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Discrimination against Queer Women in the U.S. Workforce: A Résumé Audit Study

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Abstract

The author reports on the first study to use an audit method to ascertain whether discrimination occurs against queer women (relative to straight women) when they apply to jobs in the United States. A field experiment was conducted in which a pair of fictitious women's résumés were sent to apply to more than 800 administrative jobs from online job databases advertised by employers across four states. One woman's résumé was randomly assigned leadership experience at a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) student organization to signal queer identity, while the other résumé, a control, was assigned experience at another progressive student organization. Results reveal that the women with the LGBT indicator on their résumés were discriminated against compared with the other women, receiving about 30 percent fewer callbacks.

Keywords

inequality, sexuality, sexual orientation, discrimination, employment discrimination, field experiment

Introduction

Today, it is legal in 27 states to differentially compensate, not hire, not promote, or fire a nonfederal worker because of his or her sexual orientation and in 30 states to do so because of a person's gender identity (Human Rights Campaign 2015b). When job seeking, the first point of contact with the employer of interest is of utmost importance, as this is the first impression an employer receives of a candidate. As such, whether one is "out" as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT[1]) on one's résumé may be a crucial factor when applying for a job.

Thus far, the research conducted on LGBT discrimination in the workforce has included statistical comparisons of the wages of gay and bisexual male and female workers compared with those of their straight counterparts (which include controls for observable variables known to affect wages), examinations of legal complaints filed by LGBT workers, and a few experiments such as this one that attempt to measure discrimination directly. Although employment discrimination on the basis of LGBT identity has generated considerable scholarly and policy interest in recent years, limited research has examined hiring discrimination in the United States, and little to no research has examined hiring discrimination against LGBT (or queer[2]) women specifically.

Audit studies represent the gold standard for tactics in measuring hiring discrimination, but to date, there have been only two large-scale audit studies measuring discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the United States. In the first, Tilcsik (2011) focused only on gay male job seekers, providing no data on discrimination against queer women. In the second, Bailey, Wallace, and Wright (2013) included male and female candidates but restricted the women to represent only lesbian candidates, used only one job source when applying to positions, and restricted their experiment to gay-friendly and/or left-leaning metropolitan areas, thus providing limited insight into broader patterns of discrimination. I overcome these limitations by conducting the first large-scale audit study to measure hiring discrimination

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against queer women in the U.S. workforce, by using several different job source websites, and by placing the experiment in geographic areas with diverse legal and attitudinal profiles.

The lack of focus on queer women in previous U.S. employment discrimination studies also necessitates examination of the specific theories and stereotypes for reasons behind discriminating (or not discriminating) against queer women in particular, as discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity may not be the same for LGBT women as for LGBT men. For example, although most studies show that gay or bisexual men are disfavored in the labor market compared with straight men of equal qualifications, some studies provide evidence that queer women may in fact be favored over straight women in the labor force. Because of these differing results, it vital to conduct again previous large-scale résumé audit studies using queer female candidates to assess whether queer women are discriminated against as well when they apply to open positions in the United States. Accordingly, this study is the first to initiate experimental research on hiring discrimination against queer women in the United States compared with straight women of equal qualifications, addressing an important, powerful, and relevant issue that, if present, can lead to job insecurity and overall greater economic disadvantage.

To conduct this field experiment, I created two fictitious women's résumés similar in quality and experience, except that one of the women's résumés was manipulated to include an LGBT indicator. This indicator was included by listing a leadership position at an LGBT student organization on one woman's résumé as part of her work history, implying that she is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (or queer). The other woman's résumé served as a control and listed a leadership role at a non-LGBT organization in college. The two fictitious résumés were sent side by side, within two business days of each other, to employers advertising administrative positions online in the United States. I randomly assigned the LGBT indicator to one résumé each time I sent out the résumé pair, ensuring that even if the two applicants were not perceived as 100 percent equivalent, my experiment would still permit identification of the causal effect of the LGBT indicator. I recorded response rates from employers to examine whether the queer women (the women with the LGBT indicator) were less likely to be contacted for an interview than the nonqueer, or straight,[3] women after applying to the same job.

