



# **Working Out:**

## **Workplace's influence on the coming-out of gay employees and its impact on their work and working environment.**

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# Abstract

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LGBT rights and situation have globally improved significantly, especially in the past few decades. However, being a gay employee is not always easy and though sexuality is a private matter, there is no shock in admitting that private matters are what define us along with our environments, both personal and professional. In addition, employees are at the core of firms' business results and overall performances. Yet, the topic lacks interest from academics. Though studies focus on drivers on coming out, or a general link between good working environments and good performance, very limited papers research into what drives gay employees to come out in the workplace or what role they may play in firms let alone the relationship between the two.

Therefore, this study, aims to shed some light onto the factors influencing gay employees to reveal their sexual orientation, and evaluate how this plays a role and impact an organisation's operations. Based on the results of the study, it appears that Gay employees can be influenced to come out based on the firm's environment and culture but also out of their own desires (wanting to keep their personal life private regardless of their sexuality) but surprisingly, a vast majority of the respondents involved considered themselves openly gay, hence providing valuable data.

The research has demonstrated that gay employees' coming-out seems to impact the firm on four levels: work quality, working conditions, work relations and perceived stress level.

# Acknowledgments

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# Keywords definition

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## *Sexual orientation*

Sexual orientation is defined by the APA Dictionary of Psychology as “*one’s enduring sexual attraction to male partners, female partners, or both. Sexual orientation may be heterosexual, same-sex (gay or lesbian), or bisexual.*” (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.).

Two orientations are important in this thesis: Homosexuality, as the aim of this research is to find out what influences homosexual male workers to make, or not, their coming out in the workplace. Then, heterosexuality: the most common and assumed orientation, both in society and in organisations. This heteronormativity fuels this study: workers presumed heterosexual who aren’t may face discrimination by coming out which becomes a revealing step where one has to evaluate what s/he has to gain versus what s/he risks by doing it.

## *Gay Employee*

Throughout this paper, the above-mentioned term will be used to refer to male homosexuals actively working. Also, “gay worker” can be used in the same meaning to avoid repetitions. Unlike the definitions provided by the Oxford Dictionary of English (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.), the term ‘worker’ will not refer to a specific type of work, nor refer to the working class. The term will rather address any employed individual, no matter the position, industry or work nature.

## *Coming-out*

SOS Homophobie, a French association fighting against discrimination against LGBT and homophobia defines the act of coming out as “*the voluntary announcement of one’s sexual orientation or gender identity to his/her surrounding*” (SOS Homophobie, 2011). They differentiate it from the outing where the announcement is not made by the person of interest and without his/her approval. The term ‘coming-out’ is said to be coming from English and to represent the act of exiting the closet, that illustrates the place where one hides his true identity, desire and seeks refuge from the fear of what may happen if those were revealed.

## *Well-being (in the workplace)*

Well-being, in the workplace context, is difficult to precisely frame. Indeed, many of its components happen to be subjective and can hence change from one’s opinion to someone else’s. Yet, For the rest of this study I chose to follow the definition given by Danna & Griffin who state that “*well-being should be used as appropriate to include context-free measures of life experiences (e.g., life satisfaction, happiness), and within the organizational research realm to include both generalized job-related experiences (e.g., job satisfaction, job attachment), as well as more facet-specific dimensions (e.g., satisfaction with pay or co-workers).*” (Danna & Griffin, 1999: p364).

# Introduction

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Nowadays, the LGBT community (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) is a topic often discussed. This also concerns organisations and how employees belonging to a minority are treated, protected and welcomed in the working environment. This thesis aims to find out the motives of gay workers to come out or conceal their identity at work, and to explain how this relates to the firm with the impact it may have on an individual's work and working conditions.

Minorities are a topic widely studied in business and organisational research. Indeed, over the period 1956 to 2016, Thomson Reuters Social Sciences Citation Index and Emerging Sources Citation Index, indexed 331,271 publications discussing women, 100,622 discussing disabilities and 74,896 discussing racism (Ng & Rumens, 2017). However, over the same period, only 1,497 publications indexed discussed LGBT individuals. This disproportion could be explained by the concealability of homosexuality, and the fact that, to avoid any stereotyping or discrimination, LGBT scholars choose not to write on LGBT related topics, and that heterosexual scholars could *"avoid LGBT topics for fear of being typecast or presumed gay"* (Ng & Rumens, 2017).

In the US, there are still about 30 states that do not have a regulation against gender identity or sexual orientation discrimination (Cage, Burgess & Dance, 2012). This is not the case in Europe, as the Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC) has proscribed any form of discrimination based on sexual orientation, within the 28 Members States (Fric, 2016).

Yet, despite this regulation, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights highlights that on average 28% of gay men in the EU hide being LGBT at work and 18% felt discriminated; 20% of Lesbian women hide their LGBT identity and 20% felt discriminated; 55% of bisexual men hide at work and 15% felt discriminated; and 30% of bisexual women hide their sexual orientation and 16% felt discriminated at work (Fric, 2016).

Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons (2012) argue that discrimination can be either related to the access to employment, or the treatment they receive in the work environment. They also put forward that LGBT people cope with discrimination through three possible attitudes. First by opting for an LGBT friendly working environment (when possible). Then, they can also use *"proactive identity management"* which corresponds to concealing their identity in the workplace not to face discrimination. Finally, they can also go through discrimination management, which alternatives are described as *"quitting," "silence," "social support,"* and *"confrontation"* (Ng, Schweitzer & Lyons, 2012: p334). The authors refer to another paper by Clair, Beatty and MacLean (2005) that discusses two identity management strategies that are *"passing"* where people conceal their identity and are found to be isolated and less effective at work; the other is *"revealing"*, the name is clear in the sense that it consists in coming-out but also exposing oneself to prejudice and discrimination.

This shows that there are a clear fracture and debate for LGBT workers between being open or not in the workplace and what that means and implies for their opportunities and the way they are treated in their work environment.

In a world where social issues have gained great importance, this matter is, or at the very least should be, of importance for employers. Not only because they risk losing credibility regarding the other social actions they implement to promote diversity and fight discrimination against women, include disabled workers... by having a form of “selective discrimination”. But also, because a non-welcoming environment for LGBT employees might lead them to other, more friendly companies (potentially competitors) and cost them potential talents or make them look to fill the positions left by LGBT workers. As a fact, the UK economy is estimated to be able to make up to £678m per year if businesses had better policies driving inclusion and preserving diversity (Sandhu, 2015).

As mentioned before, studies have shown that not all LGBT employees are open at work and that some have experienced or witnessed harassment, violence or discrimination due to their sexual identity (Out Now Global LGBT2020, 2013). The reason this happens is due to a predominant heteronormativity that *“is legitimized within society and reproduced within organizational contexts”*.

However, what those studies fail to highlight, is whether these actions are the only reason why LGBT employees refuse to step into the light, or if it is one factor among other motives justifying a reluctance to come-out: a gap still remains when it comes to the reasons behind a coming-out or a concealment of one’s identity. The primary reasons behind this lack of knowledge are, first due to the fact that, sexuality still represents an area under-researched in contemporary organisational theories. Then, according to Ward and Winstanley (2003), an apparent hostile behaviour towards homosexuals is observable in some work environment, refraining gay employees to come out hence rendering the conduct of research on LGBT topics in the workplace difficult as, being a focus in this study, it is a part of one’s identity that can be concealed.

On another note, well-being in the workplace has gained importance in most companies’ lives. Employers want, and due to markets growing more competitive every day, need, their employees to feel good about coming to work and having a good experience. First of all, because it can help reduce employee turnover (Clark, 1997). Also, because workplace bullying, or in that case homophobic/discriminatory behaviour, for instance, leads to higher levels of absenteeism (Hafner, 2015). Finally, workplace well-being for employees, including LGBT workers, leads to higher performance in terms of profitability of the firm, work productivity and quality of the work delivered (Acas.org.uk, 2014).

This leads to the following research question:

*“What encourages Gay employees to come-out or conceal their identity in the workplace context and what impact does it have on the organisation?”*

This study's purpose can be broken down into two main sub-goals:

- First, identify through a survey identify the proportion of gay employees open in firms, how they feel vis-à-vis their working environment and organisation, and how they believe it impacts their work quality/productivity, if they have already quit (or thought about quitting) a job, if they have experienced discrimination, homophobia, no related reason..., etc.
- Then through qualitative, in-depth interviews, the goal is to get a deeper understanding of what makes gay workers decide to come out or not in the workplace and how they believe this plays a role in their work, if at all.

These two sub-goals, when united, benefit two major actors. First, it will give insights to companies regarding how gay employees feel vis-à-vis their working environment, and what good practices employers can implement or what bad practices need to be banned in order to foster an LGBT-friendly environment for these workers to feel accepted and treated equally as any other employee. This would result in a reinforced and increased well-being for employees of such a company, hence being likely to influence the work productivity and also reduce employee turnover linked to these factors.

Second, the ricochet effect is that it will also impact and interests the people at heart of the topic: Gay employees. Mainly, because they can, therefore, find clearly identified 'LGBT-friendly' work environments where they should not worry about discrimination (career linked, opportunities...) or homophobic behaviours.

Most of the literature and arguments available tackle the whole (or multiple categories) of the LGBT community. However, for the sake of reliability and validity of this study (have a sample representative of the population) and given the available timeframe and resources, the thesis will focus on male homosexuals exclusively.

# Background and Theory

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Beside the diminishing yet existing 'taboo' regarding sexuality and sexual minorities in the workplace, a reason why so few researches are available is that conducting research about this topic is rather complicated: non-friendly environments render it difficult for LGBT employees to come out, and given the fact that sexual orientation can be considered an invisible difference, a person can choose to disclose it or not, limiting the available population to conduct studies (Gusmano, 2008).

## Work frame and organisational traits

However, many of the 'few' publications mentioned above have a focus on LGBT workers and their role, situation or impact in the workplace. The particular matter that makes it interesting for researchers to work on this topic is that *"a restrictive model of (hetero)sexual identity is legitimized within society and reproduced within organizational contexts"* (Gusmano, 2008: p474). Indeed, the observable heteronormativity within firms sets various kinds of barriers for LGBT employees in terms of potential discrimination (job access, promotions opportunities...) and may subject them to homophobic behaviours. But more than that, as advanced by Lee (2000), it also limits people who do not identify through such a system based on heterosexuality or binary measures like masculinity against femininity.

Gay and lesbian workers are believed to represent between 4% and 17% of the workforce (Gonsiorek & Weinrich, 1991), while this study only focuses on male homosexual employees, this means that the proportion touched is even smaller yet still deserves to be treated, not only as equals than their homosexual counterparts but up to a certain standard of environment favourable to them giving the best of themselves for the company to thrive.

This starts with an environment where diversity is welcomed and fought for. Indeed, from the fact that homosexuality is an 'invisible stigma', gay employees may face direct discrimination (discriminant behaviour oriented towards the individual) or indirect discrimination: through an unfriendly environment where gay employees won't be able to prosper. By ensuring that the atmosphere in the organisation is open and welcoming, not only would the situation of gay workers be improved, but those of employees of minorities in general.

Indeed, minority groups are often regarded as less than the majoritarian, so-called 'normal' group. This can drive gay employees to conceal their identity to try to pass as one of the 'normal' individuals (Goffman & Tyler, 1974).



## Coming out: a continuous performativity

Following Gusmano's point of view (2008), I chose to regard the act of coming out, important in this study, through the prism of the performativity theory.

This concept was first introduced by the philosopher and linguist Austin (1962). He argues that the unchallenged belief that statements' sole purpose was to describe did not match reality. Following Austin (1962) and Gusmano (2008), we can distinguish three levels of speech: locutionary acts (the act *of* saying something), illocutionary acts (achieved *in* doing something) and perlocutionary acts (realised *by* saying something). Austin advances here that other forms of statements exist "*in which by saying or in saying something we are doing something*" (p12), that he refers to as performative utterances.

Later, this concept has been applied by Butler (1988) in her views on gender where she argues that "*what is called gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo.*" (p520). A parallel can be drawn with the sexual orientation that needs to be regarded as something created by society giving the words used to come out, the power that makes them a performative utterance that has an effect on the individual's life once spoken. In addition to that, sexual orientation, just as she argues gender reality, is a performative: "*Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed.*" (Butler, 1988 p527). Indeed, saying "I am gay" does not make an individual homosexual; but being homosexual (having relations, whether physically or emotionally, with other men) make real the fact that one is gay and gives the performative power to the words "I am gay".

Therefore, sexual identity, through this performativity theory is considered a performative utterance as the spoken words turn into a social practice (Butler, 1997). Once the words are spoken, a reaction will come from the person in front of the utterer, reaction that can vary from full acceptance to rejection or discrimination. The very source of what gives such a strong meaning and power in the workplace (it potentially withholds big consequences, whether positive or negative) to these words and make them actually do something, is the heteronormativity earlier mentioned that creates a potential stigma on employees non-meeting the requirements of the norm.

