

# **Strategies for coping with LGBT discrimination at work: a systematic literature review**

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## **Abstract**

Members of the LGBT community suffer discrimination in various areas, and the workplace is no exception. This is why it is important to understand the strategies they adopt to cope so that policy-makers, organizations, companies, and the LGBT community can be informed of the resources that can potentially mitigate or eradicate discrimination in the workplace. In this article we use a systematic review of the literature up to and including 2018 in the databases Scopus and Web of Science. We analyzed 54 articles and extracted one model with four different strategies for coping with discrimination in the workplace: internal, external, reactive, and proactive. The model places the members of the LGBT community at the heart of the process of overcoming discrimination. We also identified strategies used by organizations and companies, and make recommendations that can inform future policies in this area. Finally, we discuss how this new model contributes to the literature on LGBT workplace discrimination, and the implications for future research on policies fighting workplace discrimination against LGBT members.

**Keywords:** LGBT, coping, discrimination, inclusion, workplace

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## **Introduction**

Goal 8 of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDG) about Decent Work and Economic Growth claims that one of its targets is to “protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers.”<sup>3</sup> However, according to the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, in 2019, only 74 UN member states (38% of all members) forbid employment discrimination based on sexual orientation by law (ILGA, 2019). Although this is not enough to guarantee safe and secure environments for LGBT workers, having legal protection in place is positive because it is an acknowledgment of LGBT rights in the workplace and a first step to furthering these rights. Furthermore, legislation and action should also tackle discrimination of groups with a different gender identity or expression (Mizock, & Mueser, 2014; Yerke, & Mitchell, 2013), since these groups can be more visible and easy to target.

### *Coping with discrimination in the workplace*

In the context of workplace discrimination against LGBT employees, this phenomenon constitutes a direct violation of article 23 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations, on the universal right to work, free choice of employment, just and favorable conditions of work, and equal pay for equal work. Even so, discrimination of LGBT employees is a reality worldwide despite recent progress made by legislation forbidding it in companies (Wang & Schwarz, 2010) and organizations (Gates & Saunders, 2016). Discrimination against LGBT employees is “a form of violence that denies them full participation in essential social and economic activities and institutions, perpetuates economic injustice, and reduces their opportunities for fulfilling

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<sup>3</sup> See Target 8.8: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/economic-growth/>

human potential” (Anastas, 1998, p. 84). Discrimination also negatively affects LGBT employees’ health (Carlson, Gammage, & Barrientos, 2015; Delgado, Gordon, & Schnarrs, 2016), their “personal, interpersonal and institutional behavior”, families and communities of LGBT individuals (Anastas, 1998, p. 84; Biaggio, 1997).

Discrimination can take place at any stage in their working life when LGBT individuals can be denied a job (Ahmed, Andersson, & Hammarstedt, 2013; Laurent & Mihoubi, 2017; O’Connell, 2012), fired (Burdge, 2008; Drydakis, 2015), promoted (Drydakis, 2015), given the same pay and benefits as their non-LGBT co-workers (Bryson, 2017; Chuang, Church, & Ophir, 2011), allowed to participate in the company or organization (Laurent & Mihoubi, 2017), given equal employment opportunities (Colvin, 2009) or provided with a safe work environment (Mennicke, Gromer, Oehme, & MacConnie, 2018; Røndahl, Innala, & Carlsson, 2007) because of their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.

As we can see, discrimination has very negative consequences not only on the professional lives of the LGBT employees, but also on their health and even in their personal lives. That is why studying how to cope with discrimination is fundamental for the LGBT community, and this study aimed at identifying all the resources available to mitigate workplace discrimination and enhance coping processes. So far, studies on LGBT discrimination in the workplace focus on levels of concealment or openness, as noted for example by Croteau (1996), or the “disclosure dilemma” (Rengers, Heyse, Otten, & Wittek, 2019) as a determinant of LGBT members being included in the workplace.

Coping is a complex phenomenon that has been widely studied in psychology. One of the first examples is the work by Lazarus and Folkman (1987) on developing a transactional model of stress and coping. These authors define stress as a relation between individuals

and their environments. When individuals perceive this stress to endanger their well-being because they do not have the resources to deal with it, they can activate two major coping strategies: problem-solving focused and emotion-focused (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Moreover, coping can affect health and mental health if the situation lasts some time (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Lazarus and Folkman (1987) claim that it is important not only to evaluate the situation correctly but also to use the appropriate coping strategies because otherwise results can be very poor. For these authors, coping consists of two important parts: a rational part focused on problem-solving and an emotional part focused on managing the emotional response to stress.

Concealment of sexual orientation or gender identity can increase the acceptance of LGBT individuals, but Newheiser, Barreto, and Tiemersma (2017) show that concealment negatively affects LGBT employees' feelings of belongingness in the company which, in turn, affects the company itself and the well-being of the LGBT employees. Therefore, restricting the information they disclose about their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression gives LGBT individuals a certain amount of control over their inclusion in the workplace because they can decide when and with whom to disclose. However, as Rennstam and Sullivan (2018) argue, LGBT employees can find collective action or the support of others useful and even necessary, depending on each case, for their inclusion in the workplace.

In this article, we build an analytical model of the coping strategies of LGBT employees who face discrimination in the workplace. We have integrated lesbian, gay, and bisexual studies (workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation) with transgender and queer studies (workplace discrimination based on gender identity or expression) that have discussed this topic. For the sake of consistency, we have used LGBT throughout the

article and our systematic literature review (SLR) because it is a well-established term in the literature that includes both sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

This study builds on Chung's Coping Strategy Framework (2001), and the work by Mizock and Mueser (2014), and establishes a new analytical model that regards LGBT employees as the key actors in their integration in the workplace. We also discuss the measures implemented by companies and organizations and other recommendations identified in the SLR for combating LGBT discrimination in the workplace.

### **Methodological framework**

In order to examine the literature on the discrimination of LGBT in the workplace we used an SLR approach (Cook, Sackett, & Spitzer, 1995; Petticrew & Robert, 2006). Cook, Mulrow, and Haynes (1997) point out that an SLR helps reduce the researcher's subjective bias in the collection of information, and ensures transparent decision making. In our study, we used keywords associated with the discrimination of members of the LGBT community in the workplace as parameters for the literature search.

We also followed the guidelines proposed by Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003), Moustaghfir (2008), and Okwir, Nudurupati, Ginieis and Angelis (2018), which describe six stages (see Figure 1).

