persona con la que se relaciona, el grado de confianza alcanzado en dicha relación y el entorno laboral concreto. A su vez, si bien las estrategias recogidas en las categorías consideradas por la literatura se enmarcan en un contexto de proactividad por parte de la persona gay/lesbiana, también hemos encontrado que, en ocasiones, las personas son víctimas de salidas del armario involuntarias, es decir, terceras personas revelan su orientación sexual sin que la persona interesada sea informada del acontecimiento y su orientación sexual se hace visible contra su voluntad.

### **Bases de las estrategias de *coming out***

Se han identificado diversos factores relacionados con las razones aducidas por los/as participantes para utilizar una u otra estrategia de *coming out*, que describimos a continuación.

*Miedo a ser rechazados/as.* El miedo a ser aislados/as o el temor a notar alguna modificación de las relaciones existentes tras el *coming out*, es uno de los factores que influye en la elección de las estrategias de *encubrimiento* y *adopción*. Algunas de las personas entrevistadas perciben que revelar su orientación sexual podría alterar los equilibrios relacionales construidos con los/as compañeros/as de trabajo o dar lugar a procesos graduales de aislamiento.

*“Los/as demás ya lo saben”.* Algunos/as participantes consideran superfluo hablar explícitamente de su orientación sexual en el trabajo porque presumen que es una información tácitamente compartida con los/as demás. En estos casos, prevalece la regla

de “Don’t ask, don’t tell”: los/as compañeros/as de trabajo no hacen ninguna pregunta “inoportuna” sobre la vida personal y, como contraparte, la persona lesbiana o gay no cuenta ningún particular acerca de su vida fuera del trabajo. La evitación de temáticas personales se traduce en la imposibilidad de profundizar las relaciones de trabajo, factor que caracteriza, en general, los contextos laborales mediterráneos, según los entrevistados.

*Desconfianza hacia el entorno de trabajo.* El no revelar la orientación sexual puede ser el resultado de un proceso de análisis del entorno de trabajo, que ha llevado a una falta de confianza hacia las personas que lo integran. Además, se percibe que efectuar el *coming out* cuando se ocupa un puesto jerárquico superior en el grupo, podría ser perjudicial para el desarrollo del trabajo.

*Sector.* Trabajar en sectores predominantemente masculinos o en sectores tradicionales, como en el mundo de la banca, de la medicina o en los cuerpos de seguridad, dificulta el proceso de *coming out*, por los valores tradicionales que caracterizan estos ámbitos. Cabe destacar que también el tipo de clientela o usuarios con el que se trabaja puede ser un elemento que obstaculiza el proceso de *coming out*. Es el caso de las personas que trabajan dentro del sistema educativo que, por desarrollar su labor con menores, suelen esconder su orientación sexual por temor a que pueda ser utilizada en su contra, por parte de los padres o de otros/as compañeros/as.

*Características del entorno social del trabajo.* Las características de los/as compañeros/as y de la clientela con la que se trabaja, como la edad de las personas que trabajan en el mismo entorno, su nivel de formación, su *background*, etc. son elementos que pueden condicionar el proceso de *coming out*. En la mayoría de los casos y aunque existan excepciones, las personas mayores, con un nivel cultural más bajo y con un

limitado número de experiencias vitales, son las que se percibe que tienen más prejuicios hacia las personas homosexuales, según los/as entrevistados/as.

### **Consecuencias personales y organizacionales**

En línea con lo observado en estudios anteriores (Ragins, 2004), el no revelar la orientación sexual produce consecuencias tanto a nivel personal como organizacional. Se relatan, a continuación, las consecuencias personales:

*Relaciones interpersonales.* Como se ha indicado anteriormente, el crear barreras entre la vida personal y la vida laboral impide profundizar en las relaciones con los/as compañeros/as de trabajo, no pudiendo compartir información y momentos significativos que van más allá del trabajo. Las personas que no llevan a cabo el proceso de *coming out* se aíslan, muchas veces con el beneplácito de los/as compañeros/as, evitando todos los eventos sociales y las reuniones extralaborales celebradas fuera del horario de trabajo. Se desperdicia así, la oportunidad que ofrecen estos espacios comunes de convivencia para mejorar el clima laboral.

*Motivación.* Las personas que revelan su orientación sexual en los contextos laborales se sienten más motivadas a la hora de desarrollar su trabajo, porque pueden ser auténticas y coherentes en todos los ámbitos de su vida. Tienen una actitud más positiva que se refleja no sólo en la satisfacción que les produce, sino también en el trabajo que desarrollan.

*Bienestar.* Aquellos/as entrevistados/as que no llevan a cabo el *coming out* tienen un nivel más bajo de bienestar, que se traduce en estados de ánimo negativos, como tristeza, insatisfacción y, en algunos casos, de depresión.



*Carrera profesional.* Todas las personas entrevistadas coinciden en afirmar que revelar la orientación sexual en la fase de selección perjudicaría dicho proceso. Es decir, si tuvieran que competir con otros/as candidatos/as con el mismo bagaje de conocimientos, habilidades y formación, pero con una orientación heterosexual, saldrían perdiendo en el proceso de selección. Parte de los/as entrevistados/as percibe también que el resultado de una competición para una promoción interna se vería perjudicado de dar a conocer su orientación sexual.

*Justicia organizacional.* Las personas que no revelan su orientación sexual perciben mayor injusticia relativa a las ventajas laborales relacionadas con su vida personal. El no poder disfrutar de los permisos que por convenio/contrato le corresponden, como los días de permiso por matrimonio o los permisos de maternidad/paternidad, les lleva a percibir un menor nivel de justicia organizacional.

Como se puede observar, aunque parte de estas consecuencias se pueden encuadrar a un nivel individual, los resultados de algunas repercuten, a su vez, en la organización en su conjunto. Así, por ejemplo, si no se selecciona a alguien por su orientación sexual aunque sea el mejor candidato/a al puesto, no sólo se está perjudicando a una persona en concreto, sino también a la organización en su conjunto porque pierde conocimientos, habilidades y competitividad. Entre las consecuencias organizacionales, destacamos:

*Calidad del trabajo.* Según parte de las personas entrevistadas, trabajar en un entorno de trabajo no discriminatorio, donde no es necesario esconder ningún tipo de información, ayuda a centrarse en el trabajo desarrollado y a ser más productivos/as.

*Trabajo en equipo.* Trabajar sin poder hablar abiertamente de la vida personal y, sobre todo, trabajar con personas abiertamente homófobas, mina la cooperación y los resultados del trabajo en equipo.

*Intención de abandono.* Las personas que no revelan su orientación sexual en el trabajo han manifestado el deseo de dejar el puesto actual para tratar de encontrar trabajo en otra organización. Esta decisión es debida por un lado, al malestar generado por no poder integrar su vida personal con su vida laboral y, por otro lado, a la conciencia de no poder sostener a largo plazo una estrategia de *encubrimiento/adopción* sin despertar dudas en los/as compañeros/as.

## **5. Conclusiones**

A pesar de los numerosos avances que se han alcanzado en los últimos años a nivel social y legislativo y del creciente compromiso de las organizaciones para la gestión de la diversidad, las personas LG no siempre confían en su entorno de trabajo a la hora de revelar su orientación sexual, por miedo a ser víctimas de actos discriminatorios patentes o sutiles. Este hallazgo concuerda con estudios previos sobre el tema, en otros contextos culturales (e.g., King y Cortina, 2010, Ragins et al., 2001). Consecuentemente y ligada a esta desconfianza, nos encontramos que muchas personas deciden no revelar su orientación sexual en el trabajo, evitando todas aquellas situaciones que puedan dar lugar a preguntas sobre aspectos de su vida privada o creando una vida heterosexual ficticia.

Si bien las estrategias propuestas por Griffin (1992) resultan de ayuda para analizar las diversas formas de *coming out*, también es cierto que las personas tienden a

combinar diversas estrategias (Ragins, 2004), midiendo el grado de visibilidad de las mismas en función del entorno laboral (las personas concretas con las que se relacionan, el sector, etc.). En este sentido, es posible que una persona utilice una estrategia de encubrimiento con parte de los/as compañeros/as de trabajo, mientras que esté implícita o explícitamente fuera del armario con otros compañeros. A su vez, nos encontramos que el modelo de Griffin aborda estrategias proactivas de *coming out*, pero dicho proceso también puede ser involuntario y promovido por terceras personas sin el consentimiento del/de la protagonista (Ragins, 2004). Para futuras investigaciones resultaría interesante analizar cómo es posible manejar distintas estrategias de *coming out*, conjuntamente, y las consecuencias que esto conlleva tanto a nivel individual, como interpersonal o grupal. Asimismo, también sería importante analizar las consecuencias de una salida involuntaria del armario.

Se ha observado que existen elementos en el contexto laboral (sector, características de los compañeros/as, tipología de cliente con el que se trabaja, etc.) que condicionan el proceso de *coming out* y que pueden dar lugar a formas de discriminación patente o sutiles que dificultan dicho proceso. El gran reto reside en entender cómo es posible incentivar el proceso de *coming out*, dados los efectos positivos que esto supone en un entorno libre de discriminación, en aquellos contextos donde hay más factores que juegan en su contra y limitar las consecuencias negativas. El punto de partida podría ser tomar conciencia de que los efectos perjudiciales para el bienestar del/de la trabajador/a (como la calidad de las relaciones en el trabajo, su nivel de motivación, etc.) pueden estar incentivados por aquellos comportamientos que Cortina (2008) define como discriminación moderna (comportamientos discriminatorios ambiguos y aparentemente inofensivos) y que, como se ha comentado anteriormente,

repercuten en la calidad del trabajo, en la interacción con el equipo y en la intención de abandonar el puesto.

Los datos del presente estudio nos proporcionan una primera imagen del proceso de *coming out* en el trabajo en el contexto español y nos muestran las dificultades que las personas LG afrontan durante el mismo. Si bien la legislación ha dado pasos importantes para facilitar y normalizar esta situación, aún existen lagunas sobre el desarrollo real de este proceso y las consecuencias personales e institucionales del mismo, que merecen la atención de académicos y profesionales de los Recursos Humanos. ¿Cuál es el papel que juegan las organizaciones? ¿A qué nivel organizacional se puede y se debe intervenir para promover un contexto de trabajo libre de prejuicios? ¿Qué estrategias implementar y cómo medir su efectividad?

Este estudio tiene implicaciones prácticas para los contextos de trabajo, dada la necesidad de implementar como parte de las políticas organizacionales la inclusión y el respeto a la diversidad. Gestionar de forma adecuada la diversidad y promover entornos donde se respete la dignidad de los/as empleados/as garantizarán no sólo mejores condiciones de trabajo y bienestar, sino también que dichos/as empleados/as quieran seguir formando parte de la organización y sean más productivos (King et al., 2010). Incluir la diversidad sexual en la definición de diversidad, crear redes de apoyo para las personas LGTB son sólo el primer paso en el desarrollo de políticas para el respeto de la diversidad. El incipiente trabajo de Githens (2011) en esta dirección, apunta a la necesidad de promover programas formativos dirigidos a eliminar los sesgos latentes en el entorno laboral.

Asimismo, deberíamos reflexionar sobre el papel que desempeña el colectivo heterosexual a la hora de facilitar el proceso de *coming out*. ¿Quiénes son los actores

involucrados en el proceso de *disclosure*? Son diversas las cuestiones que aún no han sido analizadas en el contexto de las implicaciones de la orientación sexual en el trabajo.

Por último, entre las limitaciones de este estudio es preciso señalar que, a pesar de que el mismo no tiene como objetivo la generalización de los resultados al contexto español, entre los participantes no había personas que trabajaban en el Norte de la Península ni en las islas. Además, el nivel de activismo en asociaciones LGTB, la ausencia de personas con un nivel de educación más bajo y de personas de generaciones anteriores podrían haber condicionado el discurso que se ha tratado de reconstruir. A pesar de que el método de la bola de nieve pueda haber reducido los sesgos producidos por estas cuestiones, consideramos conveniente tener en cuenta estas limitaciones en futuros estudios. Además, aunque por razones metodológicas este estudio no ha contado con la experiencia de las personas bisexuales y transexuales, futuras investigaciones deberían centrarse también en estos colectivos y, por otro lado, subrayar las diferencias y similitudes existentes entre lesbianas y gays.

**Tabla 2. Ejemplos de citas por códigos**

Temas	Códigos	Citas
<b>Estrategias de <i>coming out</i></b>	Encubrimiento	<p>C_106: [...] yo he evitado hablar de mi vida personal</p> <p>E_107: contestabas a las preguntas que te hacían ellos</p> <p>C_108: claro pero no creaba enlaces ni preguntaba para que luego no me preguntaran a mí tampoco mucho. Lo justo, no me interesaban las conversaciones, no me interesaba hablar con la gente en general, entonces pues hablaba poco (L)</p>
	Implícitamente fuera	<p>S_58: no, en ese momento yo no estaba casado. Pero sí que es verdad que mis compañeros saben que yo vivo con A. porque yo habitualmente, antes de la boda, hablaba «Sí, porque yo vivo con A.», bueno, a lo mejor no he dicho vivo con A. pero saben que siempre estoy con A., «Pues sí, yo y A. hemos salido este fin de semana». Entonces bueno, pues es lógico [...] se sabe, aunque no haya dicho «Mira, soy gay y vivo con A.» pero realmente lo</p>

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		saben, ¿no? (G)
<b>Factores determinantes</b>	Miedo a ser rechazado/a	Y_166: que no me atrevo por el temor a...lo mejor no me rechazan, pero...de hecho, la mayoría de las respuestas no han sido de rechazo (L)
	Sector	A_232: también es que es una profesión [ <i>construcción</i> ] que no es la más gay, podemos decir. Es que hay profesiones ¿no? El peluquero, o si trabajas en una tienda, o telemarketing, bueno, que hasta queda bien ¿no?, pero es que estamos en un de esto tan cerrado de constructores, de albañiles, que es la propia profesión la que...más que la empresa (G)
<b>Consecuencias personales/ organizacionales</b>	Relaciones interpersonales	AL_330: el no hablar consigues que te distancias de la gente, eso sí, el que te calles, el que no digas nada. La gente simplemente ve que no comentas, no ven confianza por tu parte hacia tus compañeros (L)
	Calidad del trabajo	C_118: [...] hay un grupo de gente que no me está permitiendo expresarme como yo soy, entonces sí, obviamente esto afecta el bienestar, la felicidad, la calidad del

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trabajo también. Creo que a lo mejor puede repercutir positivamente porque le dedicas más tiempo o también negativamente porque a lo mejor le ves menos sentido o no tienes ganas de trabajar o estás deprimida, ¿no? Pero sí, es importante para expresar lo que tú eres, siempre (L)

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## **Notas**

<sup>1</sup> Este estudio se centrará exclusivamente en los colectivos de Lesbianas y Gays. Las razones de esta elección se explicarán a lo largo del texto.

<sup>2</sup> Las entrevistas se llevaron a cabo en Alicante, Madrid, Murcia, Sevilla, Toledo y Valencia en el primer trimestre de 2012.