The very definition of performative utterances, as in acting *in* or *by* saying something, makes it think that coming-out is a brief action in gay employees' lives: the action happens when stating the words, and after becomes a social truth. However, coming out should be seen as a continuum: "*although naïve observers might assume that a homosexual is either 'out' or closeted [...] the construct is better represented by a continuum. Some gay men and lesbians may be completely open, but many carefully pick and choose those to whom they reveal their orientation.*" (Day & Schoenrade, 1997 p154).

As Goffman (1963) argues, it is not an event that only happens once as opening about one's sexual identity is not a matter of whether you are in the closet or out of it, no dichotomy is present. First, because it can be progressive by first revealing oneself to close colleagues and then extend progressively the circle of people aware of the truth. Second, because the organisational world is not fixed, there are always new people entering an organisation, new relations are built, and these represent the reason why coming out is continuous and does not happen once, but several times with different audiences: because our circle of acquaintances is never fixed.

These theoretical traits are particularly important in the light of the research question as in order to understand what influences the coming out, it is first necessary to understand what it represents, why it is an act of such importance and what gives it legitimacy.

Moreover, this aspect of being a constantly ongoing action is especially important for the firm, because, as presented further, the choice of coming out or to conceal one's identity impacts the organisation. Hence, it represents a constant fight for companies to reach and maintain LGBT friendly environment in which gay employees feel secure enough to choose to come out.

## Coming out and business environment: reciprocal impacts

### *Impact related to business outcomes*

Indeed, coming out which could be regarded as a personal matter does play a role in the workplace and in a gay worker's life. From the selection of the organisation to the production within the firm (in terms of quality, productivity...) and whether or not to stay in the organisation.

As explained below, studies have shown that poor environments, whether directly or indirectly, affect the business operations of an organisation through its workforce. LGBT employees are no exception to this phenomenon. However, what lacks and aims to be explained by this study and expressed in the research question is the link between being gay and coming-out (or not), and the impact of it on the firm.

First of all, regarding talent acquisition, it is more likely for LGBT candidates to favour a job offer over another for the sole reason of feeling that one of the employers is more LGBT-friendly and acceptant than another (Kaplan and Lucas, 1994).

Then, well-being, especially in the workplace, is a topic widely studied in the realm of business and organisational studies. Indeed, since the industrial revolution where workers were seen as a resource to exploit, the role of employees have shifted, up to the point where well-being has become crucial, to the employee, but also for the employer as stressed by Clark (1997) and mentioned by Raziq and Maulabakhsh (2015 p718): "*in current times, firms cannot afford*

*dissatisfied employees as they will not perform up to the standards or the expectations of their supervisor, they will be fired, resulting firms to bear additional costs for recruiting new staff".* Such organisations where well-being is not strong or does not include gay workers do not only have to lose in terms of work quality or productivity as discussed below (Raziq and Maulabakhsh, 2015); but also in terms of talent: *"Twenty-one percent of the 70 gay men interviewed by Woods (1994) reported that they did not disclose their sexual orientation at work, and all of these professionals reported that they had "passed" as heterosexuals in previous corporate jobs. Many reported that they had to leave their organization after 1 or 2 years because of the pressures associated with this "counterfeiting" and the fear of being discovered."*(Ragins and Cornwell, 2001 pp1246-1247).

Therefore, the work frame plays a role in the attraction of new talents, but most importantly in the retention of firms' human capital, and as markets grow more competitive on a daily basis, talent retention is not a luxury to have but a must.

Furthermore, as conceptualised by Kahn (1990), when the basic needs of employees are met, in other terms when a minimal standard of well-being is present in the firm, then their engagement is strengthened. Employers should especially reach this increase in engagement since according to Harter (2000) this also shows at the business-unit level with an increase in business outcomes.

Therefore, it is of an even higher importance for organisations to foster, not only an environment propitious to the well-being of their employees but to ensure the inclusion of gay/LGBT employees in their actions to improve the working conditions, raise the engagement of their employees and then maximise business outcomes. Again, this is confirmed by the study by Danna and Griffin (1999) that argues that *"workers experiencing poor health and well-being in the workplace may be less productive, make lower quality decisions, be more prone to be absent from work and make consistently diminishing overall contributions to the organization"* (p358).

Like explained above, the health of the environment and well-being, through what influences it and the impact it has on employees also affects the organisation's financial situation and profitability (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994).

It is confirmed by Raziq and Maulabakhsh (2015) who explain that those elements regarded as *"hygiene factors (that are working conditions, supervision quality and level, the company policy and administration, interpersonal relations, job security, and salary)"* (p719) are necessary for employees to be satisfied, or at the very least, to not be dissatisfied.

Then, from a more business-related perspective, concealing one's identity can result in a lower productivity and efficiency as well, but coming from an emotional stress linked to a negative environment and conflict between one's identity and displayed image (Day & Schoenrade, 1997). Day & Schoenrade argue that such a *"concealment creates a great deal of stress and anxiety"* and *"can lead to a desire to leave the organization or to lowered performance"*

(p148). Their study has also shown that such negative feelings and consequences are not likely to be lived to the same degree for “open” LGBT employees.

They also stress that *“it is imperative that the organizations identify the needs of their employees and satisfy them to ensure effective accomplishment of its goals and objectives”* and, yet another time, confirm the fact that *“Good working environment increases employee loyalty, level of commitment, efficiency & effectiveness, productivity, and also develops a sense of ownership among employees which ultimately increases organizational effectiveness as well as reduces prohibit cost emerging as a result of dissatisfied employees.”* (p724).

#### *Working environment: influence or be influenced*

In their paper, Day and Schoenrade (1997), also claim that identity concealment affects LGBT employees’ commitment to the organisation as they claim that commitment is the result of values and a sense of identity shared between the individual and the organisation. Yet, *“if the homosexual workers are not able to communicate a relevant part of their personal and social identities, true identification may not take place”* (Day & Schoenrade, 1997: p150).

Moreover, their study has also put in the light that open employees show a lower conflict between work and home, which is even more likely in presence of an anti-discrimination policy (Day & Schoenrade, 2000). They assume that this is likely due to the fact that the worker’s partner could resent not being included in corporate social events, or that the employees might refrain his/her social life to prevent being seen with a same-sex partner.

Indeed, employees are above all human beings who naturally have feelings. It is then normal that everything that an individual encounters in the workplace, whether it is on the physical, emotional, mental or social level, influences them and how they feel and behave in the workplace (Danna & Griffin, 1999).

However, according to Baumeister and Leary (1995), a sense of belonging is critical to reaching employee engagement and is also one of the basic human needs following Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (third in the pyramid as part of the social needs after the basic physiological and safety needs). Yet, as explained above, Gay employees might not fully belong or feel like they do, be it because of discrimination in the environment, or a fear from the individual to be seen as gay and himself refraining his engagement (not attending company social events, not bonding with colleagues, no sharing of personal experiences...).

Looking at how to improve well-being, different options are available: improving the facilities, make the firm’s policies more inclusive.... However, employers should focus on the environment, culture and way of doing things and treating employees in the organisation/leadership.

Indeed, unlike one might think, tangible rewards (pay, benefits...) are not the most important part of well-being in the workplace though they still withhold value, especially for people with low engagement (Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2003). In addition to not being the only factor influencing job satisfaction and well-being, *“monetary satisfiers can easily be matched or topped by competing organizations”* and *“relying exclusively on these short-term satisfiers*

*result in a quick-fix mentality that does not fully address the basic human need of fulfilment and feeling of impact and contribution”* (Harter, et al. 2003 p14). As defined in the keywords and for the sake of this study, well-being follows the definition given by Danna and Griffin (1999) that frames it as a sum of life experiences (happiness, life satisfaction...) and experiences linked to one’s job (job attachment, satisfaction...). Hence, job satisfaction is one of the multiple components of well-being. Job satisfaction can itself be described by following the definition of Aziri (2011): *“Job satisfaction represents a combination of positive or negative feelings that workers have towards their work.”* (p78).

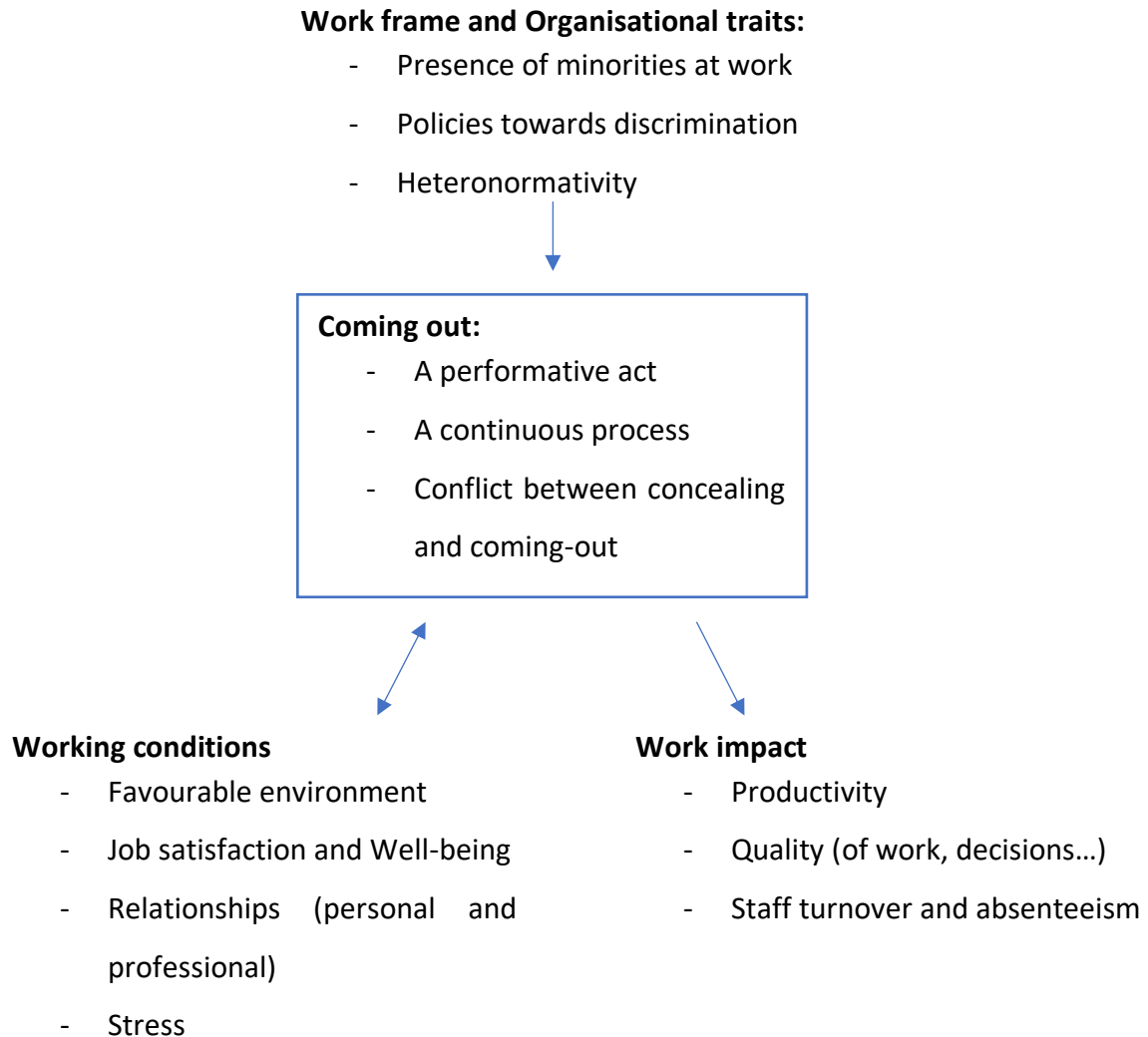
As a matter of facts, any organisation may provide better pay, benefits, a bigger break area, some free fruits on a daily basis.... However, what is much harder to do is provide a social environment, based on feelings where employee not only perceive that they are welcome and valued but most importantly an environment where they are safe to be true to who they are: where a gay employee would feel comfortable to open up to his colleagues. As Harter et al. (2003) put it: *“a majority of employees desire greater meaning and personal development from their work and suggest many workers see their work as a calling--enjoyable, fulfilling, and socially useful”* (p2). Yet this does not mean that tangible aspects should be disregarded since they do contribute to the well-being of employees.

By identifying what drives gay employees to come out, this thesis aims to provide organisations with axes to improve well-being through its environmental aspect.

