

Track: Spirals of Silence? Tackling the ‘invisibility’ of the sexual orientation strand and sexuality in academic research and in organisation equality and diversity policy and practice

Track Chairs:

Fiona Colgan (f.colgan@londonmet.ac.uk)
and Aidan McKearney (aidan.mckearney@londonmet.ac.uk)
Comparative Organisation and Equality Research Centre,
London Metropolitan Business School,
London Metropolitan University,
Stapleton House,
277-281 Holloway Road
London N7 8HN, UK

An important recent change for lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people in Europe has been the prohibition by legislation of discrimination in employment on grounds of sexual orientation. The Employment Equality Directive (2000) has required all Member States to introduce legislation making it unlawful to discriminate on sexual orientation. It is argued that this is long overdue given that the limited research to date has shown that LGB people experience discrimination and harassment at work. In addition to pointing to the cost of discrimination to LGBT people in terms of health and quality of working life, it has been argued that organisations which do not promote inclusive, working environments are less likely to reap the rewards of a well motivated, loyal and productive LGBT workforce. Yet, of all the strands covered by equality/diversity policy, sexual orientation has been described as one of the most ‘sensitive’, ‘taboo’ and indeed ‘invisible’ areas of diversity, much less researched in management and organisation studies than other ‘visible’ forms such as gender or race and ethnicity (Bowen and Blackmon, 2003).

It is not true to say that research has been ‘silent’ on sexuality generally. A number of early works have explored sexuality, work and organisation, including for example, Hearn, Sheppard, Tancred-Sheriff and Burrell’s *The Sexuality of Organization* (1989) and Brewis and Linstead’s *Sex, Work and Sex Work* (2000). This research has shown that although sexuality pervades every aspect of organisation, this has not been conventionally acknowledged. The research began to show the various ways in which the very processes of organisation reflected power relations suffused with dominant forms of sexuality and reflected on the ways in which individuals are sexed and gendered in organisations. However, despite these valuable insights, we would argue that research on sexual orientation remains ‘thin on the ground’ at conferences and in academic and practitioner journals. We would welcome theoretical, discussion and empirical papers from researchers who would like to explore themes on sexuality and sexual orientation within work, organisations, management and equality and diversity policy and practice so rendering work in the area ‘visible’ and providing the space and opportunity for discussion in this stream at EOI.

Keywords: sexual orientation, sexuality, work, organisation, equality, diversity, gender, race and ethnicity, public policy, discrimination, harassment