

5-11-2013

# Working in the Gay Front Line: A Model of Workplace Heterosexist Harassment

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## Recommended Citation

Herres, Daniel, "Working in the Gay Front Line: A Model of Workplace Heterosexist Harassment" (2013). *Master's Theses*. 420.  
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Working in the Gay Front Line: A Model of Workplace Heterosexist Harassment

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B.A., Emory University, 2009

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

at the

University of Connecticut

2013

APPROVAL PAGE

Master of Arts Thesis

Working in the Gay Front Line: A Model of Workplace Heterosexist Harassment

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2013

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to my advisor, Dr. Vicki Magley, for all of her patience(!), insight, and guidance over the years, as well as my committee members, Dr. Janet Barnes-Farrell and Dr. Mary Bernstein. Shout out and thank you to all of my friends and colleagues both in and out of the I/O Division – your encouragement and support throughout this project have been immeasurable. Lastly, thank you to my family and my partner, Paul Moberly, for their unwavering belief in me.

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## Abstract

Research on harassment by sexual orientation is becoming increasingly relevant in society. Gay rights have progressed to be in the forefront of the political and social awareness, and organizations are turning their focus toward improving workplace diversity. Still, discrimination and harassment of LGB people continue to be a problem. Although a number of studies have begun to address this issue, large gaps still exist in the literature. The goal of this study was to identify antecedents and outcomes of workplace heterosexist harassment, as well as the influences of contextual and individual moderating variables. Participants from multiple organizations completed an online survey assessing their experiences with heterosexist harassment. They also answered questions regarding workplace climate, psychological distress, and other variables. Using a structural equation modeling framework, results showed that an inclusive diversity climate was significantly predictive of experiences with heterosexist harassment, in that greater diversity was related to fewer experiences. Job satisfaction, job stress, and psychological distress were also related to harassment experiences; the latter of these was moderated by sexual orientation. These results may have implications for the application of minority stress theory, and help direct researchers and practitioners toward future collaboration in preventing heterosexist harassment.

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## Working in the Gay Front Line: A Model of Workplace Heterosexist Harassment

“Fag.” “Dyke.” “Homo.” Slang terms, tossed about casually and without regard, can cause more damage than the perpetrator may expect. Other times, homophobic remarks like these can be filled with hatred, intended to cause hurt. Too often such cases of homophobia are ignored. Every day, thousands of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals experience comments and actions that degrade their identity, simply because they are gay. The root of this discrimination stems from what is called “heterosexism,” defined as “an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship or community” (Herek, 1990, p. 89). This system can manifest itself in the form of indirect, ambient harassment, such as overhearing a gay joke, or direct, personal harassment, such as being called a derogatory term related to one’s sexual identity. Even in the workplace – an environment that should be safe, professional, and free from such harassment – these behaviors occur on a regular basis. In this context, such experiences are termed “heterosexist harassment” (HH), a relatively new name for an old phenomenon.

The impact of HH upon the target can be detrimental, and yet research on the topic has only recently begun to grow. It has been shown that such experiences can have detrimental consequences to one’s physical and psychological well-being (e.g. Waldo, 1999). Its implications can be even more severe: a recent report by the Australian Research Center in Sex, Health, and Society (Leonard, Mitchell, Patel, & Fox, 2008) suggests that a culture for HH inside or outside an organization helps to fuel the fire for more severe physical abuse and violence. The problem is not limited to LGB individuals, however: in a study of college students, Norris (1991) found that 10% of straight students

had experienced verbal HH in their academic life, simply because they were *perceived* as being gay. In the business sector, employees find little protection from harassment: Croteau (1996) found that 25-66% of self-identified LGB workers have experienced HH at work. Clearly, HH is a significant issue worldwide; rather than merely documenting its presence, however, greater attention should be placed on its consequences for the targets.

Here, I will review the existing literature on the damage that HH can cause for an individual, with particular emphasis placed on the role that heterosexist harassment plays within an organization. Following that, I will present the foundations for a model for HH and its outcomes. I will then build upon that with the inclusion of several predictor variables, and lastly incorporate possible moderators of the relationships (see Figure 1). Given the paucity of research on this topic, however, the literature of other areas of workplace mistreatment, such as sexual harassment, will be tapped as well.

#### *Outcomes of HH*

There has been some research in the area of work- and health-related outcomes as they pertain to HH, as well as harassment in general, both inside and outside of the organizational context. For example, Meyer (1995) found that high anti-gay discrimination led to higher levels of psychological distress among gay males living in New York City. In 1999, Waldo focused on HH in the workplace specifically and found similar results, while including anxiety and self-esteem as outcomes. Smith and Ingram (2004) confirmed this, citing incidences of workplace heterosexism to be positively related to both distress and depression.

Within the organizational context, researchers have continued to explore outcomes specifically related to work. Several studies have found mixed results concerning the relationship between HH and job satisfaction: some have found a strong negative relationship (e.g. Konik, 2005; McConnell, 2004; Waldo, 1999), while another (Croteau, 1996) found no relationship. Waldo (1999) also found that HH was linked with a higher intent to quit, mediated by worker satisfaction with health.

It is also of value to look beyond the HH literature when investigating possible relationships with experiences of workplace mistreatment. For instance, Cugin and Fish (2009) reported decreased work engagement when workers experienced sexual harassment. In 2002, Harned and colleagues also reported significant negative correlations between sexual harassment and several job-related outcomes, including organizational commitment and worker productivity. While there are arguably similarities between sexual harassment and HH, one cannot automatically infer that that HH will lead to these same consequences.

In an effort to both replicate and extend existing research on the work-related and psychological outcomes of HH, I first hypothesize that:

H1a: Experiences with HH will be positively correlated with psychological distress and job stress.

H1b: Experiences with HH will be negatively correlated with job satisfaction and work engagement.

#### *Diversity Climate as an Antecedent of HH*

In as much as the literature on the negative consequences of HH is limited, the antecedents of HH have also remained largely unexplored. It has been well documented

that one of the most significant predictors of sexual harassment is the organization's climate toward such experiences (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 1997). Akin to the general definition for organizational climate, which refers to the shared perceptions among employees of the everyday practices and policies of their organization (Reichers & Schneider, 1990), harassment climate refers to the perceived policies and practices of the organization by its employees that indicate the degree to which sexual harassment is tolerated by the organization. Similar to the effect of sexual harassment climate on incidence of sexual harassment, a climate toward employee mistreatment – either specifically for HH or more generally, such as for sexual harassment or diversity – would be a predictor of individuals' experiences with HH. For instance, the degree to which an individual experiences general discrimination and harassment within their organization can be predicted by the organization's climate for diversity (Nelson & Probst, 2004). Climate for diversity has been conceptualized as “employee behaviors and attitudes that are grounded in perceptions of the organizational context related to women and minorities” (Mor Barak, Cherin, & Berkman, 1998, p. 83).