Finally, a positive environment aiming at increasing well-being, also for gay employees would not only benefit the company through higher engagement and a better production of work, it would, as a primary effect, improve conditions for gay employees: *“An interview study of 70 gay men in five metropolitan cities revealed that 97% reported that their sexual orientation had, at some time, cost them a promotion, a raise, or a relationship with a potential mentor [Woods, 1994].”* (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001 p1246). Situations don’t change overnight but taking one step at a time to improve conditions would, over time, make a difference.

### *Organising framework*

In order to better visualise the topics discussed above and used later in the data collection and analysis, the following framework indicates the main themes and how they are thought to interact:



Based on the information presented and discussed above, and in accordance with the research question coming-out is represented in the centre of the diagram. The choice to do or not do it can be influenced by two main factors in the organisation. First, the traits and work frame of the organisation such as the presence of minorities, protective legislation.... Then the working conditions, meaning if the environment is favourable towards LGBT employees, if the job satisfaction is high, if the individual has good relationships with other employees.... However, coming-out can also influence the working conditions: in an uncertain environment, such a revelation could damage the relationships between employees, increase stress level.... Furthermore, it may also have an impact on the work of the individual, in terms of quality and productivity, and also on the turnover in a given organisation. This is what is aimed to evaluate from the individuals' points of view, through the approach hereafter described.

# Method

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## Use of mixed methods

The study conducted aims at identifying what influences homosexual employees to come-out or to not come-out, also referred to as conceal their identity. The results to be obtained will most likely provide future researchers with axes to develop new theories tackling LGBT related topics in the work context. The study will rely on primary data collected via interviews and a questionnaire designed for this research so as to obtain an overview of the situation.

The research hence takes on an exploratory dimension, where I will seek to identify what factors could influence and justify why homosexual employees chose to come out or to conceal their identity and gain a deeper understanding of it. The reasons behind this are multiple. First of all, given the fact that the area of the problem is not only new and unclearly defined, it is also, as mentioned previously, under-researched in the realm of business and management compared to other minorities. Thus, this type of study is more appropriate as it *"tends to tackle new problems on which little or no previous research has been done"* (Brown, 2006 p43). Furthermore, exploratory researches provide more flexibility as it is usually conducted to achieve a better understanding of a phenomenon prior to other researches as stated by Singh (2007): *"exploratory research is the initial research, which forms the basis of more conclusive research"*. This explains why an exploratory research is well suited for this study as the LGBT topics still withhold some uncovered areas and I want to expand the axes of research tackling the LGBT topic in the realm of business, rather than explore already available and limited branches to study.

A mixed method is thus what I opted for in terms of approach (qualitative and quantitative), but both with an exploratory perspective. By the name of it, one easily understands that this entails the use of more than one approach to the research. As defined by Creswell and Clark (2018), as a method of its own kind, a mixed approach *"it focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies"* (p5). Mixed methods can be used in different contexts, among which when little is known about a defined topic and where combining the strengths of qualitative and quantitative research brings relevant and necessary information to the research (Foodrisc Resource Centre, 2016). Such methods are usually more complex and demanding to implement, in terms of time and other potential resources, and also deeply intertwined where both qualitative and quantitative rely on each other to be completed. In this context, a mixed approach for this study presents advantages yet differences. Indeed, the quantitative part will mainly ensure a descriptive role and paint a picture of the community from which the sample of the qualitative research has been drawn; and then the qualitative research will expand more in details on gay employees' experiences.

Additionally, using a mixed method instead of doing a purely qualitative research and by introducing the quantitative part in the research brings additional information on what is the situation for gay employees in European countries for readers to better frame the following qualitative results and have a better understanding of the after drawn conclusions.

## Approach & Strategy

### *Data collection*

#### Qualitative data collection

Exploratory research is usually conducted through qualitative methods, most commonly via interviews (Dudovskiy, 2017). Therefore, I decided to follow the same process and include semi-structured interviews in my research process. The reason behind this choice is that as the topic is rather broad I am rather proceeding inductively, where the interviews will be the origin of the theory. Though qualitative research offers various ways of collecting method: case study, observation, focus groups and interviews, to name the main ones. However, a case study would not be representative enough of the gay community. Then, observation would be tough to realise, mainly because the topic is sensitive, it would be complicated to find willing participants and those who would agree would most likely be open in their workplace, depriving the research of the point of view of the closeted employees. A focus group might also create a bias in the sense that as the topic discussed is personal, participants may not give fully truthful answers in front of strangers and due to the group pressure.

Consequently, I considered interviews as the way to collect answers as truthful as possible. As the individual is not pressured by being in the work environment during the interview, I get to present myself and the reasons behind my studies to get acquainted and to create an environment. Indeed, the fact that I am myself a member of the LGBT community and that this study aims to shed some light on the topic and generate an improvement of the situation induces a feeling of protection, where they are not accused of being gay, but where it represents a good thing. Plus, I opted for semi-structured interviews that follows an interview guide (c.f. appendix 1) which offer some consistency as *“all the questions will be asked and a similar wording will be used from interviewee to interviewee.”* (Bryman & Bell, 2011 p467).

The interview guide (c.f. appendix 1) was built around the research question: *What encourages Gay employees to come-out or conceal their identity in the workplace context and what impact does it have on the organisation?* First, a couple of questions were asked for the individual to present himself. Then the guide tackles the experience of the individual with being out (is he or not, if yes how did it happen, if no what could incite him to do it...) and his experience vis-à-vis homosexuality in workplace contexts in general (ever suffered or witnessed homophobia/discrimination, actions led by the firms around LGBT topics, firms' heteronormativity).



Finally, questions linking this information to the organisation are formulated (what reaction they would adopt in case of discrimination, how/does being out or not impact their work, the conditions or stress level). In addition to the consistency of process, the guide also allows the interview to be framed to what is relevant to this study: LGBT in the work context, coming out and what impact is perceived by the individual. Nonetheless, it remains a rather flexible interviewing technique that enables the discussion to explore other aspects through follow-up questions depending on each interviewees' answers.

To present the data of the interviews, a narrative approach has been preferred. Indeed, as the format of the interview was semi-structured, the structured frame let the possibility to the interviewees to expand on their personal experiences. This seemed especially adequate, since, as defined by Bamberg (2012), a narrative is about *"laying out and making sense of particular kinds of, if not totally unique, experiences"* (p78). Indeed, the research question, that is *"What encourages Gay employees to come-out or conceal their identity in the workplace context and what impact does it have on the firm's operations"*, centres around one major compound: the coming-out. This, itself, is a particular and unique experience, that cannot be compared to other revelations about one's identity at work. Therefore, a narrative approach creates a space *"where speakers lay out how they as individuals experience certain events and confer their subjective meaning onto these experiences"* (Bamberg, 2012 p77), which allows a data collection more accurate, as, though it is framed, it allows freedom for the interviewee to share what s/he went through and chose to believe in. This is also presented by Hunter (2010), who argues that when one goes through the telling of a story, it represents a transformative experience, possibly coinciding with what is done here as the interviewees are required to imagine or re-live a complex situation that also withholds part of unconscious mechanisms. The subjective meaning put into it (phrasing, intonation...) is then very much relevant to fully understand what is meant by the individual.

Saturation is the point where no additional information comes up from the interviews (Turner, 2016). In this case, saturation was reached at 10 interviews resulting in the end of the interview process.

### *Sampling selection for the qualitative research*

Regarding the qualitative part of the research, a purposive sampling was preferred. Indeed, as the study focuses on gay employees, it was mandatory, for the study to be reliable, that the participants met three criteria: being a man, homosexual and being employed/looking for a job (but no students). The need for participants to be homosexual makes it harder to find random employees to interrogate. Hence, I interviewed mainly people from my personal network of gay men in a working situation. Hereafter is an overview of the participants, their age, nationality, country where they work and sector of work.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Country of work</b>	<b>Sector of work</b>
Cédric	34	French	Sweden	Research in Biology
Frédéric	38	French	France	Communication
Guillaume	37	French	France	IT
Jules	23	French	France	Medico-social
Juri	31	Italian	Italy	Hotel industry
Lionel	37	French	France	Airport security
Michael	47	Swiss	France	Aviation/Touristic industry
James	53	French	France	Aviation/Touristic industry
Charles	24	American	France	Recruitment
Wojtek	28	Polish	Germany	Press

### *Quantitative data collection*

To supplement this qualitative study, I chose to add a quantitative survey, in the form of an online distributed questionnaire (cf. appendix 2) who will have a descriptive role: provide a picture of the situation: what proportion of gay employees are out, do they believe coming out impacts them, how welcome/protected they feel in their organisation.... The questionnaire followed the same pattern as the interview guide to have some consistency between the two methods. The reason I chose to integrate this in the research is that, as mentioned before, studies are scarce regarding the LGBT topic. Therefore, including this descriptive quantitative analysis is not only relevant to provide a snapshot of reality for this study, but also to lay new ground for new ideas for further researches to be done. The coupling of the two methods will provide this picture of the context and situation, and the beginning of an in-depth understanding of what explains this situation; coming back to the research question: what influences coming-out in the workplace and what kind of impacts it withholds.

The questionnaire has the objective to deliver a portrait of reality concerning the topics discussed further in-depth during the face-to-face interviews. To have a second opinion, the questionnaire was presented to my supervisor, and after suggested changes were made, it was pretested on five respondents to guarantee that the questions were unambiguous and that there were no issues with the available answers and mandatory questions succession: this safeguards that the analysis will not face troubles link to the skeleton of the survey.

As mentioned above, the questionnaire is online distributed so as to reach a maximum of respondents. As sexual orientation is not something available in databases, it is hardly conceivable to be able to distribute it through the mail, and even harder to find enough respondents, given the time and resources constraints, to administer the survey face to face. Therefore, the questionnaire is built with the Google Forms software and will be spread, first to my personal network of gay employees, and then through LGBT groups on social media. According to Dalia Research (2016), about 6% of the European population considers itself LGBT. This equals to a population of roughly 30 million Europeans (as the study focuses on EU countries). By opting for a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 6%, this means that 267 respondents are required to have a sample representative of the population. 250 relevant answers were collected, though slightly under the estimation, it will not pose any problems for the validity of the data.

### *Method of analysis*

#### *Analysis of quantitative data*

The questionnaire was built so as to obtain a simple survey data structure (Statistical Services Centre, The University of Reading, UK, 2001): this means obtaining a 'flat rectangular file', where answers are gathered in the shape of a spreadsheet with each column representing a question and each line a respondent. This will be possible thanks to google forms through which the data is collected. Indeed, the online software provides various statistics for each question of the survey, but does not allow cross-question statistics or to remove outliers or irrelevant responses (in this case, this would mainly be the omission of heterosexuals' respondents who, though not concerned by the survey, chose to answer and can be filtered thanks to one of the questions). Yet, google forms offers the possibility to download the answers in the form of an excel spreadsheet following this 'flat rectangular file' format. This file will later be used to upload the data to a statistical software, namely SPSS, who permits more flexibility to select only the data fully relevant and also allows cross questions analysis. As mentioned above, the analysis will follow the goal of population description. Hence the various questions asked will serve to describe the existing situation later focused on during the interviews.

### Analysis of qualitative data

In this study, the Gioia methodology was used to code the data. Indeed, qualitative data and in this case, interviews need to be reviewed and coded in order to extract from it the dimensions discussed. The reason behind it is that interviews, though semi-structured, are performed with different people, who can present things from different points of views, with various wording for similar experiences and events that can easily become confusing and where one can lose track of the important and recurrent information.