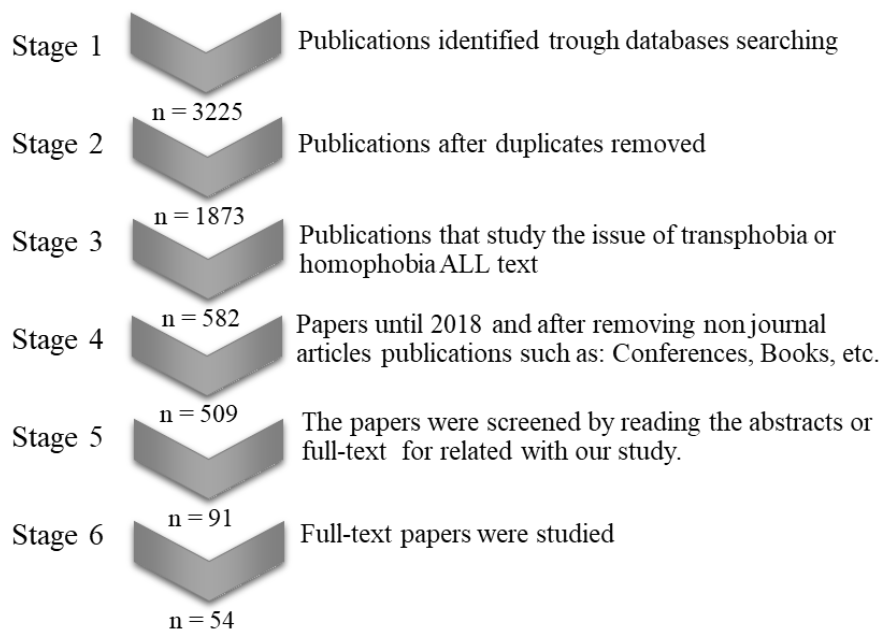


Figure 1. *Flow diagram of the article selection process*

### **Step-by-step process for sample selection**

*Stage 1.* We identified a set of keywords related to discrimination of the LGBT community in workplaces, and set further search criteria. Following the suggestion of Tranfield et al. (2003), two researchers selected the keywords and their combinations to generate effective search strings. The keyword combinations were searched for in the title of the paper, the keywords and the abstract.

Next, we carried out the search in Clarivate Analytics' Web of Science (WOS) and Elsevier's Scopus. We used these databases because they cover a wide range of areas within this discipline, and different searching, browsing and filtering options (López-Illescas, Moya-Anegón, & Moed 2008; Okwir et al., 2018). We selected the following keywords:

1. transgender AND discrimination OR harassment AND ALL work

2. transgender AND discrimination OR harassment AND ALL workplace
3. homosexuality AND discrimination OR harassment AND ALL work
4. homosexuality AND discrimination OR harassment AND ALL workplace
5. LGBT AND discrimination OR harassment AND ALL work
6. LGBT AND discrimination OR harassment AND ALL workplace
7. lesbian AND discrimination OR harassment AND ALL work
8. lesbian AND discrimination OR harassment AND ALL workplace
9. gay AND discrimination OR harassment AND ALL work
10. gay AND discrimination OR harassment AND ALL workplace
11. bisexual AND discrimination OR harassment AND ALL work
12. bisexual AND discrimination OR harassment AND ALL workplace

As can be seen in Figure 1, 3225 results were retrieved, which were further filtered in this stage and in subsequent ones in a process that incorporated the protocol's exclusion criteria (Jones & Gatrell, 2014).

*Stage 2.* Duplicate publications were removed, which reduced the number of results to 1873 (Table 2). We noticed that between the first publication by Arthur J. Marshall (1954) in the journal *Biological Reviews* and the end of 2009 only 25% of the total number of articles had been published (470 publications). The remaining 75% (1403) were published between 2010 and 2018. This demonstrates the growing importance of this topic in academic research and its social relevance. Table 1 presents the number of publications retrieved in chronological order.

Table 1

*Keyword analysis and articles until 2018*

Keyword	until 2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Transgender	66	16	23	28	47	74	76	138	124	130	722
Lesbian / Gay / Bisexual	218	18	20	41	49	43	36	54	50	42	571
Homosexuality	183	13	27	36	32	29	40	51	36	19	466
LGBT	3	5	4	6	8	12	14	21	21	20	114
Total	470	52	74	111	136	158	166	264	231	211	1873
%	25	3	4	6	7	8	9	14	12	11	100

Source: *Authors*

In addition, Table 2 and Figure 2 show that the number of annual publications increased from 52 (3%) in 2010 to 264 (14%) in 2016. During 2017 and 2018 there was a small decrease in publications (231 [12%] and 211 [11%], respectively). However, in the last three years the growing importance of this topic can be seen from the fact that there have been more than 200 annual publications. This significant number of articles that analyze LGBT discrimination is one of the main reasons why we adopted a SLR approach.

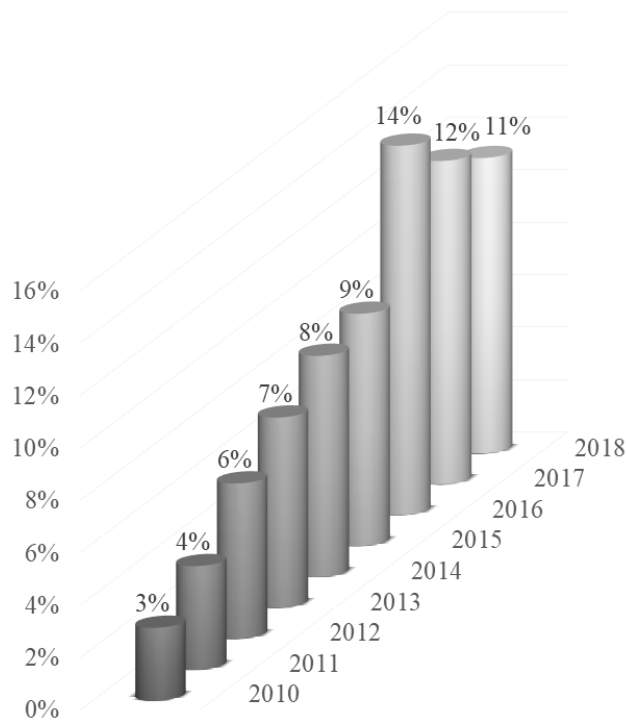


Figure 2. *Evolution of publications on LGBT from 2010 to 2018*

*Stage 3.* We classified articles, reviews, books, notes, etc., and specifically selected publications that focus on the topics of "transphobia" and "homophobia". We found 582 publications.