Although this documented relationship between diversity climate and harassment is interesting, there is little empirical data suggesting a particularly strong link. Nelson and Probst's (2004) survey of approximately 700 faculty and staff members of a university in the Pacific Northwest was one of the first – and only – to investigate this. Their measure of harassment included items that referenced gender/sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and disability as potential reasons for the harassment. In order to accurately draw a comparison, their measure of diversity climate covered those five areas as well. Their findings documented diversity climate as being the greatest predictor

(above multiple minority status and identity importance) of workplace discrimination and harassment.

Despite diversity climate being the strongest predictor of harassment, when examining the impact on specific forms of harassment, their results revealed that diversity climate did not predict harassment based on sexual orientation. An explanation for this could be that although the researchers' overall sample size was adequate, a mere 4% identified as LGB. Assuming that these numbers are representative of the organization's population, it could be that HH simply does not occur at a significant level, given how few LGB individuals are employed. Alternatively, with homosexuality not being a legally recognized protected class at the state-level at the time of the research, it could be that straight individuals are less sensitized to HH and therefore less likely to report it when it occurs. With this in mind, if provided with a larger sample size, diversity climate could very well be a predictor of HH as it is for other forms of harassment. Thus, I hypothesize:

H2: An inclusive diversity climate will be significantly negatively related to heterosexist harassment.

### *Organizational Policies*

The inclusion of an organization's policies as an indicator of its climate, such as a climate for diversity, is common (e.g. Reichers & Schneider, 1990). There are several empirically-driven studies that examine the possibility of anti-discrimination policies within organizations protecting sexual minorities from harassment and discrimination. In 2001, Button found that organizations with policies that are extremely prevalent in the perceptions of the employees exhibit less discrimination toward LGB workers. Here,

discrimination was defined as stemming from the organization itself, rather than directly from coworkers. Confirming these findings, Ragins and Cornwell (2001) reported that LGB workers perceive less discrimination in their workplace when protective policies are in place.

Contrary to the aforementioned results, a study by Guiffre, Dellinger, and Williams (2008) used unstructured interviews of 32 gay and lesbian workers in organizations considered to be “gay-friendly,” welcoming and inviting to the LGB community. Despite the alleged positive attitude these organizations held towards LGB workers, however, the researchers still found that subtle discrimination existed from coworkers. For example, one lesbian reported experiencing a male coworker saying to her that he would convert her to heterosexuality, in an effort to sexually entice her. There were no reports of outright homophobic HH. The small sample size of the study, however, is cause for mild concern as to the validity of the findings. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the interviews may not have encapsulated types of HH that are reported in other studies using quantitative measures. On the other hand, it may provide information about HH that quantitative measures lack; explorative research comparing both styles of data collection may be of value in identifying the complete spectrum of experience types.

Given this research, both quantitative and qualitative, it may be that the “gay-friendly” label and inclusive policies of companies inversely impact workers’ likelihood to engage not just in discrimination but also in displays of overt homophobia toward their coworkers . Therefore, I predict that:

H3: Organizations with anti-discrimination policies that include sexual minorities as a protected class will have lower rates of HH.

#### *Job-Gender Context*

An examination of employee-driven organizational context variables such as climate is certainly warranted in situations such as harassment. However, it could also be of benefit to explore non-behaviorally based, environmental variables, such as job-gender context. Job-gender context refers to the belief that the gender composition of a workplace influences the behaviors of employees. As an example, Fitzgerald et al. (1997) explored job-gender context as an antecedent to sexual harassment. Using a three-item marker taken from U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, they found that women working in male-dominated environments were more likely to be sexually harassed. Waldo (1999) expanded on this by examining job-gender context in relation to heterosexual harassment. His results revealed a similar phenomenon: individuals working in job environments with more female employees were less likely to experience heterosexism than their counterparts in male-dominated environments.

While these findings are interesting in and of themselves, HH is not merely a function of gender composition at the workgroup, as previously discussed; other variables determined at the organizational level help facilitate its occurrence. Organizations with a large percentage of male workers and high levels of HH cannot simply hire more women to solve the problem of harassment. It would be of value for an organization to focus on what it *can* change, such as the policies it holds towards employees. The first steps, however, must be to explore the degree to which these policies take precedence over the

job-gender composition of its workforce. Therefore, in addition to replicating the findings of Waldo (1999), I hypothesize that:

H4: Individuals working in male-dominated job-gender contexts will experience more HH than those in female-dominated or equal contexts, but only for organizations with fewer policies protecting minorities from harassment and discrimination.

#### *Moderators of the HH-Outcomes Relationship*

Clearly, antecedents of HH have commanded a modicum of attention over recent years, as well they should. Possible moderators related to HH, however, warrant exploration as well. While several consequences of HH are known, research should turn an eye to the conditions and influences, both individually and contextually, that attenuate or exacerbate the targets' distress at experiencing HH in an effort to greater protect them from its ramifications.

#### *Minority stress and sexual orientation.*

Although harassment has long been identified as a source of stress for employees, HH in particular can be especially detrimental to sexual minorities, according to minority stress theory (Meyer, 1995). Silverschanz et al. (2008) summarized it nicely: “[m]inority stress theory asserts that socially marginalized groups, including sexual minorities, can experience mental and physical health problems resulting from negative social environments created by stigma, prejudice, and discrimination” (p. 180). Consequently, minority individuals can experience more stress from such negative environments than majority individuals can, provided that the stressor is related to their minority status. HH is undeniably related to a minority status and, thus, should have a stronger negative impact upon gay than upon straight individuals. Although there is little research

comparing the general, overall effects of HH on gay versus straight targets, Waldo (1999) did demonstrate a greater negative impact of HH upon LGB targets in regards to job satisfaction and psychological distress. On the other hand, Silverschanz et al. (2008) found that sexual orientation was not a moderator for HH and psychological distress, which conflicts with both minority stress theory and previous findings. As the authors point out, however, this was a student sample and more research is needed to elaborate upon these findings. Hence, in order to clarify the research, based on the theoretical supposition, I hypothesize:

H5: Sexual orientation will moderate the relationship between experiences with HH and psychological and job-related outcomes.

#### *Perceived Supervisor Support*

Protecting workers from the harmful effects of harassment should be a goal of any organization dealing with such problems. Although there is evidence that a supportive supervisor can act as a buffer against a number of negative outcomes related to stress (Erera, 1992), little is known about what other influences a supervisor may have, if any, in a victim's experience with harassment specifically. Murry et al. (2001) found that perceived supervisory support can act as a psychological prophylactic against negative outcomes related to sexual harassment, such as decreased job satisfaction, increased intent to leave the organization, and decreased organizational commitment. Given these findings, it would stand to reason that perceived supervisor support may also provide protection against negative outcomes related to HH. Thus, I hypothesize that:

H6: Higher levels of perceived supervisor support will buffer the psychological and job-related outcomes stemming from HH.