Using a résumé audit study design for this experiment strategically allows the study of direct discrimination against queer women who apply to jobs, by realistic measures. Before detailing my methods and presenting my findings, I review past research and summarize theories behind discrimination against queer women (or lack thereof) in the U.S. workforce.

Previous Résumé Audit Studies

An audit study is a simulated transaction under controlled conditions, in which two or more individuals are given similar qualifications and personas but differ on one observable demographic characteristic (such as sexual orientation), and the individuals are sent out in an attempt to measure discrimination directly. In contrast to studying reports of discrimination from employees themselves, which rely on subjective perceptions, the audit-study approach uses clear measures and experimental techniques to derive observable and realistic evidence of discrimination.

Just two large-scale audit studies to date have used résumés to examine whether discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation occurs in the U.S. hiring process. The first résumé audit experiment was conducted over a six-month period in 2005 by Tilcsik (2011), who sought to measure discrimination against gay men. He sent two fictitious men's résumés via e-mail to the same online job opening in seven states for full-time, entry-level positions on websites that were targeted at college seniors and recent graduates. The two candidates were recent college graduates, and their résumés were similar in quality and credentials; the only difference was that one man's résumé was a control, and one had a signal indicating that the man was gay. Tilcsik used membership of a gay and lesbian organization at the man's university to signal gay identity. Using three different recruitment websites, he applied to jobs in California, New York, Pennsylvania, Nevada, Florida, Ohio, and Texas. Upon completion of the experiment, Tilcsik found that overall, gay men (i.e., the men with the gay indicator) were 40 percent less likely to be contacted for an interview than straight men.

The second résumé audit study was conducted in the spring of 2010 by Bailey et al. (2013), who sent three fictitious résumés (one straight male, one straight female, and one gay or lesbian individual) to open positions using one recruitment website and randomized whether the gay or lesbian candidate was male or female. Gender was alternated by using male or female names, and the gay indicator was given by listing a position in a gay student organization, such as "University of Wisconsin, Gay-Lesbian Association," on the person's résumé. Bailey et al. found no discrimination against either gay men or lesbians compared with straight men and women after applying to jobs. However, in addition to using just one job source, CareerBuilder, which is known to draw employers from large and nationally known firms rather than small and local businesses, Bailey et al. used four large, metropolitan cities for their study: Philadelphia, Chicago, Dallas, and San Francisco. These four cities not only are large metropolises, but they also each have thriving queer communities, and three of the four states are "blue" (Democratic) states. This may have been the reason for the lack of discrimination observed in Philadelphia, Chicago, and San Francisco. The fourth city, Dallas, is commonly

referred to as a blue city in a red state; in 2011, it was labeled "one of the best places to be queer" in the United States and "a beacon of hope for queer Texans" (Cronk 2011). In San Francisco and Dallas, in fact, lesbian applicants were called back more than any other group of applicants, whereas in Philadelphia and Chicago, gay men were called back most often. Thus, perhaps Bailey et al. would have found discrimination if they had selected and applied to positions in smaller, more conservative areas, as well as diversified their job source. I address these issues in my research design.

Summary of Past Research and Theory on Workplace Discrimination against Queer Women

Past studies and theories about discrimination against queer women in the U.S. workforce have had differing findings. There is evidence that queer women could be favored over straight women in the labor market, in wage discrimination studies, some of which showed higher pay for lesbian and bisexual women compared with straight women (e.g., Berg and Lien 2002; Black et al. 2003; Blandford 2003); experimental studies, some of which showed higher competence ratings and hireability scores for lesbians compared with their straight female counterparts (e.g., Horvath and Ryan 2003; Watts n.d.); and research showing that lesbian and bisexual women are more successful in entering male-dominated, well-paid occupations than straight women (e.g., Blandford 2003). Additionally, common stereotypes associate lesbianism with "masculinity" (see Broverman et al. 1972; Johnson 1995; Martin 1990; Pelligrini 1992; Taylor 1983) and this may positively influence the hiring potential for queer women as well, as masculine-themed characteristics are valued in many business settings. Furthermore, studies have shown that queer women are less likely to have children than straight women (e.g., Blandford 2003; Elmslie and Tebaldi 2007), and this may lead employers to infer that queer women have a stronger attachment to their careers than straight women.