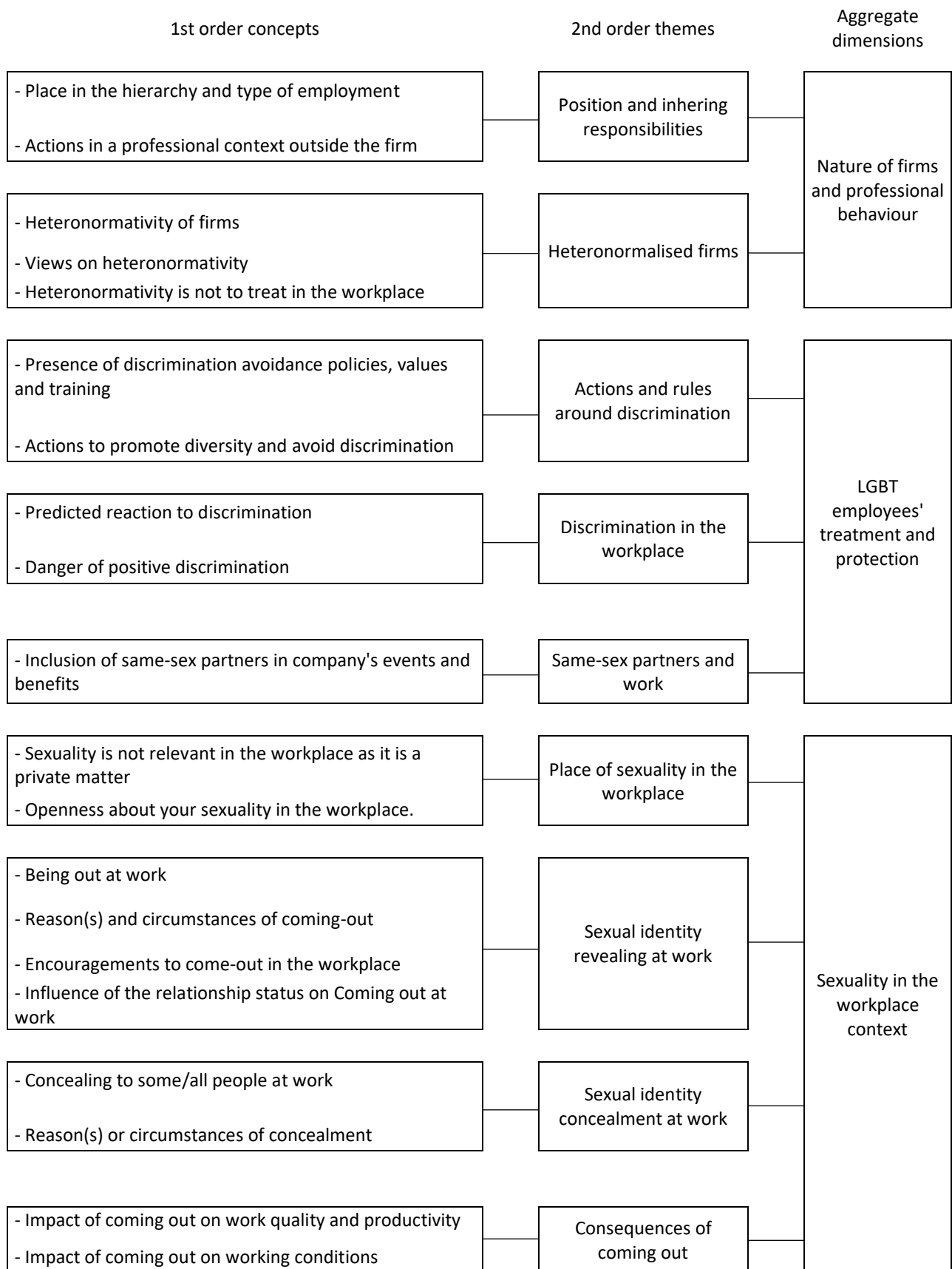
The principle behind this methodology is rather simple yet with a logic approach on how to identify, categorise and label the content of the qualitative data (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013).

The first stage consists of listing the concepts mentioned by the interviewees so as to highlight the important information and messages that were discussed during the interviews. This initiates the first sorting out of the big load of data collected by only having relevant data in the form of a list.

The second stage is then about going through this list of what stood out from the interviews and try to find out recurrent categories that are mentioned by the different interviewees and that fit well together as one block of information. What is especially interesting to note from there is the concepts that are missing or not fully integrated into the already available literature, since this is how one can improve and further what is already discussed.

Finally, the third stage is about organising those 2nd order categories into common dimensions which represents the core notions of the research and where a clear link to the existing theories and literature can be made.

Following this method and applying a similar approach than the one used by Santos and Eisenhardt (2009), I coded each interview individually and with no preference whatsoever related to theory and/or potential hypothesis and dismissing others interviews already coded. This way first order concepts could be identified with no risk of focusing only on the one found while coding the first interview and leaving room for new, different one to emerge through the process. Figure 1 below depicts the themes emerging from the inductive analysis.



**Figure 1 – Arborescence of the qualitative data analysis** (Diagram reproduced from Dennis A. Gioia & Kevin G. Corley, 2004)

## Reliability and validity of the data

Throughout this paper and in order to ensure that the data and the study are reliable, a point of honour was made to describe as accurately as possible the procedures followed to achieve every step of this study and arrive at the discussion and conclusion. By doing this, replicability of the study and data can be achieved, hence, according to Bryman and Bell (2011), the data is reliable.

Regarding validity, and again following the definitions of Bryman and Bell (2011), three axes of validity are here to consider. First internal validity, ensured thanks to the data being believable as the findings do not demonstrate significant variations to the theoretical expectations and previous studies.

Then external validity, related to how generalisable the findings are. This is why the sample in qualitative research and the survey respondents included people from different age, educational level, sectors, relationship status, coming out situation..., to ensure that what comes out of the study is applicable to the majority of the gay community and not solely to a subgroup of this community.

Finally, ecological validity is also to consider for the findings to be applicable to the daily situations of the population studied as articulated by Cicourel (1982 p15): *“Do our instruments capture the daily life conditions, opinions, values, attitudes, and knowledge base of those we study as expressed in their natural habitat?”*. Based on the nature of the questions (linked to a part of their identity and daily practices), the frame where they were asked (regarding their experience with being gay at work) and the very nature of the study: what influences gay employees to come-out or not and how does it impacts the organisation, within the population of gay employees, the study presents a rather strong ecological validity.

## Trust and anonymity

Given the sensitivity of the topic, trust between the participant and the interviewer is important to have in order to obtain truthful answers. This was first possible thanks to the interviewees knowing me to some extent (they are acquaintances but we do not have strong, close and old relationships). Then, I initiated the interviews by introducing myself, the topic of the study, why I chose to study this topic and ended by insisting that if they didn't feel confident in answering a specific question, they were completely free to decline with no impact whatsoever. Finally, I specified that the name of the companies would not be shared, nor the last name of the participants and offered to all interviewees the option to have a different name in the thesis.

## Limitations

Adding to the methodological explanations provided above, it is important to note that despite all the precautions taken, the methods present some limitations specific to how they have been employed here.

Indeed, regarding the qualitative research with the semi-structured interviews, there are two main limitations. The first one tackles the sample as all participants are from my personal network, hence a bigger subjectivity and risk of similitude in profiles. To overcome it, I contacted people with different backgrounds, from different cultures and countries and from different generations. Then, the study only tackles gay men and leaves aside the other parts of the LGBT community. This is thus a limit, but also an opportunity for further research.

Additionally, the quantitative part with the questionnaire has for limit the fact that it is online distributed. This means that, for one a part of the gay male population is left out (those who do not have access to the social platforms where it is distributed, mainly but not exclusively a part of the older generations) and second that the people answering are more likely to express their opinion as it is the reason of existence of these platforms, leaving out more shy participants that don't feel like sharing. This is, however, a limit difficult to eliminate as it would need a complementary offline distribution requiring a database of some kind of potential participants (that does not exist) and tremendous resources.

Finally, my own personal identification in the LGBT community can represent a source of bias in the approach and views of the research as a whole.

# Results

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## Quantitative results

Following this methodology and through the use of the statistical software SPSS, I analysed the data obtained through the quantitative survey. Some diagrams, descriptive statistics and frequencies run on the data are available in the appendix section (cf. appendix 3) and will be referred to with a diagram or table number.

First of all, given the research question (*What encourages Gay employees to come-out or conceal their identity in the workplace context and what impact does it have on the organisation?*) it is important to note that all 250 participants involved in the quantitative study declare to be gay, and in a situation of employment (be it full-time, part-time, apprenticeship...) or looking for a job.

Furthermore, when looking at the age distribution (cf. diagram 1) and confirmed by the descriptive statistics (cf. table 1), the curve is clearly skewed to the right. Skewness that can be explained by the mode of distribution of the survey online that is the most plausible explanation as to why we observe fewer respondents as the age increases. The age of the population surveyed ranges from a minimum of 18 to a maximum of 60 with an average of 33 years old. We can hence say that the population sample in this survey is rather young.

The quantitative survey has also shed some light on the educational level of the gay population studied. The results show that 29% of the population holds a Bachelor's degree or equivalent, 42% have obtained a Master's degree and 7% have achieved a PhD (cf. table 2). This means that a total of 78% of the population of interest has undertaken higher education following the most common paths in Europe (Bachelor – Master – Doctorate) and thus key values of the EHEA (European Higher Education Area). Yet, 18,4% of the people surveyed entered their professional journey straight after high school. This shows that the sample is rather diverse in terms of educational background, giving hence a broad overview of the situation and not just one restricted to a given subgroup.

Regarding the geographic dispersion of the population, we can note that the two biggest groups of respondents are French (162 people) and British/UK citizens (24 people) and account together for almost three fourth of the sample (73,6%). The rest of the respondents mainly originate from other countries in Europe (Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Swiss, Swedish...). However, slightly fewer respondents work in the two main countries of biggest nationality groups: 150 work in France and 21 in the UK, with a similar distribution for other countries above mentioned.



In the questionnaire, a very important question for this study was asked: “Do you consider yourself openly gay [in the workplace context]?”. On the one hand, not only do the answers to this question show that the vast majority of gay employees do: 82,8% (cf. diagram 2), which demonstrate a disappearing trend on the taboo that once was put on sexuality considered as ‘deviant’ from the norm (heterosexuality). But on the other hand, the fact that only four respondents (1,6%) chose not to answer tends to indicate that overall, they felt confident enough to admit whether yes or no they were open about their sexuality suggesting truthful answers throughout the survey, which is highly important for the reliability of the data.

Related to the previous question of whether one considers himself openly gay or not, a complementary question was asked to know to whom they were out in the workplace. The question offered the possibility to choose multiple answers each categorising a group of individuals in the workplace context (colleagues with a direct link, superiors, external actors... cf. table 4). The biggest group of respondents stating to be out to one or more categories represents 21,6% (54 people) and declares to only be out to colleagues they share a direct link with. The second largest group accounting for 13,2% (33 people) says to be out to their colleagues regardless of whether they share a direct working link, their superiors and their subordinates. The third biggest group consists of 30 people (12%) who are out to colleagues they share a direct link with and their superiors. The fourth largest group out to one or more categories represent 21 respondents (8,4%) and they state to be out to colleagues regardless of the working link, their superiors and subordinates and external actors (such as clients or customers).

Overall and between all combination of categories, we can note that a total of 196 respondents (78,4%) declare to be out to colleague they share a direct link with, which indicates clearly that gay employees tend to reveal their sexual identity to the cluster of people they are with on a regular base. However, only 106 respondents (42,4%) say to have come-out to colleagues with no direct link, supporting the idea that they are more likely to reveal themselves to people they know better and share a connection with. In addition, a total of 132 respondents (52,8%) claim to be out to their superiors compared to only 87 respondents (34,8%) saying to be out to their subordinates. This clearly shows that the place in the hierarchy of the person they are facing plays a role in whether yes or no they will come out as gay to them.

On another note, the questionnaire also asked about the treatment of same-sex partners within firms with a focus on whether they are eligible to partners related benefits (health insurance...) and whether they are invited to events held by the company. To the first question, 66,80% of the respondents answered yes, and 67,20% to the second one (cf. diagram 3 & 4). What is important to point out is not so much the proportion of people who answered “No” (respectively 6,40% and 2,4%), but rather the proportion of people who declared to be unsure: respectively 23,60% for the benefits eligibility, and 26,40% for the

invitation to company events. This clearly demonstrates that companies present a lack of communication on these matters and that there is a clear room for improvement.

On a final note and most importantly for this study, the questionnaire also asked respondents if they thought that coming-out had an impact on their work quality and productivity, their working conditions, their working relations (relationships with colleagues...) and perceived stress level. Based on the results of the bivariate correlation tests (cf. table 5), we can say that being openly gay positively influences the impact on work quality, working conditions, working relations and perceived stress level. However, it is not the case with the work productivity as the result is above the significance level of 0,05 (it is 0,301) meaning that any relation is random.

## Qualitative results

### *Nature of firms and professional behaviour*

#### Position and inhering responsibilities

The panel of interviewees for the qualitative part of this study contains 10 profiles that, though they have one thing in common: being a gay employee; present some important variations, as much in terms of responses as in terms of the situation.

Indeed, some have multiple employers, some have people and/or team to manage, some are doing research.... And these variations also mean that the working contexts are different for each of the interviewees as they do not work in the same branches, at the same positions and neither in the same countries.