### *Climate for Heterosexist Harassment*

Given the aforementioned similarities between sexual harassment and HH, one can draw parallel comparisons between a climate for sexual harassment and a climate for HH. Indeed, Waldo (1999) derived a measure for HH based on the Organizational Tolerance for Sexual Harassment scale (Hulin, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1997). He found that a climate for HH was predictive of experiences with HH, in that workers in more tolerant organizations reported more instances of HH. This reflects the established relationship between tolerant climates for sexual harassment and actual reports of harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1997).

The moderating role of climates for sexual and heterosexist harassment between the actual harassment and its negative outcomes are worthy of investigation as well. As Kath et al. (2009) argued, a climate that is intolerant of harassment could be perceived as a form of social support to the individual. As shown in the stress and coping literature, social support can be a significant protector against the harmful effects of a stressor. When an organization is seen as being supportive of a target of harassment, that perceived support can buffer the target from the consequences of the harassment.

Interestingly, Kath et al. (2009) found that an intolerant climate for sexual harassment exacerbated the negative effects of the harassment for women, while it attenuated the impact for men. They argue based on other theoretical grounds that this is due to the salience of the climate for each gender: men are more likely *less* aware of the climate *until* the harassment occurs, and thus do not hold expectations about its potential significance. Women, on the other hand, tend to be more sensitized to the threat of sexual harassment than are men. For women, a climate for sexual harassment is more

salient and thus considered even before harassment occurs. Alternatively, psychological contract theory (Rousseau, 1995) could also explain the reverse-buffering effects of an intolerant harassment climate. Rousseau posits that in some cases, an organization's intolerant harassment climate represents a psychological contract with its employees by offering a modicum of protection against harassment: employees hold the expectation that harassment will not occur. Thus, when harassment does occur and the contract is breached, the target of the harassment may feel betrayed by the organization.

The premise of both of these theories could likely be extended to other contexts outside of sexual harassment. Specifically, drawing from the arguments made by Kath et al., a climate for HH is likely more salient for sexual minorities than for straight individuals due to the anticipation or threat of HH occurring. With sexual minorities more attuned to the possibility of HH occurring, they are sensitized to their organization's tolerance of HH. Juxtaposing this with psychological contract theory, LGB individuals would feel a greater sense of betrayal by their organization when the climate is intolerant due to the contract held by the individual. This contract would be stronger for LGB individuals than for straight due to their heightened awareness to the possibility of HH, and therefore greater expectations for protection. It would make sense, then, that the impact of HH on targets would differ by the target's sexual orientation. Thus, I hypothesize:

H7: A climate that is intolerant of HH will magnify the negative outcomes of the harassment for gay individuals, but not for straight.

## Method

### *Participants and Procedure*

Participants were recruited from 41 online forums, discussion groups, listservs, and Mechanical Turk. To ensure an adequate range of participant demographics and sufficient sample size, particularly regarding sexual orientation, the forums, groups, and listservs specifically targeted (but were not necessarily exclusive for) LGB individuals. They were initially contacted via email, requesting consent to recruit participants through their mailing lists and message boards. Upon receiving consent, emails were posted publicly or sent to members of each of these communities requesting participation in an online survey. These were followed up by one reminder email, two weeks later. Participation was voluntary and monetary incentives were offered: participants were given the choice to be entered into a lottery for one of three \$50 gift cards by providing their email address, independent of their survey responses. All data were recorded anonymously. For those participants recruited through Mechanical Turk, a \$0.50 incentive was offered. This amount was determined by a brief review on the site of what is typically offered for comparable tasks.

The final sample size was 554. The sample consisted of 329 (59.4%) men, 353 (63.7%) heterosexual, and 300 (41.9%) above the age of 30, spanning 22 different job types. The most popular of these was computer/mathematical (37.9%); among bi/gay people specifically ( $n = 201$ ), the majority of participants worked in education/training (67%). The average job tenure was approximately four years and nine months. Approximately two-thirds of bi/gay participants reported being at least somewhat out at work.

### *Instrumentation*

To assess heterosexist harassment, the 8-item sexual orientation subscale of a modified Workplace Heterosexist Experiences Questionnaire (WHEQ; Waldo, 1999; modified in Konik & Cortina, 2008) was used. The WHEQ has been shown in several studies to be effective in measuring workplace harassment (Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik, & Magley, 2008; Smith & Ingram, 2004). Previous testing has resulted in a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .80. The response stem reads, "During the past year, has any coworker, staff, or administrator . . ." and participants denoted the frequency of each event (1 = "never," 2 = "rarely," 3 = "sometimes," 4 = "frequently," and 5 = "most of the time"). Items were subsequently recoded to range 0 – 4 for analysis. An example item is, "... made crude or offensive remarks about gay people (for example, saying they're 'sick')." "

#### *Antecedents*

Diversity climate was measured using a 10-item scale for perceptions of organizational diversity (Mor Barak, Cherin, & Berkman, 1998). The scale included two sub-scales measuring organizational fairness and inclusion. The scale has previously been shown to have excellent reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .83$ ; Mor Barak, Cherin, & Berkman, 1998). Several items are reverse-worded to prevent response sets by participants. An example item is, "Managers here make layoff decisions fairly, regardless of factors such as employees' race, sex, age, or social background." Items that list several minority-related characteristics were adapted to include sexual orientation.

Organizational policies was assessed with six items that ascertain the presence or absence of a particular policy within a participant's organization that is supportive of LGB individuals. This scale was previously used by Ragins and Cornwell (2001) and was developed specifically for that study using the existing literature. All items begin

with the stem, “Does your organization...” and respondents select either Yes or No; “yes” was coded as one, “no” as zero, and a higher score indicates a more supportive organization. An example item is “... have a written nondiscrimination policy that includes sexual orientation.”

Job-gender context was assessed using two items derived from the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board. These items have been used previously in research on HH (e.g. Waldo, 1999). Participants were first asked what the gender of their immediate supervisor is; available responses were “male” and “female.” They were then asked about the gender composition of their workgroup/site. Responses for the second item ranged from 1 = “completely male” to 5 = “completely female.”

#### *Moderators*

Perceived supervisor support was measured using three items from a scale developed by Eisenberger et al. (2002). A sample item is “My supervisor takes pride in my accomplishments at work.” Responses were recorded along a 7-point Likert scale. Previous testing has shown reliability to be excellent (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .91$ ).