In contrast, there is evidence that queer women are disfavored in the labor market compared with straight women, as shown through lower pay for lesbian and bisexual women compared with straight women in one wage discrimination study (Badgett 1995); low reported salaries and high unemployment rates for transgender women (e.g., Grant, Mottet, and Tanis 2011); self-reports of experiencing workplace discrimination from LGBT women themselves, including being fired, not hired, or not promoted (Badgett et al. 2007; Rubenstein 2002); and evidence of negative views about the perceived competence and morality of being a queer woman (Watts n.d.; Webster, Hysom, and Fullmer 1998). Therefore, out queer women in the labor force could suffer from negative attitudes toward homosexuality and deviating from heteronormative gender roles or gender presentation, but they could also be favored in the labor market because of perceived stronger commitment and drive for their careers than heterosexual women (Elmslie and Tebaldi 2007). It is thus necessary to conduct research on hiring discrimination using queer female candidates to assess whether they are penalized when they apply to jobs compared with straight women of equal qualifications, as Tilcsik (2011) did for gay men, and also to use diverse job sources and geographic areas to obtain realistic measures of this possible rate of discrimination.

Methods

The Jobs, the Résumés, and the LGBT Indicator

In the spring of 2014, I conducted a field experiment in which I created two fictitious women's résumés that had different but similar qualifications and credentials. The two women's résumés were e-mailed to employers within two business days of each other in response to job advertisements for open administrative, clerical, or secretarial positions listed on job recruitment websites such as Craigslist, Monster, CareerBuilder, the *Washington Post*, and Idealist. The fictitious women were both college graduates with high grade point averages, both had a few years' relevant work experience, both had studied abroad, and both were generally attractive applicants for the administrative positions. The main difference in the résumés was that an LGBT indicator was placed on one woman's résumé to imply that this woman was LGBT, or queer.

The LGBT indicator was signaled by adding in the "experience" section a secretarial position in an LGBT student organization at the woman's university. The two schools I chose were Columbia University and Cornell University (two schools of high and, more important, similar rankings according to U.S. News & World Report 2014). The woman was listed either as the secretary of Cluster Q, Columbia's LGBT business association, or as the secretary of Haven, Cornell's LGBTQ student union. I chose these names because they are the actual names of these LGBT student organizations at the schools. Additionally, on the résumés, the phrase "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender" was spelled out to ensure that the hiring manager knew what the acronym stood for, in case he or she was not familiar with it. This LGBT leadership role on the woman's résumé allowed hiring managers to infer that the woman was herself a member of the LGBT, or queer, community.

Using a leadership position in a gay student organization as the indicator on a résumé is a best-practices approach common to almost all experimental studies that have used résumés to measure discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (Bailey et al. 2013; Horvath and Ryan 2003; Tilcsik 2011; Weichselbaumer 2003). Although all

of the studies mentioned above used gay and lesbian community organizations to signal gay identity, the language used for each indicator varied: Tilcsik (2011) used "Gay and Lesbian Alliance," Horvath and Ryan (2003) used "Gay Men's Alliance," Weichselbaumer (2003) used "Gay People's Alliance," and Bailey et al. (2013) used "Gay-Lesbian Association." However, the actual names of these organizations on college campuses tend to use the acronym *LGBT* instead of simply the term *gay* or *lesbian* as an inclusive organizational measure. I made the decision to use the real names of the LGBT organizations at Columbia and Cornell, in case a hiring manager was familiar with the student organizations on campus at either Cornell or Columbia. Thus, using an indicator with the acronym *LGBT* instead of just the word *gay* or *lesbian*, in contrast to the other studies, allowed employers to infer that the woman could be any member of the LGBT community, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. For this reason, when referring to the women with the LGBT indicator on their résumés, I use the term *queer* to include women of any LGBT identity.

