

Daily Work Out?! – The Relationship Between Self-Representation, Degree of Openness About One’s Gay or Lesbian Identity, and Psychological Stress in the Workplace

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Abstract Until now, research into the causes and impacts of handling one’s homosexuality at work has mostly taken into account contextual conditions. A systematic view of individual differences, however, has been neglected. In order to develop a deeper understanding of the handling of one’s own sexual identity in the workplace with regard to the dimensions of attitude and behavior, this paper allows quantitative statements about the relationship between self-representation as a personality disposition and the degree of openness towards one’s own sexual identity. In addition, it also addresses the influence of open-mindedness on one’s individual psychological mental stress, based on experiences of discrimination in various situations. Using an event sampling diary method, individual data from 277 German lesbian and gay participants was collected over several points in time. The data collection took place from mid-June until mid-September 2014. The findings show that a highly protective self-representation results in a less open attitude, while a mostly acquisitive self-representation involves a stronger sense of openness. Furthermore, a protective self-representation does not only affect attitude, but also results in more reserved behavior. Multi-level analyses also find that openness on the level of behavior with regards to one’s gay or lesbian sexual identity involves less psychological stress. This negative correlation was further reinforced depending on the level of perceived discrimination. These findings expand the former context-oriented discourse regarding the handling of one’s sexual identity in workplace settings by adding a personality psychology based perspective. This opens up several connecting points for further investigations.

Keywords: sexual orientation, homosexuality, gay, lesbian, discrimination, workplace

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1 Sexual Identity in the Workplace

In the context of work and commerce, a prevalent opinion is that sexual identity² is a private matter (Frohn 2014a, p. 480, Hofmann 2013, Völklinger Kreis e.V. 2011). Generally, the workplace is constructed as an asexual place (Maas 1996, Rosenstiel et al. 2005), although private aspects of one's personal life, and even the search for a partner, are considered to be natural topics of workplace conversation (Frohn 2007, Hofmann 2012). In addition, heterosexuality is understood as social information, while homosexuality is mostly reduced to sexuality or sexual practices (Frohn 2007, Köllen 2012, Losert 2010, Wrenn 1988). An over-sexualization of gays and lesbians, and the assumption that asexuality is a criterion for a professional and productive workplace, results in the perception that a homosexual identity is a crossing of boundaries, and also that gay employees are less productive, if not a hindrance for the company (Köllen 2010). Since one's sexual identity is an invisible trait of one's identity (Clair et al. 2005, Goffman 2001), and because of the prevalent idea that every person possesses a clear gender identity with sexual attraction solely to the opposite sex (heteronormativity, cf. Degele 2008, Tuijter and Tietz 2003), dialogues are based on the assumption that any relationship matter refers to partners of different sexes. In this way, differing modes of behavior and lifestyles are seen as deficient and require an explanation (Köllen 2010). Due to heteronormative expectations and possible stigmatization, gay and lesbian employees are regularly confronted with situations, which require them to evaluate the extent to which they can openly express their sexual identity. This is a lifelong issue, which can turn the handling of one's identity at the workplace into a constant challenge.

In Germany, only a few quantitative studies – in addition to some qualitatively orientated works – have dealt exclusively with the job situation of gay and lesbian employees (Knoll et al. 1997, Frohn 2007, Köllen 2010, 2015). Building on each other, the studies by Knoll et al. (1997) and Frohn (2007) illustrate that the majority of gay and lesbian employees report at least one form of discrimination at their workplace due to their sexual identity, and that more than half of them keep their sexual identity a secret from their colleagues (Frohn 2007, Knoll et al. 1997). Frohn (2007) was the first to systematically observe the handling of one's sexual identity in the workplace and highlighted a negative correlation between openness and psychosomatic conditions, as well as a positive correlation between free resources, job satisfaction, commitment and organization-based self esteem. Furthermore, he showed that proactive diversity management that involves sexual identity, and an open organizational culture, are associated with open-minded interactions (Frohn, 2007).