As a result, being gay and choosing whether to come out or not does not imply the exact same consequences for all of them, as illustrated by Charles, HR consultant in recruitment in France:

*"I don't think it would have been an issue, at all, but... you know it's always one of those things, especially when you work in consulting or if you want to work in consulting: it's very important, well how you look outwardly. And, it's about building relationships, and I think that many people don't care, it's about doing business, it's not about that. But it is still something you do not want to risk, and there are people, companies who would rather hide that aspect, not because they want to discriminate, but because they'd rather not hurt client relations or candidates' relations." (Charles, HR Consultant)*

This shows that in positions when one plays a role as representative of the company, it is not only about that person's identity but also about the official trait of it, as mentions Michaël, a manager in the touristic industry in France:

*"When I am in contact with the outside [of the firm], I am always representing the company right? It is my personality, but still with the company's cap. Therefore I must pay attention to how I act outwardly as it is not only a private act: it is an official act." (Michaël, Manager in the touristic industry)*

Additionally, Michaël stresses that regardless of one acts within the firm externally it is important to look at the context and exemplifies his thoughts with an example of a situation where he was developing partnerships for his company with Russia:

*“There are situations of course, especially externally, where this question can be difficult, because of the context of the other country. [In Russia] there are no real advantages to be open in this context, at the opposite: it can be counter-productive.” (Michaël, Manager in the touristic industry)*

#### Heteronormalised firms

During the interviews, the topic of heteronormativity (being presumed heterosexual) in the firm was discussed. Out of all ten interviewees, eight of them agreed that their current workplace context was rather heteronormalised. We can though see some differences between cultures as expressed by Cédric, a French researcher in Sweden:

*Do I think that it is heteronormalised? Oh yes. [...] But I think that if it is with Swedes they would not even ask the question, they would not dare. It is too personal.” (Cédric, Researcher)*

Of the two interviewees not thinking that their current firm demonstrates such heteronormativity, one of them himself is doing what he can to avoid those situations:

*“When it comes to me [...] to complete part of the file for the employer, I generally ask the person whether s/he is in a relationship and what is the name of the person, as simple as that.” (Lionel, Team leader in airport security)*

In the second case, the firm’s values and management team itself are the factors that render the company non-heteronormalised through the attitude and approach of the people within the firm:

*“When I started the application process, [...] at the last business lunch we had, [...] the CEO of the company whom I had met had asked me, he said: “you don’t have to answer” because legally I don’t have to answer, but asked if I had a girlfriend. And another second after, he said, and that was very nice of him to say, “or a boyfriend, it doesn’t matter”. So, in that particular way, he basically, without assuming that I was non-hetero, he opened the door to say it was ok, and he later explained his actions that he doesn’t want people to feel like they have to hide who they are in the company.” (Charles, HR consultant)*

However, it is not so much a matter that shocks or bothers the interviewees as they have expressed: *“It doesn’t shock me, it seems relatively logic”; “It doesn’t seem shocking to me, so it’s not something that bothers me” (Cédric, Researcher).*

Yet, some interviewees agree that it is not a responsibility of the company to change that and act upon it in any given way:

*"If the company is open and welcomes me without restrictions and all the respect towards the individual, and if the firm lets each employee live her/his own private life, I don't see a context where it should intervene more." And speaking about his company: "and with that, not directly from the company's point of view, I don't think that it is a specific matter to treat as it is a subject generally dealt with: the non-discrimination." (Michaël, Manager in the touristic industry).*

### *LGBT employees' treatment and protection*

#### *Actions and rules around discrimination*

Coming-out, be it in the private circle or a professional context is an act of courage and the environment plays a big role in the decision to do it. During the interviews, some respondents declared that their firms were indeed leading actions and policies to protect minorities, hence including gay employees:

*"Based on what I know from the University, I think so. I think they put a lot in place to avoid that [discrimination], and anyways in Sweden I do not think that it is a question as such, I mean they probably are very attentive to everything that revolves around minorities" (Cédric, Researcher)*

*"In our company, [...] they are all equal regardless of their nationality, sexual orientation, religion..." (Lionel, Team leader in airport security)*

*"In the medico-social domain [...] I think that all barriers are lifted regarding minorities, the environment is rather open" (Jules, Occupational therapist)*

However, the majority of the interviewees stated that they either did not know whether yes or no something was being done in their firm to prevent discrimination, or strongly asserted that indeed no such things were done (though this does not mean that discrimination was present in their company, only that no preventive actions were put in place).

Yet a couple of them added that though nothing was undertaken, the corporate culture itself would not tolerate such behaviour:

*"Not specifically, but my experience with this company is that I would say the general orientation is that we are open and non-discriminant." (Michaël, Manager in the touristic industry)*

*"We do not have anything like that, but the corporate culture wouldn't allow for that." (Charles, HR consultant)*

#### *Discrimination in the workplace*

During the interviews, the topic of discrimination was mentioned. Though none of them declared having experienced or witnessed discrimination in their current workplace context

(other than some unpleasant comments in general conversations not made with malintent and not directed to them), I asked them what their most likely reaction would be to a discriminatory situation.

Answers to that question were spread between looking for support and/or confronting the person at the origin of the situation, as most state they would not let themselves be bullied and would act on it.

The most important division between the answers of interviewees is the reaction to the possibility of quitting because of it, where we can observe three different reactions:

*“Choosing to remain silent has happened before, but quitting never, it is out of the question. There is no way I would give them the satisfaction to quit for that, it would be too easy.” (Cédric, Researcher)*

*“maybe the environment as well. Basically, if I do not feel good in my work and workplace even if I love my job, I think I would change it.” (Jules, Occupational therapist)*

*“I would quit [...] because I couldn’t support a company that discriminates me.” (Wojtek, Employee in the publishing industry)*

We can here see the first reaction where Cédric states that quitting would be a way out for the person who had a discriminatory behaviour and that this is not acceptable. Jules however, is more focused about how he would feel in the environment, and if the issue cannot be resolved and it led to him feeling uncomfortable in his workplace, he would look for a new position. Finally, Wojtek displays a reaction vis-à-vis the company letting such a behaviour happen and would quit as a protest towards what would have happened.

Finally, Michaël, Manager in the touristic industry, also pointed out during the discussion that discrimination towards gay employees and minorities, in general, is one thing that should be prevented and corrected if it happens, but that it should not lead to positive discrimination either:

*“One must be careful to how s/he reacts vis-à-vis ‘the others’, ‘the normals’ who could maybe have a problem with that: how do I treat them? One should not give an advantage to the person/people of the minority concerned”.*

### Same-sex-partners and work

During the interviews, the matter of same-sex partners and their inclusion in the workplace context (invitation to events, eligible for partners-related benefits). Just like in the quantitative part, the vast majority stated that they would be treated equally as any partner of any given employee, regardless of the employee’s sexual orientation.

Unlike in the quantitative part, the people who have emitted a doubt and weren’t sure had and took the opportunity to complement by saying that even if they were not sure, they did not think that it would raise any issues whatsoever.

## *Sexuality in the workplace context*

### *Place of sexuality in the workplace*

Given the topic of the study which revolves around coming-out in the workplace, views were exchanged during the interviews regarding sexuality and the place it occupies in the work context. On this matter, opinions were converging to the same: that sexuality is a private topic that is not relevant to discuss in a professional context.

*"One must play in a professional context. And in the professional context, sexual orientation, in general, has no business being discussed right?" (Michaël, Manager in the touristic industry)*

For some of the interviewees, it was not only the sexuality but their private life that they cared about keeping as such: private, as for them the is a place of work.

*"I mean, it is my private life, I like my colleagues a lot, but I don't share my life with them. At least for now, I like it like that." (Jules, Occupational therapist)*

*"I keep it for myself, it is my private life and there is a clear separation: work and personal life. It has nothing to do with being homosexual, it is just my personal life." (James, Manager in the aviation industry)*

Nevertheless, the distinction the interviewees set between their private life and professional context does not mean that they are trying to conceal their identity either, only that they are not actively sharing their personal life, or in some of their words:

*"I don't hide it, but I don't push it forward either." (Frédéric, IT employee)*

*"I don't claim it, but when I am asked I do not lie either so..." (Cédric, Researcher)*

### *Sexual identity revealing at work*

Out of the ten interviewees, seven declared to have come out, either partially or completely but in general, again, on the basis that they reveal it when they were asked but not claiming it first. However, it has not always been the case for all of them but they reached it after a personal journey, as explains Charles (HR consultant) when he said that he first wanted to keep it a secret but when the CEO asked him, he ceased the opportunity in front of him. Another example and yet different circumstances of coming-out could be the following:

*"I first denied it a bit, until the day where people I knew from the outside came in, and they could not remain silent about it." (Lionel, Team leader in airport security)*

But the reasons around the coming-out are not always it being pushed onto gay employees, it also happens completely out of their own free will as it did for Cédric (Researcher), whose coming-out to his colleagues was just something that happened during a break at work where everyone was sharing anecdotes about their personal lives, and with his supervisor because she confided in him and a link of trust was created. But he is no exception and other interviewees came-out in a similar context:

*“Well, in the hotel, actually it’s not that I did it, but maybe it was when you have to answer some questions like “what are you doing this weekend”, or “where are you going” or why I changed my car. It’s just... only telling the truth about what was going on at that moment.” (Juri, Employee in the hotel industry)*

But the choice of coming-out can also represent a statement of who the person is and what s/he stands for. This is, for instance, the case of Michaël (Manager in the touristic industry), who mentioned during the interview:

*“On the other hand, hiding it just for the sake of hiding it, I don’t think that it is fair or that it is honest. Because I do not want someone to later blame me for hiding things: if I lie about this, then am I lying about other things?”*

All interviewees were also questioned about the incentives they had or would like to have/have had in order to encourage them to come out, and three directions of answers arose: having an open environment where gay employees feel welcomed and supported; have other open gay-employees, especially in management positions for whom it did not cause any issues; nothing would encourage them to come out from the firm’s side but rather from the personal side. As an example of the last direction:

*“At the moment nothing. Or an important event in my life: if I get married, or if I’m about to have a child.” (Jules, Occupational therapist)*

This example connects to the majority of the interviewees who have agreed during the interviews that their personal situation, and most particularly their relationship status could play a role in whether they decide to come out at work or not. Most of them stated that having someone in their life has made/would make it easier to speak about being gay and that it would become more necessary/more difficult to hide:

*“it influenced the decision, simply because it’s... if you’re single, it is a lot easier to mask your sexual identity, because there is no one else, you know? There is no one to say otherwise.” (Charles, HR consultant)*

*“For sure! Because sometimes you cannot hide if you are in a relationship, you cannot say “no I’m not taking you out with my friends”, or “no you are not coming in my dinner work” and things like that, so at a certain point, it forces you to come out in the place of work. It has to!” (Juri, Employee in the Hotel industry)*

### Sexual identity concealment at work

Out of the ten interviewees, only three of them declared not being out in their current firm/work context. Only one of them is, however, administratively out as he once had to attach his partner to his health insurance benefits, and needed, therefore, to provide his personal details and certificate of civil union.

Nonetheless, some of the currently out gay employees have admitted to having concealed their sexual identity in previous companies or workplace contexts. Other than sexuality not being considered by the interviewees as a matter to be discussed in the professional context, the reasons pushing them to conceal or to having concealed are numerous but the one that recurred the most was that coming-out presents a risk for the employee, and it is a chance one might not want to risk, or put differently:

*"I made a point not to discuss anything about relationships because it is always one of those things where it is... you can have more of a risk of something happening if you say something than if you don't." (Charles, HR consultant)*

Yet, other motives for not coming-out were mentioned by the interviewees, among which the problem of the people in the environment came up several times, be it because of religious belief, conservative values or different generation, that can be a cause to decide not to claim to be gay at work. In addition, some confessed that in their previous working experiences, they lacked experience as gay men in general and that led them to not come out as they were not feeling confident enough to do it. Finally, it can also be out of convenience as revealing one's sexuality could lead to questions and arguments which one might not want to enter like it is the case with Juri (Employee in the hotel industry):

*"mostly because it is people that I do not know or people that, like in the hotel, the guests come and maybe ask you, and want to be a little bit... to know more about you, but it's nothing that is... I don't care if he knows or not, so I stay just general, because I do not want to start a conversation, about something I don't care about."*

### Consequences of Coming-Out

The questions of whether gay employees felt that coming-out could have various impacts in their work context were also discussed in the qualitative part with the interviewees.

First, the hypothetical impact on the work quality and productivity was discussed, and the opinions were rather divided. Some do think that coming-out can have an influence on these two traits:

*"I can easily imagine that if we are in an environment where it is better to stay hidden, we are not comfortable, always on our guards, then we are more stressed and I think that it does have an impact on the work quality, the presence at work and also on the will to get involved in the firm" (Cédric, Researcher).*

Others like James or Lionel thought alike, demonstrated as Lionel shared his experience and said that coming-out freed a part of his conscience which allowed him to implicate himself more in his work. Yet some interviewees did not share the same point of view and clearly stated that they did not think that this act could/did impact their work productivity or quality. Then, the discussion shifted to the potential impacts on the working conditions in the workplace coming-out could have. Overall, the majority seemed to believe that coming-out would have a positive influence on the working conditions and stress level of gay employees as one can be more open and not having to be careful of what he says and how he behaves:



*“Being out makes it a lot easier, so I’m more relax: it’s a lot easier not to have to walk and watch your back, you don’t have to watch what you say, you can just be open and honest [...] and that has a very positive impact on it.” (Charles, HR consultant)*

*“Oh for sure, I do think so! [...] from the moment everyone knew, it was much easier [...] I was more at ease, I did not to constantly be careful.” (Cédric, Researcher)*

Regarding the relationships, the views of the interviewees were more confused as both directions the after of the coming-out could take were explored, and often by the same person. Indeed, most declare that in their current context, they do not believe that coming-out could (for closeted employees) or did (for outed ones) damage the relationships with their colleagues, but that it is a possibility to think about before doing it:

*“There is always the risk, that a colleague with whom you get along well does not wish to speak to you anymore or something else...” (Frédéric, IT employee)*

But from their personal experience, they strongly claim that it has not happened for those who have come out, and that, with some other employees who share the same secret or simply that care about LGBT equality in the workplace, they have grown closer thanks to it.