The other résumé was a control résumé, on which a secretarial position at a student organization with progressive views was listed. The progressive control organization for the Columbia applicant was the Columbia Student Solidarity Network, and at Cornell it was the Cornell Organization for Labor Action, each a known progressive group on its respective campus. By using a progressive school organization as the control organization, my intent was to make it more likely that that any observed differences in contacting the women for an interview could be attributed to anti-LGBT discrimination, rather than discrimination against progressive or leftist views (Tilcsik 2011). Furthermore, by adding the LGBT indicator in the woman's "experience" section as a relevant work experience, as opposed to a less relevant volunteer experience or by way of a hobby or activity in the section on extracurricular activities (such as being part of an LGBT book club or an LGBT softball team), my aim was to make the LGBT indicator less likely to evoke discrimination on the basis of negative views about accentuating queer identity for irrelevant reasons.

The field of administrative work was chosen for the women because according to the U.S. Census Bureau, from 2006 to 2010, about 4 million workers fell under the category of "secretaries and administrative assistants," 96 percent of whom were women (Kurtz 2013), so applying in this field for the women is not atypical. Additionally, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014) predicted 12 percent growth between 2012 and 2022 for secretarial and administrative assistant positions. Although administrative or clerical work is not necessarily what recent college graduates are aspiring to, many recent graduates find that this type of position is what they can obtain.

In the spring of 2014, I regularly checked the five job recruitment websites listed earlier and applied to any open administrative, clerical, or secretarial position with the two women's résumés. The companies that advertised these open administrative positions included large corporate firms, nonprofit organizations, and small local businesses. To comply with institutional review board requirements, specific company names were not recorded, because the aim of this study was not to measure discrimination by a specific type of company but rather to measure whether discrimination occurs as a whole for queer women who apply to open positions in the United States compared with straight female candidates of equal qualifications.

Randomization, Cover Letters, and States Selected

Before sending each pair of résumés to the job opening, I randomly assigned the LGBT indicator to one of the résumés, and the other woman's résumé was assigned the control organization. This was done by flipping a coin. Although the résumés were created to be as identical as possible in qualifications, the randomization of which résumé was assigned the LGBT indicator for each application controlled for a systematic relationship between the qualities of the two résumés (Tilcsik 2011). I also alternated which of the two résumés, applicant A or applicant B, I sent out first.

More than 1,600 résumés were sent out over a three-month period in spring 2014 to administrative positions advertised in three states, New York, Virginia, and Tennessee, and in Washington, D.C. These four regions were chosen because they represent a diverse sample of the United States. Table 1 shows that in the spring of 2014, Washington, D.C., and New York were among the more progressive areas, offering the most rights and protections for LGBT individuals, whereas Tennessee and Virginia were more conservative states, offering almost no legal protections to LGBT individuals (Human Rights Campaign 2015b). Some examples include the fact that both New York and Washington, D.C., had marriage equality, whereas Tennessee and Virginia did not; both New York and Washington had statewide laws that prohibited workplace discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, whereas Tennessee and Virginia did not; and in New York and Washington, D.C., same-sex couples could jointly petition to adopt children statewide, but same-sex couples could not adopt in Virginia and Tennessee. I chose to conduct my experiment in two "liberal" and two "conservative" areas because discrimination may differ by region, in that there may be more discrimination in the conservative states but less in liberal ones.[4]

All four regions had relatively large numbers of administrative and clerical job postings on the recruitment websites.

Table 1. Current[a] Statewide Laws and/or Protections for LGBT Individuals, on the Basis of Gender Identity and/or Sexual Orientation.

Law or Protection	Washington, D.C.	New York	Virginia	Tennessee
Hospital visitation	Yes	Yes	No	No
Workplace discrimination	Yes	Yes	No	No
School bullying	Yes	Yes	No	No
Marriage equality	Yes	Yes	No	No
Adoption	Yes	Yes	No	No
Housing discrimination	Yes	Yes (sexual orientation only)	No	No
Hate crimes	Yes	Yes (sexual orientation only)	No	Yes (sexual orientation only)
Gender marker change[b]	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
School discrimination	Yes	No	No	No

[a]These were the current laws in place describing protections on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity in spring 2014, when I conducted the study. "Yes" indicates that the state or district held the law or protection on the basis of both sexual orientation and gender identity, unless otherwise specified. "No" indicates that the state or district did not hold the law or protection for either sexual orientation or gender identity.
[b]"Yes" here means that the state or district had laws that can facilitate a gender marker change on a driver's license or birth certificate for transgender individuals.