Sexual orientation was measured using a single demographic question. Participants denoted the extent to which they consider themselves to be gay/straight, along a 5-point scale. The response options are “1 = completely heterosexual;” “2 = mostly heterosexual;” “3 = bisexual;” “4 = mostly homosexual;” and “5 = completely homosexual.” Responses were then recoded to be dichotomous for analysis: 1 and 2 were coded as straight, and 3, 4, and 5 were coded as gay, or “not straight.” Additionally, participants coded as gay were asked about their level of outness. This was done using seven items. Six of these began with the stem, “How hard do you try to keep your sexual

orientation from these people at work?” referring to people such as coworkers and immediate supervisor. All of these items were scaled 1-4, with “1 = I try very hard to keep it a secret,” and “4 = I actively talk about it to others.” The seventh item asked the proportion of people at work to whom they have disclosed their orientation. This was scaled 1-4, with “1 = No one,” and “4 = Everyone.” The final overall degree of outness was calculated by the mean of these 7 items.

Climate for HH was measured using the Organizational Tolerance for Heterosexism Inventory (Waldo, 1999), which is based off of the Organizational Tolerance for Sexual Harassment Inventory (Hulin, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1996). This measure is comprised of three vignettes, each describing a different possible situation involving discrimination against LGB workers. After each vignette, participants are asked three questions to assess the culture for heterosexism at their organization, specifically the risk of retaliation for the target in the vignette, the seriousness with which the event would be taken, and the likelihood of action being taken by the organization. The OTHI has been used for numerous studies (e.g. Waldo, 1999; Brenner, Lyons, & Fassinger, 2010) and has shown an alpha of .96.

### *Outcomes*

Psychological distress was defined as a composite of depression and anxiety, and was measured using items from the Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis & Spencer, 1983). There were six items for depression and anxiety each. Responses are measured along a 5-point frequency scale (0 = “Not at all” to 4 = “Extremely”). All items began with the stem, “During the past week, have you been distressed by....?” Previous testing

has shown reliability to be acceptable for all both sub-scales (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$  and  $.78$  respectively).

Three items from the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, & Klesh, 1983) were used to assess job satisfaction. Reliability in previous testing has been excellent (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ ). An example item is, "All in all, I am satisfied with my job." Responses were given on a 7-point Likert scale.

General job stress was measured using four item from the "Stress in General" scale by Stanton, Balzer, Smith, Parra, and Ironson (2001). All items begin with the stem, "In general, I think my job is..." and finish with such descriptors as "Hassled." Participants responded along a 3-point scale (1 = "No," 2 = "?," and 3 = "Yes"); during coding and analysis, however, each item was rescored so 1 = 0, 2 = 1.5, and 3 = 3. Reliability in previous testing has been adequate (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$ ).

Work engagement was measured using 11 items from the Utrecht Individual Work Engagement scale (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002b). Reliability in previous testing has been excellent (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ). A sample item is "I am enthusiastic about my job." Two items were reverse-worded so as to prevent response sets by participants. Participants responded along a 7-point Likert scale.

## Results

In the preliminary analysis in LISREL, 23 participants were reported to have missing data and were thus deleted, resulting in a final sample size of 531. Of these, 373 (70.2%) reported having experienced some form of HH. Hearing an offensive joke was the most common form of HH, with 61% of these participants experiencing it. Being

physically hurt was least commonly experienced at 25.9%. This pattern remained consistent regardless of sexual orientation and degree to which a bi or gay person considered themselves to be “out.” Outness, however, was negatively correlated with the amount of HH a person experienced (Pearson’s  $r = -.215, p = .00$ ). A comparison of the experiences between the highest 25% and the lowest 25% as measured by outness showed a marginally significant difference between the groups on amount of experiences ( $M_1 = .628, SD_1 = .842, M_2 = .989, SD_2 = .982, t = 1.929(94), p = .057$ ), with those who are less out experiencing more harassment. An independent-samples  $t$ -test also reported that gay participants ( $n = 191$ ) experienced a higher level of HH overall ( $M = .97, SD = .96$ ) than did straight ( $M = .66, SD = .81; t(341) = -3.82, p < .01$ ; equal variances not assumed,  $p < .01$ ).

Outness was, overall, not a significant contributing factor in a person’s psychological well-being. There was a significant positive correlation between outness and job stress ( $r = .248, p = .001$ ), suggesting that individuals who are more out experience higher stress than those who are not. This may imply that HH, despite occurring less frequently for those who are out, has a stronger impact on stress for a person is more out; this casual relationship has yet to be empirically demonstrated, however.

Outness was also related to a person’s sexuality. People who reported being bisexual were significantly less out ( $M = 2.05, SD = .82$ ) than those who were completely homosexual ( $M = 2.94, SD = 1.00, F(2,181) = 17.55, p = .000$ ). Mirroring the demonstrated relationship between outness and HH described above, those who were

bisexual experienced more HH ( $M = 1.25$ ,  $SD = .95$ ) than did those who were completely gay ( $M = .79$ ,  $SD = .96$ ,  $F(2, 188) = 5.21$ ,  $p = .01$ ).

Latent indicators for all variables within the model were composed of composite scores of 3-4 items, depending on the overall length of the scale. In cases of four or fewer items per scale (e.g. Job Satisfaction), each item represented one indicator. A correlation matrix among the resulting 23 indicators was computed via LISREL and used to test the measurement model. Correlations among all latent variables can be found in Table 1.

Within the measurement model, the Lambda X matrix was set as nonsymmetric and each indicator was denoted to be fixed to zero for all latent variables it did not represent. The Phi matrix was set to be standardized and symmetric, allowing for the correlations of the latent exogenous variables to be properly scaled in the analysis. Error terms were fixed to be uncorrelated.

Analysis of the measurement model was conducted using Maximum Likelihood Estimate, which iterated 27 times before completion. Almost every indicator had a loading greater than .60 onto its respective latent construct. The exception to this was Indicator 3 for diversity climate, which was .31. Despite this exception, all loadings were significant; individual factor loadings and their respective standard errors are found in Table 2.

Sufficient fit was found for the measurement model ( $df = 202$ ). Three fit indices were considered: the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Root Mean Square Residual (RMSR), and Comparative Fit Index (CFI). As is the standard practice in the field, the values of each were compared against commonly-accepted cut-off scores.

The exact value of RMSEA was .07 (cut-off <.08). The value for RMR was .06 (cut-off <.10). The value for CFI was .96 (cut-off >.90). The  $\chi^2$ , another statistic commonly used to determine fit, was significant ( $p = .000$ ,  $\chi^2 = 10,435.36$ ,  $df = 253$ ); however, the sample size was large and, thus, a significant  $\chi^2$  is to be expected, rendering this test erroneous (Schmacker & Lomax, 2004). Closer examination of the correlation matrix for individual indicators, however, revealed significant multicollinearity among the six indicators for engagement and job satisfaction, ranging from .47 to .77. These values were comparable to those among indicators within any given latent variable, which brings into question the discriminant validity between the measures for engagement and job satisfaction. As mentioned above, though, the fit was sufficient and the model was deemed appropriate for use in the structural hypothesis testing.