**Article 3:**  
**Negotiating boundaries:**  
**Disclosure dynamics in Spanish workplaces<sup>7</sup>**

**Donatella Di Marco**

*Universidad de Sevilla*

**Helge Hoel**

*Universidad de Manchester*

**Alicia Arenas**

*Universidad de Sevilla*

**Lourdes Munduate**

*Universidad de Sevilla*

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<sup>7</sup> Article sent to Gender, Work and Organisation

## **Negotiating boundaries: Disclosure dynamics in Spanish workplaces**

### **Abstract**

This article focuses on disclosure of sexual orientation at work, stressing the interactional dynamics which take place throughout the whole process. Through the lens of Boundary Theory, we argue that disclosure might be facilitated by or result from the integration/segmentation of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people's personal life at work, in conjunction with the collaboration of active/passive third-parties. The boundaries between both domains are, therefore, (un)consciously negotiated by LGB employees and their co-workers. In term of Spain, this process is affected by values and beliefs associated with Spanish culture (e.g., gender roles, religion). In order to understand dynamics and the role of culture in the daily negotiations of boundaries, 39 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Spanish LGB employees were carried out. Results demonstrated that LGB employees and co-workers, affected by the social-cultural context, are responsible for the construction of boundaries, playing an important role in the dynamics which are evident during every interaction at work.

*Keywords: LGB employees, Disclosure dynamics, Boundary Theory, Workplace, Socio-cultural context.*

## Introduction

Sharing information about our personal lives at work is the prelude to creating deeper human relationships (Rumens, 2008), above all in those cultural contexts where interpersonal relationships form an integral part of the fabric of the workplace. Thus, to build stronger relationships at work, lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) employees might wish to take a first step, which would involve disclosing their sexual orientation, implicitly or explicitly, breaking down the presumption of heterosexuality. Past research considers disclosure as a process dependent on the strategic choices of LGB people, who are considered to decide when, where and to what degree to come out. It is of concern that little evidence exists about the role played by third-parties (“the audience”<sup>1</sup>) in this process, in positively facilitating and supporting it or, by contrast in making the process more difficult.

We consider disclosure facilitated by, and resulting from, the integration/segmentation process between personal and work domains that affect people at work. Due to the interactional and dynamic nature of the demarcation of different life domains according to Boundary Theory (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009; Nippert-Eng, 1996), we will try to examine to what extent the audience is responsible for the co-construction of boundaries between LGB people’s personal and work life.

To this end, we will focus on the Spanish cultural context where the legislative framework to protect and affirm LGB people’ rights appears to be one of the most progressive in the world (Martínez and Dodge, 2010; Soley-Beltran and Coll-Planas, 2011). Nevertheless, the recent history of Spain, characterized by a long dictatorship preceded by a short but very intense time of evolution in terms of individual and social

liberties (the Second Republic – 1933-1936), suggests that acquired rights should not be taken for granted. The existence, therefore, of conservative fringes of the Spanish political system, whose aim is to re-establish an illiberal legislative framework, representing a deterioration in the evolution of women and LGBs' rights, is a matter of concern. Therefore, a gap between the ideal situation described by the legislative framework and the daily experience of Spanish LGB people is identified. Moreover, no previous study has documented how the disclosure process is conducted by Spanish LGB employees and how values and beliefs, associated with Spanish culture and historical developments, affect this process.

This paper makes several contributions to the debate about the disclosure process: firstly, it emphasizes the interactional nature of disclosure, identifying the dynamics involved and the role played by the audience during this process through the lens of Boundary Theory; secondly, it explores strategies used by Spanish LGB employees to disclose their sexual orientation; and thirdly, it frames and further considers these processes within a particular socio-cultural context, something previous papers have overlooked.

In terms of structure, we will start by analyzing the prevalent theories about the disclosure process and sexual identity management at work; then we introduce Boundary Theory in order to link it with the disclosure process in a third section. Following on from this, we will explore socio-cultural factors associated with the Spanish context considered relevant to our study. Having outlined the methodology, the results are presented and explored before we synthesize our findings in a discussion section.



## Disclosure at work

Until recently, and even today in some jurisdictions, LGB people are the victims of negative and discriminatory acts (Council of Europe, 2009). Sexual orientations outside a heteronormative scheme (Warner, 1991) have been stigmatized (Goffman, 1963), making the revelation of non-heterosexual orientation at work not an obvious choice (Griffith and Hebl, 2002). As a result, since the early 1990s, what is referred to as sexual identity management in the workplace has received special attention from scholars. There are two salient pieces in the reconfiguration of the complex puzzle of this topic: understanding what strategies LGB employees use in order to disclose their sexual orientation (Anderson et al., 2001; Button, 2004; Griffin, 1992; Woods, 1993), and the positive and negative effects it produces at several levels – personal, interpersonal, and organizational (Bowen and Blackmon, 2003; Button, 2001; Day and Schoenrade, 1997; Di Marco et al., 2013; Griffith et al., 2002; Ragins, 2004; Ragins et al., 2007; Ragins and Cornwell, 2001; Smith and Ingram, 2004). In order to establish how LGB employees communicate or indeed cover up their sexual orientation at work, Griffin (1992) identified four strategies that American lesbian and gay (LG) teachers apply to manage their sexual orientation at work: employees might *pass* as heterosexuals or *cover* their sexuality, avoiding conversations and social moments where information about their personal life might be required. By contrast, LG employees might disclose their sexual orientation, being *implicitly out*, by giving information about their personal life (for instance, talking about their social life or showing a photo of their partner to their work colleagues) or being *explicitly out*, which

implies talking openly and frankly about themselves, thus disclosing their own sexual orientation.

Recently, comprehensive and more complex models were introduced to explain how identity management takes place at work (Croteau et al., 2008). In line with this, Clair et al. (2005) and Ragins (2008) adopted Goffman's Stigma Theory (1963), which focuses on the experience of those holding stigmatized or negative spoiled identities, while Lidderdale et al. (2007) apply the Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent et al., 2002), which for its part explains how the interconnection of several elements shape career choices. Individuals' differences in terms of self-monitoring, propensity toward risk-taking, self-efficacy (Lidderdale et al., 2007), the personal motives people have to tell about or disclose their sexuality (Clair et al., 2005) and outcome expectations (Lidderdale et al., 2007; Ragins, 2008), are all seen to affect the decision to disclose LGB sexual orientation at work. Moreover, centrality of sexual identity (Ragins, 2008), which reflects to what extent the sexual identity is incorporated and used to define the self-concept (the greater prominence given to sexual identity in defining oneself, the more it is central for individuals), and personal development (Clair et al., 2005) seem to motivate the disclosure of sexual orientation. It is considered that both context (Clair et al., 2005; Lidderdale et al., 2007) and environmental support (Ragins, 2008) play an important role in determining which strategy to use. Altogether, the evaluation of these antecedents will affect the disclosure *decision* (Ragins, 2008), their *choice* (Clair et al., 2005) or *performance* (Lidderdale et al., 2007). In fact, once all the factors cited above are considered, LGB employees are seen as the sole protagonists of a conscious decision-making process in disclosing their sexual orientation at work. Although a handful of past studies consider those situations in which the disclosure process is

influenced by the presumptions of the audience, where the LGB person appears to fit a stereotypical image of gays and lesbians (e.g., Rumens and Broomfield, 2012; Williams et al., 2009) that is so widespread in society, past models (e.g., Clair et al., 2005; Lidderdale et al., 2007; Ragins, 2008) do not take this into account. Moreover, even if the situation is not considered favourable for LGB people to disclose, sometimes disclosure is carried out by a third person, without the consent of LGB people themselves. In such situations, which result in the person being 'outed' (Ragins, 2004), LGB employees have lost control over the disclosure process altogether. Even when they decide to talk about their sexual orientation, integrating their personal life experiences (directly or indirectly associated with their sexuality) in the workplace, the audience's reactions might ignore or suppress this information forcing LGB people to drop giving details about their personal life.

According to Ragin's model (2008), which distinguishes between work and non-work settings, people decide for themselves the degree of disclosure across different domains: for example, people who are 'out' to some degree in their private lives, might be open in a different way at work or cover up their sexuality completely, thus creating a disconnection between their identity states; or they might disclose or cover up their sexual orientation to the same extent in both domains, creating an integration between identity states. Identity disconnections, in turn, affect LGB people's well-being, producing stress and anxiety. Although this model sheds light on the relationships between different life domains, it considers the degree of disclosure and level of integration as the result of LGB employees' personal choice, not bearing in mind the role of the audience in establishing the boundaries between different domains.

## **Boundary Theory**

Boundary Theory is a theoretical framework which refers to what people do in order to create, maintain and modify boundaries between different life domains, thereby reducing the complexity of the world in which they live (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Boundaries between domains delineate physically separated arenas, as well as those separated in time from each other, and individuals' personal predisposition to play the social role/s required. Traditionally, scholars have studied the construction and the transition between the work and the home/personal life domains (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009; Nippert-Eng, 1996) and the effects of negative spillover (Goode, 1960; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Wu et al., 2012) and positive spillover (Chen et al., 2009; Powell and Greenhaus, 2010).

Boundaries between two or more domains might be more or less weak and flexible, depending on the preferences people have to segment or integrate them. Researchers imagine people placed on an integration-segmentation continuum (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996), highlighting that pure cases do not exist, because the choice to integrate or segment will depend on every single social situation (Kreiner et al., 2009).

Moreover, a person's desire regarding whether to integrate or segment different domains could be violated by other people. Kreiner and colleagues (2009) observed that people who wish to segment their personal and work life frequently have to cope with the intrusion of actors around them who tend to merge different domains. For example, in some cases people are obliged to play roles connected with their job in the

personal domain, due to continuous calls or emails from their colleagues/supervisors/clients; or because of excessive workload which requires them to work at home. By way of contrast, people might wish to integrate their personal life into the work environment, feeling free to talk about their personal experiences with actors in their workplace, but might encounter resistance in doing so. Obviously, the work-personal life nexus is not unidirectional: people might wish to integrate/segment their personal life at work and, equally, their work experience at home.

Because of the role played by other people, building and maintaining boundaries is not a unilateral process, but a social action where “the individual is an active agent in the co-construction of boundaries” (Kreiner et al., 2009: 705). Equally, this can be considered a continuous work in progress, and results from a process of negotiation and co-construction which takes place during every single social interaction (Kreiner et al., 2009). Boundaries might be strong or weak and they are created by (unconscious) negotiation with other actors as well as by integration/segmentation of social rules present within an environment (formal and informal). When the result of the interaction with the environment is not in line with the person’s own personal wish to integrate or segment, it could generate conflict. In this respect *distance violation* refers to the impossibility of integrating different domains, while the situation in which people are not able to segment different spheres of their life due to the actions of others (e.g., Kreiner et al., 2009) is identified as *intrusion violation*. Both violations produce work-personal life conflict (and *vice versa*), that in turn affects individuals’ well-being (e.g., Frone et al., 1992).

## The disclosure process and boundary theory

The disclosure process at work might be considered as being facilitated by, and resulting from the attempt to integrate part of LGB employees' personal life at work (figure 1).

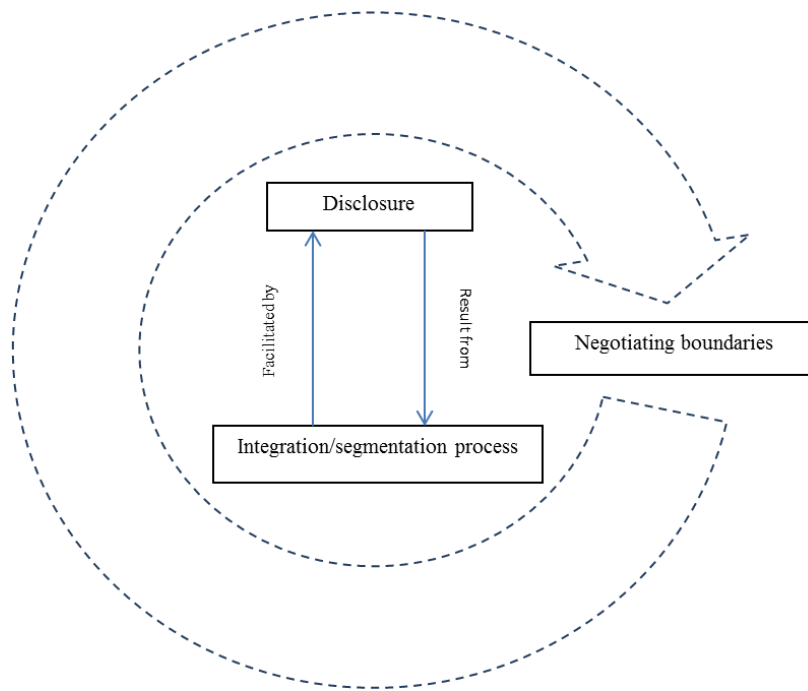


Fig. 1. Disclosure at work and integration/segmentation process

Therefore, people might decide to disclose their sexual orientation in order to feel comfortable when they share their personal experiences with co-workers; or disclosure might be the natural outcome of the integration process. For a variety of reasons, e.g. perceptions about their work context and personal characteristics (Griffin, 1992; Woods, 1993), LGB employees might decide not to disclose their sexual orientation at work, opting instead for segmenting their personal life and their work life. However, although LGB employees might have a clear idea about how to manage their

sexual identity at work, the audience may play a key role in determining the effectiveness of their initial intention. For instance, co-workers might ignore information offered about their LGB colleagues' personal life, thus counter-acting attempts by LGB people to share their personal life at work, consequently generating a *distance violation*. Alternatively, colleagues might force LGB people who fit stereotypical images of homosexuality widespread in that particular society, to give more details about their personal life, generating an *intrusion violation*. In that sense, the boundaries between LGBs' personal and work life are co-constructed by all the actors involved and are, therefore, not the result of their choices alone. Perhaps for this reason one may argue that it is not correct to define the disclosure process entirely as a "choice" (Smith et al., 1998) because, although LGB people may be the main players and retain most control over this process, social interactions affect the sexual identity management process at work.

Our study aspires to identify how Spanish LGBs manage their sexual identity at work by integrating or segmenting their personal life at work, taking into consideration socio-cultural factors which might play a role during the disclosure process, thus responding to the paucity of research about disclosure in Spanish workplaces.

### **Socio-cultural context**

Although some studies analyzed the role played by socio-cultural factors in the disclosure process (e.g., Ozturk, 2011), previous models of sexual identity management do not include factors specifically associated with societal values in the society in which

the disclosure takes place, and which are determined by its historical and socio-political evolution. In fact, past models consider context as an important predictor of the choice of disclosure strategies (Clair et al., 2005; Lidderdale et al., 2007; Ragins, 2008), in terms of environmental support (Ragins, 2008), organizational diversity climate, legislative framework and proximal interpersonal context (Clair et al., 2005; Lidderdale et al., 2007), but exclude the socio-cultural context. It is to such factors associated with recent Spanish history and socio-political development, and how they might affect LGBs' disclosure decisions at work, that we now turn.

Over recent decades, Spain has been at the centre of profound political and social transformations. The end of Franco's dictatorship in 1975 represents the symbolic starting point of that change, unlocking democratic transition. Franco's regime was characterized by a strong limitation of pluralism, the creation of an authoritarian system, and the reduction of freedom at personal and political levels, with the imposition of National-Catholicism, an imperialist ideology strictly anchored within Catholic values (Osborne, 2011). The progress initiated during the Second Republic (1933-1936) was reversed in terms of individual and social rights, eliminating divorce, stressing the inequality between women and men and keeping education under the control of the Church. The use of religion by Franco was part of a political project in order to control people through powerful sentiments, e.g. shame and guilt (Osborne, 2011), counteracting the secularization of Spanish society which had taken place during the preceding Second Republic (Casanova, 2001). A new era of puritanism and moralism was established, condemning every public behaviour considered "frivolous" or "indecent" (Abella, 1996).