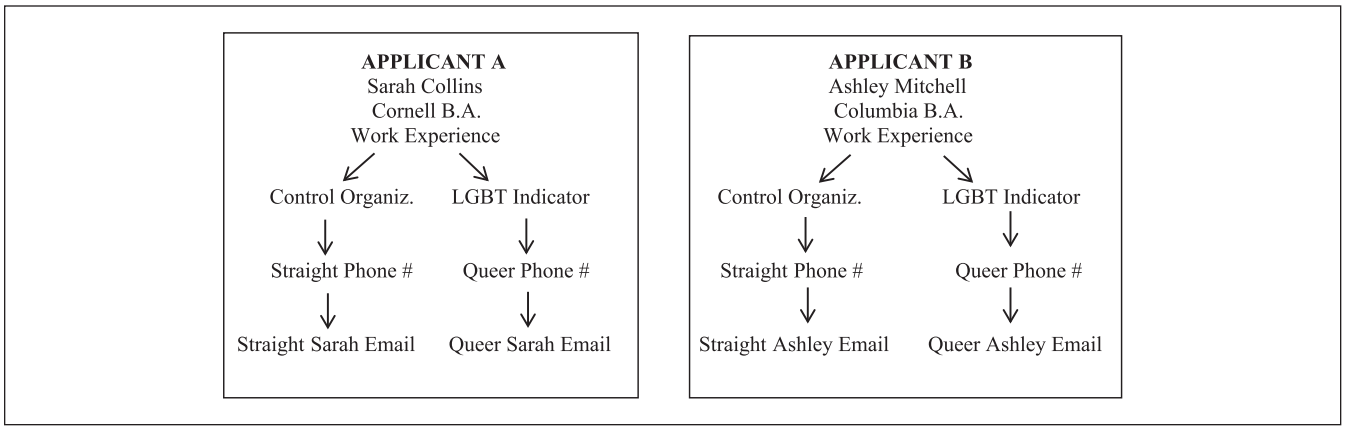

Figure 1. Résumé Templates.

I applied to 176 jobs in Washington, D.C., 192 jobs in Tennessee, 226 jobs in Virginia, and 223 jobs in New York.

Name Choice and Communication Logistics

In order not to establish any possible indicators of other discrimination, such as race discrimination, I chose common white female names for the fictitious women.[5] Phone numbers and e-mail addresses were created for the fictitious women so that employers would be able to contact the women if they decided to invite them for interviews. The e-mail addresses were created on a free e-mail service, Gmail.com, and they were combinations of the woman's first name, last name, and random numbers. Four e-mail addresses had to be created to be able to differentiate if the applicant was the straight or queer version, because the women's names were held constant while their LGBT identities alternated. Thus, two e-mail addresses were created for each woman, one queer version and one straight version, totaling four e-mail addresses. Additionally, two phone numbers were created using a phone voice messaging service, one for the queer version and one for the straight version of each woman. Figure 1 illustrates the four résumé templates created for the two applicants, applicant A and applicant B. Although the résumés were created to be as equal as possible, because I randomly assigned the LGBT indicator to one of the women's résumés before applying to each of the 800 jobs, I controlled for any unobserved difference or systematic relationship between the qualities of the two women's application materials (Tilcsik 2011).

Recording and Coding the Data

The pair of women's résumés were sent to administrative, clerical, and secretarial jobs advertised online across Virginia, Tennessee, New York, and Washington, D.C. I recorded whether the employer contacted the queer woman, the straight woman, neither, or both for an in-person

interview or a telephone interview. After the employer left a voicemail or sent an e-mail to an applicant inviting her to an interview or requesting more information from her, I coded this result 1 and then stopped the employer's involvement in the study by sending a polite e-mail indicating that the woman was no longer interested in the position. If e-mail was not available, I left a voicemail after business hours. The aim of this audit study was simply to assess whether queer women were less likely to be called back for an interview than straight women, not how far they could get in the application process. If there was no response from the employer to the candidate or if the response was a denial e-mail, it was coded 0.