The structural model was then tested using LISREL. The Lambda X, Lambda Y, Gamma, and Beta matrices were all set to have full form and be fixed. As in the measurement model, all error terms were fixed to be uncorrelated. Overall model fit, as determined by the cut-off scores mentioned previously, was marginal. Exact values for the RMSEA, RMR, and CFI are given in Table 3. Final path estimates between variables and their corresponding standard errors were determined using Maximum Likelihood Estimate and can be found in Figure 2. Hypotheses 1a was fully supported: HH was a significant predictor of higher psychological distress and job stress. Hypothesis 1b was partially supported: HH predicted lower job satisfaction, but was unrelated to work engagement. Hypothesis 2 was also supported: a stronger climate for diversity was significantly related to lower incidences of HH. Neither organizational policies nor job-

gender context were found to be related to HH; thus, neither Hypotheses 3 nor 4 were supported.

Among the standardized residuals within the structural model, values ranged from -7.71 to 17.81. The lowest value of the residuals for the engagement and job satisfaction indicators was 10.77, which again supported the evidence from the measurement model of those scales having significant overlap in the latent constructs they measure.

Interestingly, there has been some work in the engagement literature that suggests a convergence between these two concepts: one study found that work engagement cannot be clearly distinguished from work satisfaction, as measured by both the May, Gilson, and Harter scale, and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale used in this study (Viljevac, Cooper-Thomas, & Saks, 2012). Consequently, a new latent variable merging these scales was created, using three indicators comprised of a combination of items from each scale. A second measurement model was then tested using these new indicators and latent variable in place of those of the original engagement and job satisfaction constructs. Fit was assessed using the same criteria as previous; all values for RMSEA, RMR, and CFI were unchanged. However, any potential multicollinearity among variables as determined by correlations of indicators was eliminated. Given this, a second structural model was tested using the merged constructs (see Figure 3). Significance of paths remained consistent from the initial model: diversity climate significantly predicted HH, which in turn predicted job stress and psychological distress. HH was also significantly related to the merged engagement/job satisfaction construct, although only marginally so. Model fit improved over the previous structural model; exact values of measures of fit are given in Table 3.

In this second structural model, several standardized residuals were patterned in a manner that indicated potential unhypothesized paths, specifically those between engagement/job satisfaction and diversity climate, and engagement/job satisfaction and job stress. Previous research has indicated that strong diversity climates are related to positive job attitudes, such as satisfaction and commitment (Hicks-Clarke & Iles, 2000): workers, particularly minority workers, likely hold in higher esteem those organizations that have greater commitment for diversity protections. There is also empirical support showing job stress being inversely proportional to job satisfaction (e.g. Waldo, 1999) and work engagement (Andreassen, Ursin, & Erikson, 2007). In light of this, I added paths for diversity climate and engagement/satisfaction, and for engagement/satisfaction and stress to the revised model (see Figure 4). As expected, these path coefficients were significant. Curiously, however, their inclusion eliminated entirely the significant relationship between HH and engagement/satisfaction. The model fit was marginally superior relative to both structural models previously examined (see Table 3).

Moderation hypotheses 5, 6, and 7 were tested individually using SPSS. Traditional convention dictates that predictor variables be standardized via mean-centering prior to conducting a moderated multiple regression analysis. This is typically done as a method to reduce multicollinearity between the terms (Yi, 1989). However, more recent research suggests that this step is unnecessary (e.g. Foster-Johnson & Kromrey, 1998). A study in 2012 by Dalal and Zickar reports that not only does mean-centering not affect essential collinearity, it does not change the fit of the regression model nor improve the power of the moderation analysis. They do, however, conclude that it does allow for greater interpretability of any main effects, particularly when using

a measure lacking a meaningful zero point. To this end, and given the lack of a meaningful zero point on several of the relevant scales, I standardized all predictor variables via mean-centering prior to creating the interaction term. They were then entered into a series of regression equations and analyzed hierarchically. For each hypothesis, the standardized predictor and moderator were entered together in the first step, followed by the inclusion of the interaction term in the second step.

Evidence of the moderation was determined by the change in  $R^2$  and the coefficient for the interaction terms. Values for  $R^2$ , unstandardized regression coefficients, and standard errors are shown in Table 4. Hypothesis 5 was partially supported: sexual orientation moderated the relationship between HH and psychological distress. In other words, gay individuals suffered greater psychological distress as a consequence of HH than did straight individuals (see Figure 5). Sexual orientation did not moderate HH and job stress, job satisfaction, or work engagement. There was, however, one main effect for sexual orientation and job stress ( $b = .168$ ), with stress being higher for gay individuals. None of the interactions for HH with perceived supervisor support were significant, so Hypothesis 6 was not supported. Again, however, there were several main effects found for perceived supervisor support on job satisfaction ( $b = .746$ ), job stress ( $b = -.143$ ), and engagement ( $b = .459$ ). There were also no significant interactions by sexual orientation for HH with tolerance for HH, meaning that Hypothesis 7 was also not supported. Here, significant main effects did exist for tolerance of HH on psychological distress ( $b = -.108$ ), job satisfaction ( $b = .137$ ), and engagement ( $b = .116$ ), across all participants.

## Discussion

Up until now, research on how and why HH impacts workers has been limited or unclear. Regardless, organizations today must be especially cognizant of the presence of HH within their jurisdiction. The results of this study are undeniably indicative of problems associated with HH in the workplace. To start, the reported frequency of which HH targets experience physical violence is alarming: over a quarter of the sample had been physically hurt as a result of their perceived sexual orientation. Even more surprising, the majority (58.4%) of these individuals did not even identify as LGB. These disturbing statistics highlight the fact that HH is not a problem confined to the gay community, and has farther-reaching social implications than previously thought. Violence begotten by homophobia affects not just the individual target, but friends and family also, in a way that milder forms of HH, such as overhearing a joke, do not. LGB individuals are, unfortunately, regular victims of hate crimes, with many of these incidences resulting in permanent physical disability or death. Acts spurred by homophobia are not believed to occur to straight individuals with any sort of frequency, and are typically not recorded as actual hate crimes by the media or courts: how can it be a hate crime if the victim is not gay, one asks? In light of these statistics, however, should the public turn a closer eye to the motivations behind such ordinary acts of violence and begin to consider how, if any, perceived sexual orientation is a contributing factor? These data represent harassment in the workplace, but there is no foreseeable reason why there might not be less risk outside of that context.