*Stage 4.* The publications were further filtered to include only peer-reviewed journal articles, which reduced the number to 509. Therefore, we considered only articles that were published in recognized academic and indexed journals. Specifically, we used the journals listed in the WOS and Scopus databases. The journal that has published most articles is the *Journal of Homosexuality* with 49 publications. Other journals that have published articles are: the *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services* (29), *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity* (22), *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Mental Health* (17) and *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* (14) (Table 2).

Table 2

*Evolution of the number of publications in journals WOS and Scopus*

Journal	until 2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Journal of Homosexuality	13	1	3	4	4	1	3	5	7	8	49
Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services	15	-	1	1	2	1	1	2	4	2	29
Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity	-	-	-	-	-	5	6	4	4	3	22
Journal of Gay and Lesbian Mental Health	1	-	-	1	1	2	3	4	5	-	17
Sexuality Research and Social Policy	-	1	-	1	1	2	1	1	3	4	14
Culture, Health and Sexuality	1	-	1	-	2	-	3	1	4	1	13
Journal of LGBT Youth	5	1	1	1	1	1	-	2	1	-	13
International Journal of Transgenderism	-	1	-	1	-	2	1	1	4	-	10

Journal of Lesbian Studies	4	-	3	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	10
Sex Roles	5	-	-	-	2	-	1	1	-	-	9
Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling	-	-	1	-	3	-	-	-	3	1	8
Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology	1	-	1	-	3	-	1	-	-	-	6
Other Journals	81	8	11	12	25	29	27	39	42	35	309
Total	126	12	22	23	44	43	48	60	77	54	509
%	25	2	4	5	9	8	9	12	15	11	100

Source: *Authors*

*Stage 5.* The papers were screened by reading the title and abstract. In some cases, when the abstract was not clear enough, the entire paper was read for full appraisal, and to assess its relevance to the research scope. This process resulted in 91 articles. Similar steps have been used in other SLRs (Bonatto, de Resende, Betim, Pereira, & von Agner, 2015; McGovern, 2014; Tasca, Ensslin, Ensslin, & Martins Alves, 2010; Turner, Swart, & Maylor 2013). Then we carried out the following analysis in the papers:

- Statement of objectives
- Context description
- Method of data analysis
- Relevance of the findings to the theory

*Stage 6.* Finally, in the last stage, the information collected was synthesized and we evaluated the inclusion or exclusion of the articles by contrasting them with the objectives of our study. This analysis reduced the number of articles to 54, which are the ones that make up the final study sample (see Appendix). The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were adopted:

1. We excluded articles that deal with the homophobic and transphobic attitudes of professionals towards clients/users, or vice versa. The focus of the article is on the discrimination within organizations themselves, between co-workers or within the organizational hierarchy.
2. We excluded articles that use experimental designs with undergraduate students or Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals. Instead, we only focused on articles that deal with real-life experiences in the workplace.
3. We excluded articles that deal with discrimination in the broader sense and make only sporadic mention of workplace discrimination. We give priority to articles that are expressly based on workplace discrimination, which is mentioned both in the title of the article and in the abstract.

The 54 articles selected were analyzed and the information about coping strategies was extracted, organized and contrasted to the frameworks provided by Chung (2001), and Mizock and Mueser (2014). The data gathered was substantial and highly diverse, and in the inductive analysis of the strategies LGBT employees use for coping with workplace discrimination, three clear patterns emerged: individual level strategies, company or organization level strategies, and recommendations (for LGBT employees, companies and state or public institutions). Subsequently, the data was rearranged according to these new categories. This new categorization and its description was reviewed by a second

researcher, for clarity and robustness. In the Appendix, we describe each of the articles in terms of its main question or purpose, type of approach, sample, and its contribution to the analytical model and/or strategies.

## **Results**

Our methodology enabled us to identify coping strategies used not only by individuals, but also by companies to eliminate discrimination against LGBT employees. The aim of this article is to analyze individual coping strategies in the workplace and this analysis will occupy most of this section. Nonetheless, we will also briefly present company strategies for eliminating discrimination of LGBT employees and the coping strategies recommended in the literature. This analysis does not consider the impact or the result of these strategies, as this goes beyond the scope of the article.

### *Individual coping strategies of LGBT individuals against discrimination: an analytical model*

The strategies presented here emerged from the analysis of the empirical fieldwork of some of the articles, but we also considered some theoretical articles. To analyze the coping strategies of LGBT individuals (Figure 3), we used two elements common to all these strategies. The first element is whether the empowerment, or the capacity to cope with discrimination at work, can be found within the individual alone (personal empowerment) or if the individual seeks help from other people, groups or collective resources (collective empowerment). The second element is whether the LGBT employees opt to conceal or fully disclose their identity or sexual orientation at work.

