Leaving Your Identity at the Door: Exploring the Reasons Why and Impact of LGB Employees Hiding Their Sexual Orientation in the Workplace.

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Abstract

We see an observed paucity of literature focused on LGBT+ people within New Zealand workplaces. This thesis is focused on bridging this identified gap and providing a voice to lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) individuals in New Zealand. The aim of this thesis is to improve the working environment for LGB individuals through influencing positive change in workplace policy and practice across New Zealand organisations. This thesis uncovers the reasons why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation in the workplace, and the impact this has on them. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 participants. Inductive thematic analysis was used to develop the findings. The primary researcher engaged reflexivity throughout the research process as he identifies as an insider researcher. The findings of this thesis uncover two important contributions of knowledge. Firstly, this thesis demonstrates alignment between disclosure behaviour of New Zealand LGB and international literature. This is evidenced in reasons for hiding sexual orientation in the workplace (fear of discrimination, fear of how others may react, fear of a 'rainbow ceiling', workplace culture, workplace policies, and industry of work); and in the impact of employees hiding their sexual orientation in the workplace (impact on mental health, employee satisfaction, career opportunities, and work output). Secondly, this thesis has uncovered unique findings specific to this thesis. Unique reasons for hiding sexual orientation in the workplace identified are summarised as: fear of ones' personal reputation, place of work, and support networks. Unique impact on employees hiding their sexual orientation in the workplace are summarised as: impact on relationships (internal and external to the workplace), an internal dilemma faced, and influence on retention. The findings provide a strong case for future research to expand on the unique findings identified. It is only through continued research and greater understanding, that we will be supporting our rainbow colleagues to be their true authentic self as they step into the workplace every day.

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"Hope will never be silent"

- Harvey Milk-

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Jacob Grayson-Barker

Date: 20 January 2025

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a voice to a community that is often hidden. This will be achieved by uncovering the reasons why lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) employees hide their sexual orientation in the workplace, and the impact this has on them. This thesis aims to improve the working environment for LGB individuals through influencing positive change in workplace policy and practice across New Zealand organisations. This chapter provides important context to increase understanding for the reader about rainbow communities around the world, and within New Zealand. This chapter provides context and insight about rainbow communities, LGBT+ history, rationale for focusing on a specific subset of the LGBT+ community, and outlines the structure of this thesis. The chapter further sets the scene of this thesis, providing an overview of the historical context and systemic discrimination that LGBT+ face. This is outlined in the following segments, LGBT+ context and history, LGBT+ people and society, LGBT+ in the workplace and Thesis structure. We see an observed paucity of New Zealand focused research on LGB people within the workplace. This has prompted the research question of this thesis: "*What are the reasons why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation in the workplace, and how does this impact on their lives?*". Lastly, the significance and need for this thesis are outlined in this chapter.

LGBT+ context and history

The term 'rainbow communities' is an inclusive umbrella term used to describe minority sexualities and genders, including but not limited to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, takatāpui (an indigenous Māori word that has been reclaimed by Māori individuals who are members of the rainbow community), queer, intersex, asexual and others (InsideOUT, 2021). Research on the rainbow community is scant. Studies are often specific in the focus and audience they are researching, such as focused only on sexuality, or only on gender.

This thesis is focused on a sub-set of rainbow communities within New Zealand, namely individuals who identify as lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB). These are different sexualities within the rainbow community and can be defined as:

- Lesbian: "a woman or gender diverse person who is exclusively attracted to women and self-identifies as such" (InsideOUT, 2021, p. 6);
- Gay: "someone who is attracted to the same gender as themselves" (InsideOUT, 2021, p. 5);
- Bisexual: "a person who is sexually attracted to people of more than one gender, or their own and other genders" (InsideOUT, 2021, p. 5).

Other identities participants who identify as LGB may also identify with, could include pansexual, queer, homosexual and takatāpui amongst others (InsideOUT, 2021). The decision to focus this

thesis on a sub-set of the rainbow communities, specifically sexuality, was made to maintain a reasonable scope of study for a master's thesis. The decision to limit sexuality to 'lesbian, gay and bisexual' was made to align with extant literature. Whilst the focus was on participants identifying as LGB, all genders were able to participate in this thesis.

Due to the range of sexualities and gender identities in society, often different terminology will be used in extant literature. Common terminology in this thesis includes LGB [lesbian, gay, bisexual], LGBT+ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, +] and rainbow communities. The terminology will be congruent to the literature being cited. Whilst 'LGBT+' and 'rainbow community' do not speak to the specific audience of this thesis -focused on LGB sexual identities, and not gender identities-, the findings are still relevant with LGB forming a subset of the rainbow communities.

Individuals may hold pre-set perceptions when interpreting the meaning of 'sexuality' (Page, 2020). In this thesis, sexuality is relating to the private and innate desires one holds to obtain connectedness, intimacy and support from other people. When this thesis references sexual orientation, sexuality or sexual identities, it refers to the collective 'terms' society has ascribed to different forms of sexual desires, such as 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual' (Page, 2020). It is important to understand, the collective terms society uses to identify sexual orientation today, are a relatively new concept (Page, 2020; Pond, 2020). The focus of categorisation, and having a 'name' for everything (rainbow communities being labelled and defined under LGBTQIA+) is a Western and modern view on sexuality (Page, 2020; Pond, 2020). When looking back over history, there is evidence that same-sex desires have existed for centuries (Page, 2020). A New Zealand example is the identity of takatāpui, which was historically used to refer to intimate friends of the same sex (InsideOUT, 2021). In recent years the identity of takatāpui has been reclaimed by Māori and broadened to the meaning we know today (InsideOUT, 2021). Another example is that terms such as 'homosexual' emerged in Western society during the Victorian time period as a way of 'ranking' sexual identities and putting boundaries on what is, and is not acceptable by society (Page, 2020). The categorisation and ranking of sexual identities in Western society created a divide amongst people for centuries that is still felt today. This is evidenced by heteronormativity, inequality for rainbow communities and a society whereby people, namely rainbow people feel like they cannot be their authentic self.

The 'heteronormative way of the world' is ingrained in modern culture, legislated by governments and often interrelated with religion across the world (Page, 2020). This has led to generations of non-heterosexual people growing up, and living under clouds of oppression with society telling them 'the way you feel is wrong'. Heteronormativity relates to how modern society has institutionalised 'heterosexuality' as the esteemed, leading and 'normal' form of sexual identity

(Page, 2020; Pond, 2020). Many sexual identity theories and models are built upon an assumption of heterosexuality as the norm in society (Weinberg et al., 1995). In general, heterosexual people and society do not perceive their sexual identity as a defining characteristic that would be used to describe themselves: it is invisible to them because it is what society accepts as normal (Eliason, 1996). This is in contrast to rainbow people, who typically view their sexual identity as a defining and important characteristic to themselves, that is used to define their identity (Pond, 2020). Historically, the rainbow communities have suffered discrimination, persecution and often criminalisation due to hegemonic heterosexuality, resulting in strict boundaries around what is, and what is not considered as 'acceptable' relationships and behaviour (Seidman, 2015). We have seen this carried out in history, and still to this day to varying degrees across the world. Whilst we have seen in many parts of the world a more liberal view taken by governments passing legislation that removes criminalisation of sexual identities, such as homosexuality, ingrained societal impacts and stigma remain. This perpetuates individuals carrying stigma into the workplace where many feel they need to hide, and cannot be their true authentic self at work (Global & Vodafone, 2018).

A important time in history, commonly considered the birthplace of the modern gay liberation movement was Stonewall in 1969 (Eliason, 1996; Phelps, 2021). The Stonewall Inn, based in Manhattan (USA) was the location of a police raid that was met with a strong resistance from the rainbow communities (Phelps, 2021). Subsequent rioting in the streets continued over the next four nights receiving international media coverage (Phelps, 2021). There have been different accounts over the years surmising the reasoning for the resistance at Stonewall (Phelps, 2021). Most accounts agree the response was due to long-suffered oppression, and the need to be seen and treated as equal with 'straight' heterosexual peers (Phelps, 2021). In the decades following Stonewall, developments have been made increasing equality between rainbow and heterosexual people. Developments include annual pride celebrations around the world (Phelps, 2021; Pond, 2020), legislation changes (Beatriz & Pereira, 2023; Betts, 2020; Pond, 2020; RainbowTick, 2019) and legalising rainbow relationships and marriage (RainbowTick, 2019).

Notwithstanding, the gay liberation movement was not without its own in-fighting and struggles for each minority group that make up the rainbow community (Pond, 2020; Seidman, 2015). This is demonstrated by select minority groups within the rainbow community garnering greater social awareness and acceptance over time than other minority groups (Pond, 2020). The impact of this was evident in the gay liberation movement succeeding the most when it focused on pushing monosexuality (Yoshino, 2000). This was due to the ease of defining clear boundaries, whilst suppressing minorities such as bisexuals who were less clearly defined (Pond, 2020). From Stonewall until the 1990s, the gay liberation movement was commonly known as, the 'gay' liberation movement (Pond, 2020). It was not until early 1990s that the focus was taken away from

separatism and driven more towards inclusivity. This saw the formation of the ubiquitous term used today of LGBT+. This acronym [and other iterations such as LGBTTQIA+] is a way to represent a collective and inclusive term for all rainbow communities to unite behind.

Locally, the gay liberation movement in New Zealand started in 1972 closely following the international movement (Byrt, 2019). A milestone was achieved when discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, specifically for LGB was prohibited in 1993 under the Human Rights Act (Human Rights Act, 1993). An additional victory in the gay liberation movement included the legalisation of gay marriage in 2013 (Byrt, 2019). Over recent years, there has been large corporate support from workplaces sponsored pride focused events such as the annual pride parade. On the face of this support, large corporate brands willing to associate, and in some cases integrate their brands with pride for a month each year demonstrates their commitment and support to inclusivity within their workplace. However, this support can be transient and become more what critics argue is 'pinkwashing' at best (Byrt, 2019). This was demonstrated in a decision by the Auckland Pride board in 2019, specifically relating to the pride parade. The Auckland Pride board, through consultation with the rainbow communities decided it was appropriate to ask members of the New Zealand Police who wished to participate within the parade, to do so, but not in uniform. The rationale for this decision was to stand with members of the wider community, namely takatāpui, pasifika and transgender people whom felt intimidated by the police uniform (Byrt, 2019). This decision led to contention and divide, both in the rainbow communities and in mainstream media. The contention swiftly led to the majority of corporate sponsors dropping their support for the pride parade, distancing themselves from Auckland Pride, often by press release, without consulting or discussing with Auckland Pride directly (Byrt, 2019). Irrespective of the view one holds on the Auckland Pride board's decision for the parade in 2019, corporate sponsors response did demonstrate the fickle nature of said 'corporate support'. Support that would be given, only if it aligned to the corporate agenda rather than unequivocal support to stand with the entire rainbow communities, even if the views might be seen as contentious.

LGBT+ people and society

Greater understanding of the reasons why LGB hide their true identity at work and the impact this has on them will hopefully influence the often fickle nature of corporate support for rainbow people in the workplace (Byrt, 2019). Additionally, there is a strong business case for driving an inclusive and diverse workplace. Diversity within the workplace is proven to contribute to increased performance, productivity and profitability, over non-diverse workplaces (Hossain et al., 2020; Lloren & Parini, 2017; Pichler et al., 2018). When you have a diverse workforce, it is important that every team member feels like they are included and belong. An inclusive workplace improves the wellbeing for minority employee groups, irrespective of what makes them diverse (M. Santuzzi et

al., 2022). The reality is however, far less desirable with many minority groups facing disadvantage in their job on a daily basis (Black et al., 2003; Blandford, 2003; Hansen, 2008; Hersch, 2008; Pacheco et al., 2019; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). To gain greater understanding of LGB inclusion in the workplace, it is important to analyse general diversity in the workplace, before narrowing the focus to one aspect of diversity, such as LGB.

Inclusion and belonging is more than simply implementing a policy for employees to feel like they belong. Inclusion and belonging requires an environment where all people, regardless of their diversity are accepted and provided equal opportunity in the workplace. This is however, not the case with institutionalised disadvantage impacting minority groups in the workplace (Black et al., 2003; Blandford, 2003; Hansen, 2008; Hersch, 2008; Pacheco et al., 2019; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). We see this evidenced across workplaces, such as the gender pay gap whereby women earn less than men in a comparable role (Pacheco et al., 2019); merit increases for minority groups being less than their white male counterparts, even when starting at the same initial base pay (Hansen, 2008); immigrants in the United States who have a lighter complexion earning 17% more on average than other immigrants (Hersch, 2008); and heteronormativity impacting fewer promotions (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001) and lower renumeration for gay men (Black et al., 2003; Blandford, 2003). These statistics are demonstrative of the ongoing need for greater inclusion and belonging within the workplace. Intensifying these statistics are inequality regimes, whereby people who fall into more than one minority group, experience a compounded disadvantage within the workplace (Acker, 2006). Institutionalised disadvantage as outlined above, results in entrenched stigma against minority groups forcing them to consider their place in the workforce.

The rainbow communities within New Zealand makes up at least 4.9% of the population, equating to over 170,000 people (Infometrics.co.nz, 2022; Stats NZ, 2024), increasing to over 8% of the population for those under 29 years old (Infometrics.co.nz, 2022). With estimates of 51% of the rainbow communities hiding who they are to at least some of the workplace (Global & Vodafone, 2018), we can surmise at least 86,000 New Zealanders go to work every day and feel the need to hide their true, authentic self. Creating a welcoming environment within the workplace where all employees feel comfortable to be themselves at work is not only what a fair and reasonable employer should provide, but is a basic human and legal right.

Whilst legislation prohibits discrimination in New Zealand, societal stigma associated with those who are LGB still exists. This is demonstrated by workplace discrimination against LGB employees remaining (Beatriz & Pereira, 2023; Betts, 2020; Papadaki et al., 2021). Regulation is seen as one step in a long-term journey required to make a workplace welcoming for rainbow communities to be their true authentic self at work (Betts, 2020; Monaco & Pezzella, 2022). Societal stigma is

further evidenced by rainbow youth being three times more likely than their peers to be bullied in school (NZ Human Rights Commission, 2020). This not only impacts the child's time within the school system, but leads to ongoing issues with their ability to feel accepted by society. The societal stigma evidenced continues beyond the classroom and into the workplace. The most common complaint raised with the Human Rights Commission relates to employment discrimination on the grounds of an individual's sexual orientation (NZ Human Rights Commission, 2020). This results in an environment whereby rainbow New Zealanders often feel the need to conceal their true identity, put on an act during the interview process and in their everyday work life due to a fear of discrimination (NZ Human Rights Commission, 2020).

Workplace inequality for LGBT+ people is demonstrated through the unemployment rate for LGBT+ of 6.7%, considerably higher than that of non-LGBT+ sitting at 3.7% (Infometrics.co.nz, 2022). Further compounding this disparity is the level of education, whereby individuals with a bachelor's degree qualification and above equates to 33.9% of LGBT+, with only 27.7% of non-LGBT+ holding the same level of qualification (Stats NZ, 2022). Whilst LGBT+ people hold higher levels of education, their unemployment rate is almost double non-LGBT+. This example of workplace inequality reinforces a workplace culture of heteronormativity, sending a clear message to rainbow community members that disadvantage may result from being your true authentic self in the workplace.

LGBT+ in the workplace

New Zealand research focused on LGB employees in the workplace is sparce. Corporate and government funded research such as Global & Vodafone (2018) and Infometrics.co.nz (2022) provide statistical information about the LGBT+ population. What these studies lack however, is a theoretical lens that places the statistics within the social and economic context. This makes it difficult to compare industry based research to academic research available (Gray, 2014). When analysing New Zealand based academic research on LGB people, most are focused on general sexuality, societal acceptance of LGB, or university environments (Betts, 2020; Brown et al., 2020; Came & Tudor, 2020; Lucassen et al., 2013; Sander & Wilson, 2015), not the workplace. There is a clear need to shift academic research on rainbow communities within New Zealand to focus on the workplace. Of the New Zealand based research available, limited disclosure of sexual orientation amongst foreign gay men working within New Zealand is demonstrated (Adams et al., 2022). Further, there is an invisibility of rainbow families and role models in early childhood education, resulting from LGB parents and teachers who choose silence over disclosure due to the perceived risks of disclosure (Cherrington et al., 2021). Whilst research is limited, it demonstrates a need for greater research in this area.

Our need to understand sexuality disclosure in the workplace is only increasing. Recent census data tells us that young New Zealanders, aged 15 to 29 are significantly more likely to identify as LGBTIQ+ than New Zealanders aged 30+ (Infometrics.co.nz, 2022; Stats NZ, 2024). With many of these young New Zealanders about to enter the workforce, or early into their career, there has never been a more important time to answer the research question of this thesis. Compounding this shift in young New Zealanders, is New Zealand's aging workforce, with many employees soon to reach retirement age (Infometrics.co.nz, 2022). These two trends suggests the percentage of rainbow employees in the workplace will markedly increase in the coming decades. Based on this, it is imperative to understand the underlying reasons and impacts on one hiding their sexuality within the workplace.

Thesis structure

This thesis is constructed with six chapters, each detailing key elements of this thesis. The first chapter is the introduction, providing context and insight about rainbow communities, LGBT+ history and an outline of this thesis structure. The second chapter is the literature review. Within this chapter, extant literature is examined and outlined, including the heteronormative culture present in organisations; experiences of LGB employees in the workplace; sexual identity disclosure in the workplace; and exploring ways employers can make their workplace more welcoming for LGB employees. This chapter demonstrates the need for greater research into LGB experiences in the workplace. It further outlines systemic disadvantage and discrimination that is still present within workplaces today. Following the literature review, the third chapter in this thesis is the methodology. Within this chapter, the aim of this thesis and research philosophy, being the alignment of a relativist ontology, constructivist epistemology and critical theory paradigm are discussed. This chapter further outlines the methodology, and method of research, with rationale for why they have been chosen and the benefit they provide to this thesis. It lastly details ethical considerations that have been critical in forming safety in this research process. The fourth chapter of this thesis is the findings chapter. This chapter outlines findings identified through conducting 12 semi-structured interviews with members of the rainbow communities. Participants' personal journeys detailing the reasons why, and the impacts of hiding their sexuality in the workplace have been analysed through thematic analysis and summarised into key themes. Themes were broken down into two parts, part one details reasons why participants hide their sexuality in the workplace. Part two details the impact on participants as a result of them hiding their sexuality in the workplace. The fifth chapter of this thesis is the discussion, which discusses the findings within the context of the extant research. Through this analysis, extant literature and thesis findings are compared to uncover which thesis findings align to literature, and which findings are unique. Where unique findings are identified, they are discussed in detail. The final chapter of this thesis, chapter six is a conclusion. Within this chapter, a summary of the thesis is provided,

clearly articulating the findings of this thesis, answering the research question and discussing the research outcomes. The significance and contribution of this thesis is outlined with a summary of limitations and future research opportunities.

Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined the purpose and aim of this thesis, focused on providing a voice to a community that is often hidden; uncovering the reasons why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation in the workplace, and the impact this has on them. It has informed the reader of important historical context and insights required to appreciate the complexity of sexuality disclosure, both within society and the workplace. Lastly, this chapter has outlined the structure of this thesis. It is evident with higher percentages of young New Zealanders identifying as part of the rainbow community (Infometrics.co.nz, 2022; Stats NZ, 2024), now more than ever, we must challenge the status quo and push for employers to accelerate their inclusion and belonging efforts. Every day, we see circa 86,000 New Zealanders go to work and feel the need to hide their true, authentic self. This thesis will provide a strong resource for human resource (HR) practitioners across New Zealand to increase understanding, and provide baseline literature that can be built on by academics. The next chapter, will examine extant literature and demonstrate why we need to continue research into LGB experiences in the workplace.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Across the world, LGBT+ rights have progressed significantly in the last two decades (Betts, 2020; Lloren & Parini, 2017; Pichler et al., 2018). As outlined in the previous chapter, progress has been made in New Zealand through the legalization of gay marriage, the abolishment of conversion therapy and steps taken towards supporting gender affirmation (Byrt, 2019). Further to this, many large employers embark on getting accredited with a 'Rainbow Tick' to demonstrate their workplace inclusivity of rainbow communities (Byrt, 2019; RainbowTick, 2019). While this progress is a positive step in the right direction, it does not reflect the large number of LGBTTQIA+ individuals that show up to work hiding their true identity from their colleagues. This chapter focuses on the workplace and outlines the heteronormative culture present in organisations; explores the experiences of LGB employees in the workplace; examines sexual identity disclosure in the workplace; closing with exploring ways employers can make their workplace more welcoming for LGB employees.

Heteronormative organisations

Aligned to patriarchal society, the modern day workplace was established with the mindset of a heterosexual, masculine, male workforce (Acker, 1990). Feminist workplace research has evidenced patriarchal norms in the workplace, with leadership dominated by men, gender pay gaps and gender inequalities present (Acker, 1990). The term 'heteronormativity' was first coined by Inagraham (2006, p.309) as "*the belief system underlying institutionalized heterosexuality* [that] *constitutes the dominant western paradigm in Western society*". The term heteronormativity aims to explain the invisible act of conforming to heterosexuality, and the thinking within an organisation that enforces gender norms and entrenches longstanding inequality (such as gender pay gaps and more heterosexual men in senior leadership roles) (Inagraham, 2006). Heteronormativity, whilst a relatively new term to be defined, acts to highlight behaviour that has existed within organisations for a long time. Acker (1990) highlights an antecedent to what we know today as 'heteronormativity', whereby organisations are silent on sexuality at work. Heteronormativity acts as an invisible control on individuals' behaviour within the workplace, built upon dominant forms of gender, sexuality and structure (Pringle & Giddings, 2011). As a result, the dominant structures within the workplace operate with an assumed heterosexual identity of workers. This means workers are assumed to follow the expected life patterns of heteronormativity, such as having a partner with the opposite gender, with an expectation of couples having children. LGB employees are thus forced to either conform and hide their uniqueness, if they wish to have equal opportunity as their heterosexual peers, or to stand out from the 'normal' and risk discrimination, disadvantage and inequality (Skidmore et al., 2024).

Sexual orientation and heteronormativity within the workplace are under-researched in extant literature (Pringle & Giddings, 2011; Swan, 2010; Woodruffe-Burton & Bairstow, 2013). Pringle and Giddings (2011) outline the 'first wave' of research focused on sexuality in the workplace, which argued LGB people face a difficult environment in the workplace, alleviated by a supportive supervisor or protective policy (Ragins et al., 2003). Recent literature has built on the 'first wave' of research, examining compounding inequality termed 'double jeopardy' for lesbians in the workplace, whereby their gender and sexuality places them at a 'double' disadvantage (Pringle & Giddings, 2011). The concept of double jeopardy is similar to Acker's concept of inequality regimes, whereby members of more than one minority group experience compounding inequality in the workplace based on organisational structure, policies and practices (Acker, 2006). Whilst Acker's concept of inequality regimes excludes sexuality (focused on gender, class and race), it is argued that the concept of inequality regimes should extend to sexuality at work, whereby gender and sexuality are inextricably embedded into organisational practice (Britton & Logan, 2008). Both Acker (2006) and Pringle and Giddings (2011) demonstrate the impact of heteronormativity on individuals at work who feel the need to conform.

Whilst it is positive to see greater interest in research focused on challenging heteronormativity in the workplace, LGB employees remain impacted by this inescapable workplace culture on a daily basis. Demonstrated examples of how organisations are heteronormative at present include; effeminate gay men who display less masculine traits being viewed as less capable for duties at work (de Moura & Nascimento, 2021); lesbians feeling the need to 'pass' as heteronormative to avoid negative consequences (Woodruffe-Burton & Bairstow, 2013); and employees hearing microaggressions on a regular basis within the workplace (Soini, 2022). These examples demonstrate that more needs to be done to change workplace culture, focused on celebrating individual differences rather than conforming to the norm.

The culture in which all employees, LGB and heterosexual, work within influence how comfortable LGB employees feel about disclosure. The culture of an organisation is created by individuals' repeated actions and behaviours (Di Marco et al., 2022). Challenging heteronormativity within workplace culture is critical for genuine inclusion of LGB employees in the workplace (Di Marco et al., 2022). We see from the data available that workplace culture often results in LGB employees re-entering the closet as they enter the workplace or change employers. An astounding 23% of all LGBT+ employees, and 41% of LGBT+ employees aged 18 to 25 're-enter the closet' and hide their sexual orientation as they enter their first job in New Zealand (Global & Vodafone, 2018). Indeed, the study conducted by Global and Vodafone (2018) highlights the need for greater understanding of the reasons why LGB individuals hide their sexuality at work in New Zealand.

Experiences of LGB employees in the workplace

Research demonstrates large numbers of LGB employees around the world are not comfortable being open about their sexual orientation within the workplace (Bachmann & Gooch, 2018; Beatriz & Pereira, 2023; de Moura & Nascimento, 2021; Drydakis, 2009; Ragins et al., 2007; Woodruffe-Burton & Bairstow, 2013). To gain greater understanding of why LGB employees are not comfortable being open about their sexual orientation in the workplace, it is important to understand lived experiences of LGB employees at work.

Historically, discrimination against gay and lesbian people within the workplace was explicit. Studies demonstrate discrimination against LGB people was present within the workplace dating back to the 1970s (Levine, 1979; Levine & Leonard, 1984). Common workplace policies prohibited the employment of homosexuals (Levine, 1979; Levine & Leonard, 1984; Ross, 1975). Promotions were discriminatory due to the common practice of using a polygraph test for management roles, whereby questions focused on sexual orientation were asked (Levine, 1979; Levine & Leonard, 1984; Ross, 1975). Lesbian and gay people were not only discriminated against by their employer, but colleagues would often use knowledge of one's sexual orientation for self-advantage through blackmail and bullying (Levine, 1979; Levine & Leonard, 1984). A shocking 25% to 66% of lesbian and gay people report discrimination in the form of impact to career growth with in some cases, the discrimination resulting in termination (Badgett et al., 2009; Croteau, 1996; Global & Vodafone, 2018; Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012).

A recent study conducted in Britain investigating the wellbeing of sexual minorities in the workplace, found that bisexual employees have greater depression and anxiety within the workplace than heterosexual employees (Wang et al., 2022). This difference in wellbeing disappeared when participants had a supportive manager (Wang et al., 2022). Of interest, the difference was not present when analysing lesbian or gay employees versus heterosexual employees in the same study (Wang et al., 2022). These findings align to an Australian study that found lesbian and gay individuals, and cis-gender men all report higher levels of wellbeing than other minority groups in the rainbow community (Donaghy & Perales, 2024). These studies are important as they provide insight into the experiences of specific minority identities, such as bisexual employees at work. They further demonstrate the experience of one minority group within rainbow communities is not necessarily the same as another. An important limitation of Donaghy and Perales (2024) and Wang et al. (2022) studies, is their research design that has the potential to impact validity of findings. Both studies obtained their data through employee surveys, which require individuals within the workplace to disclose their sexuality to have accurate findings. If LGB individuals choose to not disclose, the findings may not be representative. Furthermore, Williams et al. (2022) argues quantitative approaches to diversity research have inherent limitations that

may not identify the extent of exclusion faced, when individuals are in more than one minority group.

Whilst explicit discrimination by employers, through methods such as workplace policies and practices appears to have declined, discrimination amongst colleagues remains. An empirical review of 50 academic studies focused on LGBT discrimination in the workplace revealed 16 to 68% of LGBT employees had experienced discrimination (Badgett et al., 2009). Further research demonstrates discrimination within the workplace is still commonplace, irrespective of antidiscrimination laws and non-discrimination workplace policies (Beatriz & Pereira, 2023; Drydakis, 2009). Discrimination is further evidenced by research that identified discrimination in the workplace due to sexual orientation is experienced by 25% of LGB employees (Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012). Examples of discrimination include 41% of LGB employees experiencing harassment within the workplace (Badgett et al., 2009); gay men being paid 10% to 31% less than their equally qualified heterosexual colleagues (Badgett et al., 2009); and gay applicants applying for a new job holding a 50% to 74% lower chance of receiving an interview if they identify as gay on their C.V (Drydakis, 2009). Whilst the overall percentage of discrimination identified with the workplace varies across studies (Badgett et al., 2009; Drydakis, 2009; Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012), it is clear that discrimination against LGB employees remains within the workplace today.

Overt discrimination is not the only form of discrimination faced by LGBT+ employees at work. Discrimination within the workplace experienced by LGBT+ employees is both overt and covert (Beatriz & Pereira, 2023). A common form of covert discrimination is microaggressions, a subtle form of discrimination that can often go unnoticed by the majority (Beatriz & Pereira, 2023; Galupo & Resnick, 2016; Soini, 2022). Microaggressions are described as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward members of oppressed groups” (Nadal, 2008, p. 23). Microaggressions are difficult for LGB employees to substantiate, and therefore difficult to make a discrimination claim for, due to it being easy for a perpetrator to deny intent (DeSouza et al., 2017; Galupo & Resnick, 2016; Soini, 2022). Due to this difficulty, microaggressions are a commonplace way for stigma, heteronormativity and discrimination to manifest within the workplace (Papadaki et al., 2021; Soini, 2022). Covert discrimination, such as microaggressions perpetuate negative organisational culture and negatively impact on all LGB employees within a workplace, whether they are ‘out’ or not.

Sexual identity disclosure in the workplace

International research focused on sexuality disclosure in the workplace dates back to the 1980s (Croteau, 1996). Notwithstanding, it remains limited when compared to other fields of academia

(Williams et al., 2022). Disclosure of one's sexual identity is not a given, with individuals opting for 'passing' as the dominant sexual identity, that is heterosexuality, when they deem the environment to be unsafe or not welcoming (Clair et al., 2005; Ozbilgin et al., 2022). Whilst the ability to hide one's stigmatised identity to pass as 'normal' may seem like an advantage, academics agree it creates additional challenges for the individual (Ragins, 2008). Choosing not to disclose is proven to result in negative impacts including increased stress, anxiety and fear (Miller & Major, 2000; Ragins, 2008; Smart & Wegner, 1999).

International research has identified common reasons why LGB employees choose to disclose their sexual orientation within the workplace. Reasons include wanting to be recognised by their correct identity, to talk about their relationships, to pre-empt situations that may arise, and to be known authentically (Benozzo et al., 2015; Kelly et al., 2021; Mattheis et al., 2020; Ragins et al., 2007). Factors with a demonstrated positive influence on sexuality disclosure at work include supportive colleagues and psychological wellbeing (Kelly et al., 2021; Lyndon et al., 2023; Ragins et al., 2007); national regulation and workplace policies (Kelly et al., 2021; Monaco & Pezzella, 2022); workplace climate and culture (Monaco & Pezzella, 2022); managers expressing clear signs of allyship (Global & Vodafone, 2018); and employees being in a long-term relationship (Bowring & Brewis, 2009). When one does disclose, research has identified a positive impact on interpersonal relationships at work between LGB employees and their colleagues (Salter & Sasso, 2022).

Across the literature, fear is one of the most common reasons why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation at work (Global & Vodafone, 2018; NZ Human Rights Commission, 2020; Ragins et al., 2007). Fears include, fear of discrimination, fear of impacting career, and a fear the workplace is not safe to come out in (Global & Vodafone, 2018; NZ Human Rights Commission, 2020; Ragins et al., 2007). Fear of discriminatory behaviour at work acts as a strong motivator that influences LGB employees to hide their sexual orientation at work (Bachmann & Gooch, 2018; Badgett et al., 2009; Beatriz & Pereira, 2023; Global & Vodafone, 2018; Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012; New Zealand Government, 2022). Fear of discrimination has driven 76% of LGBT+ employees to hide their sexual orientation, or gender identity, at least once during their working life (Global & Vodafone, 2018). This fear is common place around the world, for example in Britian (Bachmann & Gooch, 2018), Portugal (Beatriz & Pereira, 2023), and New Zealand (NZ Human Rights Commission, 2020). Fear of discrimination is not only limited to the current workplace. LGB employees have expressed that fear of discrimination is influenced by experiences of discrimination in prior workplaces (Ragins et al., 2007). LGB employees are not only fearful of discrimination, they also fear perceived outcomes if their sexuality is discovered. The fear of perceived outcomes relates to how others may act in the workplace, including limiting

their career, the attitudes of others changing and the environment at work changing (Global & Vodafone, 2018; Ragins et al., 2007). The fear of how others may react to sexuality disclosure aligns to concept of stigma theory in the workplace (Ragins, 2008; Ragins et al., 2007). Individuals balance their fear of perceived consequences, versus the social and psychological support that the disclosure decision may bring (Clair et al., 2005; Ragins et al., 2007). It is therefore argued by Ragins et al. (2007) that disclosure of sexual orientation in the workplace should be viewed through a lens of perceived consequence resulting from disclosure.

An individual's decision to disclose their sexual orientation in the workplace is not fixed with individuals moving 'in and out of the closet' based on external factors (Papadaki & Giannou, 2021). LGB employees face a constant struggle in the workplace, "to display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when and where" (Goffman, 1963, p. 43). The struggle aptly described over 60 years ago by Goffman (1963) remains today, manifesting differently in every LGB individual. No matter the decision made, the process has an ongoing personal impact.

The phenomena of LGB employees analysing whether to be open about their sexuality in the workplace or to hide, 'passing' as the norm (heterosexual), has been called different names by scholars; such as visibility management (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003), strategic outness (Orne, 2011), and the invisible identity management model (Clair et al., 2005). Visibility management is defined as "a dynamic process of social decision-making, selective disclosure and ongoing monitoring" (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003, p. 243). Whereas the concept of strategic outness is explained as a continual process of coming out that is in constant flux, rather than a pre-set trajectory that one follows when they are ready (Orne, 2011). The invisible identity management model outlines a cost benefit analysis undertaken by an individual, assessing the risks of disclosure, with influencing factors of interpersonal and environmental contexts (professional and industry norms, legal protection and organisational climate) (Clair et al., 2005). Each of the concepts outlined above, speak to the complexity of the decisions one makes when considering to disclose or hide their sexuality (Clair et al., 2005; Lasser & Tharinger, 2003; Orne, 2011; Ozbilgin et al., 2022; Papadaki & Giannou, 2021). All three concepts agree sexuality disclosure decisions within the workplace are ongoing, with LGB employees constantly analysing and assessing their level of disclosure in the workplace on a daily basis (Clair et al., 2005; Lasser & Tharinger, 2003; Orne, 2011).

Similarly, research into another invisible diversity characteristic, namely invisible disability speaks to disclosure. Kulkarni (2022) categorised the complexity of the personal disclosure dilemma individuals face with an invisible disability into three clear categories. These categories are:

authentic versus professional dilemma (whether to bring all or part of self to work), participate or withdrawal dilemma (how much to participate at risk of disclosure), and advocacy or privacy dilemma (acknowledging a loss of personal privacy for one to truly advocate for change) (Kulkarni, 2022). Based on the findings of Miminoshvili and Černe (2022), E. Patton (2022), and Ragins (2008), alignment of disclosure amongst invisible differences has been identified. Each of these studies have identified that individuals undergo a process of 'assessment' and 'decision making' in relation to disclosure of their difference, from minority members (Miminoshvili & Černe, 2022), to individuals with invisible stigmas (Ragins, 2008) and invisible disability (E. Patton, 2022). It is therefore reasonable to surmise individuals with invisible diversity characteristic(s), including LGB employees may face the same, or similar disclosure dilemmas outlined by Kulkarni (2022). Notwithstanding, the focus of Kulkarni (2022) research was on invisible disability, not sexuality, and as such identifies a gap for future research.

A recent quantitative study conducted with sexual and gender minorities (SGM), has put forward two new measures to understand sexuality disclosure at work, namely 'coming out vigilance' (COV) and 'positive coming out responses' (PCOR) (Skidmore et al., 2024). This study is the first of its kind to develop these measures, identifying relationships between the measures and participant wellbeing, health and identity outcomes (Skidmore et al., 2024). The COV measure is comprised of three sub parts, namely "rehearsing the coming out conversation, being selective with who one comes out to, anticipating others' reactions" (Skidmore et al., 2024, p. 786). The PCOR measure is comprised of eight sub parts, such as "the degree to which others celebrate, advocate for, and validate SGMs' identities" (Skidmore et al., 2024, p. 788). This is a unique approach to understanding identity management within the sexual and gender minority field of literature. Through this approach, interesting relationships were identified. For example, the influence immediate family members' reaction to sexuality disclosure, and initial coming out disclosure, can have on an individual's perception of coming out to others in the future (Skidmore et al., 2024).

Disclosure and the workplace

The majority of literature discusses diversity disclosure within the workplace as a 'choice' whereby the responsibility for the choice sits with the diverse individual alone (Clair et al., 2005; Di Marco et al., 2022; Ragins, 2008). Thus, Di Marco, et al. (2022) extend boundary theory to analyse diversity disclosure at work. Boundary theory outlines how the actions of all people change, maintain or create new 'boundaries' between life domains for example, work and personal domains (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kreiner et al., 2009). Di Marco et al. (2022) argue boundary theory applies to sexuality disclosure at work, with individuals sitting on a continuum of segmentation (keeping sexuality separate from work through non-disclosure) versus integration

(combining sexuality and work through disclosure) (Di Marco et al., 2022). Individuals, and others around them influence where they sit on the continuum, and the level of integration or segmentation that occurs (Di Marco et al., 2022). An example is work-life balance, whereby an individual may wish to keep the domains of work and home life segmented, however expectations of others may result in the need to 'work from home in the weekend', thus it is others around the individual influencing integration between the domains. Through the use of boundary theory, Di Marco et al. (2022) rebut the position that sexuality disclosure is the choice of the LGB individual alone, and rather surmises that all employees are responsible for creating an environment that is open and welcoming to disclosure from LGB employees. Di Marco et al. (2022) outline how interactions with co-workers create a stronger or weaker boundary between disclosure and non-disclosure. Positive, or negative interactions all influence the boundaries between LGB employees personal and work domains, influencing how they feel about disclosure. It is not the work of one, but rather the work of all that creates an environment welcoming for diverse people to bring their whole self to work (Di Marco et al., 2022).

Similar to the work of Di Marco et al. (2022), Shore, et al. (2011) has taken a longstanding theory, the social identity theory one step further, defining inclusion within the workplace as "the degree to which individuals experience treatment from the group that satisfies their need for belongingness and uniqueness" (Shore et al., 2011, p. 1265), establishing an inclusion framework. This work is pivotal in identifying inclusion as more than simply feeling like you 'belong'; arguing that inclusion is also about being accepted for the uniqueness that you bring as your true authentic self without the need to conform to any societal norms (Shore et al., 2011). Whilst both Di Marco, et al. (2022) and Shore, et al. (2011) directly challenge heteronormativity within the workplace, they hold differing views on scope of influence. Shore, et al. (2011) argues the influencing factor on disclosure decisions is the group that satisfies an individual's need for belonging. Whereas Di Marco, et al. (2022) argues all interactions with others irrespective of individuals influence on feelings of belonging that impacts disclosure decisions. In other words, both of these studies expand the readers appreciation for the complexity of sexuality disclosure decisions in the workplace. Whilst these studies both hold differing views on scope of influence, they both demonstrate the decision process is more complex than the individual alone deciding to disclose or not to disclose. There are far wider implications that the individual is considering during this process.