How one handles his or her sexual identity can be distinguished in attitudinal and behavioral dimensions (Frohn 2007). Attitude can be described as a stable mindset that spans multiple situations, while behavior refers to the act of dealing with one's sexual identity during one's everyday work. Since sexual identity is a relatively invisible dimension of identity, there are numerous possible behaviors that gay employees could exhibit in front of colleagues and superiors. These behaviors are applied to different extents (Clair et al. 2005, Goffman 1963, Maas 1999, Köllen 2010), which range from *revealing* to *hiding*, depending on contextual factors and individual differences (Clair et al. 2005). Contextual conditions have been taken into account in previous research (cf. Chrobot-Mason et al. 2001, Derlega et al. 1993, Frohn 2007, Köllen 2010). Individual differences, however, have rarely been looked at systematically (Clair et al. 2005, Frohn 2013, 2014a, b). Therefore, in order to develop a deeper understanding of the handling of one's sexual identity in the

² The term sexual identity is used in the article instead of sexual orientation, because it goes beyond the mere direction of desire and indicates a person's self-understanding.

workplace, this study focuses on self-representation as a personality disposition that leads to a more or less open approach to one's own sexual identity. This study investigates the influence of openness on an individual's level of stress, depending on perceived discrimination in various situations.

2 Self-Representation and Openness About Sexual Identity

According to Laux and Renner (2002), two forms of self-representation can be distinguished: an acquisitive style, and a protective style, which represent varieties of the motivational pairs *hope to succeed* and *dread of failure* (Arkin 1981, Laux and Renner 2002). An individual of the acquisitive type engages in social interaction assuming that he or she will be rewarded if he or she succeeds in presenting him- or herself well, according to the circumstances. On the contrary, an individual of the protective type strives to avoid disapproval within social interaction (Arkin 1981, Frohn 2013, Laux and Renner 2002, Lennox and Cutler 1986). If the handling of sexual identity is thought of as a continuum between two poles of secretive and open (Clair et al. 2005, Frohn 2007, Köllen 2010), it seems that the bimodal model of self-representation contains both of these characteristics of the handling of one's sexual identity. As Frohn (2013) has already asserted, an acquisitive style of self-representation is likely to be associated with a more open handling of one's sexual identity, while a protective tendency is likely to be associated with a more secretive handling.

Hypothesis 1: A person's dispositional tendency of self-representation correlates with an open attitude towards sexual identity:

- a. A more protective self-representation results in an attitude that values a less open approach.
- b. A more acquisitive self-representation results in an attitude that values a more open approach.

In addition, the type of self-representation should not only have a direct causal impact on the attitude, but, by influencing the attitude, have an indirect impact on actions and behavior.

Hypothesis 2: The attitude towards the handling of one's sexual identity mediates the relationship between one's dispositional tendency towards self-representation and openness regarding sexual identity on the behavioral dimension:

- a. Mediated by the attitude towards the handling of one's sexual identity, a more protective self-representation is accompanied by less openness on the behavioral dimension.
- b. Mediated by the attitude towards the handling of one's sexual identity, a more acquisitive self-representation is accompanied by more openness on the behavioral dimension.

3 Openness Regarding Sexual Identity and Stress

Gay and lesbian employees think about their behavior and their communication regarding their sexual identity to varying degrees, in order to deal with occupational stress (Frohn 2007, Clair et al. 2005). Because this is an individual's reaction to external factors of stress, it can be considered psychological stress according to DIN EN ISO 10075-1 (Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsschutz und Arbeitsmedizin 2014,

International Organization for Standardization 2014). A onetime retrospective record of the correlation between openness and stress (Frohn 2007) allows for conclusions to be drawn regarding the differences between various people. It is to be expected that over the course of various situations in everyday working life, a person's openness on the behavioral dimension will vary, depending on both the situation and the person, and thus several states of stress will be involved.

Hypothesis 3: A higher openness in the behavioral dimension regarding one's sexual identity results in less stress.

Experienced discrimination is strikingly correlated with contextual conditions such as the working climate, and can influence openness negatively. However, there will, nevertheless, also be people who are still open about their sexual identity despite anticipated discrimination and its possible consequences, because of a strongly acquisitive style of self-representation. In these cases, it is believed that the negative correlation between openness and stress is reversed. A high openness, despite strongly experienced discrimination, is likely to result in more stress, since the perceived discrimination involves the anticipation of negative effects for the self.