As predicted, HH was associated with poorer psychological health, greater job stress, and lower job satisfaction. This confirms the previous findings by researchers on the topic (e.g. Waldo, 1999; Konik, 2005). Interestingly, HH was not related to work

engagement in the final model, as would be suggested by findings in the sexual harassment literature (Cogin & Fish, 2009). Taken together, these results can potentially help delineate the distinction between types of workplace mistreatment. While similarities exist, clearly not all types of mistreatment have the same impact. As further support for that distinction, Kath et al. (2009) found that an organization's climate for sexual harassment predicted consequences for female targets. The results of the present study, however, show that this is not the case when measuring a climate for HH. Similarly, perceived supervisor support did not mitigate the effects of HH, as it does for sexual harassment (Murry et al., 2001). It would behoove future HH researchers to illuminate potential fissures between HH and other forms of mistreatment.

Additionally, only psychological distress as an outcome of HH varied by sexual orientation; its impact on job stress and satisfaction remained constant regardless of orientation. This could have implications for the application of minority stress theory. It may be that if the individual identifies as a minority only within the context of his/her workplace or occupation, effects on job-related outcomes would be seen. If the minority status is not defined by the job, it may impact the individual's whole sense of self or well-being without touching on a specific parameter. For example, in this study, although HH negatively impacted job stress, being gay did not magnify that stress because being gay is, presumably, unrelated to the job at hand. Indeed, non-discrimination clauses in employment are increasingly being amended to include sexual orientation; movements to pass such legislation have been taken up numerous times in Congress, although they have yet to be signed into law. Still, its presence on the agenda signifies belief in a level playing field in regards to work and sexual orientation, in that sexuality should not and

does not matter for a given job. On the other hand, consider an individual who is the sole journalist assigned to a subsection on gay-related issues for an online news outlet. Here, there is a specific occupational position in which having a sexual minority status might not only be an advantage but may even be desirable. Research on tokenism suggests that in such situations, conflict arises when ambiguous hierarchical power structures dictate interactions with majority-group members: the token journalist's power granted by subject expertise threatens the power of the majority group (Fleishman & Marwell, 1977). When targeted for HH, our gay journalist suffers in job-related outcomes as well as general due to the constant salience of his sexuality. Being a minority and working as a minority figure, writing about other minority group members, reinforces that identification. Obviously, this situation is highly specific and wildly speculative; it is offered as a possible condition under which minority stress effects for job-related outcomes may be seen. More research is needed to determine whether minority stress effects are context-dependent.

The main effect found of sexual orientation on job stress may be explained by self-selection bias and sampling techniques, rather than a true difference between the groups. Gay participants may have been more driven to participate in this study because of previous experiences with HH; the majority of straight participants came from Mechanical Turk, a site designed for people to seek and complete tasks such as this, and were likely more motivated by a desire to "work" regardless of perceived personal relevance. With HH also positively correlating with job stress, it would stand that mean stress levels would be similarly distributed.

Other main effects of the moderator variables were, by and large, consistent with existing literature. PSS has been shown repeatedly to be significantly correlated with job satisfaction, stress, and engagement (e.g., Rusbasan, 2010). Climate for HH has been less studied in general, although Waldo (1999) reported significant relationships with satisfaction, psychological distress, and two measures of withdrawal, a related construct to engagement, all in similar directions as in this study. Waldo also reported a relationship between HH climate and job stress, which was not replicated in the current study. A difference is that his sample consisted solely of LGB participants; however, when selecting out straight participants from the current study and testing for a correlation using the remaining gay participants, the relationship remains nonsignificant. A documented connection or lack thereof between HH climate and job stress should be fundamental to the literature on HH, and future studies should continue to explore this.

As hypothesized, diversity climate was a significant predictor of HH, disputing the results of Nelson and Probst (2004). This could be due in part to the disparity in respective sample sizes: in the current study, nearly 50% of participants identified as LGB, as opposed to 4% in the 2004 study. As previously discussed, given the discriminatory intent of HH that references a specific minority population, LGB individuals may be more sensitized to its prevalence, in the same fashion that older workers may be more aware of age discrimination. More research is needed to support this theoretical supposition. Additionally, the changing political climate in the nation, and indeed across the world, as it relates to gay rights may also have played a role in the identification of HH and its relationship with diversity climate. In 2004, only two countries legally recognized same-sex marriage, and in the USA, Massachusetts became

the first state to do so only in that year. Since then, marriage equality has become legal in over 15 nations or jurisdictions, including six other US states, and gay rights have become a frontrunner in American politics, with both the Democratic and Republican party platforms advertising explicit, albeit opposing, stances, and the President, Vice-President, and Secretary of State vocally expressing its priority in the national agenda. People are unable to be unaware of the presence of discriminatory actions such as HH, and when coupled with organizations being increasingly more accepting of gays and gay rights in the workplace, diversity climate is able to predict HH due to the increased variability.

The lack of relationship between job-gender context and HH, under any condition, is unexpected. It would be nice to also attribute this to the increased sensitivity and awareness of gay rights over the past decade; previous studies measuring this relationship were conducted prior to 2000. Ideally, this would be reflected by more tolerant workspaces in general, regardless of gender compositions. Further research is required, however, to consider this explanation.

Inclusive organizational policies were not a significant predictor of HH, which is curious not only given that policies are typically a facet of measuring diversity climate but also in light of previous research (e.g. Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). This may be an artifact of measurement error, however. Participants were forced to respond “Yes/No” as to whether their organization maintained LGB-inclusive policies. Despite the aforementioned likely heightened awareness of gay rights in today’s society, it is entirely possible that many workers are unaware of any explicit policies that exist within their organization. It is unknown which response participants provided in such instances,

leading one to consider how results may have differed if they were provided with a third “I Don’t Know” option.

### *Limitations and Conclusion*

As is always the case, there are several limitations to this study. For instance, although Mechanical Turk has been shown to be as an empirically valid form of data collection as traditional methods (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011), there is the possibility of participants supplying inaccurate data. Although measures were taken to ward against this (e.g. reverse-worded items and “dummy” items such as “Please mark 4 to this question”), the decision to retain some participants’ data became a judgment call due to marginally inconsistent responses on these items. Other measurement errors, such as listed above in measuring organizational policies, may be present. Additional demographic information such as geographic region should be included when drawing conclusions about the findings. Data were also cross-sectional and obtained through self-report measures. This may limit inference of the actual directionality of causation, as well as potentially result in an under- or over-estimation of frequency of HH. That being said, some argue that the truth in these perils is often inflated. Spector (2004) identified several instances in which the presence of common-method variance is shown to be virtually non-existent, indicating that such self-report measures are “safe” to use. The biasing effects of negative affectivity and social desirability, two commonly-cited concerns of cross-sectional self-report studies, he also shows to be negligible.