#### *Cross-case analysis*

Regarding the first aggregate dimension, *nature of firms and professional behaviour*, the overall opinion from the ten cases is that work contexts are rather heteronormalised. However, interviewees’ opinions seem to converge to say that it is not bothering as such and thought it would make it easier on gay employees to come out and feel accepted, it is not, or not only up to the companies to change it, but rather society.

Moving on to *LGBT employees’ treatment and protection*, none of the respondents has reported the presence of any actions in place in their firms to support the LGBT employees, but none of them has either experienced or witnessed homophobia or discrimination other than small remarks of jokes with no actual malintent. All interviewees also claimed that, though not all were sure but genuinely thought at least, same-sex partners would be treated equally as other heterosexual partners would coming to benefits and invitations to company events. Finally, if they were to face discrimination, the most popular reactions would be to look for support among the company, and confront the person causing it though few would go up to quitting would the environment/situation not change.

Finally, in regard to *sexuality in the workplace context*, the majority of the interviewees declared being openly gay in their workplace, but not to promote it either: simply say the truth when asked or when a related topic comes up in conversations (partners, social activities...). Those who still conceal their sexual identity mainly to it out of a desire to keep their personal and professional lives separate, not because of their homosexuality. Overall, even if only some foresee an impact on the work (quality and productivity), the majority of the interviewees agree that coming-out would impact the working conditions, relationships and stress level.

	Nature of firms and professional behaviour	LGBT employees' treatment and protection	Sexuality in the workplace context
<b>Case 1 - Cédric</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Researcher in the bio-medical field.</li> <li>- Heteronormalised context, but not shocking or bothering</li> <li>- Not a topic to be addressed by the company.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No specific actions in place</li> <li>- He works in Sweden and assumes the environment and culture prevent discrimination.</li> <li>- Never witnessed discrimination but his expected reaction would be to either stay silent or look for support, but not to give in and quit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In Sweden too personal to ask about it</li> <li>- He is currently openly gay and he came-out along private conversations during the breaks</li> <li>- It didn't affect him, yet he can imagine that it can impact the individual and how he would perform.</li> </ul>
<b>Case 2 - Frédéric</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Working in IT for a communication firm.</li> <li>- Place of work rather heteronormalised</li> <li>- It is not problematic, but he admits that it can sometimes generate awkward situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No specific actions led by the company</li> <li>- He presumes that same-sex partners would be treated as any other</li> <li>- Never witnessed or suffered discrimination but would expect to look for support he did</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not out to everyone as he does not promote it, yet doesn't hide it either</li> <li>- He recognises that some environment (people, type of job...) might not be ideal to be openly gay.</li> <li>- He also says coming-out can positively or negatively impact relationships at work.</li> </ul>
<b>Case 3 - Guillaume</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Works in IT in a research laboratory</li> <li>- Work environment rather heteronormal</li> <li>- Admits that it would make it easier for gay employees if the firm and society were more open.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- He is not aware of any actions around the LGBT community</li> <li>- He has not witnessed or suffered from discrimination or homophobia</li> <li>- He claims he would either stay silent or reach out for support if it ever happened.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Only open administratively due to partners benefits</li> <li>- But he has not shared his sexuality with others out of convenience</li> <li>- For him, coming-out would probably relieve some stress and reinforce the link with his colleagues.</li> </ul>
<b>Case 4 - Jules</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Occupational therapist, hence works in a socio-medical context</li> <li>- It is an environment where acceptance is common, but still remains heteronormal</li> <li>- Not something of much importance to him but it would be more inclusive for society to change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sector rather open, he has not experienced or witnessed discrimination</li> <li>- He does not think it would happen as filters are lifted in such a context (working with disabled, sick... people)</li> <li>- If it ever occurred, he would confront the person and look for support, and ultimately, if it is too oppressive, quit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not openly gay but because he draws a line between work and private life</li> <li>- For him, big events (getting married, having children...) or being in a serious relationship would be a reason to come-out</li> </ul>
<b>Case 5 – Juri</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Employee in the hotel industry</li> <li>- Heteronormal working contexts but it is not a problem for him</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No actions taken</li> <li>- Has never suffered or witnessed discrimination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Openly gay, but not claiming it, only revealing when asked or when talking about social activities.</li> <li>- Does not impact the work, but does on the working conditions and relations</li> </ul>
<b>Case 6 – Lionel</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Team leader in airport security</li> <li>- Context not completely heteronormal and he tries not to be in his behaviour and he values this very much</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No existing actions but he thinks that raising awareness to minorities could be important</li> <li>- He has never suffered or seen discrimination and would confront the person.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- He is openly gay in his current job but was outed at first</li> <li>- For him coming-out was a relief and he believes it can really impact how a person feels and what he delivers as a work as concealing can be stressful and a weight to carry</li> </ul>

<b>Case 7 – Michael</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Manager in the touristic industry</li> <li>- Heteronormal context, but it is not up to the company to change that as long as the individual is respected</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No actions oriented toward LGBT inclusion, but an open culture of no-discrimination</li> <li>- He has never had any problems with discrimination and estimates it would be severely reprimanded in his company.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- He is openly gay, and though he doesn't promote it, he says it when the context allows it, to be in line with his personal values such as honesty</li> <li>- Coming-out is a matter of context, be it inside the firm or not, depends on the country, the people... and can be positive or negative</li> </ul>
<b>Case 8 – James</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Manager in the aviation industry</li> <li>- Company is heteronormal but it is not something that he thinks of as bothering or that needs to change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No actions</li> <li>- Has not had any issues</li> <li>- Equal treatment for all partners, be them of the same-sex or not</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- He is not out: due to a will to split his private life and his job, it has no business being discussed</li> <li>- Believes that in some cases, it can impact the individual's work and working conditions</li> </ul>
<b>Case 9 – Charles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- HR consultant</li> <li>- Generally, firms are heteronormalised but in his current one, he was not automatically presumed hetero</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No actions to be noted, but a very open culture with a flat hierarchy where everyone is respected</li> <li>- Has not faced discrimination other than some stupid remarks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- He is now out and there have not been any issues</li> <li>- The situation might be a break to doing it (customer relation)</li> <li>- Being out makes it easier, less stress so positive impact</li> </ul>
<b>Case 10 – Wojtek</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Employee in the publishing industry</li> <li>- Rather conservative and hence heteronormal firm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No specific actions, but has received flyer promoting anti-discrimination policy</li> <li>- Has not faced homophobia or discrimination, but would quit if it happens</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- He is not currently out as the people he works with are rather conservative and of older generations</li> <li>- He doesn't foresee any impact on the work, but rather on the relationships.</li> </ul>

# Discussion

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## Aggregate Dimension 1: Nature of firms and professional behaviour

One way the firms can be characterised vis-à-vis sexual orientation and general views they display on it is that companies are generally heteronormal environments. Indeed from the interviews led in the qualitative part of this study, nine out of ten interviewees confessed that their current work context was heteronormal, and the tenth, though his current firm is not, recognises that it is generally the case. This matches with the findings of previous researches, as Gusmano (2008) explained this heteronormativity of sexual orientation is legitimised in society as a whole, and since firms are somewhat reduced copies of society, this phenomenon is replicated in professional contexts.

However, these previous studies conclude that heteronormativity sets barriers for gay employees and can be partly a cause of having homophobic behaviours. Yet, the respondents of this study agree that this phenomenon is not shocking to them, nor something they consider a problem as such. The interviewees agree that it would make it easier on gay employees if it was not the case, but at no point during the discussions has one of the interviewees claimed that heteronormativity is a brake to the development of gay workers.

Furthermore, the majority of the interviewees involved in this study agree that the organisation's role is to ensure the respect of its employees, but that it is not up to the firm to change this heteronormativity, if anyone's, they claim it is society's responsibility to change and be more inclusive as this is where it all starts. Yet during the interviews, some of the gay employees themselves were paying attention to this fact, for instance not assigning a genre when referring to someone's partner or offering the opportunity for the person to say they are gay. This, overall can and should impact how companies approach the human capital that represents the employees, when hiring, in internal policies... by maximising the gender neutrality whenever possible so as to offer any person who does not identify in this heteronormal context a chance to be true to her/himself and to feel included.

## Aggregate Dimension 2: LGBT employee's treatment and protection

Along the conversations with the interviewees, only one of them spoke about the presence of an anti-discrimination policy clearly presented at his workplace, but all denied the presence of any actions led to better include LGBT employees or prevent their mistreatment (discrimination or homophobia). This is especially concerning given the fact that as several studies have shown (Clark, 1997; Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015), well-being is an important matter to be achieved in companies. It is particularly true in today's global world where markets are getting more and more competitive and employees gain the luxury of getting to choose employers more easily than ever before and how previously said in the theory section: the work frame influences the attraction and retention of talents within firms which, ultimately, impacts the business's operations. This implies that firms must prevent such situations to occur, be it by discrimination policies or preventive actions destined to protect and include gay employees.

Day & Schoenrade (2000) have also explained through their study, that when employees are open, which they are more likely to be when the firm has an anti-discrimination policy clearly presented, they present lower conflict between their personal and professional lives. And though, despite the lack of anti-discrimination policies or the lack of communication around these, the interviewees have not experienced or witnessed homophobia or discrimination in their current workplace, it is an element that companies should put forward to ensure a protection and satisfaction of their human capital. Indeed, (Kahn, 1990) pushes forward that when the basic needs of employees are met, their engagement in the firm will only be stronger, statement supported by (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015) that deems the presence of these so-called 'hygiene factors' necessary for employees to be satisfied or at least, not to be dissatisfied.

Other than for the engagement and satisfaction, good working environments are particularly important for the overall business outcome of the firm, as Day & Schoenrade (1997) explain it, these environments also increase the loyalty, efficiency and productivity of the employees who will therefore directly impact the firms' results. This withholds some organisational consequences and responsibility since now that it is confirmed, firms should thrive to establish not only actions and protections for the employees in general, but also focus on minorities, in this case gay employees, to provide them with the best working environment as possible in order to increase their business' performance.

On a more positive note, the majority of the interviewees have expressed that, even though they had not always explicitly been told that it would be the case, they assumed that same-sex partners would be eligible for company benefits and invited to company events as would any heterosexual partner. This is also the opinion expressed by the quantitative part of the study as 66,8% confirm same-sex partners would be eligible to company benefits in their firm and 67,2% for the invitation to events. Both methods are pointing in the same direction, making it safe to say that this can be generalised to the majority of firms.

### Aggregate Dimension 3: Sexuality in the workplace context

Coming to the third dimension that is sexuality in the workplace, several topics are to discuss. First, it is interesting to point out that only 11,2% of the survey respondents answered to be out to no one in their workplace context which is particularly interesting as in the question to know whether yes or no people considered themselves openly gay, 15,6% answered “No”. This means that some people, while they declare being out to some people in the workplace do not consider themselves as openly gay. Continuing on that note, though I expected a significant portion of gay employees to be out in their current workplace, I was far from expect that the vast majority would be. Indeed, in the results of the quantitative part of the study, 82,8% (cf. diagram 2) declared being openly gay in their workplace, and the trend can also be observed on the qualitative part of the research as seven out of the ten interviewees declared being out at work.

However, the reason behind all this is a bit more complex: as explained by Goffman (1963) and mentioned earlier, there is no clear dichotomy when it is about coming-out: it is a continuous process that is never over as the corporate world is in constant change: new collaborators, new contractors, new customers.... This is where the qualitative data add on and complement the quantitative which solely states whether or not the respondents feel openly gay or not. Indeed, through the interview, the matter could be discussed further in details where the interviewees who are out were able to explain that though they consider being openly gay, they do not actively promote it but rather answer truthfully when asked. This joins the concept of not being a dichotomous situation but in fact more of the continuum that was described in the theory section.

One important fact to note is that, unlike the discussed previous research discussed in the theory section suggested, the three interviewees who claimed not to be openly gay in the workplace were not due to an environment that led them to conceal, but rather out of their own initiative for the sake of keeping their private and professional lives separate, regardless if they are homosexual or not. Though it does not refute the conclusions of previous studies, it builds on them by adding the option that some gay employees conceal their identity out of choice and not out of obligation. This means for firms that even if they foster including environments, some homosexual employees will no matter what choose not to come out.