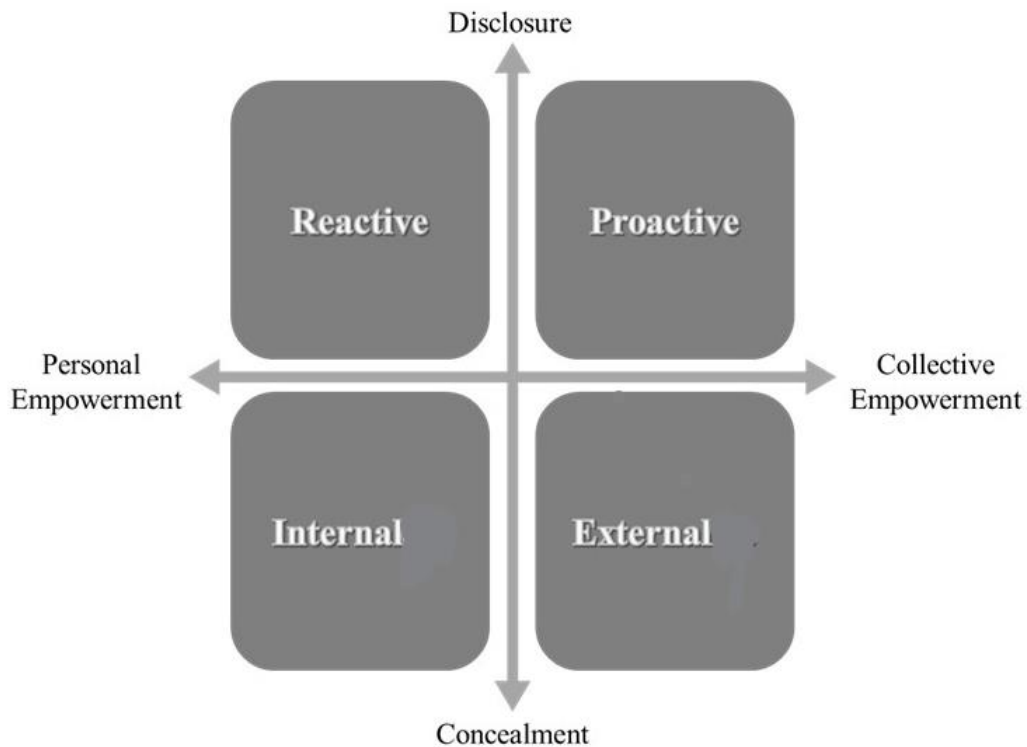


Figure 3. *Models of the LGBT employees for coping with discrimination*

Thus, each of these elements form an axis and the two axes intersect, as they relate to LGBT employees' interactions in the workplace: first, the vertical axis measures the degree of outness of the LGBT employees, which goes from the lowest outness or concealment (for example, when employees display the traditional gender attitudes and behaviors expected of them) to full outness (for example, when employees are open about their identity or sexual orientation); second, the horizontal axis measures the degree of empowerment, which goes from lowest empowerment or coping alone with discrimination (for example, when employees outperform in their job to hide their identity or sexual orientation) to highest empowerment or harnessing the help and involvement of coworkers or people in top positions in the organization, trade unions or civil society organizations (for example, when LGBT employees go to the trade union and convince them to defend and promote LGBT employee rights).

LGBT employees can use these two axes in different combinations and degrees, at different times, and in different work contexts (co-workers, management, clients or users, providers, etc.). The intersection of these two elements results in a static picture of four different sets of strategies: *Internal*, *External*, *Reactive* and *Proactive* (Figure 3). Everyday life, however, is a moving picture, but these strategies can be useful for researchers to analyze the behaviors, attitudes, strategies and acts of LGBT employees. The model can also help different actors who aim to put a stop to LGBT discrimination in the workplace: it helps LGBT individuals to reflect on their experiences in the workplace and improve their situation by applying the new knowledge they acquire, Human Resource professionals to gain knowledge about practices that are being implemented in other contexts and to reflect on the possibility of adopting those best suited to their organization, and policy-makers to promote change at the company and public organization levels. The model consists of four sets of strategies, which are described below.

### 1. Internal strategies

These strategies form the largest group and are the ones found most frequently in the literature. LGBT employees who use these strategies do not tend to seek help and they do not disclose their gender identity or sexual orientation at work. Therefore, these strategies are used at any given time and to different extents in their work-related interactions (with co-workers, management, customers, and providers). This means that the differences in how the strategies are used are very subtle and difficult to identify, as the process is mostly internal. LGBT employees internalize the discrimination against them, which means that they tend to tackle the experience of discrimination on their own.

Individuals in this category usually manage their identity by choosing if, when and who to disclose to in the workplace (Poulin, Gouliquer, & Moore, 2009; Poulin, Gouliquer, & McCutcheon, 2018; Tuten & August, 2006), which is similar to the concept of identity management coined by Chung, Williams, and Dispenza (2009). Other strategies involve displaying the traditional gender attitudes and behaviors expected of them in order to avoid being discriminated against (Blount, 1996; Ragins, Cornwell, & Miller, 2003), or using gender-normative strategies (Mizock & Mueser, 2014). Other coping strategies used by the LGBT employees identified in our analysis are (in terms of Mizock & Mueser, 2014): preventative-preparative strategies, outperforming in their jobs, disengagement and emotional-regulation coping.

Preventative-preparative strategies involve taking action to avoid or prepare for an encounter with discrimination by foreseeing or calculating the risks of their actions. Thus, this strategy includes: forward planning how to respond to homophobic remarks or behaviors (Ferfolja, 2009) or avoiding a situation that might lead to discrimination (Cavalier, 2011; Dispenza, Brown, & Chastain, 2016; Rödahl, Innala, & Carlsson, 2007), and using “half-truth disclosure”, “keep them guessing”, mixing displays of subordinated feminine heterosexuality with more stereotypically masculine behavior, and using masculine displays of dominance (Denissen & Saguy, 2014). Another set of actions was oriented toward choosing a type of employment in which they would expect less discrimination: self-employment, entrepreneurship (Galloway, 2012; Marlow, Greene, & Coad, 2018), examining whether an occupation or job position is welcoming to LGBT workers and customers (Chung et al., 2009; Galloway, 2012), or assessing and avoiding transphobia by selecting tolerant environments (Anastas, 1998; Yılmaz & Göçmen, 2016).

Outperforming in their jobs (Bliss & Harris, 1998; Mennicke, et al., 2018) is a strategy used by LGBT employees to cope with discrimination. It involves amplifying work performance (Dispenza et al., 2016; Yılmaz & Göçmen, 2016), becoming a “superstar” (Bliss & Harris, 1998; Raven, 2001), taking on the most difficult tasks (Denissen & Saguy, 2014) or performing better than their other colleagues of the same sex (Poulin et al., 2009; Poulin et al., 2018). On a different note, and less frequent in the literature, is developing a reputation for being tough, or someone not to mess with (Bliss & Harris, 1998; Ferfolja, 2009).

Disengagement strategies consist of disconnecting from sources of discrimination, by asking for a transfer or moving to another town (Bliss & Harris, 1998; Poulin et al., 2018), quitting (Chung et al., 2009; Dispenza et al., 2016; McFadden, 2015), emotionally detaching (Poulin et al., 2009), ignoring, and isolating oneself (Denissen & Saguy, 2014). Closely connected to this, emotional-regulation strategies consist of managing and adapting one’s emotions in response to the experience of discrimination. This coping strategy includes building resilience (Delgado et al., 2016), staying silent (McFadden, 2015; McNulty, McPhail, Invers, Dundon, & Nechanska, 2018), keeping calm, using humor to bring the issue to the fore (Fielden & Jepson, 2016; Priola, Lasio, De Simone, & Serri, 2014), using relaxation techniques, staying active, and managing one’s health (Mizock & Mueser, 2014).