Making workplaces more inclusive

There is a strong business case for inclusion in the workplace, whereby organisations should focus on creating a culture where all employees can be their true authentic self and feel included, like they belong. Benefits of an inclusive workplace are improved productivity (Hossain et al., 2020; Lloren & Parini, 2017; Pichler et al., 2018; Scobie, 2015), a positive influence on retention (Murison

& Game-Lopata, 2021) and attraction of employees (Murison & Game-Lopata, 2021; Pichler et al., 2018). Furthermore, when workplaces value and enforce workplace diversity policies, it has a positive impact on individuals (Pichler et al., 2018). Inclusive LGBT policies are shown to have a direct positive impact on overall performance, productivity and profitability of the workplace (Pichler et al., 2018). Nevertheless, some argue inclusive policies have not gone far enough and require further improvement (Seiler-Ramadas et al., 2022). When a workplace feels more inclusive, LGB employees are more innovative, demonstrate higher performance (Hossain et al., 2020) with increased job satisfaction and lower job anxiety (Jiang et al., 2019).

Failure to create an inclusive workplace has a negative impact. Hiding sexual orientation or gender identity within the workplace results in lower productivity for at least 30% of the rainbow community in New Zealand (Global & Vodafone, 2018). This negative impact on productivity and performance has been demonstrated across studies when an individual hides their true identity due to stigma (Scobie, 2015). Not only does hiding sexuality impact on the individuals performance, it further impacts retention. Over 35% of LGBT+ respondents indicated they had considered leaving their employer, with over 20% reporting exclusionary behaviour in the last 12 months (Barthelemy et al., 2022). When a workplace is not inclusive, sexual minorities are negatively impacted on an individual level impacting their mental and physical wellbeing (DeSouza et al., 2017).

Employers are aware of the need to be more inclusive and have been assessing how to improve and create a more inclusive workplace for LGBT employees (Hossain et al., 2020). Internationally, research conducted by Pulcher et al. (2022) has applied stakeholder theory to LGBT+ inclusion practices in the workplace. It is important to note that the application of stakeholder theory and diversity principles is uncommon, however provides unique insights into LGB inclusion in the workplace. This study identified two categories summarising the intent of making a workplace more inclusive, namely a ‘business driven intent’, or ‘equality driven intent’ (Pulcher et al., 2022). Where employers were responding to a ‘business driven intent’, stakeholders such as external LGBT+ associations advocate for a focus on greater levels of education about employees’ differences in the workplace (Pulcher et al., 2022). This approach is seen to challenge heteronormativity (through increased education and targeted support specifically to LGBT+ communities in an organisation) and enables different allocation of organisational resources (such as funding to establish a rainbow support network) (Pulcher et al., 2022). Where a business driven intent is the drive for change, employers can often be seen to participate publicly in pride celebrations such as parades, advertise with same-sex couples and establish employee resource groups (ERG) (Pulcher et al., 2022). Whereas the ‘equality driven intent’ is driven from stakeholders such as trade unions, that are advocating for equal treatment of all employees, no matter their difference (Pulcher et al.,

2022). The focus on the same treatment for all, makes the assumption that individuals are aware of others' differences and does not target the impacts of heteronormativity (Pulcher et al., 2022). Where an equality driven intent is the drive for change, results such as changes to collective agreements and workplace policies are seen, ensuring that all employees have equal access to benefits (Pulcher et al., 2022). The equality driven intent fails to address the underlying heteronormativity present within organisations, assuming everyone is the same with equal opportunity. Whilst Pulcher et al. (2022) is the first to apply stakeholder theory to LGBT+ inclusion in the workplace, the study provides unique insight, examining inclusivity in the workplace from a different perspective. Ultimately, both drivers identified, namely business drive and equality drive are needed within an organisation to have a balanced approach to LGBT+ inclusion. Both drivers have varied impacts based on the position key stakeholders are advocating from and thus, both drivers have merit.

Whilst an employer can take steps to create a welcoming environment for LGB employees, it does not come without challenge. One key challenge faced, is the advocacy and feedback challenge (Scotch, 1988). For 'invisible' diversity groups, there is difficulty of forming and mobilising employees to stand together and advocate for greater rights, due to the lack of visibility (Scotch, 1988). Without advocacy and feedback, employers struggle to know whether their actions are making a meaningful difference. However, without a welcoming environment, employees struggle to feel safe enough to self-disclose and provide the feedback and advocacy required. To compound this challenge, workplaces may also find disclosure differences across their workforce (such as field work verses office work), influencing employee's comfort self-disclosing in the workplace (Rengers et al., 2019).

Through simple steps, an employer can reposition their workplace to be a more welcoming and inclusive environment for diverse people to be their true authentic self. This can be done in simple ways, such as destigmatising the topic, encouraging discussions across the workplace, educating managers and setting out clear protection policies (Beatty & Kirby, 2006; Lloren & Parini, 2017; Pichler et al., 2018; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; RainbowTick, 2019; Seiler-Ramadas et al., 2022). Other proven ways include active and visible role models within the organization (Bowring & Brewis, 2009; Global & Vodafone, 2018; Kelly et al., 2021); support from a direct manager (Seiler-Ramadas et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022), and receiving external certification (Byrt, 2019; RainbowTick, 2019). Encouraging allyship and providing resource allocation (such as funding rainbow initiatives and resource/support groups) are strong facilitators to create an inclusive workplace (Balakrishnan & Mohapatra, 2022). Making changes within an organisation do not have to be big and can start small, with focus on the words people speak. Workplaces that encourage a strong use of inclusive language have seen strong correlation and impact on increased feelings of inclusion (Perales et al., 2022).

Chapter summary

Workplaces around the world demonstrate a culture of heteronormativity (Inagraham, 2006; Pringle & Giddings, 2011), influencing behaviour and reinforcing to employees how they should act with what is acceptable and what is not (de Moura & Nascimento, 2021; Pringle & Giddings, 2011; Woodruffe-Burton & Bairstow, 2013). Whilst employers implement policies and Governments enact antidiscrimination laws, this system of protection is fraught and based on the need to be 'out' to attain said protection (Beatty & Kirby, 2006). Whilst individuals who come out may be 'protected' by policies and legislation, they often fall victim to overt (Beatriz & Pereira, 2023; Betts, 2020; Croteau, 1996; Drydakis, 2009; Global & Vodafone, 2018; Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012; Levine, 1979; Levine & Leonard, 1984; Papadaki et al., 2021; Ross, 1975) and covert (Beatriz & Pereira, 2023; DeSouza et al., 2017; Galupo & Resnick, 2016; Nadal, 2008; Papadaki et al., 2021) discriminatory behaviour. International research tells us that fear of discrimination is one of the main reasons why LGB employees hide their sexuality at work (Bachmann & Gooch, 2018; Badgett et al., 2009; Beatriz & Pereira, 2023; Global & Vodafone, 2018; Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012). Other reasons include fear of perceived outcomes such as impact to career, change of relationships, or change to the work environment (Global & Vodafone, 2018; Ragins et al., 2007). Whilst organisations benefit from an inclusive workplace (Hossain et al., 2020; Lloren & Parini, 2017; Murison & Game-Lopata, 2021; Pichler et al., 2018; Scobie, 2015), we still see countless numbers of LGB employees who feel like they need to hide their sexuality in the workplace.

Sexual orientation is an 'invisible' characteristic (Beatty & Kirby, 2006) whereby LGB employees have the option to disclose their invisible difference (Ragins, 2008), or to hide it and be treated as a member of the 'unstigmatized majority' (Clair et al., 2005). Being open about sexual orientation or gender identity has been classified by 18% of New Zealand LGBT+ people as the hardest thing they have ever had to do (Global & Vodafone, 2018). As outlined, sexuality disclosure within the workplace is not simple or straightforward, but rather an ongoing cost benefit analysis undertaken by LGB individuals on a daily basis (Clair et al., 2005; Lasser & Tharinger, 2003; Orne, 2011). Through the application of longstanding social theories, namely boundary theory (Di Marco et al., 2022) and social identity theory (Shore et al., 2011); it is argued that the responsibility of creating a welcoming environment for individuals to come out does not sit with the LGB individual alone.

New Zealand research focused on LGB sexuality disclosure in the workplace is scant. Throughout this chapter, a need has been established for this thesis – amongst very few academic studies into this topic in New Zealand. Answering the research question will create

New Zealand specific knowledge that can be critically applied and compared to international literature. This thesis seeks to answer the research question*: "What are the reasons why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation in the workplace and how does this impact them?"*. The next chapter of this thesis will outline the methodology, research philosophy, approach and method of this thesis.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The focus of this thesis is to create new knowledge and understanding of the reasons why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation at work, and the impact that this has on them. This thesis seeks to bridge a gap of knowledge identified through being one of the first to apply a New Zealand specific lens to this field of research. This chapter will outline the research philosophy, methodology and method of research, explaining why they have been chosen and the benefit they provide to this thesis. It further provides a summary of ethical considerations that have been critical in forming safety in this research process.

Research philosophy

Research philosophy is at the centre of all academic research, either explicitly or implicitly aligning to a research ontology (Gray, 2014, 2018), epistemology (Gray, 2018; Morgan, 2014) and paradigm (Davies & Fisher, 2018; Gray, 2018). When reviewing literature, it is important academics can clearly identify and understand the research philosophy in order to reach their research aims (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2014). Research philosophy is used to inform readers' understanding of how the research was conducted and uncovers the underlying values and beliefs that informed the research (Gray, 2014, 2018).

A research ontology outlines the researcher's view of reality, what is seen to be true (Crotty, 1998; Grant & Giddings, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 1994), articulating "the nature of existence and what constitutes reality" (Gray, 2018, p. 19). The ontology chosen for this thesis is a relativist ontology, holding the belief that the reality around us is not fixed and can change over time (Gray, 2014, 2018). This is demonstrated by the participants of this thesis, each telling their story, their view of reality, built upon their assumptions and experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Differing world views align with the belief that the reality around us is not fixed and can change over time (Gray, 2014, 2018). A relativist ontology aligns with the aims of this thesis and the researcher's belief that through new knowledge, research can influence and change the future. The researcher holds a strong belief in social equity for all, believing that we must challenge the structures and systems that have been built upon oppression, segregation, greed, and inequality that benefit those with privilege in society. Through academia and rigorous research, the researcher argues that we can challenge the current 'status quo' and make changes to our reality for the better, helping those who have been treated unfairly within the workplace. This view is aligned to a relativist ontology that the reality around us can change and be influenced by new knowledge (Gray, 2014, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Epistemologies aim to understand the meaning of knowing, “identifying what kinds of knowledge are legitimate and adequate” (Gray, 2014, 2018, p. 19). The epistemological position provides clarity of relationship between participant and researcher, outlining how they interact with each other throughout the research (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Gray, 2014). In support of a relativist ontology, a constructivist epistemology has been selected for this thesis, whereby meaningful knowledge is constructed through the researcher’s interaction with participants (Morgan, 2014). The constructivist epistemology aligns with the relativist ontology, holding the belief that reality can change (Baškarada & Koronios, 2018). This thesis constructs knowledge through the researcher’s interpretation of participants’ stories, participants’ views of the world and participants’ lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2014). Through interaction with participants, the researcher can interpret, understand, analyse and tell the truth behind the research participants’ experiences. Constructivism identifies meaning and truth from individuals’ interactions with the world and phenomenon being researched, which can result in contrasting, however equally valid views of reality amongst research participants (Gray, 2014). Contrary to a constructivist epistemology, are academics who believe the world operates independently to our interactions, whereby knowledge is to be discovered rather than constructed, requiring the need for research to be objective to have meaning and impact (Gray, 2014; Morgan, 2014). This thesis unequivocally rejects this view, holding the belief that researchers invested in the background and topic of their research can provide context and support change for marginalised sections of our society.

Research paradigms outline the views, and set of beliefs a researcher holds, explaining the way in which the researcher interprets and analyses the world (Davies & Fisher, 2018). The research paradigm chosen holds a direct link to how research is conducted such as the kind of questions asked during research (Davies & Fisher, 2018), including how a researcher engages in data collection, analysis and reporting of findings (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Gray, 2014). More influential paradigms include critical theory, positivism and interpretivism (Grant & Giddings, 2002). The most appropriate paradigm for this thesis, aligned with a relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology is the critical theory paradigm. The critical theory paradigm is well known for challenging the status quo with the researcher being reflexive and adaptive throughout the process (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Smith, 1993). As stated, this thesis is focused on uncovering new knowledge, empowering LGB employees within the workplace, and promoting social change within society. The aim of this thesis is directly aligned with a critical theory paradigm by challenging the status quo (Davies & Fisher, 2018; Denzin, 2017). Achieving the aims of this thesis (providing a voice to a community that is often hidden and thereby improving their working environment) would not be possible without employing a critical theory paradigm. It is only through the alignment of a relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology and critical theory paradigm, that LGB people

can achieve the emancipation they both deserve and require within the workplace (Benozzo et al., 2015; Grant & Giddings, 2002).

Methodology

This thesis applies a relativist ontology, constructivist epistemology and critical theory paradigm. In order to carry out this thesis, the methodology and methods must be identified and explained. Research methodologies outline the way in which the researcher will uncover new knowledge, it is systematic and aligns to research ontology, epistemology and paradigm (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Gray, 2014). The methodology chosen for this thesis is narrative inquiry, the process of using individuals' narratives (their stories) to understand phenomena in society (Ospina & Dodge, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative inquiry is a useful methodology when researching specific phenomena to understand and enhance researchers' knowledge of individuals diverse experiences (Ospina & Dodge, 2005). Knowledge contained within individuals stories is unique and different to what you may uncover with explanatory methods such as a survey (Ospina & Dodge, 2005). Utilising an interpretive research approach, such as narrative inquiry is key to uncovering the why and not just what happens within participants' reality (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Ospina & Dodge, 2005). This methodology is about more than analysing written or spoken responses to questions by participants, it is about uncovering the meaning within participants' narratives and their views of reality (Ospina & Dodge, 2005). Narrative inquiry enables analysis of participants' stories to identify themes to 're-story' in a compelling way that provides explanation (Ospina & Dodge, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1995).

The narrative inquiry methodology is criticised as a 'soft' approach to research that lacks scientific rigour (Shank, 2006; White, 1999). However recent developments to what has been called 'the narrative turn' has seen a growth in narrative inquiry research (Ospina & Dodge, 2005). This turn has seen narrative inquiry research become more mainstream (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000), highlighting the importance of voice of participants and researchers often marginalised in society (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The narrative inquiry methodology is appropriate for this thesis due to its ability to identify themes across individual stories (Ospina & Dodge, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1995). The narrative inquiry methodology has enabled the researchers understanding to re-tell participants stories to address the research question:

> *What are the reasons why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation in the workplace, and how does this impact on their lives?*
>
> *a. Why do LGB employees hide their sexual orientation in the workplace?*
>
> *b. What is the effect of LGB employees hiding their sexual orientation in the workplace?*

Storytelling through narrative enquiry has been chosen due to it being an effective way to express human experiences to others in a compelling manner (Ospina & Dodge, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1995). Telling a compelling story, uncovering the need for social change and the current injustice that is occurring is inextricably linked to a critical theory paradigm (Davies & Fisher, 2018; Denzin, 2017) and the aim of this thesis.

Reflexivity of researcher

The rigor of qualitative data is important with many academics citing reflexivity as a valuable process to improve research quality (Enosh & Ben-Ari, 2016; Nodesco, 2019; Wesam Darawsheh, 2014). Reflexivity is the process in which researchers undertake active self-review of their perceptions, feelings and reactions during the research process (Enosh & Ben-Ari, 2016; Wesam Darawsheh, 2014; Yiannis, 2015). Engaging in reflexivity is seen to increase the credibility of the research, allowing the researcher to gain a deeper level of understanding, whilst ensuring no preconceptions interfere with the research findings (Wesam Darawsheh, 2014). However, some argue that all researchers engage in reflexivity, whether consciously or unconsciously, with no guarantee it adds to the quality of the research undertaken (Yiannis, 2015). Notwithstanding, reflexivity has been engaged in all stages of this thesis and has been employed due to the personal nature of the research topic. It has been seen as an important process for the researcher. Reflexivity has been engaged by active and open communication with the researcher's supervisor; by keeping a notebook to record feelings and personal experiences held by the researcher throughout each stage of the research; and through brainstorming any preconceptions the researcher has with the research topic.

During the research process, there were several occasions whereby reflexivity was of particular importance. During the research design stage of this thesis, the researcher was focused on ensuring their pre-conceived ideas of why individuals hide their sexuality in the workplace, and the impact it may have on them was not influenced by his own personal experience. To combat this, the researcher brainstormed the personal reasons why he has hid his sexuality at work in the past, and what impact hiding sexuality in the workplace had on him. He then created a separate brainstorm of anecdotal feedback and research that he had read, under the same two groups of reasons why, and impacts to individuals. This was an important exercise to engage in, as it allowed the researcher to identify what pre-conceived ideas may already be in his mind, and to ensure that the research design was created in a way that open and would allow for other ideas to be discovered. This research design was then discussed with his research Supervisor, to ensure the research design did not hold bias, was open and allowed for the discovery of new knowledge.

Another example of reflexivity that was engaged in during the research process, was specific to the researchers positionality. Positionality is the position and views in which a researcher holds in relation to the phenomenon, context and participants that they are researching (Greene, 2014; Toy-Cronin, 2018; Yvonne Bulk & Collins, 2024). Two important aspects of the researcher's positionality are his gender (male) and his sexuality (gay). These two aspects of positionality were important for the researcher to identify and reflect on how they may influence the research. As previously stated, this research was designed to discover new knowledge. As such, when the researcher was interviewing participants he reflected on his own positionality prior to the interview and following the interview. The purpose of this self-reflection was to ensure the researcher held an open mind to discover new knowledge and did not disregard participants experiences if they were not aligned to the researcher's own positionality. This was of particular importance for participants with different positionality to himself (for example, bisexual males, or lesbian females). An example of this, was bisexual participants discussing how their colleagues frequently asked inappropriate comments about sexual promiscuity. Another example was women participants discussing the overlay of career concern, not only due to being in the rainbow community, but also being a woman within the workplace. These experiences were not something the researcher has ever personally encountered, and as such, reflexivity was vital to ensure all points raised by participants received equal consideration and weighting.

Keeping positionality in mind, as part of the reflexive process the researcher engaged methods to ensure participants voices were central and guided coding and analysis. During the coding of transcripts, the researcher made sure the codes were double checked prior to proceeding to the next step of the thematic analysis process. Further to this, the researcher made sure that he always went back to the source transcript when reviewing what the participant had stated. This was of particular importance when pulling direct quotes into this qualitative research. The researcher engaged reflexively and reflected on the context of the participants' quote to ensure they were not taken out of context and were applied appropriately. This process ensured the researcher was not influenced by sentiment, his own position or seemingly sensational incidents. Through the use of the stated reflexive processes, the author has been able to ensure the coding and analysis of research findings were not bias towards the author's experiences.