Second, and following the structure of the research question we must look at the impact coming-out has on work (efficiency, productivity, quality...). It is interesting to look at the difference between the quantitative and qualitative results here. Indeed while only slightly above 25% of the respondents to the qualitative survey believe coming-out would have a positive impact on their work quality and productivity, this number rises to 40% for the quantitative study. A potential explanation for this could be that given the difference in terms of number of people involved in the two studies, more sectors are represented in the quantitative survey than in the interviews, and not all sectors might be impacted equally by the coming-out.

However, in addition to what the employees think, studies have put in the light that poor work environments and lack of well-being at work which, in this case, could be the result of a place where gay employees do not feel safe or that they belong and are welcomed, does influence the firms operation through lower productivity, decisions of lesser quality, higher absenteeism, etc, (Danna & Griffin, 1999). But in the end, all of these direct impacts on employees are also felt by the business and its financial situation and profitability (Cooper & Cartwright, 1994). The results of the study hence follow the same direction explaining why LGBT employees is a matter that companies should care about and something they should act upon to ensure they are treated with an equal respect as their heterosexual counterparts.

Finally, we must look at the impact coming-out has on the working conditions, more specifically the working relationships and perceived stress level at work. Again, the qualitative results are here more detailed than the quantitative ones. Over 40% of the respondents of the quantitative survey expressed that coming-out would positively impact their relationships at work and over 35% that it would positively impact their perceived stress level (as in a feeling of less stress after coming-out). If the proportions are similar with the qualitative results, the discussion with the interviewees offered the possibility to understand better that the relationships can be improved as it can make one closer to his colleagues, or also because one would be free to speak about his private life more. For the perceived stress level, it would go down as one would be free to speak without watching his back constantly, and it is a weight to carry not to be out that coming-out frees you from. Hence, by fostering inclusive environments and policies firms can not only facilitate relationships between employees, but also can they take some stress off of their shoulders.

This is highly important for organisations because if the environment is not favourable enough for the gay employees to come out it can negatively affect their operations as explained by Day & Schoenrade (1997) who explain that concealment can be rather stressful for the employee, potentially causing diminished performance or, in extreme situations, for the employee to quit. This has been illustrated by the two interviewees Jules and Wojtek who stated that if they were to face a 'hostile' environment, and that the situation would not change, they would look for other positions in different companies.

# Conclusion

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In this thesis I have aimed at, first, elucidating what incites gay employees to come out in the workplace and, second, what impact coming-out has on the firm's operation.

To do so and after building a theoretical framework based on previous researches in similar fields, I conducted a quantitative survey gathering a total of 250 respondents who were both gay and employed or looking for a position (no students) who helped provide a snapshot of the situation of gay employees in western European countries and understand what is going on in firms around LGBT people. To complete and strengthen the research, I also conducted a series of ten interviews with gay employees from various sectors, generations, countries and with different backgrounds. This qualitative part of the study allowed a deeper understanding of the process behind the factors influencing coming-out and the impacts it withholds.

Where previous researches either tackled the treatment of LGBT employees or the influence of given traits of an environment on the firm's operations, none actually linked the two together and it is also an objective I had with this study to explore an LGBT related topic in business from a new angle. By doing so not only did I contribute to the existing literature but also to increase the number of existing paper treating the LGBT minority in the business world and reduce the gap mentioned in the introduction with papers discussing other minorities.

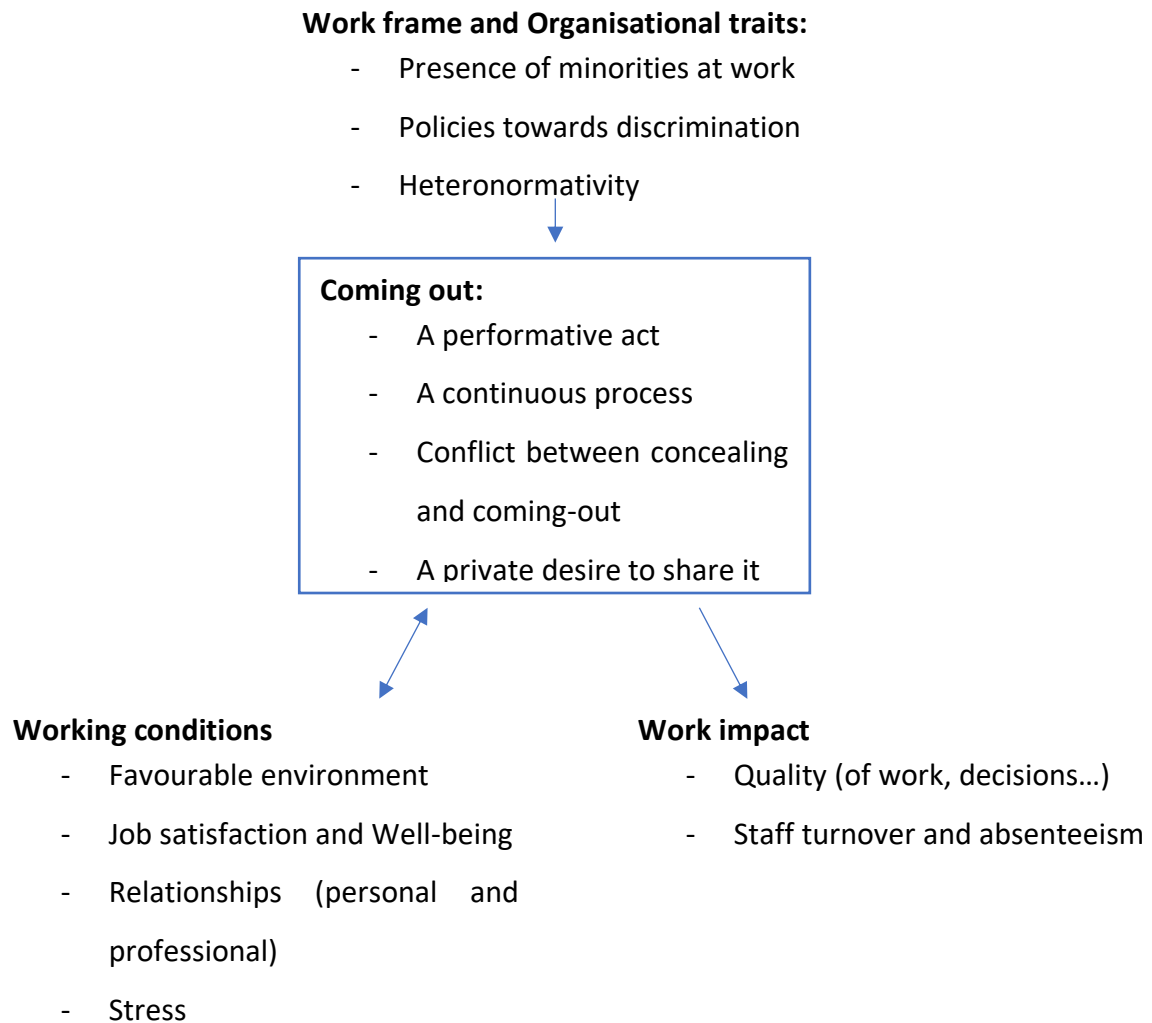
This study's results have shown that gay employees are more likely to come out in an environment where they feel safe, accepted and where the values respect them as individuals. It also put forward the fact that discrimination and homophobia, conservative environments or specific situations (first or recent hiring, position in contact with external actors...) can be an obstacle to them wanting to come out and pushing them to concealment. Finally, it has also been noticed that some gay employees voluntarily chose to conceal their sexual identity despite a favourable environment out of privacy: they want to separate their private and professional lives and it is not a matter of being gay or straight.

The findings also pointed out that coming-out impacts the firm's operations from three different angles: first it can influence the productivity and efficiency of the gay employees, either positively if the environment is favourable, or negatively if they are 'forced' to conceal their sexual identity due to a hostile environment. Then, it also plays a role on the working conditions and relationships at work as it may improve the relationships the individual has with his colleagues and overall being out might avoid some unwanted tensions, such as conflicts between home and work, strengthening the engagement of the employee towards the company. Finally, it also impacts the perceived stress level of the employee as concealing one's sexual identity can be a weight to carry and a source of great stress that occupies his mind and negatively affects back the two previous aspects in a vicious circle.

These impacts ultimately constitute the performance of the employee, which has a direct influence on the business outcomes of the firms.



Based on the findings, the proposed framework can be revised as such:



The work productivity impact has been removed as no significant relation could be observed between that and being out at work. In addition, the private desire to share their personal life, necessary for gay employees to come out has been added to the coming out section.

Overall, this paper builds on the current studies and theories who have researched work frames and traits of organisations; the act of coming out; the working conditions and work impact be it individually or the impact the former has on the latter. It adds on by proving that all of the above are linked together and that, in the context of gay employees, the company's environment and culture play a role in the decision of the said employees to come out or not which then affects their works and the firm's performance.

More generally and in simpler words: the decision to come out can be influenced by the firm's environment and whether or not the employee chooses to do it, it withholds consequences on the organisation's operations and business outcomes through work quality, working conditions, working relations and perceived stress level which are impacted by the decision to come out.

## Implications and Further research

With this study, I tried to explain how gay employees weight the decision to either come-out or conceal their sexual identity in their workplace and to what extent coming-out can impact the firm's operation. By doing such a study, I not only provide other researchers with preliminary data and information on coming out in the workplace, but I also contribute to expanding the research area tackling LGBT population in the workplace context.

The end result of the study can be summed up by the framework proposed in the theory section that is now back up by the results of the mixed approach used here.

However, this study leaves room for further research to be conducted. The first axis to keep exploring would be the impacts of coming-out, that have been put in the light, and focus on it and aim to measure in detail by how much the firm and its environment are impacted. A second axis of research would naturally be to expand this study to other groups of the LGBT community (Lesbians, Transgenders, Bisexuals...) and compare the results to those obtained for gay employees. Finally, a third direction to go would be to look at firms who do have actions in place to foster a better environment for LGBT and compare their situation, well-being of employees, turnover... with equivalent firms in the same industry that do not have such programs in place and compare the two.

# Appendixes

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## Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

*My name is Nick, I am French and I am a 22 years old master student at Uppsala University. In the frame of my studies, I am required to write a master Thesis. The study I am doing aims at finding out what can influence the coming-out of male homosexual employees in the workplace context, and how this may impact the work and working conditions of those employees.*

*This study would not only help to shed some light on the LGBT community, a minority not discussed much in the business literature, but also give organisations axes to work on to both improve their employees' life at work, but there through their business outcomes too.*

*There is no right or wrong answer, I do not expect or want you to give specific answers, but rather to answer truthfully so as to obtain reliable data.*

- Can you present yourself: age, nationality, sexual orientation, and any information you may find relevant to reveal?
- Can you please describe your employment context? If you are employed, what type of contract, what position, what type of firm and what sector...
- What do you know about sexual orientation and coming out in the workplace context?
- Can you comment what your firm is doing in terms of improving the situation for gay workers? (anti-discrimination policy, diversity training, inclusion of same sex partners in benefits and events, zero tolerance on discrimination and homophobia...).
- Many firms show a heteronormativity legitimised by society where one is assumed to be straight. Is that the case in your firm? How do you feel about it? How do you think this could be improved?
- What is your experience with your sexual orientation at work? Are you/have you been out? How did it go, have you been discriminated against or witnessed it...?
- What pushed you to come out? Or refrains you to do it? Why is it so?
- Do you conceal your identity/have you previously concealed your identity in this or a previous context? What would have incited you not to?
- Some authors define discrimination management as a way to respond to discrimination in the work place either by quitting, keep silent, reach for social support or to confront the discriminators. Have you ever found yourself in one or several of these contexts, whether now or in previous workplaces? What happened, how did you react and what changed after?
- How, in your opinion, does the fact of being out or closeted impact your work? Your working conditions (well-being, stress, relationships with co-workers)?
- Are you currently in a relationship? Does it, or has it ever influenced your decision to come out at work? How?