Finally, there are four more groups of strategies, which are reported very little or not at all in the literature. First, self-affirmative strategies consist of reinforcing one’s strengths and self-esteem (for example, by using the good institution schema to justify discrimination in the military) (Poulin et al., 2009), self-talk (Chung et al., 2009) and connecting to a sense of confidence, self-awareness, genuineness, authenticity, and perseverance in the face of stigma (Mizock & Mueser, 2014). The second and third

'coping' strategies consist of trying to bury the past by forgetting the discrimination they were victims of once they are no longer in the workplace (i.e. in the army) or using and abusing alcohol and other drugs (Poulin et al., 2009). Finally, there are the cognitive-reframe strategies, which involve using styles of thinking to cope with discrimination, including reframing, positive thinking, and understanding the perpetrator of the transphobia (Mizock & Mueser, 2014).

## 2. External strategies

External strategies consist of opening out about feelings and the discrimination suffered at work, but in contexts and with people that are not from their work environment. In our sample, social-relational strategies have the highest incidence. Employees access relational supports and engage with partners, friends and family to cope with discrimination (Anastas, 2001; Grace, 2017). Hence, they use collective empowerment but cope with the discrimination situation outside the workplace. The next most common strategy reported in the literature is LGBT employees resorting to health or legal services (Grace, 2017; Irwin, 2002) to cope with discrimination at work and find a solution to their situation. Finally, another strategy described in the literature was to use spiritual and religious strategies, which draw on a sense of spiritual direction to engage in religious study, experience a relationship with God, and connect to a religious community (Mizock & Mueser, 2014).

## 3. Reactive strategies

Reactive strategies include disclosure but they are rather defensive actions or they are used when employees have a stable situation at work and are sure they cannot lose their job. The strategies identified as reactive are discussions with management or Human

Resources (Irwin, 2002; McFadden, 2015), followed by confrontation of the harasser (Irwin, 2002; McFadden, 2015). These two strategies involve waiting until they achieve seniority (Denissen & Saguy, 2014; Raven, 2001) or obtain professional certification (Denissen & Saguy, 2014) before coming out or expressing themselves, and defying the discriminatory policy (Dispenza et al., 2016; Dozier, 2015). Defiance of the policy is seen as a source of stress for the LGBT because they need to be constantly educating others and actively resist pressures to conform (Dozier, 2015). One article reported a coping strategy used by a lesbian employee that consisted of offering advice on women's sexuality to co-workers in order to become "one of the guys". However, this meant that the employee had to get involved in the misogynistic culture of her co-workers (Denissen & Saguy, 2014). These strategies are implemented by the LGBT employees themselves, and normally they involve little or no collective empowerment since they do not aim to build alliances but focus instead on tackling the manifestations of discrimination.

#### 4. Proactive strategies

The last set of strategies considered in our analysis are the proactive ones, which consist of LGBT involving external agents in their fight against discrimination at work. The most common strategy is to establish trust with colleagues or co-workers and disclose their identity to them (Anastas, 2001; Bliss & Harris, 1998; Cavalier, 2011; Denissen & Saguy, 2014; Einarsdottir, Hoel, & Lewis, 2015; Priola, et al., 2014; Raven, 2001; Willis, 2009) in order to protect themselves from discrimination. The second most common strategy is political-empowerment: they protect or promote LGBT employees' rights (Anastas, 1998; Brooks & Edwards, 2009) by becoming involved in LGBT organizations or unions (Bielski Boris, 2010; Fahie, 2016; Grace, 2017), attending professional conferences (Denissen & Saguy, 2014), educating others, and serving as a role model for others

(Mizock & Mueser, 2014). Finally, examples of using internet or social media to connect with LGBT communities are more theoretical (Chung et al., 2009; Dispenza et al., 2016; Mizock & Mueser, 2014) than empirical (Denissen & Saguy, 2014).

#### *Company measures to fight discrimination against LGBT employees*

The strategies mentioned in this section of the article are backed by real-life experience; that is, they are extracted from empirical articles. Some articles describe companies that create a working climate that is safe and open, and employees are free to disclose their identities (Irwin, 2002; Willis, 2009) or implement inclusive workplace practices (Hur, 2019). Other articles report supportive work teams in which co-workers and people in senior positions take a stand against homophobic expressions, make use of inclusive language in everyday conversation, actively avoid the presumption of heterosexuality, and include partners in workplace conversations and social events (Willis, 2009). Finally, some articles mention the role of leaders as champions of LGBT issues in the workplace (Brooks & Edwards, 2009; Cech & Rothwell, 2019; Falcoz & Bécuwe, 2009; Rabelo & Cortina, 2014) or the emergence of straight and LGBT allies who use education as a strategy to fight LGBT discrimination at work (Cech & Rothwell, 2019; Webster, Adams, Maranto, Sawyer, & Thoroughgood, 2018).

#### *Recommendations for fighting discrimination against LGBT employees*

This section discusses recommendations made by authors who study LGBT discrimination at work. Some of these recommendations might already have been implemented totally or partially in some contexts, and we present them as

recommendations so as to make them visible for decision-makers to fight discrimination against LGBT or other minority-group employees in other work environments. These recommendations are divided in three types, depending on who they address: LGBT employees, companies and states, or public institutions. Most of these recommendations are aimed at companies and corporations.

### LGBT employees

This category contains the fewest recommendations: for the US, the LGBT employees who are victims of discrimination can bring charges of sex discrimination under federal law (Buzuvis, 2015), create a public group to defend their rights or join an existing one (Götz & Blanz, 2018), and ask employee representation groups to take LGBT issues to the management (Götz & Blanz, 2018).

### Companies and organizations

Most of the recommendations in the scientific literature focus on what companies should do to fight LGBT discrimination at work. Most of the recommendations insist on the following strategies: creating a diverse, inclusive or safe work environment; raising awareness and promoting education on gay issues in the workplace; supporting a gay/lesbian/bisexual/other minority groups employee support group and allies; advancing employment policies that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity and enforcing nondiscriminatory policies at work.

If a diverse, inclusive or safe work environment is to be created, there needs to be an inclusive workplace policy (Cook & Glass, 2016; Willis, 2009), supportive co-worker interactions (Denissen & Saguy, 2014; Webster, et al., 2018), a workplace that is a space

for LGBT self-affirmation and validation (Willis, 2009, 2010), and a change in the organizational culture (Brooks & Edwards, 2009) towards creating an inclusive workplace climate (Gibney, 2019; Wang & Schwarz, 2010). Diversity also needs to be managed and celebrated (Buddel, 2011; Wang & Schwarz, 2010).