Despite these concerns, this study remains an important contribution to the research on HH. At the least, it provides a framework for future researchers to use as a foundation for the exploration of the variables surrounding HH. No doubt, tolerance and

acceptance for homosexuality, in society and at work, is on the way to being the norm, even in the most conservative of workplaces. With this in mind, this study also has implications for practitioners interested in workplace LGB advocacy. Interventions targeting both the organizational and individual levels can be potential solutions for parties struggling with HH. Continued research in this area is crucial, and researchers and practitioners will hopefully in the future work together to extend current knowledge and help bring our world to a place of greater tolerance and acceptance of human diversity.

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Tables

Table 1.  
Means, SDs, and intercorrelations among variables (reliabilities along diagonal)  
\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

	Mean	SD	Div	Pol	GWork	GSup	HH	Hlth	JSat	Stress	Eng	Orient	PSS	Toler
Div	4.70	.91	.74											
Pol	1.40	.33	.29**	.79										
GWork	2.85	.91	-.01	.14**	--									
GSup	--	--	-.06	.12**	.45**	--								
HH	.77	.88	-.28**	-.09*	-.07	-.04	.93							
Health	.88	.90	-.27**	-.07	.03	.02	.58**	.95						
JSat	5.32	1.34	.34**	.00	-.06	-.12**	-.14**	-.22**	.85					
Stress	.71	.58	-.10*	.10*	.01	.10*	.11*	.18**	-.31**	.79				
Eng	5.13	1.04	.29**	.01	-.02	-.10*	-.03	-.12**	.77**	-.13**	.90			
Orient	--	--	-.09*	.17**	.11*	.08	.17**	.18**	-.04	.13**	.07	--		
PSS	5.18	1.25	.44**	.14**	-.01	-.10*	-.04	-.12**	.05**	-.22**	.48**	-.02	.88	
Toler	3.60	.80	.53**	.38**	.04	.04	-.31**	-.29**	.14**	.03	.11*	-.01	.28**	.87

Correlations are significant at  $p < .05$

\*\* Correlations are significant at  $p < .01$

Div = Organizational Diversity Climate

Pol = Organizational Inclusive Policies

GWork = Gender Composition of Workgroup (used to measure Job Gender Context 1 = completely male, 5 = completely female)

GSup = Gender of Immediate Supervisor (used to measure Job Gender Context 1 = male 2 = female)

HH = Experiences with Heterosexist Harassment

Health = Psychological Distress

JSat = Job Satisfaction

Stress = General Job Stress

Eng = Work Engagement

Orient = Sexual Orientation (Recorded to be dichotomous 1 = straight 2 = gay)

PSS = Perceived Supervisor Support

Toler = Tolerance for HH

Table 2.  
*CFA Factor Loadings*  
*(S.E. in parentheses)*

<i>Variable Name</i>	<i>Indicator 1</i>	<i>Indicator 2</i>	<i>Indicator 3</i>	<i>Indicator 4</i>
<b>Diversity Climate</b>	.85 (.04)	.82 (.04)	.31 (.05)	---
<b>Organizational Policies</b>	.73 (.06)	.75 (.06)	---	---
<b>Job-Gender Context</b>	.66 (.09)	.69 (.09)	---	---
<b>Heterosexist Harassment</b>	.86 (.04)	.96 (.04)	---	---
<b>Psychological Distress</b>	.91 (.03)	.86 (.04)	.88 (.03)	.89 (.03)
<b>Job Satisfaction</b>	.90 (.03)	.72 (.04)	.85 (.04)	---
<b>Job Stress</b>	.74 (.04)	.61 (.04)	.69 (.04)	.75 (.04)
<b>Work Engagement</b>	.68 (.04)	.95 (.03)	.82 (.04)	---

Table 3.  
*Goodness-of-Fit Indices: Structural Model*

<i>Model</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>RMR</i>	<i>CFI</i>
<b>Initial Structural Model</b>	.10	.15	.89
<b>Structural with Modified Measurement Model</b>	.07	.08	.95
<b>Second Structural Model with Combined Engagement/Satisfaction Latent Variable</b>	.07	.07	.95

Table 4.  
*Unstandardized Regression Coefficients*  
*(S.E. in parentheses)*  
*\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01*

<b>Moderator</b>		<b><i>Psychological Distress</i></b>	<b><i>Job Satisfaction</i></b>	<b><i>Job Stress</i></b>	<b><i>Work Engagement</i></b>
<b><i>Sexual Orientation</i></b>	Intercept	.82 (.04)	5.35 (.07)	.66 (.03)	5.08 (.06)
	HH	.47 (.04)**	-.22 (.08)**	.07 (.03)*	-.09 (.06)
	Sex. Orient.	.15 (.07)*	-.10 (.12)	.15 (.05)**	.10 (.09)
	HH x SO	.13 (.06)*	.15 (.12)	-.02 (.05)	.09 (.09)
	$\Delta R^2$ ( <i>p</i> - value)	.005 (.04)*	.000 (.61)	.000 (.62)	.002 (.25)
<b><i>Perceived Supervisor Support</i></b>	Intercept	.88 (.03)	5.31 (.05)	.71 (.02)	5.13 (.04)
	HH	.53 (.03)**	-.17 (.05)**	.06 (.02)**	-.02 (.04)
	PSS	-.09 (.03)**	.72 (.05)**	-.13 (.02)**	.51 (.04)**
	HH x PSS	-.02 (.03)	.04 (.05)	.03 (.02)	.04 (.04)
	$\Delta R^2$	.000 (.58)	.001 (.49)	.001 (.42)	.001 (.34)
<b><i>Workplace Tolerance for HH</i></b>	Intercept	.89 (.03)	5.31 (.06)	.71 (.03)	5.13 (.05)
	HH	.50 (.03)**	-.16 (.06)**	.08 (.03)**	.00 (.05)
	WTHH	-.10 (.03)**	.16 (.06)**	.03 (.03)	.14 (.05)**
	HH x WTHH	.01 (.03)	.00 (.06)	-.01 (.03)	.01 (.05)
	$\Delta R^2$	.000 (.93)	.000 (.94)	.000 (.69)	.000 (.74)