The position of the family as the core of Spanish society was emphasized and strengthened and women were relegated to the home to care for their family, for which they received official and compulsory training. Together such measures reinforced gender roles, which in turn affected the construction of public and private domains, and the discourse that characterized each of them. The distinction between public and private spheres also affected the construction of the range of (in)admissible issues identified with each of them, with sexuality<sup>2</sup> and any public display of affection being relegated to a private sphere, in line with the dominant moralism. Moreover, the division between these two domains condemned women to invisibility in the public domain (Abella, 1996). Given this premise, it is understandable that LGB people, subjected to persecution and punishment, survived only by keeping a low profile.

As has been noted above, although Spain has been the at centre of formidable social change in the last couple of decades, introducing in 2005 a new gender-neutral marriage law allowing same-sex marriage, and simultaneously providing LGB couples with the opportunity to adopt (Law 13/2005, 1 July), the legacy of its recent past is still visible in the heteronormative system (Warner, 1991) affecting the daily lives of LGB people. The traditional family, with two individuals of different gender at its centre, is still the core institution of Spanish society and only recently, thanks to legal reforms, a new family concept is starting to emerge. Moreover, the distinction between the public and private spheres is still valid for most LGBs (Velez-Pellegrini, 2008). Whilst (hetero)sexual discourses have moved out of private spheres and entered daily, public conversation, those that allude to a same-sex relationship are still relegated to the private domain, still generating embarrassed reactions from the audience or disclosees

(Velez-Pellegrini, 2008). Therefore, puritanical attitudes still remain for LGBs as opposed to Spanish heterosexuals.

As the historical and cultural factors examined above are likely to affect disclosure dynamics and how and to what extent Spanish LGB employees integrate their personal lives at work, they will inform the investigation we now embark upon.

## **Methodology**

### *Sample*

In order to draw an accurate picture of how LGB employees carry out the disclosure process in Spanish workplaces, we carried out 39<sup>3</sup> in-depth semi-structured interviews between March and December 2012, with people who were working at the time of the interview or had been working within the last six months.

The justification for the choice of a qualitative method is two-fold: first, the study was exploratory and interpretative in nature. Second, a qualitative approach allows for generating trust within the relationship between interviewee and interviewer, consequently enriching the amount and the depth of information obtained (King, 2004a), in order to reconstruct LGB people's work experience.

Geographically, the sample was drawn from across most areas of mainland Spain. In terms of sample size, recruitment of new participants stopped when saturation in terms of analysis was reached. In total, 24 lesbians and 15 gay men participated, on the basis of their self-reported sexual orientation; the mean age was 36.18.

### *Data collection*

Due to the sensitivity of the issue and the difficulty of identifying participants, people were recruited through a snowballing approach (Miles and Huberman, 1994). To support this approach, the study outline was sent to the Spanish National LGTB Federation (FELGTB – *Federación Estatal de Lesbianas, Gays, Transexuales y Bisexuales*) which publicized it on their website and circulated information about the study to the Federation's member organizations with a request for individual members to contact the research-team. These volunteers then assisted in recruiting interviewee subjects among their own personal contacts. In this way it was possible to reach a sufficient number of participants and simultaneously to overcome the bias produced by recruiting people exclusively from LGTB associations (Meyer and Wilson, 2009).

In order to avoid biases associated with different interviewers' personal styles, only one person was responsible for carrying out all the interviews.

The interview questions were divided into three main sections<sup>4</sup>: in the first section, information was collected about the participant's work context. In the second part, participants were asked about how they manage their sexual orientation at work, including information about reactions within their work environment. In the last part, social and cultural elements important for the participant's work experience (e.g., religion, colleagues' values) were explored. The questions only acted as a guide for the interviews. In addition, participants' socio-demographic information was collected. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

Interviews were carried out across Spain in the participant's choice of location, to limit the cost of participation. In order to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity, the interviewer met participants in a public and neutral space (e.g., a coffee bar), but

never at their workplace, in order to be sure that interviewees felt free to talk openly about their experiences.

### *Data analysis*

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and then, using the software Atlas.ti 6.2 (Scientific Software Development, 1999), we carried out template analyses (King, 2004b). Codes were created *a priori* on the basis of a review of the literature and a debate between researchers. Coding was undertaken by members of research team and subsequently compared, with new codes identified when necessary and disagreement resolved by internal debate.

This operation was useful to identify other important codes *a posteriori*, modifying the template *in itinere*. During the process, codes became more specific and finally it was possible to aggregate them into themes (e.g., disclosure dynamics), and organize them hierarchically.

In the following part, we present the main results of the analyses process.

## **Findings**

When the interviewer asked participants if they were “out” at work, it was possible to identify a variety of strategies LGB people apply in order to disclose their sexual orientation at work. The interconnection of three groups of factors triggers the decision for which potential strategies LGB employees would use: firstly, individual differences, including the centrality of LGB identity (Ragins, 2008), the level of self-monitoring (Clair et al., 2005), and past experiences (Lidderdale et al., 2007); secondly,

cost-benefit considerations (Ragins, 2008), for example fear of victimization and discrimination, on the one hand, or creating stronger relationships with co-workers, on the other; and thirdly, the work environment (Clair et al., 2005; Lidderdale et al., 2007; Ragins, 2008), such as working in a male-dominated sector, working with children, or occupying a position of power. However, it soon became clear that the final strategies people applied did not necessary depend on LGBs' preference alone, but on the interpersonal dynamics engaged in daily by them and their co-workers.

Using Griffin's model (1992) we noted that Spanish LGB people might be (implicitly or explicitly) out with some colleagues, integrating their personal experiences at work, and carefully hide their sexual orientation from others. However, bearing in mind that the use of a particular strategy is not definitive, but the result of many daily choices (e.g., Croteau et al., 2008), we observed that many people still cover or hide their sexuality in the workplace, or have done it at some point in their working life. Consequently, not revealing their sexuality at work would produce a strong boundary between personal life and working life (Kreiner et al., 2009), because of the impossibility of talking openly about experiences and people who are important in LGB people's lives, whether directly or indirectly connected with their sexual orientation (for instance, taking part in an event organized by the LGB community – such as a conference about LGB people's rights - or talking about a partner).

By covering their sexual orientation, people realize that sexuality actually became a central part of their identity, as explained by Nuria<sup>5</sup>:

I have never lied, I preferred to omit but it's very difficult because you end up talking using neutral pronouns, pronouns that nobody uses <laugh>. You acquire

impressive language skills, because you learn to say things without actually saying them. But at the end you confuse yourself and realize «Fuck, if I enjoy something I can't tell anyone». [...] Being able to talk about my life, about things...about my life. Of course, I'm lesbian, but it isn't the core of my life. At the end, it becomes the core of your life because it's the only thing you can't say so everything gravitates around it (Nuria, L)

This somewhat contradicts models of disclosure which emphasize the connection between the centrality of identity and the self-verification process (Ragins, 2008). In other words, the greater the part sexuality plays in someone's identity, the more they would desire other people to recognize this part of themselves, but in our study, although Nuria prefers do not reveal herself as lesbian, by adopting a covering strategy this transforms sexuality into a central part of her self-perception.

Furthermore, since "same-sex relationships are widely perceived only in sexual terms" by many heterosexuals (Herek, 1996: 305), Spanish LGB employees appear to perceive their personal life as an issue "which belongs to the private life and it's necessary not to confuse what is public and private". By contrast, due to the "desexualized nature" of heterosexuals' discourses (Herek, 1996), heterosexuals are more able to integrate their personal life at work without breaking the rule of appropriateness, as suggested by Silvia:

There are always some people who are annoyed because they think it isn't necessary to tell [*about sexual orientation*], right? My colleague talks about his girlfriend, or another says she's made a cake [*for her partner*], or another one has flirted

with a beautiful girl...sometimes they believe telling these things is normal, but when others one are homosexuals it isn't appropriate, right? (Silvia, L)

Thus, when Spanish LGBs talk about their daily experiences and those associated with them, such as a partner, the sexual side of their relationship becomes the perceived core of their discourses - even if they make no reference to sex at any time. Consequently, many Spanish LGB employees prefer not to tell anything about their personal life, covering up their sexual orientation at work and creating strong boundaries between personal and work life.

#### *Disclosure dynamics applying the Boundary Theory*

Previously we stated that the disclosure of sexual orientation at work can be seen as facilitated by, and resulting from the integration/segmentation process of different domains, which in turn is the result of a co-construction of boundaries carried out by LGBs and co-workers. In other words, LGBs and heterosexuals as well as potential LGB co-workers are co-protagonists of a series of dynamics on which disclosure and integration/segmentation depend.

Disclosure dynamics can have different manifestations, however. They might be primarily LGB person-driven and involve numerous conscious and unconscious behaviours used by LGB employees in order to establish to what extent their workplace is a supportive and safe environment. Hence, before integrating/segmenting their personal life at work, LGB people explore the context, observe their co-workers, and ask questions in order to “test the waters” (Day et al., 1997):

It's always the same. You select, observe, test the waters, and see how they can take it in order to decide if you tell or do not tell. (Alicia, L)

In assessing their situation Spanish LGBs ask questions about issues they consider provide vital clues, such as political views and religious beliefs because they perceive conservative and religious co-workers to be less tolerant. Broadly speaking, colleagues' degree of tolerance towards other people, especially toward minority groups, determines the level of trust they place in them for revealing their sexual orientation. Therefore, LGB people, "over the years, acquire tools" through which they are able to extract significant information about other people's general opinions and points of view.

When starting a new work relationship, LGB employees need to carry out a more intense observation process to understand to what extent they can integrate their personal life at work. Lara, describing the moment when she meets a new employee, especially when this is a man, talks of these dynamics in terms of "process analysis":

You have to focus more and you start asking questions, of course. Yes, you want to make sense of places he visits and if you understand he would want to flirt with you, but he's a good person and you would want to have a friendship with him, you start to tell things [*about your personal life*]. (Lara, L)

In the last example, the low visibility of Lara plays a decisive role within the disclosure dynamics. Since she does not represent the stereotypical image Spanish



heterosexuals have about lesbians, such as “[...] wearing jeans, checked shirt, short hair, masculine, a lumberjack or butch”, it could be more difficult for others to imagine that she might be a lesbian. That said, she describes relationships with men at work as being more problematic because it is more difficult to challenge their presumption of heterosexuality. Lara continues, pointing out that sometimes the conversation does not allow her to integrate experiences of her private life. Therefore, to weaken the boundaries between different life domains in order to communicate her sexuality, she needs to make a clear statement. Thus, existing stereotypes become part of the dynamics, facilitating or preventing the disclosure (or indeed covering up) process through which the integration (or segmentation) of the personal/private lives of Spanish LGBs at work takes place.

Perceived visibility and stereotypes appear to be central factors affecting the disclosure dynamics because they give rise to a parallel exploration process driven by the audience. In fact, the audience might be intrigued by the lack of information about their LGB colleagues who wish to segment work and personal domains (temporarily or permanently, partially or totally) and who do not reproduce the heteronormal feminine/masculine image widely held in society (Losert, 2008).

#### *Forced integration*

Conforming to stereotypes encourages co-workers to ask more direct questions, to spread rumours within the organization or, *vice versa*, to interrupt or withdraw from communication with an LG colleague, in order to avoid “embarrassing” situations for both parties. The first aspect of this dilemma is articulated by one interviewee, explaining how some colleagues became part of the dynamics connected with the

concealment process, thwarting his effort to segment different domains and pushing him into a *forced integration* of his personal life at work.

Yes, I feel pressure, from a couple of [*female*] colleagues who wanted a friendship with me, and that somehow they know [*that he is gay*]. I don't know, maybe I'm camp, maybe...I don't know if when I walk on the street people say "This is camp [*mariquita*]" <he laughs> I don't know. Well, there were some colleagues, mainly women, right? [...] they wanted me to tell them [...] in order to strengthen the friendships [...] and I felt... forced. (Julio, G)

According to one participant, direct, or indirect inquisitive questions arise when one does not correspond to the masculine image widespread in society (Smith et al., 1998). Therefore, being effeminate or remaining unmarried, even for heterosexual men, generates curiosity, which is more pronounced when reaching a certain age:

You are 30-35 years old...this is a horrible age, because you have got your degree, but you haven't got a girlfriend or boyfriend...so questions start (Javier, G).

Moreover, the awareness of being part of interactional dynamics and the role of stereotypes might also affect future disclosure behaviours, especially if people wish to cover their sexuality, segmenting work and personal domains:

[...] when you are gay you try to talk as little as possible because if it is obvious [*this gayness*]...you try to move as little as possible, so that you end up becoming wary.  
(Andres, G)

A radical kind of forced integration, is being outed (e.g., Ragins, 2004), that is, the disclosure process is carried out by a third-party without the consent of LGB people themselves. Sometimes, disclosure can result from rumours spread within the organization. LGB employees might decide to disclose their sexual orientation to some colleagues (e.g. Croteau et al., 2008), perhaps because they have created a closer relationship with them. Co-workers who know might pass this information on and in doing so fail to take account of LGBs' decisions not to come out to the majority of their colleagues. This scenario applied to one gay participant who used a cover strategy, but was aware that everybody knew about his sexual orientation because a colleague had gossiped about it. In this case the 'closet' is being transformed into a shop window revealing a well-known secret even if nobody talks openly about it. Being outed is perhaps one of the least controllable forms of disclosure dynamics, particularly in small towns where people know each other and social networks are denser (Ragins, 2004).

#### *Forced segmentation*

Disclosure dynamics also appear to be present when LGB employees decide to be more visible, talking openly about their personal life and, in doing so, integrate experiences and people connected with their sexual orientation.

Having tested the waters, integrating one's personal life is often a gradual process. Initially LGB employees might start the ball rolling by giving some signals

about themselves and their sexual orientation –being (potentially) implicitly out - even if the audience reaction might pay no attention to their effort, as highlighted in the following example:

[...] I was staying abroad and they told me [*her office mates*], "They have made us remove the poster [*about LGBT rights*], the one that you put up." So when I went back, I went to talk to her [*the professor in the department who asked for the poster to be removed*], I said I had put up the poster and that I wanted to leave it there. Well, I felt frustrated, right? Also, especially at that time, when not everybody knew, right? [*The poster*] was my way of saying "I'm here", right? And putting that poster up there [*in the office*] was like "Ok, you can be lesbian, but nobody is supposed to know, right?" This conversation never happened, they never told me this, but my perception was "Right, we haven't any problem with you, but we don't talk about this issue." (Elena, L)

In this case, the poster was an attempt to be visible to the majority of her colleagues, but she hit a brick wall, with the audience preventing her attempt to come out, and to talk openly about her personal life at work. The professor's reaction was attributed to her age, another potential prejudicial factor which LGBs take into account when assessing the situation.

However, even radical and unambiguous attempts to integrate one's personal experiences at work might not be sufficient to disclose sexual orientation as the story below suggests:

[...] I began in a natural way, little by little, because I talked about my partner, so I said “I was with Inés... [*her partner*]», so I believed that it was very evident, very clear, right? But obviously it isn't, because there were people that said “[*Inés*], she's your flatmate.” (Marta, L)

Although many participants had tried to integrate their personal lives at work in a natural way, they were let down by their colleagues and the barrier built by them, due to the presumption of heterosexuality and, in many cases, the low visibility of LGBs because they did not conform to prevailing stereotypical images (Smith et al., 1998). Moreover, even when LGB people explicitly state their sexuality, the audience might encourage a *forced segmentation* (Kreiner et al., 2009), consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly. For example, co-workers might choose to “ignore” or “correct” the information about the same-sex partner as in the following account:

[...] It seems that what they hear leads them to correct the word or their minds are closed to this possibility. They think that they misheard, I don't know if they think so. So then the same word again comes out [*girlfriend - novia*], but again they correct it to masculine [*form of the word*] with regard to me, [...] “Ah yes! How are you getting on with your boyfriend?” “How is your boyfriend?”, but I have said girlfriend, but they use it again [*the word boyfriend - novio*]. (María, L)

In Maria's contribution, it is possible to read a feeling of astonishment and frustration due to the ineffective communication with her colleagues. Similarly, sometimes heterosexual co-workers tend not to get the message or they pretend to

ignore what they are being told or the meaning of the information, as they are afraid they might have ‘mis’-understood and offended their colleague by attributing to them a homosexual orientation.