Hypothesis 4: The experience of discrimination moderates the correlation between openness regarding one's sexual identity (behavioral dimension) and stress, so that a low experience of discrimination creates a negative correlation between openness regarding one's sexual identity and stress, while a high experience of discrimination creates a positive correlation between the two.

Fig. 1 illustrates the hypotheses in a conceptual *framework model*.

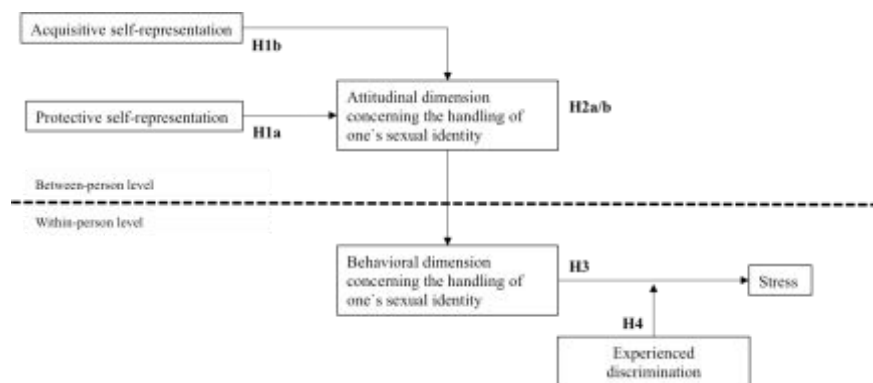


Fig. 1 Conceptual model of hypotheses

4 Method

In order to test the hypotheses, an event-sampling diary method was used to record situation-bound data per person over several points in time (for an overview of diary methodology cf. Bolger, Davis and Rafaeli 2003, Ohly et al.2010, Reis and Gable 2000), so that a multi-level design with two levels was used.

4.1 Sample

Given the fact that, so far, little verified data on the population of gay and lesbians exists, and thus the share among the entire general population can only be estimated,

most authors generally question the possibility of representativeness in this field (cp. Buba and Vascovics 2001, Sullivan and Losberg 2003, Frohn 2007, Köllen 2010). In order to acquire a sample that is as comprehensive as possible and to reduce bias, various ways of distributing the questionnaire were chosen. Through the distribution of “Out im Office?!” by Frohn (2007), people who had previously agreed to participate in follow-up studies were contacted. In addition, several lesbian and gay organizations, the employee networks of numerous companies, anti-discrimination organizations, and the gay press promoted the study.

The first study's home page was visited by 1058 people, of which 182 people went through the entire process over the course of seven points of data acquisition. Hetero-, bi- and asexual participants, as well as intersexual and transgender people, were excluded from data analysis, because their job and life situations were expected to differ from that of gay and lesbian participants (Barclay and Scott 2006, Barker and Langdrige 2008, Frohn 2007, 2013, 2014a, Köllen 2010, 2012). In addition, the number of subsamples in these subgroups was so low that it would not have been possible to make generalizations about that data. The final interpretation takes into account the data of 322 people. The sample consists of 98 lesbians and 224 gay men. This corresponds with the common gender distribution among lesbian and gay samples (cp. Knoll et al. 1997, Frohn 2007). The participants' age ranged from 18 to 65 years ($M = 39.21$, $SD = 10.11$). Interestingly, at a rate of 68.3% the majority of study participants had attained the entrance qualification for higher education, which indicates a middle-class bias that is found in most lesbian and gay samples (cp. Knoll et al. 1997, DAH 2004, Frohn 2007).

4.2 Collection of Data

The collection of data took place online using the EFS survey software from mid-June until mid-September 2014. Participants were allowed to freely determine the starting date. It took about three weeks to run through all seven points of data measurement and the overall duration did not exceed 45 minutes. The study comprised of two phases. Using the link that had been sent out via several distributors, participants were introduced to the first phase, which comprised a onetime collection of demographic data and e-mail addresses. In addition, participants were asked to answer questions that compiled information regarding protective and acquisitive self-representation and their attitude towards the handling of sexual identity. E-mail addresses were necessary in order to send out links leading to the following questionnaires. Seven days later, the participants were sent an e-mail containing the first questionnaire of the second phase, which comprised six points of measurement. They were given a new link to the next questionnaire three days after the completion of the previous section. At the beginning of each survey, the participants were asked to think of any situation within the past few days that allowed someone to infer information regarding their sexual identity. If they recalled multiple situations, they were asked to choose the one that they considered to be the most relevant. If they had an experience, they were given various questions concerning the behavioral dimension, stress, and experienced discrimination, which had to be answered according to the specific situation they had chosen. If they had not experienced such a situation, it was possible for them to say so, and they were then taken to the end of the respective survey via a filter.