I also recorded for each job the recruiting website, the city listed, the callback method (if a callback response was from an e-mail or a phone message), the number of days it took to get a callback after applying, whether the job was a "confidential" posting that did not indicate the specific company, and, last, whether the job was advertised by a staffing firm seeking to hire on behalf of another company. Most of these variables were used in my regression analysis as controls or independent variables of analytic interest.

Cases Dropped

I sent a total of 1,634 résumés to apply to 817 jobs. However, some of the jobs I applied to were in fact spam. This was made evident by the supposed employer's sending an e-mail response to the applicant asking for her credit card number or including a link in the e-mail and receiving a red flag from Gmail with the message "Warning: This email contains content that's typically used in spam messages." Thus, any response that came back as spam was dropped from the data. There were 34 spam responses in Tennessee, 10 in Virginia, 2 in Washington, D.C., and 0 in New York, for a total of 46 spam cases.

Additionally, some jobs were deleted before I could apply with the other applicant. For instance, if I had applied with applicant A's materials first and the job was deleted before I could apply with applicant B's materials, the case was dropped from the data to ensure that each applicant, whether queer or straight, had an equal and fair chance of being invited to an interview. Job postings that were deleted before I could apply with the second applicant resulted in the exclusion of 18 cases for Virginia, 8 in Washington, D.C., 6 in Tennessee, and 6 in New York, for a total of 38 deleted cases. Dropping the 46 spam cases and 38 deleted cases left me with 1,550 total cases (or 775 total jobs) to analyze.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 displays descriptive statistics on the women's callback rates between the queer and straight applicants. The total callback rate was 14 percent. When broken down by the LGBT indicator, the straight women had a 17 percent chance of being contacted for an interview, while the queer women had a 12 percent chance of being contacted. This is a difference of 5 percentage points, or about 29 percent. Also included in the table is a column to test the difference of means. If statistically significant, these results reject the null hypothesis that the queer and straight women were called back at the same rate. The difference-of-means test of the callbacks for queer versus straight women was statistically significant at $p < .01$, implying that the queer-perceived women were in fact discriminated against, as they were called back significantly less than the straight-perceived women.

Of the states, New York produced the most callbacks, with an 18 percent callback rate. This could most likely be attributed to the fact that the women listed home addresses in New York and went to New York schools, and most of their previous job experience was in New York, as companies are typically more willing to hire local than out-of-state applicants to avoid any relocation costs or any on-boarding delays. Virginia applications received the fewest callbacks, with a 10 percent overall callback rate. Every state or district's difference-of-means test for queer versus straight callbacks, except Virginia, was statistically significant at $p < .10$ (equivalent to $p < .05$ in a one-tailed test), implying that the queer women were discriminated against in New York, Washington, D.C., and Tennessee.

Applicant A was called back more often than applicant B (a 17 percent vs. 12 percent total callback rate, respectively). Although the résumés were created to be as equal as possible, employers seemed to prefer applicant A's application materials to applicant B's materials. However, the queer version of applicant A was consistently called back less often than the straight version of applicant A (14 percent vs. 19 percent), and the queer version of applicant B was consistently called back less often than the straight version of applicant B (10 percent vs. 14 percent). Difference-of-means tests for the queer version of each applicant compared with the straight version of each applicant were also statistically significant at $p < .05$ for applicant A and $p < .10$ for applicant B, implying that the versions of the women's résumés that included the LGBT indicator in fact produced significantly fewer callbacks than the versions without it, regardless of who the applicant was.

Regression Models and Variables

To further analyze the data, I turn to regression analysis. In my four regression models, the dependent variable is an indicator variable for whether the résumé led to a callback (i.e., whether the employer contacted the applicant either by phone or e-mail for an interview). The main independent variable in the models is the LGBT indicator (i.e., whether the woman was given the queer signal). To

Table 2. Mean Differences in Callback Rates.