Insider research

Insider research is defined where the researcher holds the same defining characteristics as participants within the study (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015) or are part of the same community relevant to the research (Yin, 2015). For this thesis, a researcher would be considered an insider for example, if they held the following characteristics: they are lesbian, gay or bisexual, are within paid employment and have experience of hiding their sexuality at work. Being an insider, can enable a

researcher to gain a deeper level of insight from participants' narratives (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). The primary researcher for this thesis is an insider, being a gay man who has experienced hiding his sexuality within paid employment. The researcher was able to use this experience and insight to support development of the research purpose, aim, research question, philosophy and data collection method. Being an insider supported the researcher to build trust (Veldhuis et al., 2024) with increased authenticity, enabling a deeper level of connection and interaction with research participants (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). This level of connection and authenticity was key to constructing the findings of this thesis in quite a sensitive research topic.

Whilst being an insider researcher has advantages, it was important for the researcher to be aware of its challenges (Yvonne Bulk & Collins, 2024). Common challenges raised are perceived bias (Veldhuis et al., 2024), and needing to navigate the complexity of dual roles (being a researcher and member of the community focused on within the research) (Toy-Cronin, 2018). For this thesis, it was important for the primary researcher as an insider to be aware of his positionality, identifying his psychological distance from the research focus (Moore, 2012). The researcher, through engaging reflexivity, explored his own positionality, including power, privilege and the status of being an insider, amongst other factors such as gender, age and profession. All of these factors had the ability to skew or influence the results of this thesis if they were not sufficiently explored (Veldhuis et al., 2024). Understanding his own positionality from the outset of this research project, has enabled the researcher to be informed and aware of his ability to co-construct findings based off his interactions with research participants and the analysis of the findings (Gray, 2014).

As the researcher is an insider, it was important for him to engage in reflexivity as discussed above to ensure personal bias or preconceptions did not impact the research findings (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015; Veldhuis et al., 2024). Further challenges associated with insider research include having confronting or unexpected complexities arise, including the need for emotional labour during the research process (Yvonne Bulk & Collins, 2024). Hayfield and Huxley (2015) outline potential risks associated with insider research that include; taking information collected for granted; failing to assign correct codes; and unconscious assumptions made from participants that the researcher has shared knowledge and therefore impeding the depth of conversation. In order to combat these identified risks, the researcher used probing questioning to dive deeper into participants' answers, which included rephrasing, asking and re-asking participants on certain points where they were only providing surface level answers (Kallio et al., 2016). Aligned to these risks, is unconscious assumptions that were made by some participants during the research process. An example of this was participants providing very surface level responses to why they hide their sexuality at work (such as 'It isn't safe'), assuming the researcher knows what this means. The researcher proceeded to ask further questions to understand what aspects of the workplace did not feel safe,

to ensure full understanding and no assumptions were made. To ensure the data collected in this thesis is free from personal judgement of the researcher, a robust qualitative data collection method was undertaken. This method is outlined below, including semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, that were balanced with the use of reflexivity throughout the research process to ensure no bias of personal judgement impacted the data collection.

Method

Data collection

The method of data collection chosen for this thesis was 12 one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, conducted in person or over audio-video link via Microsoft Teams. This presented an open environment for research participants to feel like they were in a safe space to open up and be honest about their experiences (Brinkmann, 2014). Often when interviewing about sensitive or personal topics, one-on-one interviews are preferred over group interviews, due to the ability to create a sense of discretion and trust (Brinkmann, 2014). A common area used to differentiate interviews is the structure, whether it is structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Brinkmann, 2014). Whilst this is commonly referred to, often it is misunderstood (Brinkmann, 2014). Structure is best thought of as a continuum rather than separate states (Brinkmann, 2014). Structured interviews are on one end of the continuum with the researcher only reading exact questions verbatim to each participant. Structured interviews are often criticised by the inability to take advantage of dialogue or opportunities to understand at a deeper level due to conversational questions not being prescribed on the set question list (Brinkmann, 2014). Unstructured interviews are at the opposite end of the continuum, whereby the researcher has very little structure and opens the interview with a framing, however it is difficult to know where the participant will take the narrative and thus, the researcher instead actively listens and provides prompting questions based on the participants response (Brinkmann, 2014). Semi-structured interviews however, sit in the middle of the continuum (Brinkmann, 2014), with some structure to guide the conversation whilst allowing the researcher to remain reflexive and adaptable to the research. This enables the researcher to engage in conversational opportunities and understand a deeper level as outlined earlier).

For the purpose of meeting the aim of this thesis, interviews in this study were semi-structured. Selecting semi-structured interviews enabled a depth of understanding to participants stories that was focused on the topic at hand, that would not be possible with structured or unstructured interviews. As outlined previously, the researcher is an insider researcher. This had the potential for participants to make assumptions of the researchers knowledge which may have impacted on the findings (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). This demonstrates why structured interviews were not suitable for this research (as they impede the ability to re-question). Furthermore, this topic is quite

personal and as such, participants may have unconsciously avoided painful or difficult topics of conversation. Without any structure to guide the conversation, there was a risk the participants responses may lead off in different directions negatively impacting coherent analysis and findings. This demonstrates why unstructured interviews were not suitable for this research.

The interviews were conducted by asking participants a set list of open ended questions, allowing respondents to tell their story (Gray, 2018). The researcher was able to adapt, asking follow up questions when deeper level of understanding was required (Brinkmann, 2014). Whilst there was a mixture of online (five) verses in person interviews (seven) for this study, there were no apparent disadvantages identified for either method. Both online and in person interviews had free flowing conversation; all participants arrived to their scheduled interview time.

Selection criteria for this thesis required participants to have:

1. Diverse sexual orientation - with research participants identifying as homosexual (lesbian or gay) or bisexual,
2. Current employment - with research participants employed in a part time, or full time capacity in New Zealand,
3. Hidden disclosure - research participants must have experience hiding their sexuality (either in part or entirely) in the workplace (either current, or past workplace).

The selection criteria had been carefully crafted to ensure the aims of this thesis can be met. It is important when researching individual impacts of sexual orientation disclosure within the workplace, that the research participants identify with a diverse sexual orientation, are in paid employment and that they have experience of not being open about their sexual orientation within the workplace. Gender was not a selection criterion, however all participants were cis-gender whereby an individual's "gender aligns with their sex assigned at birth" (InsideOUT, 2021, p. 2) and there was an even split of men and women.

Participants

In the below table is an outline of participant information who took part in this thesis.

Table A: Participants of thesis

Pseudonym	Disclosure at work	Sexuality	Gender	Age	Location	Industry of work
Emma	Out to none	Bisexual	Female	27	Auckland	Public Sector
Rob	Out to none	Bisexual	Male	35	Auckland	Civil Construction
Jillian	Out to none	Bisexual	Female	43	Waikato	National Sport
Michael	Out to none	Gay	Male	37	Auckland	Civil Engineering
Ella	Out to some	Queer	Female	21	Waikato	Public Sector
Chloe	Out to some	Queer	Female	50	Christchurch	Public Sector
David	Out to some	Gay	Male	25	Auckland	Manufacturing
Grace	Out to some	Lesbian	Female	33	Auckland	Public Sector
Alice	Out to most	Lesbian	Female	41	Auckland	Public Sector
Olivia	Out to most	Lesbian	Female	51	Auckland	Public Sector
Noah	Out to all	Bisexual	Male	34	Auckland	Electronic Payments
Tim	Out to all	Gay	Male	34	Auckland	Civil Engineering

The disclosure at work categories of ‘out to none’, ‘out to some’ or ‘out to most’ were decided upon to align to existing research available (Global & Vodafone, 2018; Goldberg, 2013; Ragins et al., 2007), whilst maintaining simple to interpret and understand categories for the reader. Categories reference participants disclosure within their current employment. Participants were categorised during the analysis phase of this thesis, through analysis of each participants responses. Out to none includes participants who have not disclosed their sexuality to anyone at their current workplace. Out to some, include participants who have disclosed to a close colleague(s), or to their immediate team they work within at their current workplace. Out to all includes participants who are out to everyone internally within their current workplace, however have experience of hiding their sexuality previously in the workplace.

Data analysis

The method chosen to analyse the data was thematic analysis. This method is aligned with the research philosophy and aim, chosen for its ability to identify themes and meaning from participants lived experiences’, from participants’ perspectives and through participants’ feelings (Braun & Clarke, 2017). This is directly aligned with the aims of this thesis. Utilising thematic analysis for this thesis has enabled the identification of themes that appear across the entire data set collected. The themes identified provide a deep level of understanding and insight to answer the research questions. The aim of thematic analysis is to identify patterns commonly referred to as ‘themes’ across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once themes were identified, they were used to understand and explain the specific research questions of this thesis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method of data analysis was chosen due to the flexibility it provides the researcher, both in the construction of the research and more notably in the analysis of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2017).

Following the completion of one-on-one interviews, the analysis of the data commenced. When initiating the analysis, there were no existing or pre-set codes or frameworks to work within; rather it was through reading and re-reading the data that allowed for open identification of codes and themes to be identified, known as inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; M. Q. Patton, 1990). Due to an inductive approach of thematic analysis being a very data-driven exercise (Braun & Clarke, 2006), Simplemind, Excel and Otter software were utilised to collate codes and themes across the data. The dataset collected in this thesis consisted of 12 semi-structured individual interview transcripts.

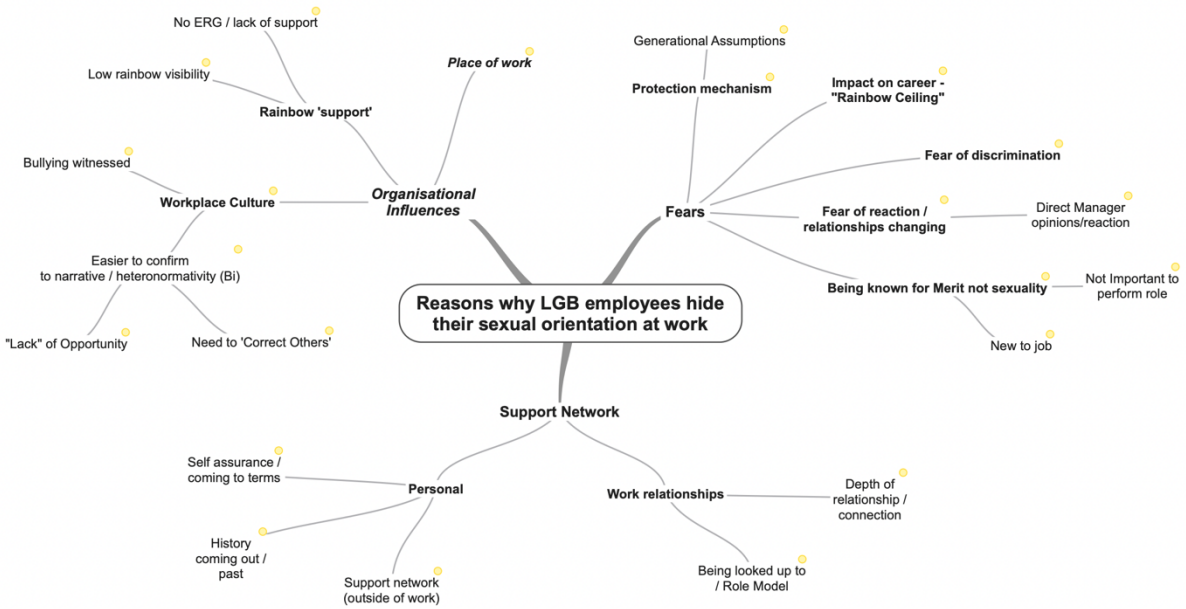
The process of data analysis that was followed aligns with the phases set out by Braun and Clarke (2006). The key phases followed were:

1. **Understanding the data:**
    a. This phase included reading interview questions, research questions and all data collected – specifically the 12 interview transcripts (from Otter) to understand the primary data collected, noting down initial thoughts on the page.
2. **Generate draft codes:**
    a. This phase included re-reading the interview transcripts to generate draft codes while reading through – noting into the margin of the page and highlighting potential codes.
    b. Once draft codes were generated, these were collated across all data collected into a spreadsheet (Excel) and mind map (Simplemind).
    c. Following all codes being collated, similar codes were merged with code descriptors added to ensure full understanding.
3. **Identify themes:**
    a. This phase included exporting codes and descriptions to analyse and collate codes under appropriate themes that apply for more than one code.
4. **Analyse and review themes:**
    a. This phase involved reviewing themes that had been developed to understand if they are aligned with all levels (codes and dataset). This included developing thematic maps (*see Figure A below*).
5. **Define confirmed themes:**
    a. In this phase, themes were refined and the names and definition of the themes were identified.
6. **Develop report of findings:**

a. Once themes were confirmed, the final phase was to present the findings in a thesis that can be reviewed and analysed. These findings were written into Chapter 4 – Findings of this thesis.

Figure A: Thematic Map

Below is an example of the thematic maps created to aid in defining themes and sub-themes of this thesis:



Ethical considerations

A key foundation to quality research is ensuring full ethical consideration is given. All research outlined within this thesis adheres to the AUT Code of Conduct for Research (AUT, 2019) and has received ethics approval from AUTEC under application 23/74. A foundational element to conducting ethical research is to ensure that the potential benefits outweigh the potential harm (AUT, 2019).

Voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality

Critical components of ethical research are voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality (AUT, 2019). To ensure voluntary participation for this thesis, a participant information sheet was provided to all individuals who were interested in partaking in this study. Once individuals were fully informed on the research, it was their choice to participate by signing a consent form. Once an individual signed the consent form, they had the ability to withdraw from the research at any stage prior to submission. To uphold respondents' anonymity, pseudonyms have been used. This ensures respondents remain anonymous. Participation was away from the workplace at either an AUT campus meeting room or conducted online via audio-video link over Microsoft Teams.

Chapter summary

As outlined, this thesis is aiming to create new knowledge to understand the reasons why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation at work, and the impact that this has on them. This aim was achieved through engaging the appropriate methodology. The research philosophy that has been followed for this thesis is a relativist ontology, constructivist epistemology and critical theory paradigm. Through this philosophical alignment, this thesis provides a voice to a community that is often hidden, LGB people hiding their true authentic self at work. The researcher has engaged in reflexivity throughout the research process to ensure the data collected and analysed holds rigor (Enosh & Ben-Ari, 2016; Nodesco, 2019; Wesam Darawsheh, 2014). Inductive thematic analysis has been employed to analyse the data collected, identify codes, themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2017). This process of data analysis has aligned with the research philosophy and allowed rich themes to emerge for discussion in this thesis. An important aspect of this research methodology was ensuring all ethical implications were considered and planned for. This included mitigating potential risks by engaging steps that would uphold anonymity for participants whilst ensuring support was available should they wish to engage in counselling post interview. All participation in this thesis was voluntary with participants able to withdraw their consent and participation at any point of the research process up to submission. Key themes that have emerged are outlined within the next two chapters, chapter 4 outlining the findings, and chapter five outlining the discussion of this thesis.

Chapter 4: Findings

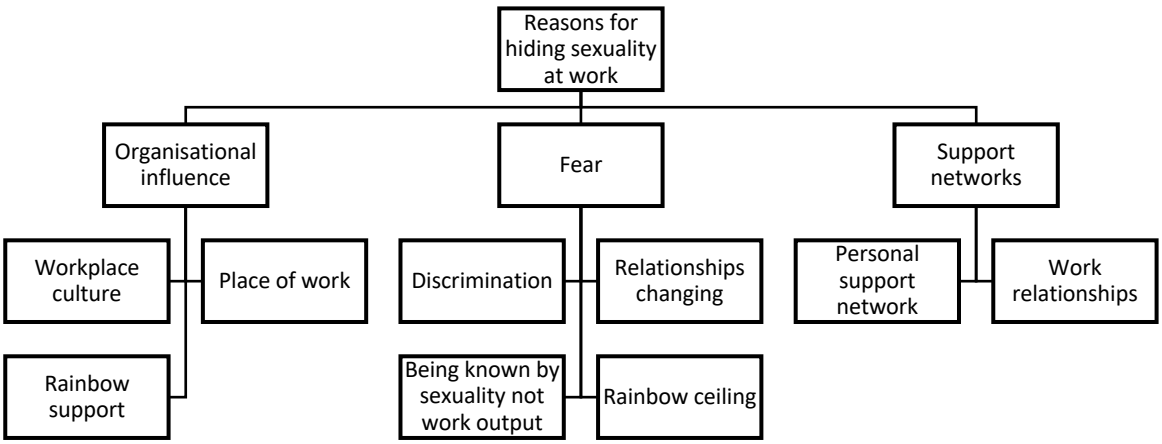
Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings identified through conducting 12 semi-structured interviews with LGB individuals in New Zealand. Interviews represented both men (42%) and women (58%), with all participants identifying as cis-gender. Across participants, there was an age range of 20 to 59 years old. Participants varied in how open they are about their sexual orientation in the workplace. A total of two participants were 'out to all' and the remaining ten participants ranged from being 'out to none', 'out to some' or 'out to most'. Participants' current workplaces represented a range of industries including public service, national sport, digital technology, construction and manufacturing. Through the exploration of participants' personal journeys, detailing their own reasons and the impacts of sexuality disclosure in the workplace, key themes have emerged. Thematic analysis was utilised to distil the findings and uncover two groups of themes and sub-themes. The first grouping of themes outlines the reasons why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation at work. The second grouping of themes outlines the impact on LGB employees who hide their sexual orientation at work. Whilst all themes and sub-themes will be explained individually, it is important to recognise the complex and interdependent relationship of these themes and the influence they have on each other.

Reasons for hiding sexuality at work

Uncovering the reasons why LGB employees hide their sexuality at work found three main themes with a range of sub-themes. Themes and sub-themes identified are shown in Figure B below, categorised as organisational influence, fear and support networks.

Figure B: Reason themes and sub-themes identified:



Organisational influence

The organisation participants work in, influences how comfortable they feel about sexuality disclosure at work. These influences can be distilled into three main sub-themes. The first sub-theme is workplace culture; the second sub-theme is the place of work, and the third sub-theme is the rainbow support present within the workplace.