4.3 Questionnaires

Previously established and validated instruments were used for collection of personal types of self-representation and the attitudinal dimension. To gather data on the

behavioral dimension, stress and experienced discrimination, items were predominantly orientated towards existing scales. Two-pole items were designed for stress and the level of behavior, enabling the participants to answer via a slider bar. The scales ranged from 0 to 100. However, participants were only able to see the slider, not the scale itself.

4.3.1 Types of Self-Representation

In order to capture data on both the acquisitive style and the protective style of self-representation, German-language adaptations of the *Revised Self-Monitoring Scale* and the *Concern for Appropriateness Scale* were used (Laux and Renner 2002). These scales consist of 12 statements, each of them involving a four-level format of answers ranging from 1 (*does not apply at all*) to 4 (*applies completely*). An example item for the collection of acquisitive self-representation data is “I have had the experience that I can control my behavior so that I can live up to the expectations of any situation” and an example for the protective self-representation is “To avoid disapproval, I exhibit completely different aspects of my personality towards various people”.

4.3.2 Attitudinal Dimension Regarding the Handling of One's Sexual Identity

For the measurement of attitude, a questionnaire was used that had already been approved by Frohn (2007). It was based on six items that were again accompanied by a four-level format of answers ranging from 1 (*does not apply at all*) to 4 (*applies fully*). An example item is “I handle my sexual identity openly at work”. Higher measurements signify an attitude that aims at higher openness.

4.3.3 Behavioral Dimension Regarding the Handling of One's Sexual Identity

To achieve a consistency between the behavioral scale and the attitudinal one in accordance with Frohn (2007), statements by respective poles (open – secretive) were adjusted to Frohn's scale, but were formulated in a behavioral way. Fig. 2 shows the item that measured behavior as it was presented to the study's participants.



Fig. 2 Item measuring the behavioral dimension regarding one's sexual identity with the two poles of conceal and reveal

4.3.4 Stress

Stress was differentiated into emotional, cognitive and temporal dimensions. Since emotional stress can be understood as a state of anxiety (Wieland-Eckelmann et al. 1999), and such a state coincides with experiences reported by gays and lesbians with regards to the handling of their sexual identity, and in the context of coming-out situations (Rosario et al. 2001, Watzlawick and Heine 2009), emotional stress was measured with an item on anxiety (“Did you feel anxious as a result of the situation?”) which could be answered via a slider between the two poles *very slight* and *very strong*. Psychological job analysis methods often operationalize cognitive

stress via the ability to concentrate and to relax (Dunkel 1999). Therefore, cognitive stress was operationalized by one of these two qualities (concentrate, relax), which were based on already established items (Frohn 2007, Mohr et al.2005). For the evaluation of the temporal dimension, a new item was designed. Using a slider, which included the time span of *less than 5 minutes* up to *more than 30 minutes*, this item captured the amount of time that the study participants spent contemplating their handling of their sexual identity. Over the course of six different points of measurement, an average Cronbach's α of .93 (range between .90 and .95) was detected for these three dimensions. Fig. 3 depicts the items that captured cognitive and temporal stress.