## Figures

Figure 1.  
Proposed Structural Model with Moderation Variables

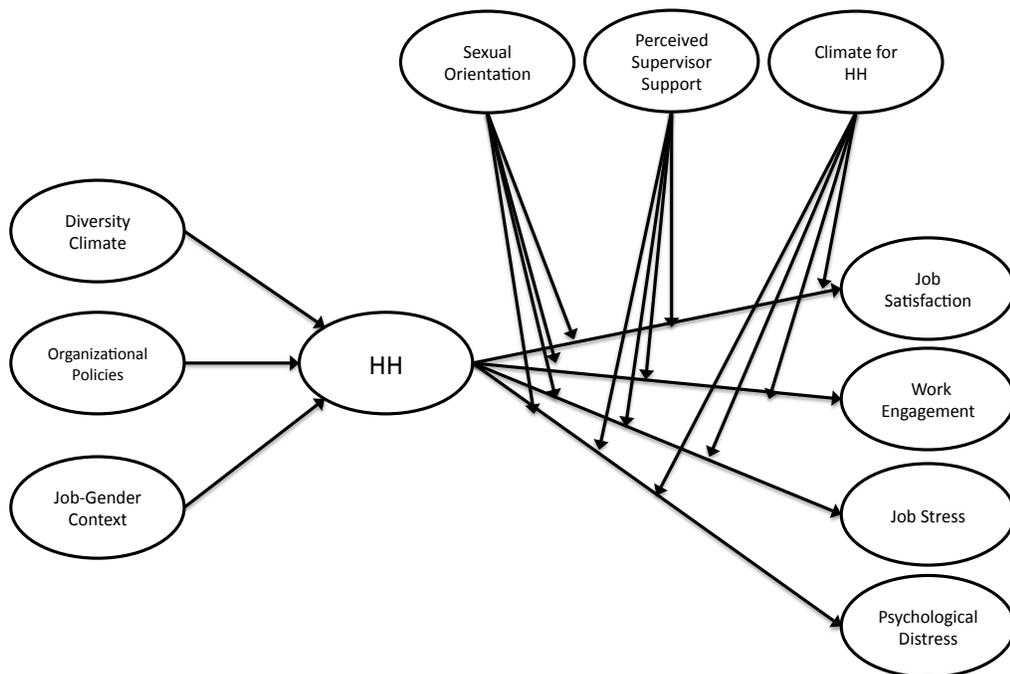


Figure 2.  
Initial Structural Model  
\*  $p < .05$

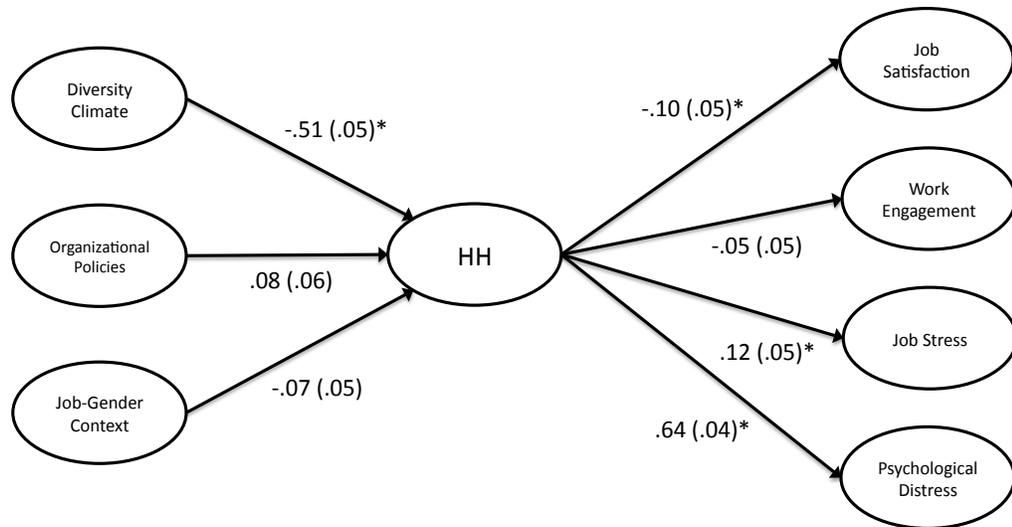


Figure 3.  
Structural Model with Combined Engagement/Job Satisfaction Variable  
\*  $p < .05$

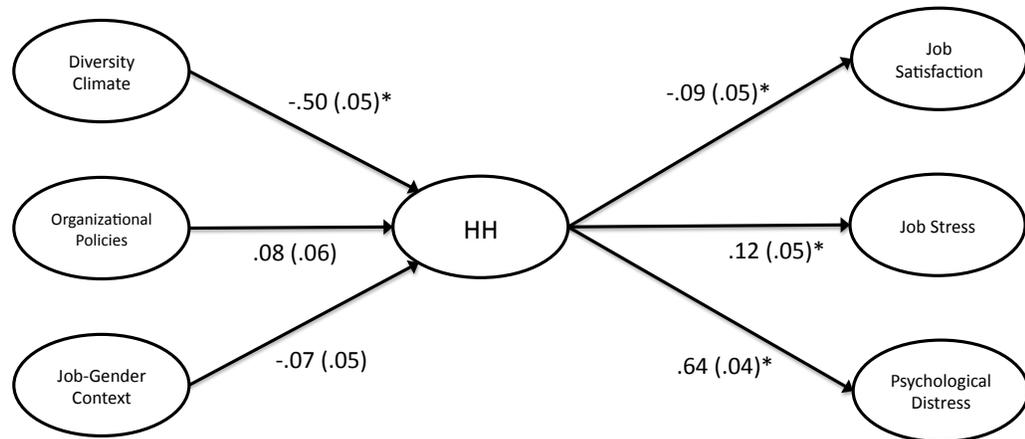


Figure 4.  
Structural Model with Combined Variable Plus Additional Paths  
\*  $p < .05$

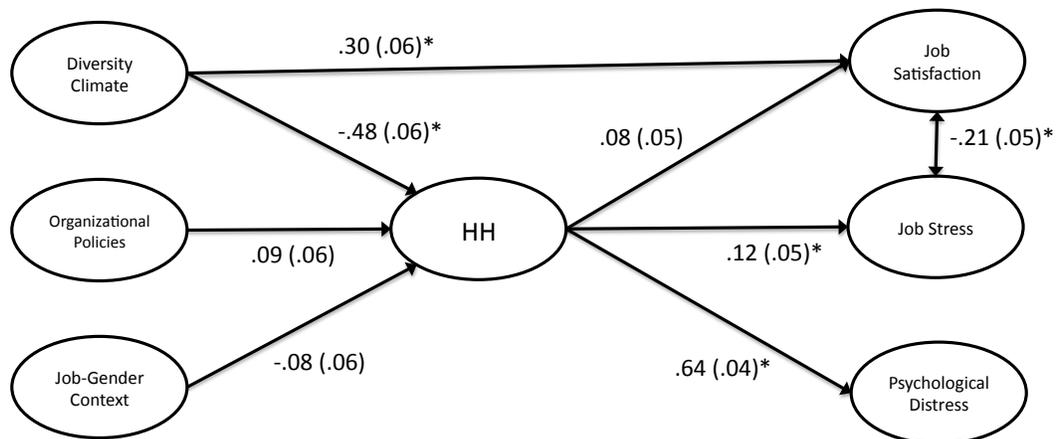


Figure 5.  
Two-Way Interaction Between HH and Sexual Orientation on Psychological Distress