Throughout interviews, participants described workplace culture that influences them to remain 'hidden' at work. These descriptions ranged from a 'boys club', to a workplace filled with 'heteronormativity' and 'sexism'. These negative views of culture at work were evidenced by microaggressions, inappropriate questions and comments made towards participants that would not have been made to their 'straight' colleagues. An example of this is described below by Noah:

> *"Old boys club, you know, it's very difficult to kind of break into that environment and be successful when you are different. The question that inevitably gets asked is 'how many people do you sleep with?' Because we're both bisexual, the assumption is that we are polyamorous, have an open relationship, or we're just blindingly promiscuous" –* ***Noah***

Examples of microaggressions and jokes in the workplace were raised frequently by participants. Whilst in isolation the examples may seem like a small comment or joke, overtime participants discussed how they compound and have a much larger impact on how they feel about the culture and workplace. Michael describes feeling this below:

> *"Everyone thought I was straight. And straight men can say awful, awful things. I know that it might be a joke, but if you inside are gay, and you have to just laugh at these jokes where they are making fun of your life, it is pretty shit […] It became quite painful to deal with. And then to be able to tell them that I'm gay, after they've said all these awful things about gay people, yeah, it's just like, I can't. I just couldn't do it" –* ***Michael***

Inappropriate comments made in a workplace is an indication of heteronormativity, whereby the common assumption is that you are heterosexual and cisgendered. A culture of heteronormativity impacts all sexually diverse employees at work. When describing the complexity that heteronormativity creates at work, participants discussed a lack of opportunity to be out, due to others always assuming someone's partner is the opposite sex. This results in participants needing to correct their colleague, disclosing the correct gender of their partner if they wish to be out. The small act of correcting a colleague takes an immense amount of courage and bravery. An example of heteronormative culture in the workplace is described by Grace, talking about the first day with her employer:

“My colleague said, ‘so did you come to New Zealand by yourself?’ and I said ‘with my partner’, a go to when you don’t want to announce it. And somebody then said ‘what does he do?’ So I had to say, she's a nurse” - ***Grace***

The act of correcting others is a barrier that is often too large or happens too often. It is what leads to participants taking the view it is ‘easier to conform to the narrative’. Conforming to the narrative is when participants do not correct anyone and let people assume their sexuality. Whilst this seems like an easy thing to do, ‘brushing it off’ has flow on impacts, creating an inner conflict and over time impacts participants’ mental health. This challenge is even more complex when an individual is bisexual and after having an opposite sex partner, they then have a same sex partner and feel a sense of difficulty in explaining this to their colleagues. Rob details how this can feel for a bisexual person:

“I've got my partner who is a female and identifies with she/her pronouns, we have a daughter, and it seems like that typical narrative. To have to try to explain anything alternative to that, it feels like it's just additional bits and pieces that I don't really feel people would be well equipped to have that conversation. So therefore, why have it?” - ***Rob***

Compounding inner conflict and participants’ decision on whether to push against heteronormative norms and culture in an organisation, is workplace bullying. Participants noted examples of workplace bullying that were both connected and not connected to rainbow matters. Regardless of the kind of bullying witnessed, participants discussed the influence the process has on how comfortable they feel about being out at work. This was due to participants’ perceived confidence that bullying behaviour would, or would not be handled well within an organisation. Jillian describes an example of this:

“I experienced sexual harassment at work. I tried to address it and it made it worse. We had an HR manager who specifically said they would not tell the CEO because the last time the CEO found out, they made it worse. What happened? HR immediately went to tell the CEO” - ***Jillian***

Simple acts like what Jillian described, whether participants are involved or not, undermine the confidence participants have on the organisational processes and policies that deal with bullying in the workplace. A lack of confidence results in a decision to not disclose due to the risk it could make their situation worse. Regardless of steps organisations take to influence culture, or create a welcoming environment for rainbow employees, a baseline must be that bullying is not tolerated and is addressed formally. This view was discussed by Alice:

“We have lovely rainbow decorations in our foyer. It's pretty, very pretty, but that's actually not helping the poor kid who is being bullied. So, the rainbow staff network has been

extremely good at holding the organization to account. Holding Senior Leadership to account and saying, actually your actions need to match your words. They're not matching them well enough, and you need to do more" - ***Alice***

Place of work was discussed as a contributing factor for why some participants choose to hide, or partially hide their sexuality in the workplace. Place of work includes the influence of an industry and where work is conducted (office work versus field based work, internal work verses external work). Participants discussed influencing factors including societal acceptance of LGB people working in a profession; a normalised culture across an industry of homophobic slurs; and being a visitor in others space.

Demonstrating the influence industry culture has on how LGB employees feel about sexuality disclosure at work, Rob recounts two separate work experiences in two different industries below:

"In the arts the concept of disclosure in the workplace is actually just really foreign because the arts community is so open. I never felt that there needed to be an actual declaration of, you know, your identity to colleagues because people know you love who you love and it's just very much accepted in the arts industry. But what I realized when I shifted into the corporate world, it took me aback a lot, especially in the construction and infrastructure [industry]. All of a sudden, it was the first time I ever felt like I had to make decisions on whether or not I was going to talk about things openly or not" - ***Rob***

These two experiences in different industries described by Rob demonstrate the influence industry can have on how comfortable LGB employees feel about disclosure at work.

Furthermore, where work is conducted can hold a strong influence on disclosure. Participants who are currently 'out to all' internally within their workplace, discussed an influence to hide their sexuality when interfacing externally with clients or contractors. Tim describes this feeling:

" And I was like, okay, is this a situation that I want to be out in? Someone is saying some pretty awful homophobic things. Is that someone I'm going to talk to again, or someone that I want to talk to again? No. So that's one example of a situation where I'm just like, goodbye. It is not worth my time" - ***Tim***

Within a large organisation, feeling isolated, alone and without strong support was discussed as an influencing factor to remain 'hidden'. Connection is vital to LGB employees feeling like they have a trusted person or group of people that will have their back and be there to support them. Jillian, describes below how she feels in her current workplace where she is not out to anyone:

“In terms of work culture, I'm not sure I'd say that I feel supported or connected… I don’t have that level of connection or friendship with someone who feel like it's a safe space to be open to” - ***Jillian***

The feeling of being alone is a key influencer for Jillian to keep her sexuality hidden at work. Jillian is one example of many others who noted support and connection at work as a strong influencing factor. A common way that employers facilitate support and connection amongst employees are Employee Resource Groups (ERG), commonly referred to as rainbow communities or rainbow networks at work. Often LGB employees when not provided the opportunity to connect with an ERG can feel lost in an organisation. Jillian describes how an ERG would help at her current workplace:

“At the moment, not many people are either out or it's just assumed, yeah, a rainbow network would be helpful even just so that I know if there's like, one person who I could just talk to, one on one. Yeah, that'd be really helpful” - ***Jillian***

This view exemplifies the power of human connection and why ERGs are important to support LGB employees at work. David shares this sentiment as he reflects on the ERG at his current workplace:

“It [Rainbow ERG] helps me to be more comfortable and more assured that I'm working in the right place” - ***David***

This demonstrates the need for organisations to be looking at ways to build support for rainbow communities across their workplace. ERGs are one way of doing this, however participants also discussed how visible and clear signs of allyship at work help. They are vital to signal to members of the LGB community that you are an ally that supports rainbow communities at work. Visible allyship helps individuals overcome the fear of others reactions, as explained by David:

“If my manager did show some sort of interest or support with a rainbow stickers or lanyard, I would be more inclined to be out” - ***David***

Fear in the workplace

The most common reason why participants hide their sexuality at work was fear. Participants’ fear resulted in feelings that being ‘out’ at work would make the workplace more difficult, awkward and unsafe. Fear was explained in a range of general and specific contexts, however common fears outlined as sub-themes are discrimination, relationships changing, being known by sexuality rather than work output and a rainbow ceiling.

Participants described engaging a ‘protection mechanism’ as a way of combating their fear in the workplace. What this protection mechanism is referring to, is participants making ongoing, constant decisions around their sexuality disclosure with the aim of mitigating risk and managing their fear. Through the ongoing and conscious choices participants make, they move between disclosure and hiding their sexuality to ‘protect’ themselves.

Participants admitted fear within the workplace is increased as a result of assumptions that are made. A common assumption made was generational, with an assumption that younger colleagues would be more welcoming, and older colleagues would not understand or accept participants’ sexuality. This assumption made by participants harboured their fear and was driven through past experiences. This fear was aptly outlined by Emma:

> *“Yeah, seeing older people as people who may not be accepting of it, but knowing the younger people are. My state of mind is that people of my parents’ generation or older, seem to not be as accepting. Because that's what I've experienced in my life” – **Emma***

Assumptions of how others would react was a key factor influencing participants’ likelihood to be out, as shown by Olivia:

> *“I probably, like most people do make assumptions and they can affect how out I am or whether I'm out or not” – **Olivia***

However not all assumptions are right, and are often based on stereotypes as Tim explains below:

> *“Some of my colleagues, I knew they went to church. I knew they were quite religious. And you know, I mean, I made an assumption which turned out to be incorrect actually, which is interesting” - **Tim***

Participants displayed a strong fear of discrimination. This fear included being targeted in the workplace; perceptions of them changing; being ‘mislabelled’ at work; becoming ‘the joke’ in others banter; and becoming the victim of bullying at work. Chloe shared a clear example of why she uses a ‘protection mechanism’ to stay safe at work. In this example, Chloe opened up at work during a rainbow workshop, only to make her situation worse due to the organisation not having the right support mechanisms in place:

> *“I self-identified that I was Queer at the very beginning in a very small group of people, and I had some pretty challenging statements that were made in a somewhat passive aggressive way. My personal favourite someone saying directly to me ‘I knew you were’ and I kind of went, ‘huh’. And she said ‘when I was riding up in the lift with you, I knew you were’. It was ignored by the facilitator, never formally addressed […] I had to walk from one*

building to another to go back to work and I was just in tears. It was quite devastating" – ***Chloe***

The fear of how direct managers and colleagues would react to participants' sexuality was a common fear. Participants specifically discussed how they felt relationships may change and what this could mean for their work life. Participants discussed concern with the need to take the first step and broach the subject, without knowing how their colleagues may react. This fear is demonstrated below by Rob:

"A relationship with an organization is directly linked to the relationship you have with your direct manager and your management line. So if that is a supportive line, then you're going to feel safe in your working environment. If it's not, you're not, no matter how much the organization as a whole is talking about safety" - ***Rob***

Another fear related to how others may react, is the fear that through disclosure of their sexuality, participants would become known for their sexuality, or assumptions of their sexuality, and not their own merit and work output. This led to some participants discussing how they would not be 'out' immediately, but once they had built up a name for their 'work' they would then consider it. Chloe explains this internal battle that has played on her mind over her career:

"It is what I have heard over many, many years and different situations of 'I thought she was' or 'I knew she was', and I think that that's what plays into the fact of, I want to be taken on my merits" – ***Chloe***

Lastly, the fear of being 'known for your sexuality', fear of discrimination and fear of others' reactions are all compounded when participants are looking to take the next step in their career. Participants described their fear of a 'rainbow ceiling', whereby they could see impacts on their career if they were out at work. Rainbow ceiling concerns are summarised aptly by Michael:

"If they had the situation where you take heteronormative guy one, and homosexual guy two, and if the person making the decision is heteronormative, then I know their decision and they wouldn't pick me […] I avoid talking about it because I don't want to be counted out because of something that doesn't impact my work" - ***Michael***

Support networks

The third theme influencing participants' sexuality disclosure at work is support networks. This influence can be distilled into two main sub-themes. The first sub-theme is personal support networks. The second sub-theme is work relationships.

As participants described reasons why they choose to hide their sexuality at work, a common influence that arose was personal support networks, regardless of the employer they work for. Most participants discussed their history of coming out and how this currently impacts their support network, or has impacted their support network in the past. Participants provided many examples of when coming out to family or friends has been met with very mixed responses. Negative reactions experienced in the past have resulted in participants fearing how others will react at work, and for some, have resulted in a lack of support outside of work. Examples of mixed reactions are described below by participants:

> *"They would say, 'you're either straight or you're gay, what one are you?' But, I'm Bi"* - ***Rob***
>
> *"I'm sure my Mum thinks that I'm, you know, her version of normal but my Dad would never accept it"* - ***Emma***
>
> *"My parents, I don't think they've processed fully that I'm gay yet or believe that it's true"* - ***David***

These mixed reactions and negative experiences lead to LGB individuals questioning their sexual orientation, or simply not feeling ready to be open about their sexuality to others. Not feeling ready was discussed by a few participants that described their feelings as both internal conflict and a lack of self-assurance. An example of this was discussed by Alice as she reflected back to a time when she hid her sexuality at work:

> *"I just had a lot of baggage you know, like thinking that things are supposed to be a certain way and not knowing where to put myself. I just wasn't ready to come out because I just wasn't sure how it all worked… If you don't know how to say it yourself. It's hard to say to anyone else"* - ***Alice***

Participants discussed how important external networks such as friends, family and intimate partners were to provide support and confidence in identity. Tim describes how gaining a committed, long-term partner has influenced his confidence of being out at work:

> *"There's a level of confidence that has grown as I've gotten older and you know, have a partner that's turned into a long term partner, who has turned into a husband. You know, there's some confidence there"* - ***Tim***

Another common theme that arose in support networks is work relationships. Whereby the current, or perceived future relationship participants and their colleagues have, was discussed as a strong influencing factor towards their willingness to disclose their sexuality. Most participants who discussed relationships, described a 'depth' to the relationship that they needed, before they felt comfortable or that it was appropriate to disclose. Ella describes below how she assesses the relevance of her colleagues knowing her sexuality:

“It would be based on how much I want to maintain the connection with them in the long term like, if they're going to see me all the time or outside of work, then I'd be like, this is more relevant to you knowing who I am” - ***Ella***

Similarly Michael discloses to his close colleagues to ensure relationships are built on trust and transparency. Michael sees this as particularly important for colleagues who work closely with him. He describes his way of deciding who he will disclose his sexuality to at work:

“It’s how I dealt with things for a while now. If I work closely with people, they get to know about my life, and if I don't work closely with people, they don't” - ***Michael***

Another factor raised by participants on why a depth of relationship is needed, was safety. David describes below how he feels trust for his colleagues when he has more of a relationship with them:

“I'd have some sort of relationship with that person first, being my colleague in the direct team, or people my age, or the rainbow committee, you know providing comfort in my sexuality, I can trust that they care about me enough to appreciate that it’s private – ***David***

Fluidity of disclosure

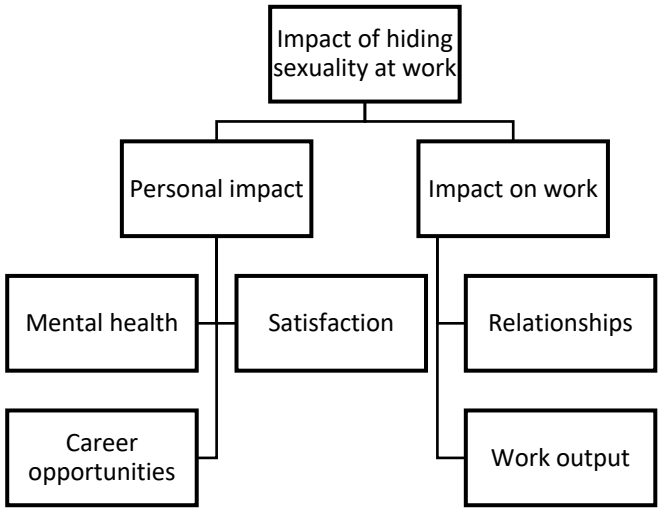
An important finding to understand, is that being ‘out’ now does not mean an individual will always be ‘out’. Based on the large and complex reasons outlined above, LGB people are constantly assessing the workplace, team, situation and interactions they are having. A change of employer, manager, or team member is all that is needed for participants to assess the situation and decide they are no longer safe. This assessment was described by participants as ‘second nature’ that is performed on auto pilot. A never ending cycle, participants are constantly choosing when and how it is safe for them to be open about their sexuality at work. Tim, who is currently ‘out to all’ at his workplace aptly describes this never ending cycle of assessment when he meets someone new at work:

"If I'm just talking about my partner, most people, if they don't know me will definitely still assume my partner is a female. It is a choice that I'll make depending on who I'm talking to, if I want to say husband or partner. So I mean, I'm still making those decisions based on who it is, the situation, and if I'm going to talk to them again" – ***Tim***

Impact of hiding sexuality at work

When participants discussed the impact of hiding their sexuality at work, two main themes arose. Themes and sub-themes identified are shown in the Figure C below, categorised as personal impact and impact on work.

Figure C: Impact themes and sub-themes identified:



Personal impact

Participants described a range of impacts to self that resulted from choosing to hide their true identity at work. These personal impacts are summarised into three sub-themes of mental health, employee satisfaction and career opportunities.

A large number of participants noted a negative impact on their mental health as a result of hiding their sexuality at work. Stress was a primary factor impacting the mental health of participants. Not being out at work was noted as a contributing factor towards increased anxiety and/or depression by participants. This link is described below by Jillian:

> *"I have struggled with depression and anxiety in the past. I don't think it's all about not being out at work, but when you're not able to be your whole self, it just, it feels connected, and I feel emotional just saying that"* - ***Jillian***

Participants described angst that colleagues would 'find out', always feeling like an outsider 'faking' who they truly are, needing to 'put on a face' every time they walk into work with an added layer of managing their 'hidden side'. These were described as factors leading to higher stress and negative mental health at work. This feeling of putting on a face is expressed by Emma below:

> *"I get home and it's like, I'm taking off a mask. I've done it for so long, I don't really feel anything except apathy"* – ***Emma***

The ongoing state of emotional labour participants are engaged in on a daily basis exacerbates their personal feelings of being unauthentic at work. Feeling like participants cannot be their true authentic self at work impacts on their mental health, satisfaction, enjoyment and relationships. An example of a participant engaged in emotional labour at work is described by David below:

“I'm choosing not to express myself at work how I may usually express myself. That's like, any quirks that I do, just little things. Yeah. I might tone that down so that I'm more confident in the workplace” - ***David***

Whilst over time participants have become accustomed to dealing with these situations on a day-to-day basis, participants described an underlying level of stress through omitting or hiding who they are at work. Several participants discussed the ongoing toll it takes and how it “wears you down over time” explaining the feeling as “exhausting”. Tim aptly describes what this can feel like below:

“So yeah, not being able to be completely honest with everybody, you know, it doesn't feel great to be dishonest. It does wear you down. You have to think a lot about what you say, and don't say, it's pretty tiring doing that. That affects you, how you feel about yourself” - ***Tim***

Whilst some participants were able to understand changing their behaviour in the workplace to ‘fit in’ and ‘hide’ at the time, some participants were only able to see this behaviour upon reflection. This is shown by Alice reflecting on her journey of coming out at work and demonstrates the complexities and mental strain involved:

“I suddenly became aware, because I'd been fully out for a year at uni. Then when I went back into the workplace, I’d never been out in a workplace before and I didn't know how to do it. Suddenly I was very aware of the complicated complexities of not being out and how annoying it is to police your language and all that stuff. I suddenly was like, did I do this for four years in my last job? How did I do that?” - ***Alice***

An important note employers need to be aware of, is the compounding nature that LGB issues arising in the workplace can have on the mental health of employees who are not out at work. Emma below discusses an incident involving rainbow communities in her workplace - and the impact it had on her mental health. However, the impact was compounded as she is not out, and as a result, struggled to explain to her manager why the incident impacted her so much.