Another possible third-party reaction is represented by silence (Ward and Winstanley, 2006). The absence of questions about LGB people’s partners and personal life from co-workers invalidates any effort by LGB employees to construct permeable domains:

[...] people know, and also other people tell me that they know, right? But nobody ever –among people who are not very close to me- talks to me, nobody ever asks me, nobody ever asks about my partner. (Elena, L)

Lack of communication also impedes the opportunity for building relationships and might cause isolation. Therefore, if the audience does not listen or fails to interact, LGB people might avoid integrating different life domains.

A forced segmentation could also be the result of a direct and explicit third-party reaction and might apparently take on a positive meaning. Thus, co-workers might force LGB employees who have talked openly about their personal life to take a step back in order “to protect” them from other colleagues who might react negatively. In other cases, co-workers just avoid talking about issues which might be perceived as “embarrassing”. For instance, one participant reported that after having communicated her sexual orientation to the human resources manager, her line-manager, she was advised in a ‘vague’ manner not to tell their boss:

She said “I don’t mind, I haven’t any problem with this, but I will not tell the director anything.” She’s the human resources manager. (Marta, L)

By being pushed back into the closet LGBs are deprived of choice with respect to their disclosure strategy and their wish to integrate their personal life at work.

*Disclosure dynamics: an emerging model*

Through the prism of Boundary Theory we were able to analyze the disclosure process in terms of integration/segmentation between different domains, identifying the active role played by the audience. It appears that LGB employees and co-workers conduct an implicit negotiation daily, shaping the boundaries between LGBs’ personal and work domains dynamically. The result of these interactions could lead to what was referred to above as an *intrusion violation*, when LGB employees’ wishes to segment are violated by the audience, or to a *distance violation*, when instead the wish to integrate is violated by the audience (see figure 2).

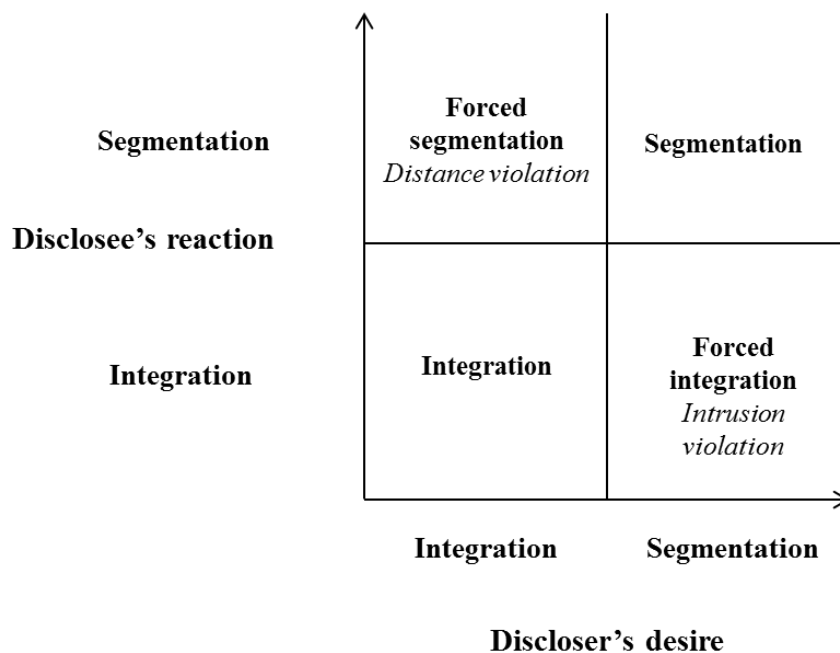


Fig. 2. Disclosure dynamics outcomes matrix

If the wishes of LGBs (discloser) to integrate or segment are in line with the (re)action of the audience (disclosee), LGB people will be able to apply the disclosure strategy they prefer, to the extent they desire, after having considered all those factors that affect their decision. By contrast, if during the co-construction of boundaries, LGBs' wishes do not correspond with the audience's (re)action, we observe a forced segmentation (distance violation) or a forced integration (intrusion violation) which might be assumed to be of different degrees.

*The impact of Spanish culture on disclosure dynamics*

From the start, as documented above, disclosure dynamics are informed by social values and beliefs. The fact that so many LGBs do not talk about their sexual orientation takes on a particular significance given that Spain was one of first countries to make radical changes to its legal framework in order to promote same-sex couples'



rights. Thus, it is possible to observe a disconnection between the legal framework, on the one hand, and the LGB employees' perception of their work environment, on the other, which appears to be affected by Spanish socio-cultural values, largely shaped during Franco's dictatorship. Due to the sexualized nature that LGBs' personal lives acquire for heterosexuals, LGB employees experience fear of saying or revealing something within a perceived inappropriate space, which could embarrass the receivers. This, in turn, often brings about feelings among LGBs of guilt, shame or anxiety, all of which could be attributed to the Catholic religion, which has a strong hold despite the secularization of Spanish society. Thus, although some interviewees declared that they were not Catholics, they admitted to being affected by Catholic values, thereby leading to segmentation between domains. Also, third-parties' religious and political values might give LGB employees a first signal about the degree of openness of their co-workers, given the historical persecution by the Franco regime, and the Catholic Church's condemnation of homosexuality.

It can be argued that religion has reinforced the segmentation and therefore the invisibility of Spanish LGBs in every domain, particularly lesbians, due to the intersection between gender and sexuality (Bowleg, 2008; Cole, 2009) and society's expectations about gender roles. Interestingly, however, once lesbians disclose their sexual orientation, they appear to be more accepted, as articulated by Elisa:

[...] if you don't question gender roles. Thus, if you are a feminine lesbian, good mother with stable work... you may more easily be accepted, "Well, she's *[only]* lesbian. (Elisa, L)

Therefore, the reproduction of heteronormative patterns in terms of procreation and gender roles seemingly reduces the potential negative consequences of disclosing sexual orientation at work, at least for women. However, although the previous example seems to be a way to integrate different domains more easily, actually it could be defined as a partial integration, since the acceptance of traditional gender roles is a way to keep non-heterosexual orientations invisible.

Beliefs and stereotypes about LGB people's appearance and behaviours represent key elements in order to understand the flow of the dynamics, influencing third-parties' (re)actions and facilitating or obstructing the disclosure (or concealment) process. The greater visibility of gay men compared to lesbians in Spanish society also explains why the former are more concerned about being identified as gays than the latter.

## **Discussion**

This study contributes to research on disclosure of sexual identities in the workplace, emphasizing the role of interactional dynamics during the disclosure process. Therefore, the disclosure process, and its effectiveness, do not depend on LGBs' decision making alone about the extent to which they should integrate/segment their personal life at work, but they are affected by interactional dynamics acted out by LGBs and their co-workers. Since participants had self-selected, and represented a group of LGB people with links to the LGB community, it is interesting to observe that many Spanish LGB employees conceal or have concealed their sexual orientation at work at some point during their working life.

From the interview analysis, not disclosing one's sexual orientation is not necessarily a signal of low sexual identity centrality, as past studies suggest (Ragins, 2008). This is because being prevented from integrating one's sexuality naturally into daily discourse tends to make all those aspects connected directly or indirectly with LGBs' sexual orientation more salient, engaging an active self-monitoring of their behaviours (Sedlovskaya et al., 2013). In that respect, it might be useful to revise the concept of centrality of sexual identity, given that it may not necessarily be the case that those whose sexuality is central to their identity are necessarily more inclined to integrate different spheres of their life.

The paucity of research about disclosure dynamics is worthy of attention. This might result from primarily considering disclosure as under the control of LGB people, resulting from a declaration by them, not taking into account how the interaction affects the process. Also, it is impossible to understand how dynamics work if we do not bear in mind the rules which govern the process, such as social values, beliefs, stereotypes, and gender roles which might reduce the possibilities for LGBs to be visible. Although Spain is seemingly a progressive example in terms of legal protection of LGB people's rights, a subtle disconnection with social rules still exists. In spite of transition and rejection of dictatorship, social rules shaped during Franco's regime are still manifested through the apparently harmless definition of public and personal spheres and the identification of what are considered appropriate issues associated with each domain. Moreover, some personal issues, which many heterosexuals can disclose in public, such as how people spend their leisure time, are sexualized by the audience when protagonists are LGB people, and become a private affair inappropriate to share in a public sphere. Therefore, the line between personal and private spheres is

indistinguishable for LGB people. It follows that the range of discourses heterosexuals can make public is broader than those available to LGB people. Although it is possible to observe the same process in many countries, this is more pronounced in Spain, due to its socio-cultural heritage. Indeed, despite a process of secularization the legacy of puritanism and moralism continues to influence behaviours in post-Franco Spain in terms of feelings of guilt and shame. Moreover, recent Spanish conservative winds of change questioning acquired rights (e.g., abortion; same sex marriage) suggest that it is always possible to reverse progress in the acquisition of social and individual rights, as happened with the transition from the Second Republic to the dictatorship, so it is necessary to keep a watchful eye on social and individual rights. With EU anti-discrimination regulation on sexual orientation being challenged in several Eastern European countries, such awareness seems of even greater importance (Gera, 2012).

Future research might explore the concept of appropriateness as established by heterosexual people and to what extent heterosexuals are aware of such issues and the role they play in disclosure dynamics. Moreover, future research might replicate the same study in other countries, taking into account particular social and cultural mores, in order to assess how dynamics are affected by them.

We believe this study has several implications at theoretical and practical levels. It adds to theory about disclosure of non-heterosexuality, highlighting the role of third-parties in the process through the guidance of the Boundary Theory. Moreover, it shows the importance of the socio-cultural context, going beyond the work environment, in understanding how identity management is carried out.

On a practical level, the relevance of disclosure dynamics and social values which regulate them should be recognized by Human Resources managers who should

be able to identify potential prejudicial dynamics, related to the violation of the integration/segmentation desire of LGB employees, assisting in preparing the ground for a positive co-construction of boundaries between LGB employees and co-workers. If it may be unrealistic to think organizations are able to change people's values and beliefs in a short period of time, it appears necessary to introduce into the public space a new discourse which includes LGB people, thus reshaping the concept of appropriateness, respecting those who decide to maintain separation of their personal and work life. Some practices Human Resources managers can employ include intervening when forced segmentation/integration happens; encouraging the creation of LGB networks within the workplace; expressing interest in LGB employees' well-being; supporting LGB people who have been victims of negative acts and disciplining people responsible for them; and monitoring protected groups in order to create an inclusive organizational environment.

In terms of limitations, the understanding of LGBs' disclosure dynamics at work might be limited by the recruitment of participants through LGBT associations, because they might share similar experiences which they could have reproduced during the interview. Nevertheless, we consider that the high number of participants and the snowballing approach limited such bias. Moreover, the relatively low average age of participants might have projected an image not applicable to the way older LGB employees manage their sexual orientation at work and the kind of dynamics with which they are involved. Future research should attempt to fill this gap.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The words “third-parties” and “audience” are used interchangeably. They refer to people who gravitate in the LGBs’ work environment as colleagues, supervisors, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Franco’s regime oppressed and punished any manifestation of non-heterosexual identity, incorporating in 1954 ‘homosexuality’ within the Vagrancy and Villainy Act (*Ley de Vagos y Maleantes*) and reaffirmed in the 1970 the Social Menace and Rehabilitation Act (*Ley de Peligrosidad y Rehabilitación Social*). This later law highlighted the “harmful status” of homosexual people and authorized public authorities to take measures in order to “rehabilitate” gay and lesbian people (Calvo y Pichardo, 2011; Valiente, 2002). The law was not repealed until 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Although we called just for lesbian and gay people, one bisexual woman and one FtM transsexual were interviewed. We decided not include these interviews in the analyses since previous studies demonstrated that bisexuality and transexuality might be perceived by heterosexuals in a different way (Worthen, 2013) and might trigger distinct processes due to their specificities (Williams et al., 2009).

<sup>4</sup> One pilot interview was carried out in order to test the clarity of guide questions. Subsequently questions about society (e.g., masculinity) were modified.

<sup>5</sup> To ensure anonymity, participants’ names are fictitious; any information that could be used to identify the individual participant has been removed.

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## **Article 4:**

# **Workplace incivility as modern sexual prejudice<sup>8</sup>**

**Donatella Di Marco**

*Universidad de Sevilla*

**Helge Hoel**

*Universidad de Manchester*

**Alicia Arenas**

*Universidad de Sevilla*

**Lourdes Munduate**

*Universidad de Sevilla*

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<sup>8</sup> Article sent to Journal of Interpersonal Violence

## **Workplace incivility as modern sexual prejudice**

### **Abstract**

The current study explores the experience of Spanish lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) employees, focusing on workplace incivility as a vehicle of sexual prejudice. Although Spain is a country where LGBs' rights are protected by law, negative prejudices against LGB people, promoted by the dictatorship, might be internalized, being a source of a modern and subtle form of discrimination. Results from 39 in-depth semi-structured interviews show that LGB employees are victims of workplace incivility which is manifested through jokes, use of language, stereotypes, intrusive behaviors. Such acts are barely recognizable as a form of discrimination and for this reason it is more difficult to act against them at an organizational level. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed in the article.

*Keywords: Workplace incivility; Modern discrimination; Modern sexual prejudice; Inclusive organizations; Spanish workplaces*

*“For them those were jokes; for me those weren't” (David)*

*“Language, the loaded weapon” (Adrian)*

The end of Franco's dictatorship (1936-1975) represented the starting point of a deep transformation of Spain. During the transition to democracy Spanish society won many victories in terms of civil and social rights (e.g., divorce, abortion) which were reflected at the legal level. This new wave of change included lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people who were condemned and punished by law during the Franco regime. The recognition of same-sex marriage and the possibility for same-sex couples to adopt children (Law 13/2005, 1 July) have transformed Spain into one of the most supportive countries of LGB people's civil and social rights.

However, acquired rights are not invulnerable, as recent conservative political winds of change have demonstrated, threatening abortion rights and same-sex marriage. Although the victories of LGB people at the social and legal levels might suggest that discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation has diminished, past research demonstrated that 44% of Spanish people believe that there is still discrimination against LGB people in their country (European Commission, 2012). Moreover, a study carried out in the UK revealed that the probability that LGB employees are victims of bullying is more than double that for heterosexuals (Hoel, Lewis, & Einarsdóttir, 2014). Therefore, discrimination has not disappeared; it may have changed in terms of manifestation, becoming subtle and, for this reason, barely recognizable. Also, the acknowledgment of mistreatment is harder if we consider that LGB people are less prone to attribute such negative acts to belonging to a protected group (Fevre, Nichols,



Prior, & Rutherford, 2008); thus, they might be less vigilant in the face of discriminatory acts.

The aim of this article is to analyze to what extent Spanish LGB employees are victims of those acts which enter the realm of workplace incivility; moreover, we want to analyze such events through the lens of modern discrimination, identifying those acts which are the expression of negative stereotypes and prejudices against LGB employees (Herek & McLemore, 2013), hence expressions of modern sexual prejudice.

In terms of structure, we will start by reviewing the literature about workplace incivility and modern discrimination, in order to link them with sexual prejudice in a third section. Then, we will focus on the Spanish socio-cultural context, highlighting those factors which might affect the experience of LGB employees. Results are presented and discussed at the end of the article.