	Straight Applicant	Queer Applicant	Difference	Total
Total				
Total résumés sent	775	775		1,550
Total callbacks	130	94		224
Percentage callbacks	17	12	5**	14
States				
New York résumés sent	220	220		440
New York callbacks	47	32		79
Percentage New York callbacks	21	15	6†	18
Tennessee résumés sent	172	172		344
Tennessee callbacks	29	18		47
Percentage Tennessee callbacks	17	10	7†	14
Virginia résumés sent	212	212		424
Virginia callbacks	19	22		41
Percentage Virginia callbacks	9	10	-1	10
D.C. résumés sent	171	171		342
D.C. callbacks	35	22		57
Percentage D.C. callbacks	20	13	7†	17
Applicant				
Applicant A sent	380	395		775
Percentage applicant A sent	49	51		100
Applicant A callbacks	74	56		130
Percentage applicant A callbacks	19	14	5*	17
Applicant B sent	395	380		775
Percent applicant B sent	51	49		100
Applicant B callbacks	56	38		94
Percentage applicant b callbacks	14	10	4†	12

Note: Difference-of-means tests were two tailed.
†$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

examine the variation of discrimination by state or district, I created indicator variables for Virginia, Tennessee, New York, and Washington, D.C. Similarly, to see if area-specific protections for LGBT people influenced the results, I created an indicator variable for the presence of laws or protections (coded 0 if the state or district had no protections for LGBT individuals in the workplace and 1 if it did). Because I used random assignment for the LGBT indicator variable, the need for controls in my regression analysis is less imperative than in other analyses. Nonetheless, I include controls in my models because postestimation testing revealed that the models performed slightly better with the inclusion of the control variables described in Table 3.

Model 1 was performed using logistic regression, with the LGBT indicator variable, the control variables, and state or district entered as independent variables. The dependent variable (callbacks) is an indicator variable for whether the résumé elicited an invitation to an interview. Model 1 seeks to assess whether the queer female applicants have lower odds of receiving a callback than straight female applicants while holding constant the state or district, staffing firm, whether the job was a confidential posting, whether the job was in an urban area, which website the job ad appeared on, and which of the two fictional résumés was sent. Model 2 is similar to model 1 except that instead of the state or district indicator variables, it includes an indicator variable for the presence of LGBT laws or protections (coded 0 if the state or district does not hold antidiscrimination protections in the workplace for LGBT individuals and 1 if it does).

Models 3 and 4 are identical to models 1 and 2, respectively, except that they also include interactions. Thus, model 3 is the same as model 1, but it includes interactions between state or district and the LGBT indicator variable. These interactions seek to assess whether regional differences by state or district affected differences in the callback rate for queer relative to straight women. Likewise, model 4 is the same as model 2, except that it also includes an interaction term between the law dummy variable and the LGBT indicator variable. This model seeks to assess whether employers located in states or districts with relevant antidiscrimination laws were less likely to discriminate against queer female applicants.

Table 3. Control Variables Used in All Regression Models.