Other recommendations include: raising awareness and promoting education about LGBT issues and preventing discrimination in the workplace (McFadden, 2015; Noknoi & Wutthirong, 2010); presenting the negative consequences discrimination has on lesbians and gays, and deconstructing the stereotypes of the "folle" and the "camionneuse", while at the same time proposing positive referents in the form of portraits of lesbians and gays with successful careers (Falcoz & Bécuwe, 2009, p. 85); challenging heteronormative practices and comments and promoting inclusive language (Buddel, 2011; Hornsby & Munn, 2009), or leadership taking the initiative to promote these training ideas in the workplace (Falcoz & Bécuwe, 2009; Wang & Schwarz, 2010).

Employee support groups are another tool for fighting against workplace discrimination of LGBT and other minorities. These groups may provide support for a variety of identities with the goal of appreciating diversity and fighting against workplace discrimination (McFadden, 2015; Webster et al., 2018), and also cater for other minority groups who suffer workplace discrimination (Willis, 2010). They will provide mentorship for LGBT employees (McFadden, 2015; Rabelo & Cortina, 2014), and support for employee-supervisor relationships (Buddel, 2011).

The next set of recommendations for fighting discrimination against LGBT employees seeks equitable benefits programs for the children and domestic partners of LGBT

employees (McFadden, 2015; Rabelo & Cortina, 2014). Other authors claim that talented LGBT employees should be promoted to top management positions (Noknoi & Wutthirong, 2010), and that the senior-level should give support to LGBT initiatives (Buddel, 2011). On a different note, another way companies can fight discrimination of LGBT employees in the workplace is to organize and take part in community outreach programs related to diverse sexual orientation (Webster et al., 2018).

With regards to company structure, some authors ask the Human Resources professionals to introduce organizational development initiatives and policy-update practices, policy makers to be trained (Hornsby & Munn, 2009; McFadden, 2015) and the LGBT employees themselves to explain how to advance inclusion in their daily work (Hornsby & Munn, 2009). A more practical recommendation is to train leaders and managers in LGBT issues (Götz & Blanz, 2018). Companies are also recommended to: screen their policies and working practices in order to eliminate bias (Colgan, Wright, Creegan, & McKearney, 2009; Noknoi & Wutthirong, 2010), encourage good employment practices, address issues of diversity in the workplace (Noknoi & Wutthirong, 2010; Webster et al., 2018) and apply these practices to workers in all sectors of the economy (Cech & Rothwell, 2019).

Some recommendations are aimed at career counsellors, who may be able to help LGBT young people and adolescents to develop coping skills and support systems (Dispenza et al., 2016) and personal traits such as optimistic attitudes, perception of controllability, self-acceptance, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Dispenza et al., 2016). Finally, some authors suggest that companies that have more women and more members with a higher

education on the board create more inclusive workplaces (Cook & Glass, 2016; Lloren & Parini, 2017).

#### State or public institutions

State or public institutions are recommended to implement employment policies that prohibit discrimination, including structural protections at the federal and state level in the U.S. (Bauermeister et al., 2014); encourage the full participation of LGBT employees in all aspects of corporate life, and appoint LGBT liaison officers to deal with discrimination at work, and apply zero tolerance for discriminatory acts (Bernstein & Swartwout, 2012); promote awareness and education about transgender issues (Mennicke, et al., 2018; Poulin et al., 2018; Yerke & Mitchell, 2013), with leadership organizing these training initiatives (Mennicke et al., 2018); promote support groups for LGBT employees in the workplace (Mennicke et al., 2018); review policies on transgender entry into and discharge from the army, and grant specific health care benefits (Yerke & Mitchell, 2013).

Some recommendations about how to fight discrimination against LGBT employees are only occasionally mentioned in the literature: Götz & Blanz (2018) suggest including courses on sexual orientation in higher education; governments and NGOs should raise the awareness of the private sector and the general public about LGBT issues (Noknoi & Wutthirong, 2010; Tebele, & Odeku, 2014); preemptory challenges on the basis of gender identity or expression should be prohibited in courts of law (Maddera, 2016); criminal agencies of justice need to value the contributions of all genders (Mennicke et al., 2018); governments should apologize for and acknowledge how badly they have treated LGBT soldiers (Poulin et al., 2018), invite soldiers to tell their stories in private and public

meetings as a form of healing and retribution, and inform past soldiers of the programmes available to them for compensation (Poulin et al., 2018).

## **Discussion and conclusions**

In this paper we have discussed the prevalence of LGBT workplace discrimination, a violation of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations that goes against Goal 8 of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDG) about Decent Work and Economic Growth. The analytical model we propose here aims to give visibility to the coping strategies used against LGBT workplace discrimination. It intends to be a starting point for a new understanding of strategies for coping with LGBT workplace discrimination and set the stage for initiatives from civil society and policy makers around the world designed to eradicate this social injustice. To this end, we have created a model of LGBT coping strategies against workplace discrimination that combines the degree of outness, a concept that is prevalent in the literature (Chung, 2001; Mizock & Mueser, 2014), with the degree of empowerment. And we have seen that more empowerment comes from other organizations and from society. To create these spaces and resources for LGBT employees who are the victims of discrimination in the workplace, organizations, society and policy makers need to commit to more decisive involvement.

As noted in the 54 articles selected for this SLR, disclosure is fundamental and is present to a different extent in all strategies, which is why it is one of the axes of our model. The contribution of this article is that it has constructed an analytical model that brings together the personal-collective empowerment identified in the SLR, thus integrating and simplifying the scientific knowledge acquired so far. LGBT individuals have the choice

to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity and they can take active part in their inclusion in the workplace by seeking allies or building supportive relationships with colleagues and management. It goes without saying that this inclusion of LGBT employees depends on context and these strategies are only available to a small proportion of the world's population. Most of the strategies come from the Western countries (especially US, Canada, UK). In these countries, the legal frameworks and social acceptance are very different and, in some places, they even allow for LGBT workplace discrimination. Thus, even though LGBT action is fundamental, we must not forget that companies, organizations and especially governments are also responsible for the inclusion of LGBT individuals, and for overcoming discrimination at the workplace.

