

Unbound Leadership: How Gender Non-Conforming, Or Non-Binary Lesbians Navigate the Workplace from A Place of Visibility

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Abstract:

This doctoral research explores the hidden workplace structures of homophobic binary expectations and enforcement, and how such constructs affect the working lives of gender non-conforming and non-binary lesbians. From the bathroom to the boardroom and most work spaces in between, non-binary and gender non-conforming lesbians face discrimination and harassment stemming from assumptions and prejudices arising from their gender presentation. Participants from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia report harassment and discrimination ranging from being sexually harassed, and sexually assaulted, to a lack of mentoring, purposeful misgendering, bullying, misogyny, precarity, homophobic comments and gendered discrimination, and being fired. This qualitative research project used a constructivist grounded theory approach to gain insights from 25 gender non-conforming and non-binary lesbians/queers on their workplace experiences. Through a thematic analysis of these interviews, a theoretical model was developed to illustrate the ways in which participants navigate and mitigate hidden structures of binary enforcement and homophobic policing. This analysis gave rise to an emergent leadership model of 'Unbound Leadership'.

Keywords: Non-binary; lesbian; critical workplace theory