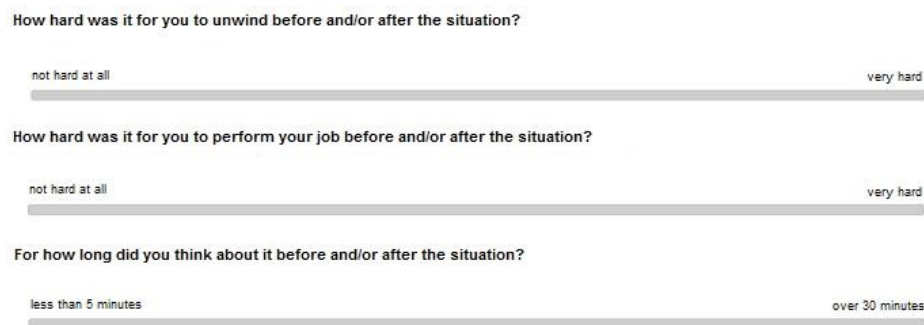


Fig. 3 Items to capture cognitive and temporal stress

4.3.5 Experience of Discrimination

Since the question of discrimination often involves a self-serving bias, the question of perceived acceptance was included as well. Perceived discrimination (“I perceived the situation as discriminating”) and acceptance (“I felt accepted in that situation”) were answered on a four-level scale ranging from 1 (*does not apply at all*) to 4 (*applies fully*). With an inverted acceptance the two items' average correlation over six points of measurement was .43 (range of significant correlations between .37 and .51). Higher measurements of both items represent a higher experience of discrimination in the respective situation.

4.4 Data Analysis

The hypotheses' evaluation included all gay and lesbian participants who had reported at least one relevant situation, so that the analysis comprised 277 people in total. Points of measurement in which none of the participants reported any relevant situation were excluded from the evaluation. In order to meet the requirements of data dependency, Mplus 6.0 (Muthén and Muthén 2012) multi-level analyses with a maximum-likelihood estimation method were used. The variables captured by sliders were divided by 10 to achieve a better comparability of all scales used. In line with the recommendations of Hofman and Gavin (1998) all multiply collected predictors and moderators for the testing of hypotheses of the within-person level were centered based on each person's mean value. In order to test the moderation hypothesis, the interaction term had to be significant and the context had to match the predicted presumptions. On the basis of Snijders and Bosker (1999), pseudo- R^2 was made the effect size. Pseudo- R^2 indicates the share of the total variance (level 1 plus level 2

variance) for the dependent variable based on added predictors (Snijders and Bosker 1999, Bryk and Raudenbusch 2002). R^2 is the measure for the effect size concerning the testing of the first hypothesis.

5 Conclusions

Looking closer at the situations experienced by the 322 participants reveals that, at a rate of 44.9%, the answer “I have not experienced such a situation since the last survey” is the most frequently chosen answer, followed by “situation experienced in conversations with colleagues” (33.9%). Table 1 depicts the analyzed variables' descriptive statistics and correlations of all 277 participants whose data was used for the hypothesis testing, and also depicts intra-class correlations (the “ICC”; that is, the proportion of a dependent variable’s variance that can be explained by the observation unit). In diary studies, the ICC measurement represents the variance share in a dependent variable, which is affiliated with differences between the people (Klein and Kozłowski 2000, Nohe et al. 2014). The occurring intra-class correlations indicate the data's dependency within a person and thus point to the necessity to consider the data hierarchy by means of adequate multi-level models.

5.1 Analysis of Between-Person Main Effects: Self-Representation and the Attitudinal Dimension

It was presumed that the protective and acquisitive types of self-representation influence the attitude towards one's handling of sexual identity (Hypothesis 1a/b). To test this hypothesis, a model with a multiple regression from the attitudinal dimension to the protective and acquisitive self-representation was used. As hypothesis 1a assumes, higher measurements of a protective self-representation are linked to lower measurements of the attitude

Table 1 Descriptive statistics, correlations of variables and intra-class correlations.

	M	SD	ICC	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Protective self-representation	1.95	.49	--	1						
2. Acquisitive self-representation	2.74	.45	--	.23***	1					
3. Attitudinal dimension concerning the handling of sexual identity	3.23	.69	--	-.47***	-.04	1				
4. Behavioral dimension concerning the handling of sexual identity	7.53	2.85	.64	-.34***	-.01	.65***	1			
5. Stress	1.95	2.28	.64	.45***	.05	-.41***	-.37***	1		
6. Experienced discrimination	1.43	.61	.29	.25***	-.04	-.37***	-.41***	.49***	1	
7. Age	38.87	10	--	-.25***	-.20***	.10	.07	-.21**	.05	1
8. Sexual identity	1.69	.46	--	.00	.03	-.08	.00	-.08	-.02	.09

Annotations: The correlations for within-person level variables are based on participants' mean value (N=277). Cf. results section for a detailed explanation of intra-class correlations (ICC). Experience (1=yes, 2=no) and sexual identity (1=lesbian, 2=gay) were gathered categorically. * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$, **** $p < .001$.

dimension ($b = -.737, p < .001$). At the same time, higher measurements of the acquisitive self-representation involve higher measurements of the attitude dimension ($b = .234, p < .01$), as suggested in hypothesis 1b. The effect size R^2 was 0.244. These findings therefore verify both parts *a* and *b* of the first hypothesis.