### **Workplace incivility**

Over recent decades, researchers have focused on a multitude of forms of mistreatment at work that often overlap (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Barling, Dupré, & Kelloway, 2009; Hershcovis, 2011), analyzing behaviors whose actors, severity, frequency and the degree of ambiguity may vary considerably. Workplace harassment (Richman et al., 1999; Rospenda, 2002), bullying (Einarsen, 2000; Hoel, Rayner, & Cooper, 1999), emotional abuse (Keashly, 1998), workplace incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), ostracism (Williams, 2007; Robinson, O'Reilly, & Wang, 2013), are just some of the constructs studied, perpetrated by means of acts which range from psychological acts of mistreatment to physical

assault. Most of them fall under the labels of deviant behavior because they violate organizational norms (Robinson & Bennet, 1995), although, sometimes, mistreatment is carried out in pursuit of organizational goals (e.g., to dismiss an employee) (Beale & Hoel, 2011; Ferris, Zinko, Brouerc, Buckleyd, & Harvey, 2007). Many of these acts may also be labeled as aggression as they aim to harm a potential victim, although in some cases, such as workplace incivility, this intent is less clear (Andersson et al., 1999). However, in some cases aggressive mistreatments enter the realm of violence, causing physical harm to the victim (e.g., physical assault) (Barling et al., 2009; Raver & Barling, 2007).

Although physical and psychological forms of mistreatment, with a clear intent to harm the victim, are worthy of attention (e.g., Dupré & Barling, 2006; Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010), research has demonstrated that the more wrongdoers' intent is ambiguous and their behaviors are indirect (vs. direct), verbal (vs. physical), and passive (vs. active), the more recipients might interpret such acts as hostile (Buss, 1961; Raver et al., 2007). Individual minor acts (e.g., rudeness or *forgetting* to include a colleague in a social event), whose intent to harm is unclear, may pass unobserved; however, their cumulative effect may produce negative outcomes equaling or even surpassing the effect of more dramatic events (Andersson et al., 1999; Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000) and escalate into more severe forms of aggression (e.g., Andersson et al., 1999; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2011; Penney & Spector, 2005).

Bearing in mind the harmful aspect of minor acts, Andersson et al. (1999), in their study about workplace incivility, drew attention to uncivil behaviors at work, defined as low- intensity acts, which violate the norms of respectful behaviors

established in a specific setting, and whose intent to harm is ambiguous. Lower levels of formality required at work, work intensification and communication mediated by new technology are seen to be responsible for the breakdown of “polite niceties” (Pearson et al., 2000, p.128), bringing about scope and opportunity for workplace incivility.

Although several qualitative (e.g., Andersson et al., 1999; Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001) and quantitative studies (e.g., Cortina et al., 2001; Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Leskinen, Huerta, & Magley, 2013) have tried to establish the range of actions which people generally consider to be uncivil in the work setting, it is not easy to recognize all of them because “workplace incivility is not an objective phenomenon; it reflects people’s interpretation about how actions make them feel” (Porath & Pearson, 2010, p. 64). Being rude, not acknowledging the opinion of a colleague, ignoring or excluding somebody, denigrating someone or making jokes at other colleagues’ expense, interrupting co-workers, being sarcastic: these are just some behaviors which are associated with workplace incivility (Andersson et al., 1999; Pearson et al., 2001; Cortina et al., 2001, Cortina et al., 2013; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008). The multiple interpretations that it is possible to attribute to them are the sources of ambiguity (e.g., wrongdoers’ ignorance, tiredness, workload).

Incivility and its potential harmful impact are not fully understandable without adopting a social interactional perspective (e.g., Andersson et al., 1999; Blau & Andersson, 2005). In fact, workplace incivility is not a single event but rather part of a wider, often escalating, process that involves target, wrongdoer and potential witnesses, the consequence of which might be a conflict escalation. Uncivil behaviors might further trigger a spiral, where the target may wish to reciprocate and engage in retaliatory actions against the original wrongdoer or third-persons (Andersson et al.,

1999; Blau et al., 2005; Lim et al., 2008), who, in turn, might retaliate too. Incivility is, therefore, contagious and might gradually affect the entire organization by shaping an uncivil environment (Andersson et al., 1999). Nevertheless, since the intention to harm is often ambiguous, people targeted might decide not to enter into the spiral of incivility, attributing to the perpetrator's behavior a harmless state (Andersson et al., 1999).

Although incivility might appear a trivial problem to address within organizations, its implications are worthy of attention. In fact, it produces negative consequences at a personal level (e.g., less satisfaction, diminished well-being, desire to reciprocate) (Andersson et al., 1999; Cortina et al., 2001; Ferguson, 2012; Lim & Cortina, 2005; Lim et al., 2008; Pearson et al., 2001); and at the organizational level (e.g., reduced job performance; negative organizational climate) (Penney et al., 2005; Porath et al., 2010; Taylor, Bedeian & Kluemper, 2012).

Although workplace incivility has mostly been studied as “general incivility”, recent research has increasingly focused on uncivil acts which are directed against workers who belong to minorities or protected groups. Therefore, workplace incivility might be considered “selective”, instrumental for expressing negative attitudes (Cortina, 2008), and potentially discriminatory, as we discuss in the following section.

### **Selective incivility and modern discrimination**

Research into workplace incivility consistently suggests that uncivil acts might be addressed more frequently toward employees who belong to protected groups, such as ethnic minorities and women (e.g., Cortina, 2008; Cortina et al., 2013; Lim et al.,

2005). Such “selective incivility” may therefore represent a contemporary instrument to express prejudice against protected groups, although those involved are often unconscious of the process (Cortina, 2008). In fact, according to past studies, prejudices, in terms of negative attitudes towards protected groups, have not disappeared (Dovidio, 2001; Herek et al., 2013), despite being generally condemned by society, forbidden by law and prohibited by organizations. They still survive in the memory of many employees, becoming implicit, but their consequences are still identifiable, affecting people and organizations (Dovidio, 2001; Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002; Jones et al., 2013).

To explain how prejudices towards protected groups still persist, although openly condemned, it is necessary to explore psychological processes which take place at the cognitive and affective level. According to Dovidio (2001), throughout people’s lives, their expressed or explicit attitudes change in line with the rules of the environment within which they act. However, the original attitudes have not disappeared, but are stored in the memory, becoming implicit, thus, dual attitudes (explicit and implicit) co-exist within the same person. For instance, people may grow up in a Catholic environment, where values associated with the institution of family are strongly respected, considering divorce as a deviance. Over the course of time, their explicit attitudes toward divorced people might change, due to the secondary socialization which takes place at school or within the peer group; nevertheless, the original attitude might be retained in the memory, becoming implicit, affecting their behaviors unconsciously. In fact, while explicit attitudes are easily controlled, “implicit attitudes influence responses that are more difficult to monitor and control (e.g., some non-verbal behaviors) or responses that people do not view as indicative of their attitude

and thus try to not control” (Dovidio, 2001, p. 840). Therefore, people who store implicit negative attitudes against specific social groups could fall, perhaps unconsciously, into modern (Cortina, 2008) and subtle forms of discrimination (Hebl, Bigazzi, Manner, & Dovidio, 2002; Jones et al., 2013; Montgomery, Kane, & Vance, 2004) which are hardly recognizable, due to the absence of any reference to social categories (Dovidio et al., 2002). In this respect, aversive racism (Gartner & Dovidio, 1986), symbolic racism (McConahay & Hough, 1976), modern sexism (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001) or microaggression (Pettigrew & Martin, 1987) are just some constructs which recognize modern forms of discrimination at work which share the common trait of subtlety (Jones et al., 2013).

Modern discrimination is perpetrated by people who are often unable to recognize the discriminatory side of their actions, and who explain their behavior by blaming the other party – e.g., women and black people get exactly what they are worth and they are guilty to be overambitious- (e.g., Cortina, 2008; Cortina et al., 2013). Therefore, these people act in a discriminatory manner when there exists another reason that could justify their behavior, in order to maintain their egalitarian identity in front of others and themselves.

Cortina (2008) explains modern discrimination at personal and situational levels: in fact, not just cognitive (categorization and stereotypes) and affective (prejudices) factors will determine to what extent people engage in discriminatory (overt or covert) behaviors against co-workers who belong to minority groups; contextual factors, such as rules established at societal and organizational level, will play a role in inhibiting or facilitating modern discrimination.

Some exceptions notwithstanding (Cortina et al., 2013; Lim et al., 2005), research on modern discrimination remains theory-driven, focusing on the development of a coherent theoretical framework, with little empirical research to support the theory. Consequently, it is difficult to identify when mistreatments against people who belong to protected groups are influenced by prejudices. Moreover, supposing that negative attitudes are responsible for modern discrimination against protected groups, it is impossible to determine when this is being carried out unconsciously.

The few empirical studies on modern discrimination suggest that workplace incivility might be instrumental for perpetrating modern discrimination in organizations, due to the ambiguity which characterizes its manifestations (Cortina, 2008). Past research, in fact, suggests that female employees are victims of incivility more than males (Cortina et al., 2001) and this finding is even stronger when gender intersects with race (non-white women reported higher levels of incivility) (Cortina et al., 2013).

Although selective incivility as modern discrimination at work has focused on a limited number of social minorities, such as women, black people and older employees, Cortina (2008) suggested that it can be applied to other socially stigmatized groups, such as LGB employees. In the following section, we explain why modern discrimination might be a useful lens through which to understand the experience of LGB employees.

### **Workplace incivility as modern sexual prejudice**

Historically, LGB people have often been victims of discriminatory acts. For many years they have been stigmatized for not observing heteronormative rules (e.g.,

Warner, 1991), with heterosexual people's affective models established as the sole acceptable mode of living, and with anyone not expressing their sexuality in accordance with it labeled as deviant at the social and legal levels. However, in the last few decades, attitudes toward LGB people have changed in many Western countries and sexual prejudice, understood as "a negative attitude toward an individual based on her or his membership in a group defined by sexual attractions, behaviors, or orientation" (Herek et al., 2013, p. 312), has been condemned. Despite this, LGB employees are still victims of discriminatory acts. In a survey carried out by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2013), 19% of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) employees perceived themselves as having been discriminated against in the workplace in the previous year, due to their sexual orientation/identity. Moreover, according to a recent study carried out in Spain, 31% of LGBT employees reported having been victims of discrimination at work (López, Generelo, & Arroyo, 2013).

Therefore, despite the fact that many countries have promoted new legislative frameworks against discrimination on ground of sexual orientation, and many organizations have adopted anti-discriminatory policies, LGB employees still appear to be victims of discriminatory acts. Anti-discriminatory legislative frameworks have focused on "old-fashioned" forms of discrimination or formal discrimination (e.g., promotion and recruitment) (Hebl et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2013). However, the contemporary social undesirability of discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation may have transformed the way in which people manifest their negative attitudes against LGB people, still extant at implicit and explicit levels (Hebl et al., 2002). Sexual prejudice might be expressed in the form of uncivil behaviors which, as we have seen, due to their nature, can easily be ascribed to other causes. In other words, when such



behaviors generate uncertainty about the real motivation behind them, they might be expression of modern discrimination, therefore, a modern sexual prejudice.

### **The Spanish context**

Recently, the effort of Spanish LGB communities to gain equal status at social, legal and civil levels has produced positive results. As has been mentioned above, Spanish same-sex couples' rights have been recognized at a legislative level through the introduction of same-sex marriage in 2005 (Law 13/2005, 1 July), also giving LGB people the opportunity to adopt.

However, the recent history of Spain has been characterized by persecution of LGB people, which reached its culmination during Franco's dictatorship (1936-1975). During that time, LGB people were considered deviant and punished by law<sup>1</sup>.

In fact, after a short democratic period (1933-1936), when there was much progress in terms of individual, political and civil rights, including women's right to divorce, the dictatorship represented a regression in terms of liberties affecting the experience of several generations. National-Catholicism (e.g., Pichardo, 2011), the ideology which promoted values associated with the Catholic religion, was imposed and became central to the education of Spanish people. Women were confined to the private sphere and traditional gender roles were strongly promoted (Abella, 1996). The position of the traditional family, man, woman and children as the central institution of Spanish society, guided by the patriarchal figure, was strengthened and reinforced throughout society. Only recently, following the end of the dictatorship, when a new concept of family started to emerge (Abella, 1996), Spain has been the protagonist of a formidable

social change. Despite such progress, we should still consider the possibility that values and beliefs shaped during the previous regime may still be present, representing a legacy that might be affecting Spanish people's attitudes even today. The aim of this article is to analyze the experience of Spanish LGB employees through the lens of workplace incivility and modern discrimination. We will examine to what extent LGB employees are victims of uncivil acts as an expression of sexual prejudice, therefore, modern discrimination.

## **Method**

### **Data collection**

To assess the experience of workplace incivility of LGB employees, 39 in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with people who were either employed, or had been in employment within the last six months.

The choice of interviews as qualitative method was motivated by the exploratory nature of the study and the sensitivity of the issue being discussed. In fact, people might be resistant to talking openly about sensitive subjects, because of their potentially embarrassing or threatening nature (Jehn & Jonsen, 2010), and to the extent that LGB people have been victims of historical stigmatization, as well as the assignation of sexuality to the private domain (e.g., Herek, 1996). Interviews allow for such limitations to be overcome, generating trust within the relationship between interviewee and interviewer and enriching the amount and the depth of information obtained (King, 2004a).

Altogether<sup>2</sup>, 24 lesbians and 15 gay men participated; the mean age was almost 36 years; the mean tenure was approximately 6 years (75.05 months). Recruitment of new participants was stopped at the point at which new interviews did not contribute to generate additional information, i.e. when data saturation was reached (Morse, 2000). Socio-demographic details of participants are presented in table 1.

*Table 1. Participants' socio-demographic data*

Pseudonym	Sexual Orientation	Age	Education	Sector	Tenure in their current jobs (years)
Adrián	G	41	Postgraduate	Education	5
Alberto	G	40	Postgraduate	Accounting and Finance	10
Alejandro	G	37	University Degree	Civil engineering	4
Alicia	L	27	University Degree	-	- <sup>a</sup>
Álvaro	G	34	University Degree	Communication	5
Ángela	L	55	Secondary school	Education	28
Cintia	L	42	Secondary school	Sales and retail	9
Cristina	L	28	Secondary school	Marketing and advertising	5
David	G	57	Secondary school	Public sector administration	Retired <sup>b</sup>
Diego	G	47	University Degree	Accounting and Finance	4
Dorleta	L	36	Postgraduate	Health	3
Elena	L	45	University Degree	-	-
Elisa	L	36	Postgraduate	Research	4
Érica	L	24	University Degree	Research	1
Estefanía	L	24	Postgraduate	Health	1 month
Estrella	L	42	Postgraduate	Health	9 months
Fernando	G	34	Secondary school	Accounting and Finance	10
Flora	L	35	Postgraduate	Charity, Not for profit	5
Guillermo	G	47	University Degree	Communication	10
Inés	L	27	University Degree	Health	1
Jaime	G	27	University Degree	Education	6
Javier	G	56	University Degree	Education	20
Jorge	G	36	University Degree	Marketing and advertising	10
Lola	L	43	Postgraduate	Public sector administration	11
Maite	L	36	University Degree	Health	10
Manuel	G	33	Postgraduate	-	-
Marcos	G	31	University Degree	Education	5
Marta	L	36	University Degree	Public sector administration	3
Mercedes	L	42	University Degree	Design and Architecture	7

Margarita	L	33	University Degree	Marketing and advertising	15
Miriam	L	27	University Degree	IT	-
Natalio	G	33	University Degree	Education	8
Nuria	L	35	University Degree	Education	2
Patricia	L	40	University Degree	Public sector administration	17
Rafael	G	22	Secondary school	-	-
Sara	L	25	University Degree	Marketing and advertising	4 months
Sonia	L	27	Secondary school	Transport	6
Susana	L	33	Postgraduate	Research	8
Violeta	L	38	University Degree	Education	14

*Note.* <sup>a</sup>Information about sector and tenure miss for unemployed people.