“My mental health really took a dive and then having to explain to my boss why it had dived was hard, because he didn't understand why I was, you know, reading everything and so invested. He didn’t understand” - ***Emma***

What is positive to see is the increased mental health of participants when they were out in the workplace. Tim below describes how his mental health has changed as a result of being out at work:

*"My mental health is definitely way better. It feels way better to just be open and honest. Not have to think about it. So much better. So yeah, that's a big improvement" – **Tim***

Participants discussed a link between feeling the need to hide their true identity at work and how satisfied they are at work. A common point raised, was how hard it is to be fully engaged and satisfied when you are not 'yourself'. When discussing satisfaction at work, Alice reflected on not being out with her previous employers:

*"I do regret not being out. Yeah, because I think that if I just managed to bite the bullet and get it over and done with I probably would have found a lot of things easier" – **Alice***

Additionally, participants noted their satisfaction at work was impacted by the organisation, management actions and culture. These factors, as described previously directly link into reasons why participants choose not to disclose their sexuality at work. Grace duly describes an example of this below:

*"I do feel there's an open environment [at work]. I'm not sure if I see that full embracing at the management level. That impacts my satisfaction" - **Grace***

Participants discussed the conundrum they faced when they identified anti-LGBT+ actions at work or were wanting to advocate for the LGBT+ community. Participants discussed how their ability to advocate was negatively impacted due to being hidden. Participants mentioned feelings of not being seen as genuine, authentic or that they lacked the authority to speak on the matter due to being 'hidden' at work. Jillian describes this below:

*"When I'm trying to explain why something is homophobic, I feel it would be easier to be able to say it, or I'd have more authority to say it, if people knew I was gay" - **Jillian***

Whilst participants may be able to reflect and see that being out would have a positive impact on their satisfaction at work, sometimes, it is just too difficult to take that step. An example of this is detailed by Michael:

*"I do think that if I was more open about my sexuality at work, I probably would get more enjoyment out of work. I think there's just too much surrounding it in my head that makes it feel like it's not a comfortable thing for me to do" - **Michael***

Although participants see a negative impact on their satisfaction at work, they believe that hiding their sexuality provides benefit to career opportunities. This is due to participants' perceptions of career opportunities. Participants felt that through not disclosing their sexuality, this would positively impact their ability to get a new role in the future. This was due to avoiding the potential for discriminatory behaviour or actions of others. This view is consistent for both internal

movements and external movements outside of their current workplace. Participants noted an 'uncontrollable perception' of hiring managers that was driving this belief. This impact was discussed as a ‘perception’ and relates to one of the reasons why participants are not out at work. David describes this impact below:

> *“I think [hiding sexuality] would make career opportunities easier because it sort of eliminates a factor in people's consideration. Yeah. You know, it is something that they will consider and that's something that you can't control”* – ***David***

Impact on work

As outlined previously, participants described a feeling of being unauthentic at work. This feeling, alongside the ‘face’ put up to all of those around them, and the constant controlling of words spoken to ensure participants did not inadvertently out themselves at work all have a large impact on the ability to build and form sustaining relationships. Relationships for participants were impacted both internally between participants and their colleagues, and externally to the workplace. This view was shared by Michael:

> *“Yeah. I think that if I was completely open at work, I probably would make more friends”* – ***Michael***

The impact of hiding their identity at work, made it hard for participants to connect with others and feel like they belong. This is felt by participants on a daily basis and can be demonstrated in an example by Rob below, whereby even small talk does not feel natural due to the need to omit information.

> “*People ask you like ‘how was your weekend?’ It's those little things that you just end up cornered, where all of a sudden you go, actually, I'm just going to say ‘good weekend’. You just really start to give vague answers. I think it's really weird how that happens, but it does because I don't think people realize just on the day to day how much they gender assume”* – ***Rob***

The constant state of trying to form relationships with colleagues at work puts pressure on participants’ mental health. Relationships are critical at work, to get the job done, but also to build a feeling of connection and belonging. When participants are not able to be themselves, when they need to think about every word they say before they say it, it takes its toll. Tim explains the emotional toll this can take on participants who are not out:

> *“I'm not sharing what I would like to share with you, the people I work with and spend a lot of time with. So, you know, there's almost a feeling of guilt. Yeah, it is quite exhausting”* – ***Tim***

Relationships outside of work with colleagues, friends or family are impacted by participants not being out at work. Participants discussed a range of situations demonstrating how forming meaningful relationships is more difficult. These situations ranged from work functions where participants cannot answer any of the more personal questions honestly; to congratulating their significant other on LinkedIn and needing to think twice about it; to walking down the street with their partner and not holding hands due to a fear that someone from work may see them. These are a few of the examples shared whereby participants ability to build meaningful relationships was negatively impacted by them not being out at work. Grace shares how one of these situations felt for her:

> "*You know, like a Christmas do, everyone wants to go for a meal. That's when people start to ask you more about yourself, where they think I don't need to talk about work stuff. Yeah I would choose to either not go, or I would have stress at the idea of being in a group and having to hide it, or feeling like I had to hide it because maybe one person knew but like, all these other people didn't know" – **Grace***

As outlined earlier in reasons why participants hide their sexuality at work, support networks is a common theme. This highlights the difficult spiral LGB people face, whereby their ability to form good relationships at work or in personal life is impacted by them hiding who they are, however, by not having access to supportive networks it results in them feeling the need to continue hiding.

It is important to note that the majority of participants involved in this thesis are not out at work and have never been out at work. Assessing whether hiding one's sexuality at work impacts on their work output is a difficult question to answer objectively, especially if participants have not been fully out at work before and cannot compare their experience. Notwithstanding, there were a few participants who discussed how work output is impacted through hiding their sexuality at work. The largest impact on work output was the ability to hold focus and be completely immersed in the work at hand. Participants discussed how the constant state of watching what they are saying, how they are acting and the constant assessment of situations for risk, distracts from their ability to hold focus, as outlined by Jillian below:

> *"Not being completely out makes it harder to be fully present and focus at work" – **Jillian***

Chapter summary

In summary, this chapter has provided detailed insight to the findings identified through conducting 12 semi-structured interviews with LGB individuals in New Zealand. Through the use of inductive thematic analysis, key themes emerged within two groupings. The first grouping related to the

reasons why participants hide their sexuality at work, and the second grouping of themes related to the impact of hiding their sexuality in the workplace.

The themes identified in the first grouping of ‘reasons’ are categorised as organisational influence, fear and support networks. Each of these themes had sub themes that were interrelated. Within these themes, it is important to understand how they have cross over. Organisational influence provides a welcoming, or unwelcoming environment within the workplace for LGB employees. This environment directly influences LGB employees fear, in which the support networks individuals have can positively or negatively influence disclosure decisions. Whilst these relationships may appear linier, they are simply one example of interrelation.

It is important to recognise the compounding influence that the interrelation between themes and sub-themes can have on LGB employees at work. The earlier quote by Michael [Organisational Influence p.44] is an example of this, which speaks to an organisational culture that allows homophobic jokes to thrive; where Michael was hiding his sexuality out of fear, afraid of becoming the ‘punchline’ to jokes; it demonstrates the lack of a support network in the workplace; where Michael is hiding himself out of protection for his own wellbeing and safety. This is one of many examples that were raised by participants, detailing the interrelation and complexity of the decisions LGB employees make every day. Based on the complexity and interrelation of reasons outlined, LGB people are constantly assessing the workplace, team, situation and interactions they are having. This process speaks to the fluidity of being out.

The themes identified in the second grouping, ‘impacts’ are categorised as personal impact and impact on work. Within these two themes, sub-themes emerged whereby participants discussed impact to mental health, satisfaction at work, career opportunities, relationships and their work output. All findings should be read as a whole rather than independent themes in isolation. To analyse a theme or sub-theme in isolation without taking into context the wider findings would not fairly represent the true complexity of sexuality disclosure and bringing your true, authentic self into the workplace. Within the next chapter, the themes and sub themes identified will be compared to extant literature, identifying similarities and unique findings from this thesis.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

This thesis consists of 12, semi-structured interviews with LGB participants in New Zealand. Out of the 12 participants, most were still not open about their sexuality within the workplace with only two identifying as 'out to all'. In discussion with these two participants, they contrasted between when they did hide their sexuality at work and now. During the interviews, each participant discussed the reason(s) why they hide their sexual orientation at work and the personal impact(s) this has had on them. Whilst New Zealand specific literature available on this topic is scant, it was interesting to see that most of the findings aligned with international literature and research. Throughout this chapter, the findings of this thesis will be split into two sections, the first exploring the reasons why LGB employees hide their sexuality at work, the second looking at the impact this has on them. Both sections will be contrasted to extant literature, identifying similarities and then discuss differences and new findings uncovered by this thesis.

Section 1: Reasons for hiding sexuality at work

Exploring the reasons why participants choose to hide their sexuality at work uncovered common themes. These themes relate to the culture and practices of a workplace falling short in supporting participants to feel safe being 'out' at work. This failing results in participants acting in a fear based approach to protect themselves. This thesis has identified unique findings that add to extant literature, namely fear of ones' personal reputation; place of work; and support networks.

Fear, workplace culture and policy

The extant literature available provides a range of reasons why LGB employees hide their sexuality in the workplace, aligning with some of the findings of this thesis, specifically fear, workplace culture and policy, Fear is one of the most common reasons cited by extant literature influencing LGB employees to hide their sexuality at work. Employees' fear includes how others within the workplace will react, including a fear that being out may result in a negative impact to career (Global & Vodafone, 2018; Ragins et al., 2007; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001); and a fear of being discriminated against within the workplace (Bachmann & Gooch, 2018; Badgett et al., 2009; Global & Vodafone, 2018; Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012). The findings of this thesis are aligned to the literature, whereby participants noted fear of others' reactions, discrimination and being impacted by a 'rainbow ceiling' as motivators to keep their sexuality hidden at work. Participants specifically discussed assumptions on how others may react, the potential change in dynamic between colleagues and direct line manager, and how they engage their own 'protection mechanism' of hiding their true identity to ensure they are not negatively impacted within the workplace.

Workplace culture influences LGB employees' likelihood to be 'out' at work (Monaco & Pezzella, 2022). Workplace culture is formed from a range of factors, including the actions and behaviours individuals display on a regular basis. Taking individual action to create an open and welcoming environment for disclosure is the responsibility of all employees (Di Marco et al., 2022). A strong factor positively influencing 80% of LGBT+ disclosure in the workplace, is managers expressing clear signs of LGBT+ inclusion and allyship (Global & Vodafone, 2018). However, the use of microaggressions within the workplace make it difficult for LGB employees to feel safe and to substantiate discrimination claims (DeSouza et al., 2017). The findings of this thesis are aligned to literature, whereby participants noted workplace culture, specifically microaggressions, inappropriate questions and 'jokes' at work as influencers to continue hiding their sexuality. Put bluntly, participants discussed how it is often easier to 'conform to heteronormative narratives' than needing to constantly 'out' oneself.

A notable factor proven to have a positive influence on sexuality disclosure at work is workplace policies (Kelly et al., 2021; Monaco & Pezzella, 2022) focused on destigmatising sexuality and encouraging discussions in the workplace (Beatty & Kirby, 2006; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). The findings of this thesis demonstrate an acknowledgement amongst participants that workplace policies play an important factor in providing a 'base' level of comfort at work.

Location of work has been proven to influence disclosure differences due to an employee's comfort and feelings to self-disclose their sexuality at work changing (such as office work verses field work) (Rengers et al., 2019). The findings of this thesis are aligned to the literature, whereby location of work (such as office work verses field work) has an impact on participants likelihood to disclose their sexuality at work in different circumstances.

Personal reputation, place of work and support

Whilst the extant literature available outlines common reasons why LGB employees hide their sexuality within the workplace, this thesis has uncovered unique aspects amongst its findings. These unique findings are summarised as a fear that disclosure would change their personal reputation; place of work; and support networks. The remainder of this section is dedicated to explaining each of these unique findings uncovered in this thesis and the implications they have for workplace and human resource communities.

Personal Reputation

Participants discussed how fear drives behaviour at work and influences their propensity towards disclosure. A common fear across participants in this thesis aligned to literature, was the fear of others' reactions and how relationships may change as a result of their sexuality (Global & Vodafone, 2018; NZ Human Rights Commission, 2020; Ragins et al., 2007). This unique finding,

however, adds a deeper level of understanding to the intricacies of fear held by LGB employees within New Zealand. Participants described their fear as a worry that once they were open about their sexuality at work, that management and colleagues perception of them would change. Specifically, that they would no longer see the participants 'value' that they add to the organisation based on their work output or quality of work, but rather, they would simply see them as 'lesbian, gay or bisexual'. The fear was underpinned by a belief that their sexuality would become the defining characteristic of who they are, rather than the value they can bring to the workplace.

Interestingly, as participants discussed this fear, they did not discuss how this change in perception may impact on their career. Participants were focused on discussing how others' 'view' them within the organisation, and how this 'view' may change. Participants made reference to not wanting to become the 'token' LGB person within the organisation. Of note, this fear developed in participants during their tenure within an organisation. Participants noted this fear to be stronger when they first join an organisation, with it lessening after they have been able to build up their 'reputation' (based on their skillset and ability to perform in their role) and became more 'well known' within the organisation.

This unique finding is demonstrative of the lack of rainbow inclusion maturity within New Zealand workplaces, and the New Zealand work environment. With estimates 51% of rainbow communities hiding their true identity to at least some within the workplace (Global & Vodafone, 2018), it is hard for participants to see others like them. This is due to the number of LGB employees out to all within workplaces being relatively small in comparison to the LGB population in New Zealand. When LGB employees choose to come out, they understandably stand out within a workplace, more so than countries that have higher rates of LGB employees out at work. This likely results in other LGB employees, such as the participants of this thesis, viewing LGB employees who are out, being treated differently as a result of their disclosure.

With New Zealand being a relatively small country with only 'four degrees of separation' in the workplace (Macgibbon, 2009), personal brand and reputation are essential to building a long term, sustaining career. Central to this, is building up credibility of delivering a high quality of work within a chosen career or field. It could be that this adds to the pressure for LGB employees within New Zealand having to navigate, and manage their own 'personal brand', more so than LGB employees in larger countries. This could be why we see this fear lessening once LGB employees have longer tenure within an organisation. The sample of this thesis had over 90% of participants working within professional fields, most of whom were not out. For the reasons outlined above, it is suggested that this unique finding has emerged within this thesis primarily due to the country of study. A larger study within New Zealand may well uncover a similar finding due to the country

specific reasons given above. It highlights unique complexities for human resource communities within New Zealand to navigate when looking to increase LGB inclusion and visibility in the organisation, without perpetuating this fear.

Place of work

The second unique finding in this thesis was the influence place of work has on participants' likelihood to be out at work. As outlined earlier, extant literature has demonstrated a link between location of work (field work verses office work) and likelihood to be out at work (Rengers et al., 2019). However, this thesis has identified a broader influence on sexuality disclosure at work, specifically the influence of interactions at work, and industry of work. Whilst Rengers, et al. (2019) findings provide context to disclosure differences across a workplace based on location, this thesis adds to these findings. Based on this thesis, it is argued that interactions at work (internal verses external interactions) have an influencing factor on LGB disclosure in the workplace. Similar to Rengers, et al. (2019), the level of disclosure is not static and changes as individuals adapt their level of disclosure to the situation at hand. How safe an individual may feel could vary significantly based on industry and the work being completed (internal verses external), thus influencing disclosure. An example of this is Tim who works within the civil engineering industry. Tim is 'out to all' within their organisation (internally), however they will often hide their sexuality when engaging externally with clients or contractors due to the 'nature of the industry' as outlined in the findings.

Industry norms, behaviours and culture were all described as strong influencers on how comfortable LGB employees feel about disclosure at work. This is demonstrated by participants change of disclosure in the workplace, based on the industry they are working in. Participants called out specific example industries to provide context to their experiences, namely teaching, construction and the arts industry.

The first example discussed by participants within this thesis was the teaching industry within New Zealand. Whilst participants felt comfortable being out in previous workplaces, as they stepped into a schooling environment for their job they suddenly felt uncomfortable to be their true authentic self. Participants focused their discussion on a lack of 'societal acceptance', focused on the perceived 'non-acceptance' of LGB employees teaching children. This feeling resulted in participants of this thesis feeling the need to go back into the closet whilst working within the teaching industry. This feeling is not isolated and is a feeling experienced by teachers around the world whereby school environments are identified as heteronormative, unsafe and stigmatised environments to be 'out' within where LGB teachers may be seen as unprofessional or a threat (Connell, 2014; Llewellyn, 2023; Neary, 2013).

The second example given by participants was the construction industry in New Zealand. When discussing the construction industry, specific mention was made describing a culture of microaggressions and 'banter', whilst referencing a lack of rainbow visibility within the workplace. The construction industry is known for a strong culture of heteronormativity, promoting gender binaries with the need for 'masculinity' to succeed at work (Rumens, 2013). Of note, participants within the construction industry did discuss positive improvements happening across the industry, specifically ERGs establishing strong networks. Participants discussed how these improvements are still within their infancy, with a long way to go in influencing the culture and feel for LGB employees within the industry.

The third example discussed by participants was the arts industry. This was the only industry specifically called out for being open and welcoming for rainbow inclusion. As participants described their experiences in the arts industry, reference was made to an overwhelming feeling of acceptance. One participant that started their career in the arts, stated the concept of disclosure at work felt foreign due to it being such a 'non-issue' within the arts, with them only identifying there was a 'work-closet' after changing industry of work.

These examples exemplify stark differences across industries of work, demonstrating the influence an industry can have on LGB employees' disclosure within the workplace. The influence industry of work can have on disclosure is aligned to the invisible identity management model developed by Clair, et al. (2005). Whilst aligned, they present unique findings in respect to this thesis being the first to demonstrate the presence of this influence in New Zealand. Furthermore, Clair, et al. (2005) model developed is generalised across invisible differences. As such, the findings of this thesis being specifically focused on LGB, contributes to knowledge by confirming industry has influence on LGB disclosure decisions in New Zealand workplaces. Whilst these findings are unique, they are of a small sample size. The findings highlight the need for employers across an industry to work together to understand the current state and specific reasons why LGB employees may feel uncomfortable to be out at work. As demonstrated in the examples above, the reasons for one industry are not the same for another. Additionally, some of these reasons transcend the influence one workplace can have on its own. Industries need to work together to create a unified plan to improve rainbow inclusion across industry, rather than taking on a siloed approach of focusing only within a workplace.

Support Networks

The third unique finding in this thesis was the influence that participants' support network has on their propensity to be out at work. Participants discussed a range of circumstances that influence disclosure decisions, regardless of the workplace they are in. Circumstances include participants' personal experience of coming out, participants' own level of self-assurance, and their opinion of

relationships all influencing their propensity for disclosure at work. These areas build on extant literature and provide greater awareness of influences on LGB sexuality disclosure in the workplace.

As seen in Ragins, et al. study (2007) past experience of workplace discrimination due to sexuality negatively influences sexuality disclosure in the workplace. Additionally, recent literature has found that family members' reactions and initial coming out reactions to sexuality disclosure outside of work, influence sexuality disclosure inside the workplace (Skidmore et al., 2024). Both of these studies demonstrate the influence past experience can have on future sexuality disclosure decisions. This is aligned to the findings of this thesis. The findings of Ragins et al. (2007) and Skidmore et al. (2024) and this thesis, indicate a link between LGB employee's personal history and their future likelihood of coming out at work.

However, this thesis builds on these findings, through the identification of all prior coming out experiences having an influence on future disclosure decisions. This broadens the findings away from only family member and initial reactions as found by Skidmore et al. (2024) to all experiences. Furthermore, this thesis has demonstrated an influence on disclosure decisions based on others' stories of sexuality disclosure at work. Participants discussed the influence negative reactions have, even if the reaction was not against themselves, and was a story they had heard. This was explained by participants in this thesis as 'horror stories' that they had either heard from a friend or read online. Overall, participants noted they were more likely to disclose in the workplace, if they had positive previous experiences with disclosure. Equally, previous negative reactions discouraged participants from disclosure in the workplace.

Whilst the literature provides a range of models to examine sexuality disclosure in the workplace, such as visibility management (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003) and strategic outness (Orne, 2011), these models are silent on an individual's self-confidence in their own identity as a LGB person. A unique finding of this thesis that falls outside of these models, is participants' level of self-assurance and confidence in their sexual identity. Participants discussed how a lack of confidence negatively influences their likelihood to disclose. Participants discussed a concern for labels, and that they may confuse others if they are seen to be 'changing their mind' later. Additionally, participants described this influence as a 'personal journey of identity disclosure' that they were still trying to grapple with and understand themselves. This included participants noting they 'did not have the language' to explain or identify who they were to themselves, let alone to other people. This demonstrates the importance of allowing LGB employees to undertake their own journey of identity and disclosure. However it also raises a question on whether workplaces can do more to support employees who are struggling with this personal journey. For example, often employers

engage external providers such as EAP to support the wellbeing of their employees. Ensuring these providers are equipped to provide support to employees in this identification journey is a simple way workplaces can support their employees.

