

Employers less likely to interview openly gay men for job openings: study

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A new study suggests that openly gay men face substantial job discrimination in certain parts of the U.S.

The study, which is the largest of its kind to look at job discrimination against [gay men](#), found that employers in the South and Midwest were much less likely to offer an interview if an applicant's resume indicates that he is openly gay. Overall, the study found that gay applicants were 40 percent less likely to be granted an interview than their heterosexual counterparts.

"The results indicate that gay men encounter significant barriers in the [hiring process](#) because, at the initial point of contact, employers more readily disqualify openly gay applicants than equally qualified heterosexual applicants," writes the study's author, András Tilcsik of Harvard University.

The research will be published tomorrow (October 4) in the *American Journal of Sociology*.

For the study, Tilcsik sent two fictitious but realistic resumes to more than 1,700 entry-level, white collar job openings -- positions such as managers, business and financial analysts, sales representatives, customer service representatives, and administrative assistants. The two resumes were very similar in terms of the applicant's qualifications, but one resume for each opening mentioned that the applicant had been part of a gay organization in college.

"I chose an experience in a gay community organization that could not be easily dismissed as irrelevant to a job application," Tilcsik writes.

"Thus, instead of being just a member of a gay or lesbian campus organization, the applicant served as the elected treasurer for several semesters, managing the organization's financial operations."

The second resume Tilcsik sent listed experience in the "Progressive and Socialist Alliance" in place of the gay organization. Since employers are likely to associate both groups with left-leaning political views, Tilcsik could separate any "gay penalty" from the effects of political discrimination.

The results showed that applicants without the gay signal had an 11.5 percent chance of being called for an interview. However, gay applicants had only a 7.2 percent chance. That difference amounts to a 40 percent higher chance of the heterosexual applicant getting a call.

The callback gap varied widely according to the location of the job, Tilcsik found. In fact, most of the overall gap detected in the study was driven by the Southern and Midwestern states in the sample -- Texas, Florida, and Ohio. The Western and Northeastern states in the sample (California, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and New York) had only small and statistically insignificant callback gaps.

"This doesn't necessarily mean that there is no discrimination in those states, just that the callback gaps were small in the case of the jobs to which I sent applications," Tilcsik explained. "I think it's very plausible that, even in those states, there might be a large callback gap in some other [jobs](#), industries, or counties. What this does show is that discrimination in white-collar employment is substantially stronger for the Southern and Midwestern states in the sample."

The research also found that employers seeking stereotypically

heterosexual male traits were more likely to discriminate gay men. Gay applicants had lower callback rates when the employer described the ideal candidate for the job as "assertive," "aggressive," or "decisive.

"It seems, therefore, that the discrimination documented in this study is partly rooted in specific stereotypes and cannot be completely reduced to a general antipathy against gay employees," Tilcsik writes.

The technique Tilcsik used, known as audit study, has been used in the past to expose hiring prejudice based on race and on sex. This is the first major audit study to test the receptiveness of employers to gay male job applicants.

Understanding the ways in which these biases might operate at the interview stage of the employment process, or how they might apply to lesbian job seekers in the U.S., requires additional research, Tilcsik says.

More information: András Tilcsik, "Pride and Prejudice: Employment Discrimination against Openly Gay Men in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology* 117:2 (September 2011).

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