<sup>b</sup>Although solely people who worked or had been working in the six months previous the interview were recruited, we decide to interview a retired person for the strong experience of mistreatment he lived at work. In fact, the retirement was anticipated, due to the strong depression caused by the discriminatory experience at work.

Due to the sensitivity of the issue and the difficulty of identifying participants, people were recruited through a snowballing approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994), through the support of the Spanish National Lesbians, Gays, Transsexuals and Bisexuals Federation (FELGTB) which promoted the study on its website where LGB people, interested in participating, were invited to contact the research-team. Interviewees then spread information about the study through their own networks. In this way it was possible to reach a sufficient number of participants and simultaneously overcome the bias produced by recruiting people exclusively from LGTB associations (Meyer & Wilson, 2009).

To avoid biases being generated by different interviewer styles, only the first author was responsible for carrying out interviews. These took place in public locations (such as coffee bars or the offices of LGB associations), places where participants felt safe to talk openly about their work experience. To ensure anonymity, any information that could be used to identify the individual participant has been removed, and all

interviewees are identified by pseudonyms only. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

The interview guideline was created after a review of the literature and was modified following a pilot<sup>3</sup> interview. The interviews were structured around three main sections: work context and workplace identity management; incivility at work; and social and cultural elements (e.g., values, religion) important for the participants' work experience.

### **Data analyses**

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and then, using the software Atlas.ti 6.2 (Scientific Software Development, 1999), the transcriptions were analyzed by means of template analyses (TA) (King, 2004b). TA is a flexible technique which allows researchers to organize data through the identification of a list of codes (template), which is determined in two steps: *a priori*, before carrying out the interviews, and *a posteriori*, throughout the process of analysis (King, 2004b).

Following the literature review the research team generated, dynamically, the template (*a priori*) and the interview guidelines. Therefore, the structure of the interview was shaped by the list of codes identified and *vice versa*.

Once data was collected, the team-members, separately, undertook the codification process, identifying a more comprehensive template (*a posteriori*). Then, researchers' results of the codification were compared and any disagreement solved by debate.

Finally, the codes were aggregated into themes (e.g., workplace incivility manifestations; workplace incivility consequences), and organized hierarchically.

Below, we present the main results of the analyses process, stressing those cases which might be considered modern discrimination.

## **Results**

Several distinct groups of uncivil acts emerged from the data concerning the experience of Spanish LGB employees. Each group is characterized by mistreatment expressed by different actions: insulting, joking, devaluing, stereotyping, sexualizing, ostracizing, and work-related behaviors. In the following section, we are going to explore such forms of mistreatment, which show different degrees of negative attitudes in terms of perpetrators' intention to harm, trying to identify those examples which appears to be expressions of sexual prejudice, therefore, modern discrimination.

### **Verbally expressed incivility: the power of words**

Words appear to be the most common vehicle of incivility against LGB employees. Jokes in “bad-taste”, rude comments, inappropriate use of language are the uncivil acts most often reported by those interviewed. In line with this, terms such as “maricón” (fag) in all its Spanish variants (e.g., “maricona”, “marica”, “mariconazo”, or “mariquita”) frequently enters into daily discourse, with a fine line separating when the use of this word is “funny” or when it is insulting.

“The fact is they don’t realise they are insulting you [...] less each time and the outrageous things they say each time more flippant [...] and even today, together with the sexist comments, there is still the marica maricón, maricón used colloquially same as dickhead the “queer, fag, the queer fag” [...] it’s the constant repetition. It’s the same as being black and being called “fucking nigger”. In another conversation, that you are not being involved in, but “Nigger, nigger, nigger”. Well, in this context, one day we thought of playing a trick to see if they realised and counted up every time the word fag was repeated. In three quarters of an hour [...] can’t tell you how far we got [...]” (Patricia, L)

In this quotation, Patricia recognizes that mistreatment of LGB people has changed, now “more flippant” which could be a way to excuse such subtle behaviors. Also, she stresses the different meanings of the word “maricón” and how frequency plays an important role in transforming something that initially wants to be a joke into an uncivil act. Patricia compares the use of the word “maricón” with insults toward black people. However, the latter are less present in everyday language, are socially condemned and considered more offensive than the former; therefore, Spanish society might be more concerned about the fight against racism than the one against sexual prejudice.

By analysing the interviews, it is possible to recognize different levels of meaning of the word “maricón”, being increasingly offensive to LGB employees. The term is used as the “*typical* joke” without any clear negative connotation or intention to harm, in the presence of LGB people or not, and it is quite tolerated by many organizations. However, the same word could have a negative connotation, indicating

something negative or unpleasant. So, for example, one participant, Elisa tells that when research data are not considered good enough, some colleagues might refer to them as “mariconada”. In this case the offense is not directed at LGB people (sometimes colleagues might not even be aware that their co-workers are LGB); nevertheless, an association between something negative or wrong and the word “maricón” is being made. The term “maricón” is used in a derogatory way at least in three other circumstances: in order to insult LGB colleagues “behind their backs”; indirectly by using it in a derogatory manner against heterosexual colleagues in front of LGB employees; and finally it is used directly against LGB co-workers in order to offend them.

As some participants tell, heterosexual people who use the word “maricón” as an insult toward another heterosexual person, apparently dissociate the offence from the sexual orientation. This process “legitimizes” using this word even if LGB people are present at the same time. However, such dissociation does not mitigate the negative effects of this act. Such an act is an expression of workplace incivility given that the intent to harm is not clear; but it is also an expression of negative attitudes and stereotypes to the extent the wrongdoer tries to offend someone using a specific social category: sexual orientation. It is reasonable to think that, in other circumstances, such negative attitudes and stereotypes might be aimed, albeit unconsciously, at LGB employees, leading to “modern forms” of discrimination. Participants are concerned about this issue, aware that “language shapes thought”, as one of them stated, and, consequently behavior. In the following quotation, Dorleta explains the ambiguity of stereotypes which nowadays LGB people have to cope with:



“[...] The issue of stereotypes is kept there, in a cloud, it is on the borderline between a joke and something [*the stereotype*] that suddenly you do more or less assume, or you fail to fully assume or suddenly you feel unable to acknowledge that you do in fact assume it. But they use it a lot as in a joke.” (Dorleta, L)

According to Dorleta’s words, heterosexual people do not know exactly their position with respect to protected groups. Stereotypes are in a “cloud”, therefore heterosexual people are not able to identify with any degree of precision their attitudes toward LGB people. Heterosexual people may well reject holding explicit negative stereotypes and prejudices on the basis of sexual orientation, on the one hand, but they still have implicit ones, on the other. Jokes are the primary channel by which heterosexual people express these prejudices, to show that they are, in fact, tolerant. Spanish LGB people were condemned by law<sup>3</sup> and considered dangerous for a long time and, as previous studies have demonstrated (e.g., Dovidio, 2001), changing implicit attitudes is not simple. Spain and its socio-cultural context were characterized by a forced heteronormativity (e.g., Warner, 1991), whilst being non-heterosexual was considered deviance and punishable, and only recently attitudes toward LGB people are starting to change.

However, the ambiguity which characterized such language and/or jokes generates a variety of responses by LGB employees which range from frustration and annoyance, on the one hand, to indifference, on the other. Some participants consider such jokes harmless, as in Manuel’s words:

“Yes, he [*a colleague*] is always telling jokes, but he doesn’t mean any harm, I don’t think so. I think he does it because he wants raise this issue [*homosexuality*]”  
(Manuel, G)

Like Manuel, many participants think that heterosexual people would like to know more about homosexuality and bisexuality, but they do not ask directly because they fear to be identified (and stigmatized) as LGB people; asking for more information is considered an “attack” on the integrity of their sexual identity.

However, Manuel also communicates an attempt to excuse such behaviors, a way to cope with such uncivil acts. In fact, some LGB people might have developed coping strategies, such as humour, to deal with the negative attitudes of others. It allows people to “normalize” or reduce the negative outcomes of incivility associated with belonging to a protect group (e.g., Ford, Ferguson, Brooks, & Hagadone, 2004); tolerating a low level of sexual stigma is a way to “survive” in order not to “develop a generalized hate against” any people who manifest negative attitudes toward LGB people.

In some cases, LGB employees adopt the same jokes. This might be due to two different causes: they might try to protect themselves against the negative effects of such stereotypes by joking as “a defence”; or LGB people might unconsciously externalize negative stereotypes that they acquired during the socialization process.

## **Devaluing non-heterosexuality**

Workplace incivility against LGB employees is manifested in many other different ways, which go beyond jokes or direct insults aimed at LGB people. Devaluing, even indirectly, LGB employees by expressing judgments about non-heterosexual orientations, represents a subtle way to express sexual prejudice. In the following quotation, Flora tells about the relief of her colleague when she realized that her son is heterosexual:

“Someone would come to visit us [*at work*], and she [*a colleague*] was asked “How is your kid doing? And so on” “Yeah, really well! And his father is very happy with him fancying girls and so on, and very laid back because he does not seem to fancy boys” and those sorts of comments. I remember this because I had to call her to order, you know? I took her aside and told her “Look, at least in front of me, try to avoid this, get a grip on yourself, whatever, but those things offend. Because this is how I live, so that is offensive. [*She answered*] “Ok! well, take it easy”, and [...] obviously I have not changed her way of thinking” (Flora, L)

This experience demonstrates that being LGB can be seen positively if it does not affect the inner circle, the family. Discovering the homosexuality of a brother, sister or son might be for some a shocking experience or, at least, something extraordinary which needs serious attention. Flora’s colleague focused more on her husband’s reaction, who felt directly affected by his son’s sexual orientation. In a certain way, we might say that it might compromise the “integrity” of the family and question the role

that parents play in upbringing. Although this is not behavior directly aimed at Flora, it is indirectly uncivil because it devalues non-heterosexuality, so it is reasonable to think that it could be the first step toward manifesting subtle discrimination.

Even more ambiguous are those comments which apparently show support toward LGB people, but which, in reality, demonstrate the presence of implicit negative attitudes. In the following example Dorleta tells about when she and her colleague went by car to another city for a meeting. During the trip the colleague explained the reaction of a couple of her friends when they discovered that their daughter is lesbian. Instead, she had “accepted” such situation:

“[...] [Dorleta’s colleague] [...] understood [...] the girl being a lesbian, these things happen and she had no problems with it and me, listening to what I was being told <she laughs> That’s what I found so odd, it was like a sign of...not even empathy, it’s some sort of sympathy, it is the same as saying “No, I put myself in your place and I feel the same as you, I understand your situation” it is just that, I don’t exactly tolerate you, but I want to make clear I am a good citizen and as such I accept you for what you are [...] There are those people that try to be sympathetic in such matters but fail to understand that I am exactly the same as them. It is like, I don’t know, as if that would put me at a disadvantage. And, then “In society you are placed at a disadvantage but don’t worry because I am with you, or at least I am not going to create problems for you.” (Dorleta, L)

Although the colleague tries to maintain a tolerant self-image by offering her support, she is unable to put herself in Dorleta’s shoes. Being lesbian is something that

“might happen” and if it happens it is necessary to “cope” with it and finally accept the situation. In line with this, Dorleta’s colleague builds her tolerant image on the bases of the concepts of inequality and disadvantage. Since heterosexual and LGB people seemingly are not equal, the former have to offer their “help” or “support” to the latter. Dorleta’s co-worker may not be conscious about the subtle and discriminatory nature of her expressions. However, due to the ambiguity and subtlety of her words, it is reasonable to think that this is an example of modern discrimination.

Data about disclosure processes at work could also be a source of examples of modern discrimination. Some people who present themselves as “liberal” and “open minded” are the same people who force LGB colleagues to carry out a forced segmentation, appealing to them not to talk openly about their personal life at work, as in the following case:

“She said “I don’t mind, I haven’t any problem with this, but I will not tell the director anything.” She’s the human resources manager.” (Marta, L)<sup>4</sup>

Marta’s human resources manager offers “protection”, using the director as a shield, maybe because she feels uncomfortable talking about Marta’s personal life. She insists that she does not have “any problem” with Marta’s sexual orientation but, at the same time, it has to remain a taboo. Therefore, whilst verbally defending her tolerant image, her behavior appears to betray this image, so that negative attitudes and sexual prejudice are externalized.

## **Stereotyping**

During the interviews another important issue emerged connected to the stereotypical image people have about LGB people, femininity and beauty. LGB employees often witness negative comments or insults toward co-workers or clients that fit the stereotypical image heterosexual people have of LGB people. Inés, for example, told about negative comments, such as “dyke”, which her boss uses about female clients whose image does not match the traditional Spanish feminine standards of beauty (“short hair, wearing a tracksuit, looking, let’s say, less feminine”). Since Inés’ looks do not correspond to the stereotypical lesbian as described above, the boss might feel free to express such comments. We observe, one more time, a process of dissociation between the insult, on the one hand, and the sexual orientation of LGB employees present at that moment, on the other. Even if Inés believes that such comments do not refer to her, it makes her boss’s sexual prejudices visible. Moreover, it generates a negative climate because Inés perceives that being lesbian is accepted if she keeps a low profile, in terms of visibility, without going beyond certain limits.

The stereotypical image of LGB people is still widespread in Spanish society and it is the subject of jokes and denigration as Sara told us. Openly uncivil, Sara’s colleague imitates in her presence the stereotypical image heterosexual people have of gay men, exaggerating mannerisms, for example through the intonation of the voice. Sara has not publicly disclosed her sexual orientation at work, but she was still considered as lesbian from the time she was hired. Therefore, Sara is unable to identify whether her colleague’s behavior was meant to harm her due to her sexual orientation;

but then, Sara explains how such stereotypes shaped the social interaction with her co-workers:

“A lot of times they get it wrong, so they greet one person [*another woman*] giving her two kisses and then I get a slap on the back and it’s like...let’s get this right, I am a woman.” (Sara, L)

Since Sara might appear to fit the stereotypical image of a lesbian, people seem not to know how to behave in her presence. She suggests that her colleagues do not treat her as a woman but, using the words of another participant, as a “half guy”. Sara’s sexual orientation creates confusion between her co-workers, unable to assign to her a “label” in line with the traditional binarism of femininity/masculinity. Such different treatment on the basis of negative attitudes and stereotypes might be an example of modern discrimination.

Sometimes, heterosexual people who construct a liberal image are affected by the binary opposition heterosexuality/homosexuality (e.g., Rosenfeld, 2009) which leaves to one side bisexuality, which is often associated with promiscuity. Bisexual people are still considered “dissolute” and open to any sexual practices. The acceptance of diversity is, therefore conditional upon respecting certain “standards”.

