

Hiring Discrimination Against Openly Gay Feminine Men in the Workforce

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SOC 337: Social Research Methods

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October 05, 2025

Even though society has made progress toward LGBTQIA+ acceptance, discrimination in hiring still happens in subtle ways. One group that faces this strong bias is openly gay men who present themselves in a more feminine manner. Many of these men experience a “double penalty” and one for their sexual orientation and another for how their gender expression challenges traditional masculinity. This leads to consequences in hiring, lateral moves, and career advancement. My research question asks: How does feminine gender expression among openly gay men affect their chances of being hired, especially in male-dominated jobs?

In *Wielding Gay Men's Agency: Empirical Evidence from HEIs in the Philippines*, Labayandoy and Erasga (2024) examine how gay men working in higher education exercise agency in environments shaped by heteronormativity. They note that “the school, like many other social institutions, is not immune from the far reaches of heteronormativity,” and that participants responded by “distancing strategically and displaying masculinity” or by “dissenting intellectually” (pp. 2510). This means they often had to decide when to be open and when to hide who they are to avoid negative judgement. The study shows how professional spaces tend to reward people who fit traditional expectations of masculinity. This kind of pressure can shape how openly gay men present themselves, especially when being too feminine might limit their opportunities.

In *Task Interdependence and the Discrimination of Gay Men and Lesbians in the Workplace*, Lim, Trau, and Foo (2018) examined how the structure of jobs influences bias during the hiring process. They found that “gay men and lesbians are discriminated against for task-interdependent occupations by hiring personnel” (p. 1385). Essentially, employers were less likely to select openly gay applicants for jobs that require close collaboration. This pattern stems

from perceptions of “a lack of fit between a gay or lesbian job applicant and a high-task-interdependent job due to their stigmatized identity” (p. 1387). This means that discrimination is not just about sexual orientation, it is also about how employers associate certain personal traits, like femininity or nontraditional gender expression, with poor team compatibility. Together, these findings suggest that bias may be intensified in male-dominated workplaces, where social norms about masculinity remain considerably strong.

Steffens et al. (2019) studied how stereotypes about gay and straight men affect hiring decisions. They found that gay men were seen as “less masculine, and more communal than heterosexual men” (p. 548). These traits are often labeled as more feminine, which can make gay men seem like a poor or lesser fit for jobs that value masculinity or dominance. The researchers also found that “both perceived agency and communion determine hireability judgements, particularly in gender-neutral job contexts” (p. 549). Whether someone is seen as strong or caring can potentially change how likely they are to be hired, depending on the type of job. Despite Steffens et al. (2019) found “no difference in agency” between gay and straight men, they did find “positive and negative indirect effects of sexual orientation on hireability” (p. 548), which means that stereotypes still shape how people were judged. These results show how both sexual orientation and gender expression, openly gay men who act or appear more feminine, face extra barriers and difficulties due to how others judge someone’s competence.

Bailey, Wallace, and Wright (2013) conducted a field experiment in *Are Gay Men and Lesbians Discriminated Against When Applying For Jobs?* They sent out more than 4,600 identical resumes that only differed in whether they hinted at being gay or straight. The results provided evidence that found no bias at the first screening step and concluded that “there is no evidence that gay men or lesbians are discriminated against in their first encounter with

employers” (2013, p. 888). Since their field experiment only tested the first encounter with employers, it is important to look at the rest of the screening process, such as face-to-face, where the gendered cues and expression matter. Bias may be muted at initial resume review but can surface once sexual orientation and femininity/masculinity become visible and job context activates role-fit stereotypes.

Finally, the research shows that bias against openly gay men becomes more visible in situations where gender expression and teamwork expectations meet. While Bailey et al. (2013) found no discrimination in early resume screenings, the other studies above suggest that subtle forms of bias appear later in the process. For this paper, the dependent variable is the likelihood of being hired, while the independent variable is gender expression (feminine vs. masculine presentation). Another factor that is considered would be contextual influences shapes how bias appear. These variables demonstrate how appearance, behavior, and context interact to influence hiring outcomes for gay men. Based on this review, my hypothesis is that feminine gender expression among openly gay men is negatively associated with their chances of being hired for jobs that emphasize traditionally masculine traits. This relationship highlights how gender norms and stereotypes continue to shape workplace inequality in ways that are often hidden behind neutral hiring processes. Even when hiring seems fair on the surface, ideas about masculinity and femininity still quietly determine who is seen as professional, confident, or capable.

References

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