## Appendix 2 – Questionnaire

The following text displays before one fills in the questionnaire in order to explain the frame of the study, what it is about (based on the research question), why I chose such a topic and most importantly, that no specific answer is preferred from them:

*“My name is Nick, I am French and I am a 22 years old master student at Uppsala University. In the frame of my studies, I am required to write a master Thesis. The study I am doing aims at finding out what can influence the coming-out of male homosexual employees in the workplace context, and how this may impact the work and working conditions of those employees.*

*This study would not only help to shed some light on the LGBT community, a minority not discussed much in the business literature, but also give organisations axes to work on to both improve their employees' life at work, but therethrough their business outcomes too.*

*There is no right or wrong answer, I do not expect or want people to give specific answers as I am not testing a theory, but rather want truthful answers so as to obtain reliable results.*

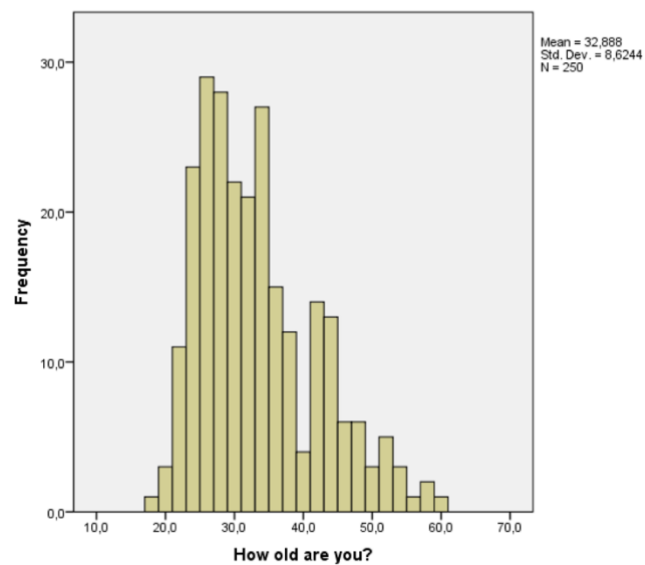
*I thank you in advance for the time you will allocate to answering this questionnaire (it should take about 5 minutes), it will really help me complete my master thesis, and hence strengthen the presence of the LGBT community in the business literature.”*

As the questionnaire is rather long to copy here, and in the optic of saving paper at printing, it is available to see at the following link:

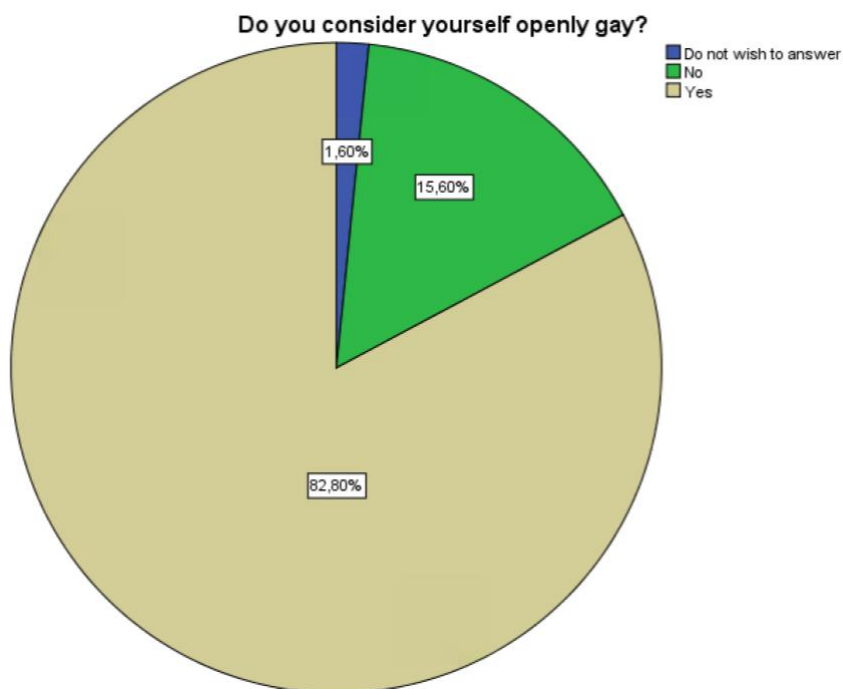
<https://goo.gl/forms/el3OwG8kMtSakp6v2>

## Appendix 3 – Quantitative Diagrams and Tables

**Diagram 1 – Age distribution of the quantitative sample**

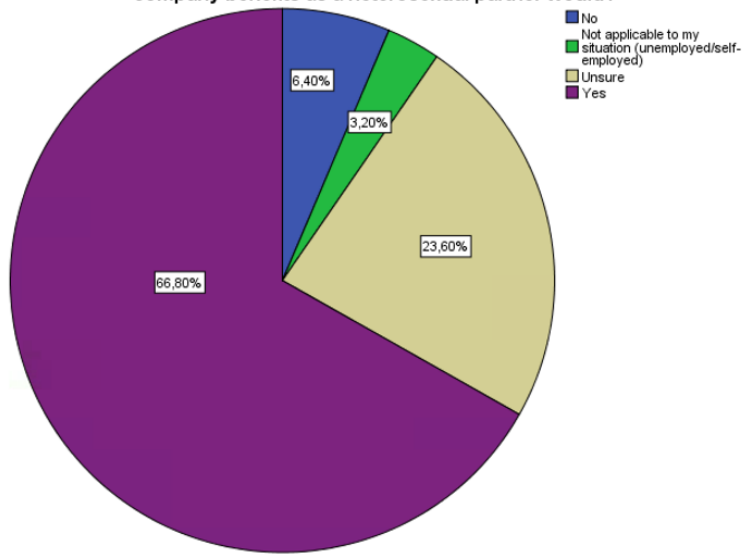


**Diagram 2 – Being openly gay**



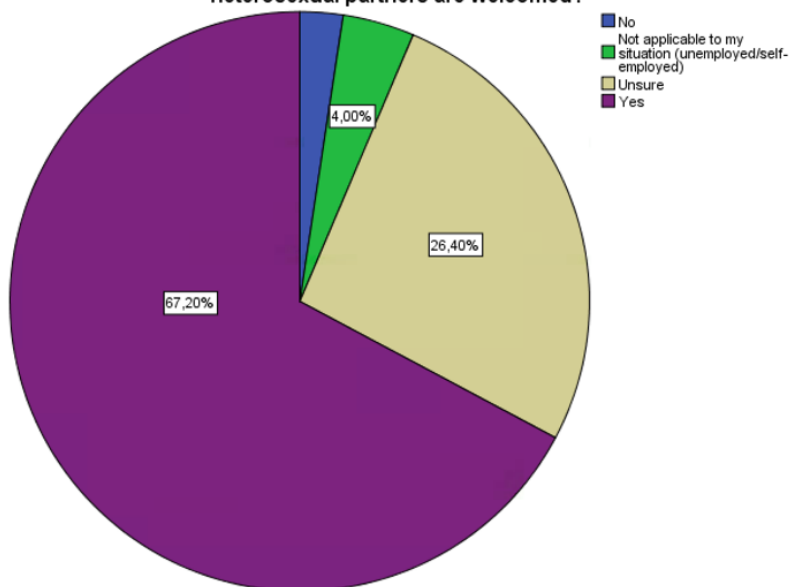
**Diagram 3 – Same-sex partners eligible to companies' partner related benefits**

In your firm/working environment, are same-sex partners eligible to the same company benefits as a heterosexual partner would?



**Diagram 4 – Same-sex partners invited to company events**

In your firm, are same-sex partners invited to company events where heterosexual partners are welcomed?



**Table 1 – Descriptive statistics related to the age distribution**

Descriptive Statistics									
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
How old are you?	250	18,0	60,0	32,888	8,6244	,815	,154	,094	,307
Valid N (listwise)	250								

**Table 2 – Educational level repartition**

What is your educational level?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Bachelor (Licence)	73	29,2	29,2	29,2
	BTS	3	1,2	1,2	30,4
	Doctorate/PhD	18	7,2	7,2	37,6
	High school Diploma	46	18,4	18,4	56,0
	Master	104	41,6	41,6	97,6
	Other	6	2,4	2,4	100,0
	Total	250	100,0	100,0	

**Table 3 – Being open as gay, frequency**

Do you consider yourself openly gay?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Do not wish to answer	4	1,6	1,6	1,6
	No	39	15,6	15,6	17,2
	Yes	207	82,8	82,8	100,0
	Total	250	100,0	100,0	

**Table 4 – Categories of people respondents are out to**

Who are you out to in the workplace (multiple answers possible)					
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid					
As said before, not openly out at work. Only a friend who works each year for seasonal needs knows because I told him years ago.	1	,4	,4	,4	
Colleagues I don't directly work with	13	5,2	5,2	5,6	
Colleagues I don't directly work with, Colleagues I have a direct link with	3	1,2	1,2	6,8	
Colleagues I don't directly work with, Colleagues I have a direct link with, External actors	1	,4	,4	7,2	
Colleagues I don't directly work with, Colleagues I have a direct link with, My superior(s)	14	5,6	5,6	12,8	
Colleagues I don't directly work with, Colleagues I have a direct link with, My superior(s), External actors (Clients, customers...)	3	1,2	1,2	14,0	
Colleagues I don't directly work with, Colleagues I have a direct link with, My superior(s), Subordinates	33	13,2	13,2	27,2	
Colleagues I don't directly work with, Colleagues I have a direct link with, My superior(s), Subordinates, External actors	10	4,0	4,0	31,2	
Colleagues I don't directly work with, Colleagues I have a direct link with, My superior(s), Subordinates, External actors (Clients, customers...)	21	8,4	8,4	39,6	
Colleagues I don't directly work with, Colleagues I have a direct link with, My superior(s), Subordinates, External actors, students	1	,4	,4	40,0	
Colleagues I don't directly work with, Colleagues I have a direct link with, Subordinates	3	1,2	1,2	41,2	
Colleagues I don't directly work with, Colleagues I have a direct link with, Subordinates, External actors (Clients, customers...)	1	,4	,4	41,6	
Colleagues I don't directly work with, External actors	1	,4	,4	42,0	
Colleagues I don't directly work with, External actors (Clients, customers...), Students	1	,4	,4	42,4	
Colleagues I don't directly work with, My superior(s), Subordinates	1	,4	,4	42,8	
Colleagues I have a direct link with	54	21,6	21,6	64,4	
Colleagues I have a direct link with, Anyone I work with	1	,4	,4	64,8	
Colleagues I have a direct link with, External actors (Clients, customers...)	2	,8	,8	65,6	
Colleagues I have a direct link with, My superior(s)	30	12,0	12,0	77,6	
Colleagues I have a direct link with, My superior(s), External actors (Clients, customers...)	2	,8	,8	78,4	
Colleagues I have a direct link with, My superior(s), Subordinates	9	3,6	3,6	82,0	
Colleagues I have a direct link with, My superior(s), Subordinates, External actors (Clients, customers...)					
Colleagues I have a direct link with, My superior(s), Subordinates, External actors (Clients, customers...), No one					
Colleagues I have a direct link with, My superior(s), Subordinates, External actors (Clients, customers...), My superior(s)					
Colleagues I have a direct link with, My superior(s), Subordinates, External actors (Clients, customers...), My superior(s), Subordinates, External actors (Clients, customers...)					
No one	28	11,2	11,2	100,0	
Total	250	100,0	100,0		

Colleagues I have a direct link with, My superior(s), Subordinates, External actors (Clients, customers...)	3	1,2	1,2	83,2
Colleagues I have a direct link with, My superior(s), Subordinates, Not every superior or colleague.	1	,4	,4	83,6
Colleagues I have a direct link with, Subordinates	4	1,6	1,6	85,2
External actors (Clients, customers...)	4	1,6	1,6	86,8
External actors (Clients, customers...), No one	1	,4	,4	87,2
My superior(s)	3	1,2	1,2	88,4
My superior(s), Subordinates, External actors (Clients, customers...)	1	,4	,4	88,8
No one	28	11,2	11,2	100,0
Total	250	100,0	100,0	



**Table 5 – Being openly gay and its various impacts**

Correlations							
		Do you consider yourself openly gay	Impact on work quality?	Impact on work productivity?	Impact on working conditions?	Impact on relationships ?	Impact on stress level
Do you consider yourself openly gay	Pearson Correlation	1	,149*	,066	,163**	,201**	,164**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,020	,301	,010	,001	,009
	N	250	246	250	250	250	250
Impact on work quality?	Pearson Correlation	,149*	1	,732**	,700**	,483**	,395**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,020		,000	,000	,000	,000
	N	246	246	246	246	246	246
Impact on work productivity?	Pearson Correlation	,066	,732**	1	,643**	,428**	,394**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,301	,000		,000	,000	,000
	N	250	246	250	250	250	250
Impact on working conditions?	Pearson Correlation	,163**	,700**	,643**	1	,639**	,478**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,010	,000	,000		,000	,000
	N	250	246	250	250	250	250
Impact on relationships?	Pearson Correlation	,201**	,483**	,428**	,639**	1	,488**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,001	,000	,000	,000		,000
	N	250	246	250	250	250	250
Impact on stress level	Pearson Correlation	,164**	,395**	,394**	,478**	,488**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,009	,000	,000	,000	,000	
	N	250	246	250	250	250	250

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

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