### **Sexualisation of LGB employees and intrusive questions**

Incivility against LGB employees can materialize through unusual questions or behaviors which breach the boundary of appropriateness in the workplace, focusing on

personal and intimate issues, thus a form of harassment. Such behaviors can result from the sexualisation of discourses which involve LGB people, and which view same-sex relationships in primarily sexual terms (Herek, 1996). Moreover, we observe the sexual objectification of LGB people, especially women. In the following quotation Alicia, who at that time had not disclosed her sexual orientation at work, tells what happened when she went to the *fiesta* of the town together with her partner, where she was spotted by a colleague:

“[...] When I started work a colleague, a mechanic, since I worked at a car dealers, came and said to me in a lewd and insinuating way “I saw you last weekend, you were very wrapped up in a special [*girl*] friend, am I right? Why don’t you introduce her to me and you come along too?” as if seeing us had aroused him. And I found it very unpleasant because it was an intrusion into my private life, a presumption that because I like women I like sex with anyone. I found it very offensive. And then I lasted about a couple of weeks there and moved somewhere else in the same company, I went to another branch by my own choice because they wanted someone who could speak English so I left and went there. And to be honest those weeks there were very unpleasant, he was always looking at me, finding excuses to be close to me, talked a whole load of garbage to me...” (Alicia, L)

Even in this case, being lesbian has been seen as being open to any sexual practices. By knowing her sexual orientation, Alicia’s co-worker breaks the rules of appropriateness established in the workplace, crossing boundaries that Alicia had built between work and personal domains, and starting to really harass her. Moreover, the



choice of words used by her co-worker devalue her relationship. Alicia's partner is just "una amiguita" that is a "special friend", focusing on the sexual aspect of Alicia's relationship. The behavior of Alicia's colleague is, no doubt, overtly uncivil and discriminatory, and easily identifiable. Nevertheless, such sexual objectification of LGB people can be carried out in more subtle terms. In the following quotation, Inés tells of her frustration and, at the same time, her astonishment at her boss's questions about private issues, such as sexual practices:

"He asks me personal questions that I am not going to answer. I may find it funny because as I say it is so absurd that he is trying to persuade me to tell him what I do in bed. He has gone that far. Well, I am not telling him but I find it funny, I find such an absurd situation funny. But we go from that extreme to me saying "I want to get married" to be told "What for?" or "So you love her so much that you want to have a family with her. Wouldn't you rather do that with a man?" (Inés, L)

Inés defines ironically her boss's questions as "funny" because although they might be apparently a reflection of a liberal and non-prejudiced mind, they can be considered a way of invading her intimate sphere; a sexual objectification of Inés' personal life. In fact, when she tries to share with the same person long-term projects she has with her partner (e.g., building a family) she feels she is rejected. In this case, by asking why she does not want to create a (*real*) family with a man, who traditionally has played a central role in Spanish families, her relationship with her female partner is devalued. Furthermore, the boss's intrusion into her sex-life could reveal sexual prejudice; although in a subtle and less obvious form.

### **“Involuntary” ostracism**

One way to manifest workplace incivility is through ostracism, defined as the omission of actions to involve organizational members when it is considered appropriate according to social norms (Robinson et al., 2013). Although ostracism has been studied as a specific form of workplace mistreatment (Robinson et al., 1995; Robinson et al., 2013), past studies of workplace incivility have recognized exclusion as an uncivil act (e.g., Cortina et al., 2001; Cortina et al., 2013; Pearson et al., 2001). Ostracism is based on inaction, albeit in some cases it may alternate with active uncivil behaviors, and generates ambiguity because the intent of wrongdoers is often unclear. LGB employees interviewed have experienced ostracism; in some cases as a clear manifestation of discrimination on grounds of their sexual orientation, as explained in the following quotation:

“[...] there was something that really surprised me. There was a girl, still one of my subordinates today, and she married her husband about two years ago and I was surprised when the wedding date arrived and she invited everyone but me, and me with a good relationship with her because, you see, we have a good relationship, I am not at all an authoritative person, on the contrary, I try to promote good vibes and no arguments, don't I? But funnily enough I didn't get invited. Then obviously colleagues were surprised, [...] it's only natural that it makes me feel uneasy because it singles me out as the only one not to be invited, that really is something that makes you feel different [...] that makes you say, why did she do that?” (Jorge, G)

Whilst Jorge's colleague tried to justify her decision, saying that she thought that he was not going to participate and for this reason she did not invite him, Jorge finds it difficult to make sense of her decision given their seemingly good relationship. Instead, he thinks she was motivated by having to invite his partner; in other words, by having a same sex couple in an event as public as a wedding, a time which traditionally has represented values associated with family, religion and gender roles, and where the whole family of Jorge's colleague would have been present.

Rejection might be another way to demonstrate sexual prejudice toward LGB employees. In fact, heterosexual co-workers might distance themselves from LGB colleagues after their disclosure. In the following example, Violeta tells about her colleague's reaction, with whom she was building a friendship, after Violeta's disclosure:

"[...] She said "Oh sorry then; I'm boring you [*talking about her boyfriend*]; and I said "No, you are talking about your boyfriend, your problems and, as a fellow human being, I can give you advice too, but I can't tell you the same story. I empathize with you" [...] There was no rejection, but we grew apart it was something along the lines of "Ok, you are of no use to me" or something along these lines." (Violeta, L)

For Violeta's colleague being lesbian is an obstacle to creating a deeper friendship. She thinks that Violeta might not be interested in, or able to listen to her personal problems. She is considered inadequate and silently excluded; therefore, subtly discriminated against.

Silent treatment is also a common way of ostracizing LGB employees. Avoiding a person might be a way of escaping from a conflicting or embarrassing situation (Robinson et al., 2013). Elisa tells that many of her colleagues refrain from direct conversations about her personal life and she thinks that one of the possible causes is her sexual orientation; in order to escape they avoid any conversation with her or engage in conversations that she does not feel are “natural”. Therefore, Elisa becomes victim of a forced segmentation of her personal life at work: her co-workers do not ask about her personal life and she does not feel comfortable talking about it:

“If I am put on the spot and asked do you feel discriminated against? I don’t, but if I stop to think about it, I feel that I am different, I am different because *[communication between Elisa and her colleagues]* is not natural and because people do not ask me questions *[about her personal life]* in a natural manner and I don’t talk about it. I don’t know the reason why [...] I just know it is different.” (Elisa, L)

Elisa rejects the idea of being discriminated by her co-workers but at the same time she feels that the treatment that she receives is different; she feels that in the eyes of her colleagues she is different. Inaction, such as being given the silent treatment, generates ambiguity because the target is not totally aware of the intention to harm of wrongdoers and their behaviors can be attributed to several causes and, therefore, difficult to challenge.

### **Work-related incivility**

Another set of uncivil behaviors are those directly related to one's work. Lack of promotion opportunities, excessive criticisms about work outcomes and excessive workload, or indeed no workload at all, are forms of mistreatment identified by LGB employees, in line with past studies (e.g., Di Martino, Hoel, & Cooper, 2003).

Even among this group of behaviors, it is possible to differentiate between overt forms of discrimination and subtle ones. In terms of overt discrimination, Alberto tells about a promised promotion that never arrived:

“I start looking around me and I see colleagues that started later than me starting to become managers, deputies and I see that this does not happen to me, the moment never comes, you know? And I take note of all this. When in a month or so [*after the company tried to fire him*] I am sent to another office, which happens to be the union president's office, who is the one defending me, and I have been working for him for six years. So I am sent there, to a position, but an administrative one. I am not taken on as a manager, or deputy as I had been promised. That is when I realised that I had lost everything in the sense of all the professional development that I had been promised [...] and to cap it all there was the union president, as if I had been put there to be protected, [...] they put me there as if to say “Ok, let's put him there with the union president who is the one who has been defending him.” (Alberto, G)

After an attempt to fire him, Alberto was sent to a “secure” environment, an office where people who worked had no part in attempts to dismiss him. However, there

was no possibility to get promotion because the higher positions were all filled. Transfer to a safe environment is, in a certain way, a punishment for being allowed back to work after the initial decision to fire him. Such a discriminatory act is ambiguous to the extent that Alberto recognizes the real causes of past events after many years.

Excessive criticism is another work-related uncivil act. Margarita, for example, tells about her experience, explaining that a lot of criticisms came from a colleague who suddenly changed the way she treated her, becoming increasingly negative. She attributes the change in behavior to her sexual orientation, even if she is not sure about it. Excessive criticism is a type of mistreatment less easily identifiable than overt discrimination because targets might easily be blamed and justification for the behavior is easy to provide. In fact, in these examples wrongdoers never refer to any social categories, generating ambiguity.

Another example of uncertainty follows. Protagonists and mistreatment are different, but even in this case the person involved is not sure about the influence of her sexual orientation on the colleague's behavior:

*"[My sexual orientation] came in addition, it was something more. She was leaving us [the participant and her partner who worked different shifts] without any role, nothing to do, until we were left with nothing, not even taking care of customers almost"* (Marta, L)

Both Marta and her partner worked in the same workplace and with the same colleagues, but on different shifts. The colleague who mistreats them is aware of their sexual orientation, but Marta is not able to define her colleague's behavior as

discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation; she does not attribute such behaviors to sexual prejudices. However, Marta thinks that disclosing her sexual orientation could have exacerbated her colleague's uncivil acts, so it is reasonable to think that at one point incivility was a way to externalize negative attitudes associated with sexual orientation.

## **Discussion**

According to data collected, the range of mistreatments experienced by Spanish LGB employees varies in terms of severity and degree of perceived intention to harm. Whilst overt forms of mistreatment persist, albeit infrequently, there exists another group of frequent experiences which appear to fall within a “grey zone” because they may not be identified as mistreatment by the recipient, but at the same time are perceived as a lack of respect, therefore corresponding to incivility. Although in our study we did not compare LGB employees with heterosexual organizational members, uncivil acts experienced by LGB employees were often associated with negative attitudes linked to sexual stigma. In some cases, such uncivil acts can be recognized as a form of discrimination; a channel through which colleagues are seen to externalize modern sexual prejudices. Moreover, when such behaviors generate uncertainty about the real motivation behind such acts, we can talk about modern discrimination.

Our data demonstrated that modern sexual prejudice is most often transmitted by means of insults and jokes. We observed that jokes and common derogatory terms (e.g., the word “maricón”) are always addressed to gay men, while “women pass unnoticed”, as expressed by a participant, seemingly being less visible when society externalizes

negative attitudes through jokes. However, this does not express a higher level of respect toward lesbians, simply reflecting the greater invisibility of Spanish lesbians in the past (e.g., Robbins, 2003).

Humor can be a shield to mask modern forms of discrimination and often wrongdoers appeared unaware of the discriminatory nature of their jokes. But humor is also a coping strategy applied by LGBs, an instrument to deflect or reduce the impact of sexual prejudice experienced on daily bases through inappropriate comments and jokes (Ford et al., 2004).

The externalization of prejudices and negative attitudes through humor and language might suggest that sexual prejudice is today a secondary problem. However, the presence of such modern sexual prejudice highlights the discrepancy that exists between the liberal image that Spanish society wants to project through its legal framework and the realities on the ground. The transition started after Franco's dictatorship was not completed and now it risks remaining incomplete, under threat from political forces which are questioning acquired rights, such as abortion and same-sex marriage. Incivility might represent the subtle end of the extreme of the well-known continuum of discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation; while at the other extreme, overt forms of discrimination, such as physical threats, still exist.

Workplace incivility as an expression of acts of modern sexual prejudice might also be responsible for several consequences. Due to their ambiguity, people involved (LGB employees and witnesses) are less prone to react and challenge the behavior in question. In fact, according to past studies (e.g., Ryan & Wessel, 2012) only when wrongdoers' intent to harm is quite clear do witnesses offer their support to their LGB co-workers and raise their voice to defend them. Also, when LGB employees are not



directly involved as victims but they witness uncivil acts against other LGB colleagues or LGB clients, a climate of disrespect and incivility is transmitted, affecting indirectly LGBs' well-being and job satisfaction.

Moreover, workplace incivility as modern sexual prejudice might have repercussions for LGB people's disclosure of their sexual orientation at work, in two different ways: LGB employees who witness uncivil acts against other LGB people might decide not to disclose their sexual orientation at work, because they feel unsafe in their environment, or co-workers might use the disclosure itself to express sexual prejudices and discriminate against LGB employees. In fact, co-workers might ignore the intent of LGB people to integrate their personal life at work, avoiding talking about personal issues, resulting in a forced segmentation of LGB employees' personal and work life; or they might force LGB colleagues, who do not wish to do so, to disclose their sexual orientation, to discuss personal issues at work, asking private and intrusive questions. In both cases, LGB employees' decisions are not respected, resulting in negative consequences for the LGB person.

Workplace incivility is understandably adopting a social interactional perspective (Andersson et al., 1999; Blau et al., 2005). It is important to bear in mind that being part of a protected group might change the perception of social interactions and trigger several processes of attribution. For example, people who belong to a protected group might be more sensitive during the interaction and attribute the cause of an argument with a colleague to their social category. Nevertheless, past studies (Fevre et al., 2008) revealed that LGB employees are less prone to attribute mistreatments received to sexual prejudice. Thus, it appears to be more likely they will blame themselves for an argument with a colleague or they will attribute such argument to

other causes. Consequently, LGB employees might be less vigilant in identifying discriminatory acts, especially if such acts are ambiguous.

This article offers several contributions. At a theoretical level we extend the current knowledge about modern discrimination, studying protected groups that past research did not take into account: LGB employees. Also, we identify forms of modern discrimination that are aimed at LGB employees, highlighting the difficulty in recognizing workplace incivility as modern discriminations, due to its subtlety. Just a fine line separates an uncivil act from modern discrimination and the risk of confusing both is, therefore, high, increasing the negative consequences for LGB employees who experienced such treatment.

At a practical level, this study is a wake-up call for organizations. Even those who apply zero-tolerance policies against any forms of discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation have to remain vigilant because sexual prejudice can manifest itself through subtle uncivil acts which do not make any reference to social categories; modern sexual prejudice might work silently, shaping an uncivil work context which affects people and organizations at many levels. Consequently, it is not sufficient to apply zero-tolerance policies solely in respect of blatant discriminatory acts and Human Resources managers have to be trained to recognize modern forms of discrimination. Also, past research has demonstrated that zero-tolerance policies might produce counterproductive effects, just scratching the surface of the workplace (Ryan et al., 2012; Stockdale, Bisom-Rapp, O'Connor, & Gutek, 2004). For this reason, Human Resources managers should also intervene at a personal level, trying to guide employees throughout their categorization process (e.g., Cortina, 2008; Dovidio, 2001), creating

inclusive groups, with a superordinate goal, from the first steps of employees' organizational socialization and training.

### **Limitations**

We are conscious of the limitations of our study. Firstly, we cannot compare the incivility experienced by LGB people to the incivility addressed to other groups present within organizations. For this reason, we cannot talk about “selective incivility”, although the uncivil acts identified are expressions of sexual prejudice and fall into the realm of modern discrimination, due to the ambiguity of wrongdoers' motivation. Also, we have focused only on the perspective of targets, and did not explore the wrongdoer's perspective. Future studies should fill this gap (Cortina, 2008; Hershcovis & Reich, 2013).

Moreover, the recruitment of participants through LGBT associations might bias the discourse we have reconstructed, because people interviewed might share similar experiences. However, the high number of participants and the snowballing approach employed should have reduced such bias (Meyer et al., 2009).

Finally, participants' low average age and their high level of education might have contributed to project a partial picture of LGB employees' work experience.

### **Conclusion**

In the current study, we extend research on workplace incivility and modern discrimination to LGB people. By doing so, we demonstrated how workplace incivility

toward LGB employees can be the expression of modern sexual prejudice and, therefore, modern discrimination. Discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation has not disappeared; it has just changed its manifestations, especially in those contexts where anti-discriminatory normative statutes exist, as Spain. We have also noted the difficulty in recognizing such forms of discrimination due to their ambiguity. Organizations should be vigilant in order to identify modern discrimination and shape a safe environment for LGB people.