These strategies have given rise to considerable debate in the literature. For example, there is the issue of appraising or evaluating the discrimination situation, as it was put by Lazarus and Folkman (1987), which means differentiating between perceived discrimination and real discrimination. Since LGBT discrimination in the workplace can be very subtle and LGBT can choose to internalize discrimination as a coping strategy, this discrimination is often not visible, and it is harder to prove. Besides, some say that not disclosing their identity or sexual orientation or adopting an internal coping strategy is just another form of discrimination, while others claim that LGBT employees retain their power of decision because they can decide whether to disclose their identity or sexual orientation and to whom. As Lazarus and Folkman (1987) noted, it is important that the situation be appraised accurately and that LGBT employees give an appropriate response in these situations of discrimination in order to achieve the best possible results. It is also very important to look at the impact of these coping strategies on the well-being of LGBT individuals (from the perspective of mental, physical and social health), which

may improve the policies related to LGBT-associated psychosocial risks in the workplace.

The model aims to be helpful to researchers in future studies on the workplace discrimination of LGBT individuals. It is a basis for analysis that can be updated as many times as the social and legal circumstances allow it to be. The model proposed here can help LGBT employees to reflect on their own actions and consider new options based on the resources provided. And the company strategies and recommendations can help managers, HRD professionals and policy-makers to evaluate their own contexts and improve their companies or organizations and enhance the human development of LGBT employees on the basis of scientifically informed recommendations. It would be interesting for future research to analyze the impact of the four strategies of coping with discrimination in the workplace, although this will be no easy task, considering the different legal and social contexts, as well as the fact that LGBT employees can use a mix of these strategies during their working life. The more we know about which elements or strategies are useful for combating LGBT discrimination in the workplace, the more chances we have of promoting better policies, based on scientific evidence, which will result in better social outcomes.

Finally, only articles published in journals from the Web of Science and Scopus databases were included in this review, which means that other types of literature were not analyzed. This is because these articles undergo a peer review process that ensures their quality. Furthermore, the original contribution of this article is the criteria that we have imposed in our SLR, which assures the replicability of our study. This necessarily meant that part of the literature had to be excluded. Different criteria will produce different results. One

limitation is that we did not check for the impact of the coping strategies, as mentioned in the results section, although the aim of the study was merely to lay the theoretical foundation for further research. Lastly, the topic of LGBT coping strategies in the context of workplace discrimination is still understudied, and some parts of the world are not represented at all. This limits our findings but, at the same time, calls for research in this area to be done in other parts of the world.

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## Appendix

### *Articles included in the study*

Reference	Question/Purpose	Approach	Sample	Strategies
Blount (1996)	Identify the ways in which sexual stigmatization contributed to changes in women's employment in education, between 1900 and 1976.	Conceptual	Teachers and superintendents	Internal
Bliss and Harris (1998)	Explore the reasons which teachers and parents gave for disclosure or failure to disclose their sexual orientation to others in a school setting.	Case study	Gay and lesbian parents and teachers	Internal; Proactive
Anastas (1998)	Summarize what is currently known about the employment problems of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people and suggest what the social work response should be.	Theoretical	Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people	Internal; Proactive/ Companies and organizations
Anastas (2001)	Review evidence which suggests that the economic rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people as workers are not presently secure.	Theoretical	Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people as workers	External; Proactive
Raven (2001)	Examine the trends and themes of discrimination within a theoretical and analytical context that addresses the hetero-dominance of a professional and occupational role.	Theoretical and analytical context	Lesbian social workers	Internal; Reactive; Proactive
Irwin (2002)	Research on homophobic harassment and discrimination workplace experiences of gay, lesbian, and transgender teachers, academics, and educators.	Case study	Gay employees teachers, academics, and educators	External; Reactive/ Companies and organizations
Ragins et al. (2003)	Develop and test two competing models of the effects of multiple group	Case study	Gay employees	Internal

	membership on heterosexism and disclosure of sexual orientation in the workplace.			
Tuten and August (2006)	Identify correlates of work-family conflict, specifically work interference with family (WIF), among lesbian mothers.	Case study	Working lesbian mothers	Internal
Röndahl et al. (2006)	(1) To describe how homosexual nursing staff experienced their psychosocial work environment, and (2) to illustrate what the informants regarded as important to highlight issues concerning homosexuality and the nursing environment.	Case study	Homosexual nursing staff	Internal
Ferfolja (2007)	Examine the ways that some self-identified lesbian teachers negotiate their sexual subjectivities at work.	Case study	Lesbian teachers working	Internal
Brooks and Edwards (2009)	Why and how individuals develop into workplace LGBT allies.	Case study	8 LGBT employees and 5 heterosexuals	Proactive/ Companies/ Recommendations companies
Hornsby and Munn (2009)	Examine the work-life policies and benefits practices of 10 Midwestern public universities.	Theoretical	10 Midwestern public universities	Recommendation companies
Chung et al. (2009)	Validate and expand on Y. B. Chung's (2001) models of work discrimination and coping strategies among lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons.	Case study	8 lesbians and 9 gay men	Internal; External; Reactive; Proactive
Poulin et al. (2009)	Examine the short- and long-term psychological, physical and social health implications associated with pre-1992 investigations and eventual discharge of Canadian military	Case study	Former military personnel who self-identified as lesbian	Internal

	servicewomen for reasons of homosexuality.			
Colgan et al. (2009)	Examine the extent to which the law and/or a business case is considered to be a driver to sexual equality work.	Case study	LGB employees within nine public service, 'good practice' organizations	Recommendations companies
Willis (2009)	Locate the experiences of young queer workers as newcomers to the Australian labour market and to shed light on how young queer people negotiate sexually exclusive and inclusive workspaces.	Case study	Young people (18-26 years old) who primarily identified as LGBTQ, employees	Internal; Proactive/ Companies and organizations/ Recommendations companies
Ferfolja (2009)	Compile the key academic literature that addresses lesbian teachers' in predominantly four western, English speaking, capitalist countries.	Theoretical/ Review	Lesbian teachers	Internal
Falcoz and Bécuwe (2009)	Study egalitarian, non-discriminatory and "diversity management" in France.	Case study	Gay and lesbian workers	Companies and organizations/ Recommendations companies
Wang and Schwarz (2010)	Analyze the effect of firm GLBT nondiscrimination policies on that firm's stock market value.	Case study	Firms included in this study were obtained from the database of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (HRC).	Recommendations companies
Noknoi and Wutthirong (2010)	Sexual orientation discrimination in the workplace of Thailand.	Theoretical/ Review	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered [LGBT] community	Recommendations companies/ state or public institutions