5.2 Analysis of Cross-Level Mediation: Self-Representation and the Behavioral Dimension

Hypothesis 2 assumed that the correlation of the protective and acquisitive self-representation with the behavioral dimension is mediated by the attitudinal dimension of handling one's sexual identity. In order to test this hypothesis, a full-mediation model was compared to a partial-mediation model. Therefore, a mediation model that included the direct paths between acquisitive and protective self-representation and behavior (partial-mediation model), was compared to a model without those direct paths (full-mediation model). Since no significant difference became evident between the two models ($\Delta-2 \times \log = 1.202; \Delta df = 2; n.s.$), the most economical model without direct paths was used for the testing of the second hypothesis. In this model, the correlation between protective self-representation and the behavioral dimension was significantly negative (path a1; $b = -.677, p < 0.001$). The relationship between acquisitive self-representation and the attitudinal dimension was not significant (path a2; $b = .111; n.s.$). The attitudinal dimension and the behavioral dimension showed a significantly positive correlation (path b; $b = 2.665, p < 0.001$). In order to quantify the indirect effects of protective and acquisitive self-representation to the behavioral and attitudinal dimensions, a product-of-coefficients method was applied. The coefficient of path *a* was multiplied by the coefficient of path *b* (Mac Kinnon et al. 2002). The analyses resulted in a significant indirect effect concerning the protective self-representation and the behavior (path a1*b; $b = -1.803, p < .001$). Regarding hypothesis 2a, the conditions for a mediation are met (Baron and Kenny 1986, Hayes 2009), so that it can be considered verified. No significant indirect effect was indicated with regards to an indirect correlation between acquisitive self-representation and behavior (path a2*b; $b = .297, n.s.$). Therefore, hypothesis 2b could not be verified.

5.3 Analysis of Within-Person Main Effects and Moderation Effects: Behavioral Dimension and Stress

Hypothesis 3 claimed that a higher openness of the behavioral dimension involves less stress. In order to verify the hypothesis, a model with a regression from stress to the behavioral dimension was used. As shown in table 2, model 1 shows a better fit than the null model concerning the data ($\Delta-2 \times \log = 18.284; \Delta df = 1; p < .001$). Consistent with the hypothesis, a higher openness of the behavioral dimension involves less stress ($b = -.157, p < .001$) so that hypothesis 3 can be accepted.

Based on this, hypothesis 4 assumed that the negative correlation between the behavioral dimension and stress is moderated by experienced discrimination. To test this hypothesis, several nested models with stress as a dependent variable were compared, as shown in table 2. The analyses found that the data fit model 2 better than model 1, because it also includes experienced discrimination separate to the behavioral dimension as a predictor ($\Delta-2 \times \log = 147.748; \Delta df = 1; p < .001$). Model 3, which also includes the interaction term between the behavioral dimension and experienced discrimination, did not show a better fit concerning the data in comparison to model 2 ($\Delta-2 \times \log = 3.698; \Delta df = 1; n.s.$). The low pseudo- R^2 corresponds to these findings, but it indicates a tendency towards additional explanation of variance, which could be achieved by including the interaction term. A significantly negative interaction term

was found ($b = -.165$, $p < .01$). Stress is higher depending on the amount of experienced discrimination. Contrary to expectations, the negative correlation between behavioral dimension and stress (higher openness – less stress) is amplified by a high experience of discrimination (see fig. 4). Hypothesis 4 could therefore not be verified.

Table 2 Main effects and moderational effects of the behavioral dimension concerning the handling of the sexual identity and experienced discrimination on stress (hypotheses 3 and 4).