Within this thesis, a unique finding was the influence depth of connection participants have, or want to have with others, has on sexuality disclosure. Current literature has demonstrated a positive influence on relationships between individuals when LGB employees are open about their sexuality in the workplace (Salter & Sasso, 2022). When participants were describing depth of connection, proximity to others (how often or closely they would work together) was often discussed. With participants more likely to disclose their sexuality to colleagues that they work with more often. One of the reasons provided by participants was due to their need to present authentically at work. The need for authenticity has been identified as a reason for disclosure in extant literature (Ragins et al., 2007). What is unique however, is participants discussing the need for authenticity does not relate to everyone in the workplace. The need to present authentically and therefore disclose is more likely to present when the depth of connection or proximity of work is high. Participants noted individuals with a higher depth of connection and/or proximity, are more likely to build trust and keep their identity private. This feeling was not directly reflected with direct line manager however, where participants expressed concerns with their line managers view on the rainbow community. Participants discussed simple ways for line managers to support disclosure by showing visible signs of allyship towards the rainbow community.

Each of the influencing factors outlined above are examples of unique findings discussed by participants, building on extant literature. These unique areas are yet to be explicitly identified in literature to date due to the maturity of academic research into rainbow communities. Literature conducted largely holds a broad inclusion lens, rather than focusing on specific topics. The identification of these findings however, enables further research to be undertaken into each area respectively. Whilst the unique findings are not surprising and are likely to confirm common assumptions held amongst academics and human resource practitioners, they are yet to be outlined in literature. Therefore the identification of these findings are important and add to the knowledge and understanding of sexuality disclosure at work.

Section 2: Impact of hiding sexuality at work

Exploring the impact of hiding one's sexuality at work has uncovered common themes aligned to extant literature. These themes relate to impacts on mental health, employee satisfaction, discrimination, and productivity. This thesis also identified unique findings that add to the extant literature, namely impact on personal and work based relationships, an internal dilemma faced by LGB employees, and an influence on retention.

Mental health, satisfaction, discrimination and productivity

The extant literature available outlines impacts on LGB employees that are hiding their sexuality in the workplace. Impacts aligned with this thesis have been outlined below.

Impacts on LGB employees' mental health is outlined in research by Clair et al. (2005) which found that an individual's need for authenticity is impacted through not disclosing sexuality at work**.** The findings of this thesis align whereby participants explained how the emotional labour required of 'putting on a mask' at work was exhausting. Participants referenced a strong feeling of being 'unauthentic', which results in high mental strain.

Further research has demonstrated lower anxiety with increased job satisfaction when LGB employees perceive an open climate (welcoming environment for LGB) at work (Jiang et al., 2019). Additionally, LGB employees who are out in the workplace experience higher levels of satisfaction, increased organisational commitment and reduced conflict between work and home (Day & Schoenrade, 1997). The findings of this thesis align with this literature, whereby participants discuss increased stress, anxiety and/or depression as a result of not feeling like they can be their true authentic self at work.

The literature tells us that LGB employees who are open about their sexuality at work are subject to discrimination within the workplace, impacting on career growth, relationships and in extreme cases, resulting in termination (Croteau, 1996; Global & Vodafone, 2018; Levine, 1979; Levine & Leonard, 1984). This thesis was conducted with LGB participants who are mostly hiding their sexuality at work. Consequently, many of the participants have not experienced impacts of disclosure at work personally. Notwithstanding, their perception of what is likely to happen if they did disclose at work is aligned to this literature.

The relationship between authenticity and increased productivity has been widely proven (Hossain et al., 2020; Lloren & Parini, 2017; Pichler et al., 2018). This finding is supported when looking specifically at sexuality disclosure in the workplace. When employees are focused on the job at hand and not on hiding their sexuality, they are proven to be higher performers (Scobie, 2015). The findings of this thesis align, whereby participants who are now open about their sexuality at work have noted an increase in their ability to hold focus and be fully present at work.

Relationships, internal dilemma and retention

Whilst the extant literature outlines impacts on LGB employees hiding their sexuality within the workplace, this thesis has uncovered unique findings. These unique findings are summarised as the impact on personal and work based relationships, an internal dilemma faced by LGB employees, and influence on retention. The remainder of this section is dedicated to explaining

each of these unique findings uncovered in this thesis, and the implications they have for workplace and human resource communities.

Relationships

This thesis has identified a consistent impact on relationships within the workplace for LGB employees who are not open about their sexuality at work. Participants discussed how this impact not only negatively influenced relationships within the workplace, but also impacted relationships outside of the workplace.

Participants described how 'trying to hide who they are' leads to feelings of being inauthentic and fake. Participants noted how difficult small talk is, feeling like they can only give 'surface level' answers to questions, trying to answer in a vague way, or changing the topic so that they do not give away their sexuality. Additionally, participants discussed how this resulted in feelings of guilt for not being honest to colleagues. This feeling results in many participants trying to avoid social situations in the workplace. Overall, participants find it hard to connect personally, and on a deeper level with their colleagues. Many participants in this thesis specifically called out the negative impact that hiding their sexuality has on building friendships within the workplace. Relationships are formed by joint conversation, mutual interest and common understandings. However, participants are not able to be themselves and engage in meaningful conversation within the workplace, due to the fear that their sexuality will be discovered. This not only impacts on enjoyment, engagement and satisfaction within the workplace (Clair et al., 2005; Day & Schoenrade, 1997; Jiang et al., 2019), but may additionally impact their career opportunities.

Participants discussed how relationships outside of work are also impacted as a result of not being out at work. Due to the fear and risk participants associate with being 'found out' in the workplace, they actively engage methods of protecting their identity. Participants described this as a 'protection mechanism'. An example is participants always 'being on the lookout' for people they work with when in public with a significant other. This resulted in some participants feeling 'on edge' in public, like they are unable to relax with their significant other. Examples of protection mechanisms were participants crossing the road with their partner if they saw someone from the workplace (to try and avoid them); or immediately stopping holding their partner's hand to try and 'act like friends' around work colleagues. Participants further discussed how they feel like they cannot post publicly on social media about their partner, due to the risk someone will know someone, and their sexuality will be found out. This not only has impacts on participants' relationship with their significant other, but additionally impacts friends and family around the world who no longer see updates on social media. The final impact on relationships outside of work that participants discussed, was feeling like they are 'offloading' onto close friends and family about their experiences at work; specifically about hiding their true identity within the workplace.

These findings uncover impacts on relationships, both internal work based relationships and external relationships. This provides greater understanding and contributes to extant literature about the impacts on LGB employees who are hiding their sexuality at work. The findings provide a holistic view of impact to LGB employees' relationships when trying to hide their identity at work. It highlights the need for organisations to support LGB employees' disclosure in the workplace.

This thesis was undertaken with a narrative enquiry methodology which contributed to the unique findings uncovered by this thesis. The purpose of this thesis was to uncover personal stories to understand the reasons and impacts of hiding one's sexuality within the workplace. The benefit of this style of research, is the ability for participants' voices to be heard in an authentic way. Following the collection of participants' experiences, they were analysed, themed and outlined in a compelling way that provides explanation to the experiences of LGB employees in the workplace. Utilising this methodology has uncovered broad and unique findings. Additionally, the unique relationship impacts uncovered may well be a result of the country context of the research. All participants within this thesis currently work within New Zealand. As a small country, it is more common for people to know each other within an industry and professional networks or even across industries (Macgibbon, 2009). Consequently, the need to maintain a strong personal brand is of higher importance in New Zealand than it is in larger countries that have larger populations and professional networks. Whilst the impact on relationships is still likely to be uncovered within larger countries if surveyed, it may not be uncovered to the same degree as New Zealand.

Internal dilemma

The second unique finding relating to the impact on LGB employees in the workplace, is an internal dilemma faced. Participants discussed a feeling of internal angst at work due to not being open about their sexuality. Participants discussed the impact that hiding their sexuality has on their ability to be advocates for rainbow communities. Participants stated they feel like they are not listened to, or that they are not able to have as much influence as they otherwise may, due to hiding their true identity at work. This was raised by participants discussing incidents at work whereby rainbow voices were not being listened to, or were being ignored. The dilemma discussed by participants, is whether they should continue hiding their sexuality, to retain personal privacy, at the cost of having less 'advocacy impact', or whether they should be open about their sexuality to enhance the strength of their advocacy for rainbow communities. This dilemma is not identified in extant rainbow literature and as such, is a unique finding of this thesis. Notwithstanding, a similar dilemma has been identified for invisible disabilities in the workplace. Literature discusses the 'advocacy or privacy' dilemma that individuals with invisible disability face in the workplace; whereby they need to choose a trade-off between retaining privacy and being able to effectively advocate for change within the workplace (Kulkarni, 2022). This unique finding suggests the

internal dilemma LGB employees face around disclosure in the workplace, is aligned to the advocacy or privacy dilemma identified by Kilkarni (2022). This finding presents interesting insight for stigma academics and identifies an opportunity for future research.

Retention

The final unique finding of this thesis that should be of particular interest to employers, is the impact that sexuality disclosure can have on LGB employees' retention within the workplace. Participants noted their ability to be 'out' with their current employer as a motivating factor to remain within their current workplace.

Whilst this thesis was conducted primarily with participants who are actively hiding their sexuality at work, there were some participants that are currently open about their sexuality in the workplace. Of participants open about their sexuality at work, they all referenced a strong influence on retention to their current employer. This influence, was explained as a feeling of comfort and stability. Participants discussed the ability to work in an environment where they are accepted for their true authentic self. Of note, these participants who are 'out' within the workplace did not discuss any negative experiences resulting from being open about their sexuality in the workplace. This suggests that employees who feel safe to be 'out' at work and do not experience negative experiences from being out, may be more likely to stay with their employer, increasing retention. An example negative experiences can have on retention is demonstrated in research whereby LGB employees facing exclusionary behaviour in the workplace consider leaving their current employer (Barthelemy et al., 2022). When participants discussed making a change from their current workplace, a consistent influencing factor uncovered, was the openness of the organisation and participant's ability to be 'out' at work. This demonstrates the importance of employers focusing on rainbow inclusion in the workplace.

This unique finding was uncovered through the selection criteria of this thesis. The participant pool was open to any LGB employees that has current or past experience with hiding their sexuality in a New Zealand workplace. As a result, this thesis included LGB employees who are currently out at work who were able to contrast their previous experiences when they were hiding their sexuality at work. This has resulted in uncovering unique findings that highlight the need for additional research.

Chapter summary

This thesis is focused on exploring the reasons why LGB employees hide their sexuality at work, and impact this has on them. As outlined, there are a range of reasons why participants choose to hide their sexuality at work. Reasons identified that are aligned with extant literature include fear of discrimination, fear of how others may react, fear of a 'rainbow ceiling', workplace culture,

workplace policies, and the industry of work. This thesis additionally identified unique reasons why LGB employees hide their sexuality at work. These unique findings are summarised as a fear of ones' personal reputation, place of work, and support networks. Impacts on LGB employees hiding their sexuality at work that align to extant literature are, impacts on mental health, employee satisfaction, career opportunities, and work output. This thesis additionally identified unique impacts on LGB employees hiding their sexuality at work. These unique impacts include the impact on relationships, both internal and external to the workplace, an internal dilemma faced by LGB employees, and an influence on retention.

The findings of this thesis have identified similarities and difference to existing research and literature. This thesis is one of the few New Zealand rainbow studies conducted focused on the workplace. Of specific interest, the majority of findings in this thesis are aligned to, and validate international literature with a New Zealand focused lens. This is important to note, as 'rainbow literature' as a field of research across the world is sparce and still developing. When aiming to understand experiences of rainbow employees specifically within New Zealand, this is difficult and often not possible through extant literature. Notwithstanding, this thesis demonstrates a large range of findings in this New Zealand based study align with international literature. This means New Zealand based HR practitioners, academics or employers who are interested in understanding the experiences of LGB employees at work can refer to international literature and research. This will support building a strong base level of understanding while New Zealand specific literature develops. The unique findings identified, highlight to academics the value of researching sexuality disclosure in the workplace within a smaller country such as New Zealand. An example of this is the influence population size (Macgibbon, 2009) may have on the experiences of LGB people in the workplace. Focusing research on LGB people in smaller countries, is equally as important as larger countries to uncover a full understanding of sexuality disclosure and experiences of LGB employees at work.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter summarises the findings of this thesis, answering the research question, *"What are the reasons why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation in the workplace, and how does this impact on their lives?"*. Throughout this chapter, research outcomes will be discussed, the significance and contribution of this thesis will be outlined under a theoretical and HR practitioner lens, concluding with a summary of limitations and future research opportunities.

Research outcomes

The focus of this thesis was to provide a voice to a community that is often hidden, namely LGB employees who are hiding their true authentic self in the workplace. As a result of providing this voice, this thesis aims to improve the working environment for LGB individuals through influencing positive change in workplace policy and practice across New Zealand organisations. To achieve this aim, this thesis was designed with a focus on understanding the reasons why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation at work, and the impact that this has on them. Conducting this thesis within the New Zealand environment, was intended to bridge an identified gap within extant literature, whereby this thesis would be one of the first to apply a New Zealand specific lens to this field of research. Whilst international literature exploring the same or similar topics is growing, this thesis adds critical knowledge for LGB individuals, academics and HR practitioners within New Zealand.

This thesis has answered the research question "*What are the reasons why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation in the workplace, and how does this impact on their lives?*". Answering this research question required the exploration of LGB employees' experiences in the workplace. It required deep understanding of the reasons why they hide their sexual orientation at work, and what impact this has on them. To effectively understand participants' experiences and achieve the aim of this thesis, two sub-research questions were identified:

1. Why do LGB employees hide their sexual orientation in the workplace?
2. What is the effect of LGB employees hiding their sexual orientation in the workplace?

The research question has been answered through the alignment of a relativist ontology, constructivist epistemology and critical theory paradigm. Utilising a critical theory paradigm was important to the research process, allowing for a depth of understanding through reflexivity of the researcher (Brinkmann, 2014; Grant & Giddings, 2002; Smith, 1993), whilst enabling the research to challenge the status quo (Davies & Fisher, 2018; Denzin, 2017; Grant & Giddings, 2002; Smith, 1993).

This thesis consisted of 12 one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, conducted in person or over audio-video link via Microsoft Teams. Interviews were conducted in a safe space to ensure participants felt comfortable to open up and be honest about their experiences (Brinkmann, 2014). Participants in the research met selection criteria of being a diverse sexual orientation (lesbian, gay or bisexual), currently employed within New Zealand, with real life experience of hiding their sexual orientation in the workplace. Research participants were diverse in their disclosure at work, industry, gender and age, with most living in Auckland, two living in the Waikato and one participant living in Christchurch.

As a gay man with personal experience of hiding his sexuality in the workplace, the primary researcher employed an 'insider researcher' technique. Being an insider researcher was of particular importance to this thesis, as it enabled an authentic and deeper level of connection and understanding with participants (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). Semi-structured questions were used in interviews to provide a consistent structure of response from participants, whilst enabling flexibility and reflexivity to the researcher (Brinkmann, 2014; Grant & Giddings, 2002; Smith, 1993). This data collection method uncovered depth within participants' responses, with probing questions asked based on participants responses where relevant. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interviews producing the findings that answer the research question and to meet the aim of this thesis.

The first sub-research question was focused on identifying reasons why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation in the workplace. The most common reasons participants hide their sexual orientation at work are summarised into the themes of organisational influence, fear in the workplace, and support networks. Organisational influence identified the importance of rainbow support within the workplace, the influence industry of work can have, and the impact cultural factors of an organisation such as heteronormativity and workplace bullying have on willingness to be out at work. Fear in the workplace identified how participants engage a 'protection mechanism' of hiding their sexual orientation to avoid perceived 'negative impacts' of being out at work. Participants demonstrated strong concern about how others will react if they learn about their sexual orientation. Support networks identified internal influencing factors, such as personal history of coming out, an individual's support network outside of work and individuals' self-assurance of their sexuality. This theme also identified how depth of relationships at work, influenced participants willingness to be out at work.

The second sub-research question was focused on identifying impacts, either positive or negative, that resulted from LGB employees hiding their sexual orientation in the workplace. The most common impacts were themed into personal impact and impact on work. The first theme of personal impact outlined negative impacts to participants' mental health, including emotional

labour, exhaustion, anxiety, stress and depression. This theme further identified a negative impact on participants' satisfaction as an employee. Lastly, this theme identified participants' belief that career opportunities were positively impacted when they choose to hide their sexual orientation at work as they were able to avoid discrimination and bias. The second theme of support networks identified a negative impact on participants' building and sustaining genuine relationships in and out of work. Participants discussed strong feelings of being unauthentic, like they needed to put on a 'mask' at work, and like they need to think about every word they say, before they say it. This impact extends beyond the workplace, where participants' ability to form relationships inside and outside of work is impacted. Participants recounted examples of restricting their friendships, limiting what they do with friends or a significant other, and always being on the lookout for colleagues from work. This was due to a fear that they may be seen by a colleague with members of the LGBT+ community. Lastly, this theme highlighted impact on work output. Participants noted a negative impact on their ability to hold focus and be completely immersed in the work at hand, due to a constant state of watching what they are saying, how they are acting, with an ongoing assessment of situational risk.

These findings are important as they provide a baseline for New Zealand focused literature aimed at understanding the reasons why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation at work and the impact to individuals. The findings are interesting as they both align with the international literature, but further provide unique findings whereby themes were identified that are not common in international findings.

Significance and contribution of research

This thesis is one of the first LGB focused literature with all participants working within New Zealand at the time of research. This is important to enable academics and policy makers the opportunity to compare New Zealand specific research with international research available, providing a greater depth of understanding of what may be occurring in New Zealand. Many of the findings identified in this thesis align to the extant literature. When analysing the reason why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation in the workplace the following areas align to the international literature: fear of a negative impact on career (Global & Vodafone, 2018; Ragins et al., 2007; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001); fear of discrimination in the workplace (Bachmann & Gooch, 2018; Badgett et al., 2009; Global & Vodafone, 2018; Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012); workplace culture (DeSouza et al., 2017; Monaco & Pezzella, 2022); workplace policies (Kelly et al., 2021; Monaco & Pezzella, 2022); and place of work (Rengers et al., 2019). When analysing the impact of hiding sexuality in the workplace, the following impacts align to international literature; mental health (Clair et al., 2005); anxiety and job satisfaction (Day & Schoenrade, 1997; Jiang et al., 2019); discrimination and career growth (Croteau, 1996; Global & Vodafone, 2018; Levine, 1979;

Levine & Leonard, 1984); and productivity (Hossain et al., 2020; Lloren & Parini, 2017; Pichler et al., 2018). The demonstrated alignment of this thesis with international literature is important. It enables New Zealand based HR practitioners and academics to more confidently look to international literature to build understanding of rainbow people, in the growing field of rainbow research.

As outlined, the findings of this thesis add to the knowledge and understanding available on sexuality disclosure at work. This thesis provides theoretical contribution through the discovery of unique findings not yet outlined or identified within extant literature. When analysing the reasons that influence LGB employees to hide their sexual orientation at work, unique findings can be summarised as a fear of a negative impact on ones' reputation, place of work, and support networks. Fear of one's personal reputation adds a deeper level of understanding to the intricacies of fear held by LGB employees within New Zealand. Further to this, participants described stark differences in experience across industries of work; demonstrating the influence an industry can have on LGB employee's disclosure within the workplace. Lastly this thesis uncovered the influence depth of connection participants have, or want to have with others, has on their sexuality disclosure decisions.