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#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Franco's regime oppressed and punished any manifestation of non-heterosexual identity, incorporating in 1954 'homosexuality' within the Vagrancy and Villainy Act (*Ley de Vagos y Maleantes*) and reaffirming this in the 1970 the Social Menace and Rehabilitation Act (*Ley de Peligrosidad y Rehabilitación Social*). This later law highlighted the "harmful status" of homosexual people and authorized public authorities to take measures in order to "rehabilitate" gay and lesbian people (e.g., Valiente, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Although we called just for lesbian and gay people, one bisexual woman and one Female to Male transsexual were interviewed. We decided not to include these interviews in the analyses since previous studies have demonstrated that bisexuality and transexuality might be perceived by heterosexuals in a different way and might trigger distinct processes due to their specificities (e.g., Worthen, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> The total number of interviews does not include the pilot.

<sup>4</sup> The same quotation was used in the paper "Negotiating boundaries: Disclosure dynamics in Spanish workplaces". Paper submitted to *Gender, Work and Organization*

## Chapter 4. Main findings

## **1. Summary of main findings**

The main goal of this doctoral thesis was to shed light on the experience of LGB employees in Spanish workplaces. Through the analysis of several factors, we were able to recognise specific processes in which Spanish LGB people are involved at work, analysing LGBs' experiences through the lens of Spanish culture.

In the first article the research question aimed to identify those aspects of Spanish socio-cultural context which affected the experience of LGB employees.

After the end of Franco's regime a period of transition began which represented the starting point of a change in attitudes, values and beliefs of the whole society. However, stereotypes and prejudices might have been resistant to the change even when the expression of them becomes socially undesirable. Our study has demonstrated that negative stereotypes and prejudices about LGB people, shaped during Franco's regime and reinforced by religious beliefs, still exist at an implicit level, affecting people's behaviour (Dovidio, 2001; Dovidio et al., 2002).

Workplaces are microcosms of society, the reflection of values and beliefs shared by people. Therefore, values and beliefs shaped during the dictatorship affect LGB employees as follows:

- LGB employees still perceive the prevalence of traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity. Such concepts create heterosexuals' expectations about LGBs' expression of masculinity and femininity, increasing or diminishing their visibility.
- Traditional gender roles still exist and affect LGB people determining their adequacy to labour sectors.

- The division between public and private space and the definition of appropriate issues attributed to each of them determine the range of matters that LGB employees can make public.
- Feelings such as guilt and shame, typical of Catholic religion, are still present in the interaction between LGB employees and co-workers.

Socio-cultural factors affect LG employees during many interactional processes, among them the disclosure. According to previous research, the disclosure process represents one of the most important processes in the working life of LGB employees. Past studies have demonstrated that this process is determined by several factors, such as individual characteristics, organisational context, co-workers' support, etc. (e.g., Clair et al., 2005; King et al., 2014; Lidderdale et al., 2007; Ragins, 2008). Through the second study we collected salient information about how Spanish LGs carry out this process at work. Our research questions aimed to identify strategies that LG employees mostly use at work and antecedents and consequences of this process. Main results can be summarised in the following way:

- Spanish LG employees use different strategies of disclosure (or coming out) to reveal or hide their sexual orientation at work. LG people's strategies change according to their interlocutors and the moment when the process is carried out.
- Covering is the most applied strategy between people who do not reveal their sexual orientation at work.
- LG people who do not disclose their sexual orientation at work find it harder to create deeper relationships with co-workers.



- LG employees who disclose their sexual orientation mostly do it implicitly, talking about their personal life.
- Several antecedent factors determine Spanish LG employees' preferences in terms of strategies of disclosure. Among these are: the fear of rejection, the level of trust in the workplace, the hierarchical position occupied in the sector, colleagues' and clients' characteristics.
- Disclosing or covering sexual orientation at work produces several consequences. At personal level, LG employees perceive that motivation, relationships at work, affective mood, well-being, perception of justice, chances to obtain a job or a promotion are factors affected by disclosing or covering sexual orientation. At organisational level, they perceive that the quality of work, turnover and team work are variably affected.

The second study represented the first step in the understanding of processes in which Spanish LG employees are involved. Through it we could ascertain that the control of LG employees on the disclosure process is, in part, limited because of the role played by third-parties (colleagues, supervisors), who obstruct or facilitate the disclosure process. LG employees' preferences about how to manage their sexual orientation at work is conditioned by co-workers. For the above-mentioned reason, in the third article we explored in depth the disclosure process through the lens of the Boundary Theory (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009; Nippert-Eng, 1996). In fact, disclosing sexual orientation might be considered an attempt to integrate or segment different domains. The research questions of the third article aimed to identify interactional dynamics in which LG employees and co-workers are involved during the

disclosure, highlighting once again those socio-cultural factors which affect the daily negotiation between LGs and co-workers. The main findings suggest:

- According to the second study, LGB employees use several strategies during the sexual identity management at work.
- People who cover their sexual orientation perceive that such an issue is not appropriate in a public space, such as the workplace.
- Sexual orientation becomes more central in the identity of people who use the covering strategy.
- The disclosure process is perceived as not unilateral, that is managed by LGB people alone, but is the result of interactional dynamics.
- Disclosing (or covering) sexual orientation at work might be the result or facilitated by the integration (or segmentation) process between different domains. For example, people who create weak boundaries between work and personal domains talk spontaneously about their personal life and, in doing so, disclose their sexual orientation. On the other hand, people who want to disclose their sexual orientation at work can do it by creating weak boundaries between domains and giving information about their personal life at work.
- Not being in line with the stereotypical image heterosexual people have about LGB people makes LGB people less visible at work.
- Traditional gender roles are still valid for lesbian employees who perceive themselves to be more accepted if they fit into these roles.

In studying this process we have considered two important aspects: the role played by third-parties and by Spanish socio-cultural factors. Some socio-cultural

factors, such as the division between public and private spaces, concepts of femininity and masculinity and gender roles, facilitate or obstruct the disclosure process. Moreover, our results demonstrated that the centrality of sexual orientation in LGBs' identity is not always the antecedent of revealing sexual orientation at work (Ragins, 2008). In fact, people who cover their sexual orientation view this aspect as more central in their life due to the effort they have to make in order to hide their sexual orientation at work.

Throughout the studies of this thesis, we have seen that co-workers are perceived as playing a crucial role during the whole interaction with LGB employees and determine LGBs' perceptions of the workplace, in terms of safety after the process of disclosure.

Although blatant discrimination is less widespread in the workplace, subtle discriminatory acts still exist (Hebl et al., 2002; Jones et al., 2004), affecting the daily life of LGB employees. Such acts might be due to the presence, at an implicit level, of negative stereotypes and prejudice (Dovidio, 2001; Dovidio et al., 2002), in other words "sexual prejudice" (Herek et al., 2013), which might be the source of modern discrimination.

In the last study of the doctoral thesis, we attempted to explore subtle discriminatory acts which affect LG employees. According to the previous statement, the goal of the fourth study was to analyse the experience of workplace incivility (Andersson et al., 1999; Pearson et al., 2001) of LG people at work, on the one hand, and pinpoint when such acts can be an expression of modern discrimination, on the other. The main findings of the fourth article explained:

- Spanish LG employees perceive themselves as victims of workplace incivility which has several manifestations.
- LG employees still perceive the existence of negative stereotypes and prejudice, sometimes at a sub-conscious level, held by heterosexual people.
- Words and "jokes" are the most common vehicle to express workplace incivility. In response to such uncivil acts, LG people sometimes tend to use humour as a coping strategy.
- Devaluing LG sexualities and manifesting negative comments and behaviours toward LG employees or clients, whose physical appearance is in line with the stereotypical image heterosexual people hold about LGs, is another expression of workplace incivility.
- Incivility is manifested through questions which go beyond the realm of appropriateness, entering the private sphere of LGs' lives. LG people perceive that their personal life is sexualized by their co-workers.
- Ostracism and rejection are a vehicle of workplace incivility when manifested subtly.
- Workplace incivility is also perceived as expressed through work-related acts, such as lack of promotion or lower workloads.
- Such uncivil acts might be the expression of modern discrimination, which is subtle sexual prejudice. The line between workplace incivility and modern discrimination is very subtle and barely recognisable. The impossibility of comparing with other groups of people does not allow us to talk about "selective incivility".

Results presented above are the summary of the main findings of the studies of this doctoral thesis. In the following chapter, we are going to present a global discussion of the thesis, considering limitations and implications of present studies.

## Chapter 5. General discussion and conclusion

## **1. General discussion**

This research explored the experience of Spanish LGB employees in the workplace, focusing on the disclosure process and modern discrimination manifested through uncivil acts as a form of sexual prejudice. Such factors were analysed taking into account Spanish socio-cultural factors shaped since the start of Franco's dictatorship, a period in which traditional values and beliefs conditioned many people's lives.

Through the lens of Boundary Theory (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009; Nippert-Eng, 1996) we were able to identify interactional dynamics that take place during the disclosure process, highlighting the daily negotiation in which LGB employees and co-workers are involved. Such a perspective helped us to consider disclosure as a process in which many protagonists play an important role. In fact, the effectiveness of strategies LGB people use to reveal or conceal their sexual orientation at work depends on many actors, among these, their colleagues and supervisors. The disclosure is not the result of the "decision" or "choice" of LGB employees alone, as past models demonstrated (e.g., Clair et al., 2005; Lidderdale et al., 2007; Ragins, 2008), but the outcome of a daily negotiation between several actors.

Data about people who still conceal their sexual orientation in the workplace are worthy of attention. Although Spain has shaped quite an advanced legislative framework in terms of LGBs' rights, there exists a disconnection between the image that is transmitted at institutional level and the social reality. The daily life of LGB people is still conditioned by traditional values and beliefs which, for example, label as inappropriate discourses about the personal life of LGB people in public spaces, due to

the sexualisation of such issues (Herek, 1996). The construction of boundaries between LGBs' life domains is affected by both socio-cultural values and heterosexuals' stereotypes about the image and behaviours of LGB people. Concepts such as masculinity and femininity and their manifestations can affect LGB employees. Lesbians especially, are affected by the concept of femininity and traditional gender roles generally widespread in society, being more accepted if they conform to these, because challenging them would mean being more visible.

Another important step of this thesis was to explore uncivil acts (Andersson et al., 1999; Pearson et al., 2001) which are expression of sexual stigma (Herek et al., 2013). Negative stereotypes and prejudices are difficult to change, so they can become implicit, affecting people's behaviours (Dovidio et al., 2002). Uncivil acts might be an expression of such stereotypes and prejudices; when reasons behind negative acts are not clear, we can talk about modern discrimination (Cortina, 2008). Consequences of modern discrimination are several. LGB people who are victims or witnesses of workplace incivility are less prone to react, due to uncertainty as to the underlying cause of such acts (Ryan & Wessel, 2012). Moreover, LGB people do not lightly attribute mistreatment to sexual prejudice (Fevre, Nichols, Prior, & Rutherford, 2008), so they might be less vigilant in identifying discriminatory acts. Although lesbians are victims of such acts to a lesser extent, this could be the result of their historical invisibility. Discrimination has not disappeared; it has just changed its appearance, becoming less identifiable.

This thesis sheds light on processes in which LGB employees are involved, making up for the lack of studies about their experience in Spanish workplaces. Although research has been carried out in other countries, it is important to consider the



peculiarity of specific socio-cultural contexts. Moreover, it is important not to take for granted liberties and rights acquired, especially in times of austerity when conservative and authoritarian predispositions are prone to rise (Merolla et al., 2012).

### ***1.1 Theoretical and practical implication***

This thesis has several implications, at theoretical and practical levels. On a theoretical level we offered three main contributions: firstly, we challenge previous understanding of disclosure of non-heterosexual sexuality, highlighting the dynamic nature of the process. Whilst previous identity management models defined the disclosure process as the result of LGB employees' decision, we identify the role that third-parties play during this process, through the lens of the Boundary Theory. Secondly, we make a breakthrough analysing workplace incivility against LGB employees as an expression of modern discrimination, that is, sexual prejudice. Doing so, we overcame the lack of studies about modern discrimination and LGB people. Finally, throughout the whole doctoral thesis, we consider the role played by socio-cultural factors, pointing out the need to reconsider previous models taking into account such a framework.

On a practical level, the implications are several and are addressed to Human Resources managers. Organisations cannot change people's values and beliefs, especially if they are implicit. Nevertheless, they can promote a safe environment where LGB employees are free to manage their sexual orientation as they consider convenient. At the same time, organisations should highlight the existence of implicit stereotypes and prejudices, banning those acts (e.g., jokes, comments) which are ambiguous but

discriminatory at the same time. In order to reach this aim, organisations should start by including homosexual and bisexual orientation in their definition of diversity, keeping in mind that hiding or silencing social categories contributes to making them invisible and might silence protected groups' voice. For example, protected groups, if invisible, might feel less empowered when it comes to reporting mistreatments by other members of the organisation.

Moreover, in order to create a safer environment, organisations should provide training for Human Resources managers and supervisors, who are closer to the daily dynamics which take place between organisational members. Promoting the creation of LGBT networks might provide support, building a friendly and trusting environment (Capell, 2013).

Nevertheless, providing zero-tolerance policies against any form of discrimination is not enough (Ryan et al., 2012) to create a safe environment. For this reason it is necessary to intervene at a personal level, helping people to recognise their processes of categorization associated with negative stereotypes and prejudice, which are responsible for discriminatory behaviours (Cortina, 2008; Dovidio, 2001). Guiding people in their categorisation process, creating superordinate groups, might be the way to go beyond negative stereotypes and prejudices (Cortina, 2008).

## ***1.2 Limitations***

In the articles presented in this doctoral thesis we have underlined limitations of each of them. The bias which all studies share is connected to participants and their recruitment through LGBT association, because they might share similar experiences

which they could have reproduced during the interview. However, such limitation is attenuated by the high number of participants and the snowballing approach. Also, the relatively low average age might have excluded the reality of older LG employees, who might be involved in other types of disclosure dynamics at work.

Another important limitation is represented by the impossibility of comparing the experience of incivility of LG employees and heterosexual people. Due to this bias, we are not able to prove the existence of “selective incivility”. Future research should attempt to fill this gap.

## **2. Conclusions**

The present investigation extends the knowledge on the experience of Spanish LG people at work. Through this research, we underpinned to what extent it is decisive to consider the influence of socio-cultural factors, at a conscious and unconscious level, during the social interaction that involves LG employees. Values promoted during the relatively recent dictatorship and the role played by the Catholic religion at that time, traditional gender roles, the division between public and private spaces and protagonists of each of them might be still affecting LGs’ lives. Such social and cultural factors determine several important processes, such as disclosure. This is a central process in the work life of LG people during which many parties play a role, eliminating or creating barriers. Through Boundary Theory we have recognised the interactional dynamics in which LG employees and third-parties are involved during disclosure. Such a process is not the result of daily “decision” by LGs, but the result of a negotiation between actors mentioned above.

Moreover, we have identified subtle forms of discrimination against LG employees which are expressed through uncivil acts. Such forms of mistreatment might be the expression of negative stereotypes and prejudices, that is, sexual prejudice (Herek et al., 2013). Discrimination has not disappeared. It has changed its aspect, moving itself along the continuum in which at one extreme it is possible to identify blatant forms of discrimination and, at the other, subtle ones. Joking, using insulting words, stereotyping, breaking the barrier of LGs' intimacy through pushy questions are some forms of uncivil acts which might be an expression of modern sexual prejudice.

Organisations should be able to identify such forms of modern discrimination, in order to fight against them, creating a safe environment for LG people and other sexual identities.

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