	Model 1 Main effect behavioral dimension		Model 2 Main effects behavioral dimension, experienced discrimination		Model 3 Moderational effect	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Level 1 variables						
behavioral dimension	-.157***	0.027	-.107***	0.026	-.095**	0.029
experienced discrimination			0.885***	0.079	0.869***	0.084
behavioral dimension × experienced discrimination					-.165**	0.061
-2×log-likelihood (df)	3052.1 (4)		2904.352 (5)		2900.654 (6)	
Δ-2×log-likelihood (Δdf)	18.284*** (1)		147.748*** (1)		3.698† (1)	
Level 1 error variance (SE)	2.050 (0.073)		1.893 (0.080)		1.885 (0.081)	
Level 2 error variance (SE)	3.795 (0.567)		3.693 (0.546)		3.667 (0.542)	
Pseudo- R^2	.006		0.050		0.056	

Annotations. Model 1 was compared to a null model with the intercept as the only predictor, $y = 1.891$; $SE = 0.237$; $-2 \times \log = 3070.384$; $df = 3$. Level 1 error variance = 2.136; $SE = 0.068$. Level 2 error variance = 3.746; $SE = 0.563$. Reported unstandardized coefficients. Pseudo- R^2 based on Snijders und Bosker (1999).

† $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

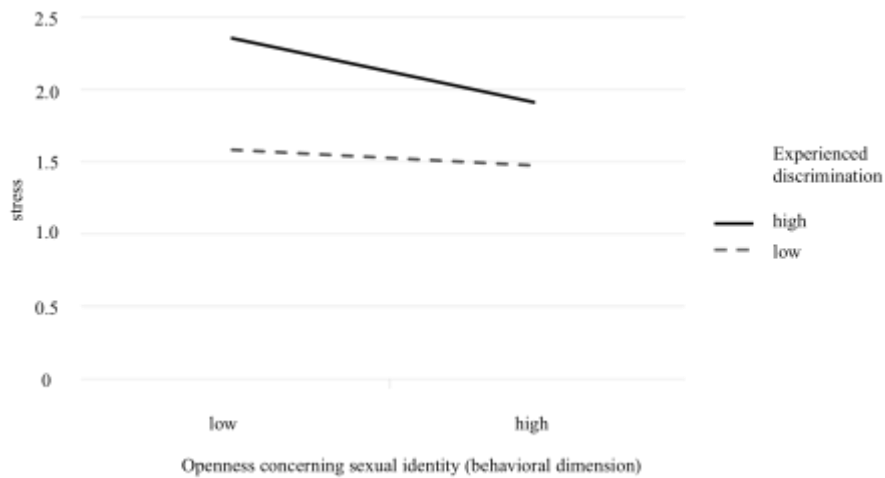


Fig. 4 Interaction of behavioral dimension and experienced discrimination with stress

6 Discussion

This paper is the first to allow quantitative statements about the interrelation of self-representation as a personality disposition with an open approach to one's own sexual identity. It also analyzes perceived stress on an everyday behavioral level. As expected, a stronger protective self-representation resulted in less openness on the attitudinal level, while a stronger acquisitive self-representation involved more openness. It was also affirmed that a protective self-representation, via the attitudinal dimension, resulted in less open behavior. The presumption that a higher openness is associated with less psychological stress could be verified for the behavioral dimension. This negative correlation was further amplified by a more strongly experienced discrimination.

6.1 Implications

The type of self-representation seems to be a central element in determining a person's degree of openness. Since only protective self-representation indirectly affects the behavioral dimension via the attitudinal dimension, protective self-representation appears to be a particularly central factor. The fear of social stigmatization characterizes one's attitude towards the handling of one's sexual identity and proves to be the driving force behind behavior in various situations. Findings of a negative correlation between openness and stress complete previous studies by proving that this correlation also exists on a within-person level. A gay man or lesbian will experience less stress when exhibiting more openness regarding their sexual identity. Furthermore, it became evident that, independent of the degree of openness, a higher experience of discrimination involves more stress. The difference in stress between employees who are open about their gay or lesbian identity, and those who are covert about it, is reinforced by a high experience of discrimination. Keeping one's own gay or lesbian identity a secret results in extreme stress, since a high degree of self-monitoring is considered to be necessary. This, again, consumes cognitive capacities and brings about a decrease in concentration, and an increase in distraction. This points to previous findings that less open behavior is related to a loss of efficiency (Powers and Ellis 1995, Ellis and Riggle 1995, Ellis 1996, Barreto et al. 2006). These findings

emphasize how important it is for organizations to promote a supportive workplace culture, in order to encourage open behavior (Derlega et al. 1993, Chrobot-Mason et al. 2001, Frohn 2007, Köllen 2012) and to prevent negative consequences (Frohn 2007). It is therefore not only reasonable and necessary to accept gay employees from an ethical and legal perspective, but also in the interest of a sustainable and productive business (Frohn 2007).