When analysing the impact on individuals when they hide their sexual orientation at work, novel findings can be summarised as impact on relationships (both internal and external to the workplace), an internal dilemma faced by LGB employees, and an influence on retention. These findings uncover a negative impact on relationships, both internal and external relationships to the workplace. These findings illustrate a holistic view of how impact can transcend the workplace and impact LGB employees' personal lives. Participants further described negative impact through an 'advocacy dilemma' faced, whereby the ability to advocate for rainbow communities is impacted by remaining hidden at work. Lastly, participants noted the ability to be 'out' with their current employer as a motivating factor to remain within their current workplace.

The unique findings were identified through a combination of location of study (New Zealand), methodology of the study (qualitative, in-depth interviews analysed through thematic analysis) and macro environmental factors (New Zealand's small professional and industry communities).
This thesis provides practical contributions and insight. As discussed above, participants in this thesis often hid their sexuality because of fear of discrimination on multiple levels. This indicates that, while many employers and HR professionals promote diverse and inclusive cultures, there are still significant improvements needed to be made for the LGB community. The findings are of particular relevance to HR communities and policy makers as they provide context to the complexity of sexuality disclosure in the workplace. The findings further provide context for why

increased visibility of rainbow matters within a workplace may not translate directly into greater disclosure within the workplace. What is important however, is for employers to be focusing on the small actions that can support individuals on their disclosure journey. This thesis provides findings that can be of use to employers, alongside engaging with LGB communities, to make more informed decisions when developing and implementing inclusion focused change within an organisation. Based on the findings of this thesis, practical initiatives organisations can enact to increase impact of this thesis are outlined below. These include:

1. Workplace policy: as a baseline, it is recommended that all employers have workplace protection policies in place that protect all diverse individuals (including LGBT+) employees from discrimination, harassment and disadvantage. These policies should be enforced consistently and be well communicated to all employees on induction and at regular intervals (such as annually).

2. *Education*: it is recommended that employers engage regular education across their workforce on LGBT+ content. Increased education of a workforce can result in cultural change (such as challenging heteronormativity) as more informed conversations can occur. Furthermore, providing education within the workplace indicates to employees that LGBT+ inclusion is of importance to the organisation. To ensure uptake of training, setting KPIs for managers and team leaders will aid in completion, whilst also demonstrating the importance of LGBT+ inclusion and support from managers.

3. *Support*: It is recommended that employers look to increase support for LGB within their workplace (such as visible allyship and a rainbow network). As outlined in the findings of this thesis, the 'unknown' response of how others will react or whether they will have support is a key driver to hide sexuality in the workplace. Initiatives to combat this are:

- Allocating funding for an employee resource group (rainbow network) to form, focused on increasing support and connection for rainbow employees and allies across the organisation.
- Providing opportunities for all employees to display their active allyship. Opportunities can include rainbow lanyards, computer or workstation stickers, virtual backgrounds, bumper stickers and uniforms with rainbow designs. Visible allyship is of particular importance for line managers of LGB employees and as such, this should form part of the education as previously recommended.
- Encourage a focus on the language individuals use within an organisation. This focus should look to educate individuals on inclusive language (such as non-gendered language) to use within conversation to ensure all feel welcome and included. Using inclusive language will directly challenge workplace culture (such as a culture of heteronormativity).

4. *Working across industry*: it is recommended that employers look to connect across an industry to share learnings and develop a unified plan that aims to create cultural change across the entire industry. As demonstrated in the findings, the industry of work influences LGB perceptions of safety and decisions on disclosure. Working across industry will ensure a rising tide of inclusion for LGB employees across the industry that will experience the benefits of inclusion initiatives.

5. *LGBT+ plan*: it is recommended that the leadership of organisations develop a long term plan focused on the inclusion of their rainbow communities. This plan should specifically state LGBT+ key performance indicators for the organisation, initiatives that will be rolled out, LGBT+ workplace statistics, and be reviewed regularly.

This thesis provides a demonstrated need to make change within organisations across New Zealand, where employees are not only turning up to work and hiding their authentic self, but are being negatively impacted as a result.

Limitations and future research

This thesis has made theoretical and practical contributions to the field of rainbow research. Notwithstanding, there are limitations to this thesis that are important to outline. Limitations identified are linked to the research design of this thesis, namely sample size and scope.

This thesis has been conducted within the framework of a master's thesis at the Auckland University of Technology. Due to the required timeframes of completing a masters qualification, sample size of respondents is limited to what is practicable for a masters student to reasonably conduct within the required timeframe. This thesis was conducted with 12 participants. Whilst this sample demonstrated diversity in sexuality, gender, age, industry of work and disclosure at work, there were two characteristics that were not as diverse, namely location and worker type. Participants of this thesis were mostly located in Auckland, with the majority of participants being working professionals (working within an office type environment). The skew of participants in Auckland and in working professional fields is likely due to the recruitment method utilised. Participants were identified by posting an advertisement on LinkedIn to reach Rainbow Support Networks across New Zealand. On social media, algorithms are known to promote posts unevenly across the network (Milczarek, 2023). Notwithstanding, Auckland holds an equal population of LGBT+ people (4.9% of Aucklanders identify as members of the LGBT+ community) as New Zealand (4.9%) (Stats NZ, 2024). In summary, the sample size of 12 participants is not large enough to be a representative sample for all of New Zealand. This presents an opportunity to conduct further research with the same research design, but a larger sample size across New

Zealand. It is suggested to ensure a split of regional based and metropolitan based locations in future research, to test any differences in these locations.

Lastly the scope of this thesis has been identified as a limitation. This thesis was limited to focusing on LGB employees from the outset. This is due to scant literature available, both locally and internationally in the field of rainbow research. Of the research available, a large majority is focused narrowly on LG and LGB respondents. Aligning this master's thesis to the respondents of international and existing literature, namely narrowing the focus to LGB respondents, has enabled the researcher to compare findings and make theoretical and practical contributions. Notwithstanding, individuals' identities and minority sexual orientations are not limited to lesbian, gay or bisexual identities. There is considerably more diversity within rainbow communities, especially when you overlay gender, sex and sexuality, which are intrinsically linked and part of individuals' identity (InsideOUT, 2021). Limiting the scope of this thesis to focus only on LGB employees, misses many other minority identities within rainbow communities. This is a challenge for all rainbow research, whereby collectively the field of academic research needs to progress to be more inclusive for all rainbow communities, not simply limiting the scope to LGB (Donaghy & Perales, 2024; Skidmore et al., 2024). Future research being more inclusive of rainbow communities in its scope will encourage other researchers to follow suit, to enhancing analysis and enabling comparability of findings.

Further to limitations outlined, this thesis has uncovered specific areas that would benefit from greater research and analysis. Research is suggested to build on the unique findings of this thesis. An example is the unique finding of impact on relationships, both inside the workplace and external to the workplace resulting from LGB employees hiding their sexuality at work. Future research may identify whether this finding is unique to New Zealand, or translates into other countries. This research would contribute knowledge to the global understanding of the impact of non-disclosure of sexual identity at work.

Another unique finding that would benefit from further research is the link between disclosure of sexual orientation at work, and if received positively within the workplace, the influence this has on retention of LGB employees. These results would be of particular importance for employers. Uncovering influence on retention within the workplace could be a key driving influence for change within an organisation.

The methodology of this thesis enabled participants from a range of industries to partake. This uncovered the unique findings relating to industry of work, and the influence industry can have on how welcoming an industry feels for sexuality disclosure at work. Further research that uncovers which industries across New Zealand are more welcoming for rainbow employees to be their true

authentic self at work, and why is recommended. Such research would be invaluable in supporting all workplaces across New Zealand to be more inclusive for rainbow communities.

Lastly, in the discussion of this thesis, similarities between sexuality disclosure at work and invisible disability disclosure at work was discussed. This link opens up the possibility of future research into minority disclosure at work. It highlights a possibility that individuals of each minority community may face similar challenges and or impacts within the workplace. It highlights that other groups of individuals within the workplace that do not align to the 'norm', may have some experiences that are similar to LGB employees who are hiding their sexuality at work (Kulkarni, 2022; Miminoshvili & Černe, 2022; E. Patton, 2022; Ragins, 2008). If proven through further research, this link could support HR practitioners to increase their understanding and support efforts of making an inclusive workplace for all.

Chapter summary

This thesis was focused on understanding the reasons why LGB employees hide their sexuality within the workplace, and the impact this has on them. This thesis applied a New Zealand focused lens with all participants of this thesis working within New Zealand at the time of the research. To answer the research question, two sub-research questions were identified. The research question was answered through 12 semi-structured one-on-one interviews, thematic analysis and alignment of research philosophy. The findings of this thesis were supported by the researcher being a gay man, able to relate as an insider researcher (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015) and apply reflexivity in the research process (Brinkmann, 2014; Grant & Giddings, 2002; Smith, 1993). The first sub-research question focused on identifying reasons why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation in the workplace. Reasons identified are summarised into the themes of organisational influence, fear in the workplace, and support networks. The second sub-research question was focused on identifying impacts, either positive or negative that resulted from LGB employees hiding their sexual orientation in the workplace. Impacts identified are summarised into themes of personal impact and impact on work. The findings of this thesis provide theoretical contributions to extant literature and practical contributions to human resource communities across New Zealand. This thesis has identified the similarities of sexuality disclosure reasons and impacts from New Zealand, with international extant literature. It has further identified unique findings specific to this thesis. Unique reasons for hiding one's sexual orientation at work includes personal reputation, place of work and support networks. Unique impacts relating to sexuality disclosure at work includes relationships, internal dilemma and retention. This thesis provides a depth of knowledge into the complexity of sexuality disclosure in the workplace. It further provides context as to why increased visibility of rainbow matters within a workplace may not translate directly into greater disclosure within the workplace. It is only through continued research and greater understanding, that we will

be able to emancipate rainbow colleagues, supporting them to be their true authentic self as they step into the workplace every day.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Approval

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

17 May 2023

Katherine Ravenswood
Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Katherine

Re Ethics Application: **23/74 Leaving your identity at the door: Exploring the personal impacts and reasons why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation in the workplace.**

Thank you for your responses to AUTEC's conditions.

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 17 May 2026.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research and as approved by AUTEC.
2. All public facing documents must have the AUTEC approval number and be of a high standard of spelling and grammar. Dates on the Information Sheet(s) and Consent Form(s) must be consistent.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented.
4. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.
5. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project.
6. Any serious or adverse events must be reported to AUTEC, this includes unforeseen issues that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
7. AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management permission for access from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

The application number and title need to be referenced on all correspondence related to this project.

All forms are available online http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics

For any enquiries, please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz
(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: Jakenzhr@gmail.com

Auckland University of Technology, D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, New Zealand.
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316: E: ethics@aut.ac.nz: www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

Appendix B: Consent form

Consent Form

Project title: ***Leaving your identity at the door: Exploring the personal impacts and reasons why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation in the workplace***

Project Supervisor: ***Katherine Ravenswood***

Researcher: ***Jake Barker***

- ○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 16/02/2023.
- ○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ○ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ○ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ○ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ○ I agree to take part in this research.
- ○ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes○ No○
- ○ I wish to receive a copy of the complete thesis (please tick one): Yes○ No○

Participants signature: .....

Participants name: .....

Participants Contact Details (phone): .....

Date: .....

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 17 May 2023 AUTEC Reference number 23/74

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix C: Interview questions guide

Interview Questions

Interview number:
Pseudonym:
Eligibility criteria:

- In current employment
- Lesbian, gay or bisexual
- Not open about their sexuality in the workplace

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1. **I am a 27 year old, cis, gay male and my pronouns are he/him. I work within the field of HR as an HR Business Partner, currently within the civil construction industry. Within my role I work predominantly within an office environment. Can you tell me a bit about yourself?**
    a. *Pronouns*
    b. *Age*
    c. *Qualification level*
    d. *Occupation*
    e. *Type of work (office vs in field vs customer facing etc)*
    f. *Industry*

2. **As you know, this research is about sexuality disclosure within in the workplace. Can you tell me about your current workplace?**
    a. Culture/feel of the workplace
    b. Location
    c. Tenure in workplace
    d. Size (headcount)

3. **Can you talk me through the reason(s) why you choose to hide your sexual orientation within the workplace?**
    a. *Fear of discrimination*
    b. *Fear of perceived outcomes / how others will react*
    c. *Fear of impacting on career*
    d. *Other*

4. **Can you take me through what basis you have formed the reason(s) that we have just spoken about?**
    a. *First-hand experience in current workplace*
    b. *First-hand experience in previous workplace*
    c. *Friend/whānau experiences*
    d. *Media*
    e. *Other*

5. **Through hiding your sexual orientation within the workplace, what impact(s) do you feel this has on you <u>within</u> the workplace?**
    a. *Relationships*
    b. *Focus*
    c. *Communication*
    d. *Work output*

e. *Job satisfaction*
f. *Mental health*
g. *Friendships*

6. **Through hiding your sexual orientation within the workplace, what impact(s) do you feel this has on you <u>outside</u> of the workplace?**
    a. *Relationships*
    b. *Connection*
    c. *Communication*
    d. *Mental health*
    e. *Friendship*

7. **Have you ever been open about your sexual orientation within the workplace before? And if so, what caused you to go back 'into the closet' and hide your sexuality in your current workplace?**

8. **Do you see your current organisation as a safe place for diverse people?**
    a. *Senior leader commitment – what demonstrates this commitment?*
    b. *Are efforts tokenistic – if so, what makes you feel this way?*
    c. *Have you witnessed bullying within the workplace?*

9. **Has your organisation taken any steps to demonstrate their support for the rainbow communities?**
    a. *What have they done?*
    b. *Has it been consistent or a one off?*
    c. *Does it feel genuine?*
    d. *Has this impacted how you feel about sexuality disclosure? If so how?*

10. **Tell me about the support and connection you have with your direct line manager?**
    a. *Do you feel this relationship has any influence on how likely you are to disclose your sexuality within the workplace?*
    b. *Do you feel a personal connection with them?*
    c. *Do you feel they would support you and back you up in a conflict?*

11. **What would need to change, in order to make you feel comfortable disclosing your sexual orientation within the workplace?**
    a. *Would this differ at another workplace?*

12. **Do you have any final comments you would like to make relating to sexuality disclosure within the work place?**

Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced

16/02/2023

Project Title

Leaving your identity at the door: Exploring the personal impacts and reasons why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation in the workplace.

An Invitation

Kia ora, my name is Jake Barker, I am a cis gay man, and my pronouns are he/him. I am a student researcher at AUT University, currently undertaking a thesis that will contribute to my Master of Management qualification. I would like to thank you in advance for taking the time to consider partaking in my research project. I am truly passionate about the topic of research I have chosen and believe the findings will support improved understanding and create meaningful change in organisations across Aotearoa, New Zealand.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to understand the reason(s) why lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) individuals hide their sexual orientation in the workplace, and the impact(s) this may have on them. This research is focused on individuals experience in their career, not a particular workplace and/or industry. The research is focused on answering the following research questions:

What are the reasons why LGB employees hide their sexual orientation in the workplace, and how does this impact on their lives?

a. Why do LGB employees hide their sexual orientation in the workplace?
b. What is the effect of LGB employees hiding their sexual orientation in the workplace?

The findings of this research may be used for academic publications and presentations.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You have been identified as a potential participant for this research due to:

- Being a member of a Rainbow Employee Network in your workplace, or
- Reading an advert placed within Rainbow friendly magazines
- Being provided the advert for this research by a social connection (friend/whanau)

To qualify under the inclusion criteria for this research, you need to be either lesbian, gay or bisexual; currently in paid employment; and not be open about your sexuality within the workplace.

Individuals who work at Downer New Zealand (as this is my current place of employment), or those who have a personal connection to myself, are excluded from this research to avoid conflicts of interest.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Do you wish to participate in this research? Amazing! The first step is to contact myself, Jake Barker via email. I will send you a consent form to read and sign. Once you have provided consent to partake in my research, we will arrange a suitable time to undertake an interview. This will take place in a relaxed environment, away from your workplace and at a time that is suitable to you.

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

What will happen in this research?

Partaking in this research will involve one face to face interview, one on one with the primary researcher, Jake Barker. The interview will take place in either an AUT Campus in a private meeting room, or privately over Zoom, away from your workplace and at a time that is suitable to you. The duration of the interview will take approx. 1 hour and will be audio-recorded. Following this interview, the audio-recording will be transcribed, and you will have the opportunity to review this transcription once completed. This concludes your involvement in the research. Once the research has been completed, you have the option to be provided a summary of findings and/or the completed thesis, should you be interested.

What are the discomforts and risks?

Potential discomforts and risks of this research relate to you talking about topics, specifically your sexual orientation disclosure in the workplace, that you may find uncomfortable, and that you may not commonly discuss.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

As the primary researcher, I am a gay man who too, has struggled with the disclosure dilemma around my sexual orientation in the workplace. I know that this can be a difficult topic to talk about. You will be in friendly company, and we can either take a break or stop the research at any point if you feel the need. Pseudonyms (false names) will be used within this research to ensure anonymity from readers of the research findings. Strict confidentiality protocols will be adhered to, ensuring your information remains confidential.

AUT Student Counselling and Mental Health is able to offer three free sessions of confidential counselling support for adult participants in an AUT research project. These sessions are only available for issues that have arisen directly as a result of participation in the research and are not for other general counselling needs. To access these services, you will need to:

- drop into our centre at WB203 City Campus, email counselling@aut.ac.nz or call 921 9292.
- let the receptionist know that you are a research participant, and provide the title of my research and my name and contact details as given in this Information Sheet.

You can find out more information about AUT counsellors and counselling on https://www.aut.ac.nz/student-life/student-support/counselling-and-mental-health

Should you prefer to talk to a rainbow-centred counselling services, I encourage you to reach out to **Outline**, a confidential, free, all-ages support line that specialises in rainbow counselling matters. To speak to Outline, simply call 0800 688 5463.

What are the benefits?

There are a range of benefits from this research, namely:

- Participants: Will get to understand trends and see that they are not alone in how they are feeling. It further provides a platform for participants to have their voice heard, their story told, and to influence positive workplace policy and practice in New Zealand.
- Researcher: Will add to the current lack of knowledge in this field for New Zealand and will receive a qualification (Master of Management).
- Wider Community: This will add new knowledge that can be built on, specific to New Zealand, that will support executives to understand LGB better. The aim is for this information to support understanding and creating more inclusive workplaces.

The research is being conducted by a rainbow identifying researcher, for the rainbow community, with the hope of helping the rainbow community.

How will my privacy be protected?

The researcher will know who the research participants are. Pseudonyms (fake names) will be used for you as a participant to ensure your personal stories and experiences remain confidential. Only I as the researcher will know which pseudonyms pertain to you. There will be no identifying personal information would be referred to in the findings. Data will be stored in a secure and locked location at AUT University with only the researcher and project supervisor of this research having access to this data. All data will be destroyed once no longer required.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The cost of participating is your time. The interview will take approx. 1 hour. Time to review the summary of findings (optional) will take approx. 30 minutes.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You have one month, until 30 April 2023 to consider participating in this research and making contact with the primary researcher, Jake Barker via email.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

A two-page summary of the findings will be provided to you if you indicate 'yes' on your consent form, expressing your wish to receive a summary of the research findings and/or the completed thesis.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Katherine Ravenswood, katherine.ravenswood@aut.ac.nz , 09 921 9999 ext 5064

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , 09 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Jake Barker, fpx6834@autuni.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Katherine Ravenswood, katherine.ravenswood@aut.ac.nz , 09 921 9999 ext 5064

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 17 May 2023 AUTEC Reference number 23/74

Appendix E: Sample thematic analysis map