Willis (2010)	Explores young lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer identifying employees' accounts of working with queer coworkers and managers in Australian workplaces.	Case study	Young LGBTQ people (18–26 years old)	Recommendations companies
Bielski Boris (2010)	Explore the adequacies of the predominant theories regarding labor unions and sexual orientation.	Case study	UAW union activists, members, and staff, key informants	Proactive
Buddel (2011)	Providing an overview of the experiences of GLB people in the workplace, focusing on forms of discrimination, its impacts on GLB people, and coping mechanisms employed to mitigate stress.	Review	Gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) individuals	Recommendations companies
Cavalier (2011)	Examines employees of professional, collegiate, and club sports.	Case study	Gay men working in professional, collegiate, and club sport	Internal; Proactive/ Recommendations companies
Galloway (2012)	Study of male gay entrepreneurs in the UK.	Case study	11 male gay entrepreneurs	Internal
Bernstein and Swartwout (2012)	Examine what heterosexuals expect will happen when gay men and lesbians come out.	Case study	Heterosexual police department employees	Recommendations state or public institutions
Yerke and Mitchell (2013)	Transgender citizens should have equal opportunity to honorably serve their country, and to be treated with respect and sensitivity as they do so.	Review	Transgender people in the military	Recommendations state or public institutions
Tebele and Odeku (2014)	Examine the legal position and at the same time consider the social implications and concerns for discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation.	Review	Homosexual, bisexual or transsexual identities	Recommendations state or public institutions

Priola et al. (2014)	Explore the practices of inclusion/exclusion of LGBTs in the workplace in Italian social cooperatives.	Case study	Senior managers, supervisors and LGBT workers	Internal; Proactive/ Recommendations companies
Denissen and Saguy (2014)	Examines how the meanings of sexual orientation, gender presentation, race, and body size, shape the constraints that women face in the construction industry and the specific resistance strategies they develop.	Case study	Tradeswomen and female apprentices	Internal; External; Reactive; Proactive/ Recommendations companies
Rabelo and Cortina (2014)	Examine the incidence, interplay, and impact of harassment of LGBQ employees in higher education.	Case study	Permanent nonstudent employees at a small, rural, public university	Companies and organizations/ Recommendations companies
Mizock and Mueser (2014)	Investigate experiences of double stigma, internalized stigma, and coping strategies for dealing with transphobia.	Case study	Transgender individuals history of diagnosis of a mental health disorder	Internal; External; Proactive
Bauermeister et al. (2014)	Examine the association between overall health and experiences of sexuality-based work discrimination.	Case study	People between the ages of 18 and 29, identify as male, report currently residing in the Detroit Metropolitan Area, and report having ever had sex with men.	Recommendations state or public institutions
Buzuvis (2015)	Generating support for retaliation claims.	Legal review	LGBT employee	Recommendations LGBT employees
Dozier (2015)	Examines the experiences of lesbian and gay faculty within the framework of minority stress theory.	Case study	Lesbian and gay faculty members at a	Internal; Reactive

			regional, public university	
Einarsdóttir et al. (2015)	Focus on the experiences of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals (LGBs) in relation to bullying, harassment and discrimination in the British workplace.	Case study	LGB employees	Proactive
McFadden (2015)	Systematic review within the business, management, and broader social sciences disciplines, on the careers and workplace experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) workers.	Review	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) workers	Internal; External; Reactive/ Recommendations companies
Maddera (2016)	Propose that courts apply the trans-inclusive conception of sex discrimination that has gained traction in Title VII jurisprudence to the context of peremptory challenges.	Conceptual	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender jurors	Recommendations state or public institutions
Fahie (2016)	in-depth examination of the apparent contradiction between EU law and the derogation afforded organizations with denominational ethos in Irish equality legislation which explicitly permitted discrimination in order to protect that ethos from being 'undermined'	Case study	Lesbian, gay and bisexual teachers	Internal; Proactive
Fielden and Jepson (2016)	Identify specifically the salient issues faced by lesbians in the workplace.	Case study	Lesbians	Internal
Yılmaz, and Göçmen (2016)	Explore experiences of discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) individuals in employment, housing and health care.	Case study	139 LGBT individuals	Internal
Cook and Glass (2016)	Analyze the impact of the gender composition of firm leadership on the likelihood that a firm will adopt lesbian,	Case study	Fortune 500 firms	Recommendations companies

	gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT)-friendly policies.			
Dispenza et al. (2016)	Review the existing literature regarding facets of minority stress across the career lifespan trajectory and provide a conceptualization on how to incorporate minority stress into affirmative career appraisal, intervention, and research practices.	Conceptual	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer [LGBQ]	Internal; External; Reactive; Proactive/ Recommendations companies
Delgado et al. (2016)	Increase the body of knowledge on the sexual and behavioral health among gay and bisexual servicemen while methodologically identifying factors, such as discrimination and stress, which negatively impact negative health behaviors and risky sexual behaviors.	Case study	85 male servicemen	Internal
Grace (2017)	Investigate the political, cultural, and educational work of two pioneering Canadian gay teachers during the 1990s.	Case study	2 Canadian gay teachers	External, Proactive
Lloren and Parini (2017)	Examine whether LGBT-supportive policies help (1) to reduce discrimination based on sexual discrimination and (2) to increase LGB employees' well-being and psychological health at work.	Case study	Self-identified LGB persons aged 16 or older who were currently working or had worked in the last 3 years	Recommendations companies
Marlow et al. (2018)	Explore self-employment amongst gay men and lesbian women.	Case study	163,000 UK adults	Internal
Götz and Blanz (2018)	Address a hidden discrimination of homosexual people working at Germany's largest employers in the social area: the Catholic and Protestant Churches and their Charities.	Case study	200 homosexual persons	Recommendations LGBT employees/ companies and organizations/ state or public institutions

Webster et al. (2018)	Conduct a comprehensive review and meta-analysis of the outcomes associated with three workplace contextual supports.	Conceptual	LGBT employees	Companies and organizations/ Recommendations companies
McNulty et al. (2018)	Explore the role of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) as a form of voice for LGBT and global mobility.	Case study	20 respondents: 15 LGBT male and female employees (11 of whom have lived and worked, or are still living and working, abroad), and five managers	Internal/Companies and organizations
Mennicke et al. (2018)	Describe the workplace experiences of criminal justice personnel who self-identify as lesbian or gay.	Case study	10 law enforcement and 4 corrections officers who self-identify as lesbian or gay	Internal/ Recommendations state or public institutions
Poulin et al. (2018)	Investigate how the institutions of heterosexuality and the Canadian military shape gay and lesbian soldiers' experiences.	Case study	10 lesbian and 10 gay soldiers	Internal; External/ Recommendations state or public institutions

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Source: *Authors*