6.2 Limitations

The use of an event-sampling diary method allows for conclusions regarding the behavior and the inner states of gay employees within their job environment. Its external validity can thus be considered very high. In spite of this, however, some potential limitations arise. Influences of common method effects on the observed correlations cannot be ruled out (for an overview of common method effects see Podsakoff 2003). Participants' implicit theories on correlations and emotional states due to past incidents, or other personal properties, can result in measuring inaccuracies. Generally, correlations could trace back to individual differences in negative affectivity or neuroticism, and the design does not allow for causal conclusions. Further experiments are necessary in order to make a causal statement. In addition, variables were measured through self-reports, as is common in most diary methodologies, but which can of course involve a self-serving bias (Bolger et al. 2003, Ohly et al. 2010, Nohe et al. 2014). That being said, a diary method seemed favorable compared to one-time questionnaires, since it reduces errors in measurement and retrospective bias (Ohly et al. 2010).

The assessed situations were mostly related to conversations with colleagues and were depicted as comparable to previously experienced situations, which made them appear familiar and for this reason probably easier to handle. It should also be mentioned that the participants were characterized by a high level of openness. For interpreting the results it is important to take this into consideration, because for the bulk of the participants, the handling of one's sexual identity is, in all likelihood, a familiar situation. These conditions can explain why a high experience of discrimination and a high openness involve less stress. A longer survey period would thus be preferable, in order to achieve a higher variation of situations. For openly gay employees, more discrimination could result in more stress in unfamiliar situations.

Generally, it should be noted that a gay man or lesbian who exhibits a strongly acquisitive self-representation might interpret a situation differently, compared to an individual who exhibits a strongly protective tendency of self-representation. As a result, they might subjectively perceive certain situations as less discriminating or stressful.

6.3 Future research

Even though this study provides an important insight into individual personality psychology based dynamics of openness regarding one's sexual identity in the workplace, more research is necessary in order to fully understand the phenomenon. Until now, it has been assumed that the behavior of gay and lesbian employees in different situations is determined by their attitude. This, however, neglects the fact that certain occurrences might result in a deviation from one's usual attitude. This discrepancy could result in more stress due to an emerging cognitive dissonance (for an overview of cognitive dissonance see Festinger 1957) – a case which should be looked at in the future.

This paper analyzed types of self-representation as a personality disposition for

openness regarding sexual identity in the workplace. For a better understanding of the causes which bring about such an open approach, other personal traits such as willingness to take a risk (Claire et al. 2005), or the attribution style (Frohn 2013), and also various motivational structures (Clair et al. 2005, Frohn 2013), would be of interest in the future. In this context, the Big Five should be considered as well, in order to analyze dimensions of personality, and an open attitude and behavior. As the relationship between stressful situations and experiencing stress is strongly explained by the trait neuroticism, which is often described as emotional instability, this can be considered as an important factor with regards to the observed findings on self-representation, openness with one's sexual identity and stress (Bolger and Schilling 1991; for an overview of neuroticism confer Henning 2005).

In the context of the history of LGBT*-movement, lesbians and gay men increasingly assert their sexual identity and demand to be treated in a more appropriate and respectful manner (Frohn 2014a, b). Therefore it makes sense to not only investigate deficits, which focus on stress in everyday work, but also resources and competencies, which are potentially brought about by specific biographical experiences or resilience factors (Frohn 2013, 2014a, b).

Bisexual and transgender people were not included in this study for the sake of a specific focus. A detailed investigation of both bisexual and transgender employees' situations – which have been almost completely neglected in the past – would be recommended for the future. The current state of research needs to be complemented by this perspective, in order to do justice to the social diversity in the field of sexual and gender identity. In the long term, an intersectional perspective of research, which looks at sexual identity, gender identity and also additional individual dimensions and their correlations, is desirable (Frohn 2014a, b).

7 References

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