Variable	Description
Urban	Urban is a dummy variable for whether the city where the job was located was an urbanized area. As defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, an urbanized area has a population of at least 50,000 people. Thus, any city whose population was >50,000 (in the 2010 census) was coded 1 for urban, and any city with a population of <50,000 was coded 0 for not urban. Of the 1,550 total cases, 312 cases were coded 0 for not urban, and 1,238 were coded 1 for urban.[a] I chose to include urban as a control variable because urban and rural environments may play a factor in callback rates.
Staffing firm	Staffing firm is a dummy variable for whether the job listing was from a staffing agency. Several listings for administrative positions were actually placed by staffing agencies recruiting for other companies. This could affect the likelihood of receiving a callback, because staffing firms may be more likely to contact applicants than actual employers. Of the 1,550 total cases, 1,446 cases were coded 0 for not a staffing firm, and 104 cases were coded 1 for staffing firm.
Confidential postings	Confidential is a dummy variable for whether the job listing was a confidential position, as some job listings did not specify companies but rather mentioned "a marketing firm" or "a small nonprofit." The reasons employers choose to advertise jobs confidentially may affect the callback rate for women, and thus I include it as a control variable. Of the 1,550 total cases, 1,098 cases were coded 0 for not confidential, and 452 cases were coded 1 for confidential.
Applicant	I included applicant as a control variable by creating a dummy variable for whether the applicant who applied to the position was applicant A (coded 0 for not applicant A and 1 for applicant A). I included applicant as a control to ensure that the rate of discrimination did not correlate with a specific applicant. Of the 1,550 total cases, 775 cases were coded 1 for applicant A.
Job source	Job source was included as a control to ensure that the rate of discrimination did not correlate with a specific job recruitment website. I created dummy variables, coded 0 and 1, for each website of Craigslist, Monster, Idealist, the *Washington Post*, and CareerBuilder. Of the 1,550 cases, 516 were coded 1 for Craigslist, 492 were coded 1 for CareerBuilder, 374 were coded 1 for Monster, 146 were coded 1 for Idealist, and 22 were coded 1 for the *Washington Post*.

[a]Of the 775 total jobs I applied to, 5 did not indicate cities but rather indicated "Westchester County." U.S. census data show that Westchester County is composed of 97 percent urban populations and 3 percent rural populations. On the basis of these data signifying an overwhelmingly urban environment, I decided to code these 5 jobs (10 cases) as urban, rather than completely deleting their cases from the analysis.

Regression Results

Regression results are displayed in Table 4. Note that coefficients have been exponentiated into odds ratios; an odds ratio larger than 1 indicates that the variable is positively associated with being contacted by an employer, whereas an odds ratio less than 1 indicates that the variable is negatively associated with being contacted by an employer.

The LGBT indicator variable (queer female) is statistically significant in model 1, with an odds ratio of .675. This regression thus reveals that after holding urban, staffing firms, state or districts, confidential position, applicant, and job source constant, listing a leadership role in an LGBT organization on a woman's résumé lowers her odds of being contacted by an employer by 32.5 percent.

Turning to the effects of model 1's control variables, New York is statistically significant and indicates that callback odds are about 2 times higher if the job was located in New York compared with Virginia. The indicator variable for applicant A is also statistically significant, indicating that applicant A's callback odds were about 1.5 times higher than those of applicant B. The results also reveal that no differences were detected in the rates of callbacks among job websites, for confidential postings, or in urban versus rural areas.

Model 2's regression results indicate that after holding urban, staffing firm, confidential position, applicant, and job source constant, an applicant who applied to a job in a state or district that had protections for LGBT individuals in the workplace (Washington, D.C., and New York) had 1.6 times higher odds of receiving a callback than if applying in states that did not extend protections for LGBT individuals at work (Tennessee and Virginia), regardless of perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. New York and Washington, D.C., elicited the largest numbers of callbacks out of the four regions, so these regression results are consistent with the bivariate finding. However, this finding may have little to do with the relevant laws in place and more to do with the location of the applicants. Because the applicants were based in New York, perhaps employers in New York and Washington, D.C., were more likely to contact the applicants as opposed to employers in Tennessee and Virginia solely because of distance, as Washington, D.C., and New York are closer in proximity than New York and Virginia or New York and Tennessee. Important to note is that in this model, the LGBT indicator is also statistically significant, as it was in model 1, again revealing that indicating a leadership role in an LGBT organization on a woman's résumé lowers her odds of being contacted by an employer by 32.5 percent.

Table 4. Odds Ratios for Logistic Regression Models Predicting a Callback (n = 1,550).

Main Effect	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Queer female	.675***	.675***	1.203	.811
	(.0662)	(.0661)	(.272)	(.119)
State/district				
New York	1.991*		2.730**	
	(.564)		(.856)	
Tennessee	1.339		1.908	
	(.417)		(.637)	
Washington, D.C.	1.714		2.440**	
	(.536)		(.828)	
Staffing firm	1.693	1.728	1.703	1.730
	(.564)	(.573)	(.568)	(.574)
Confidential	1.156	1.171	1.155	1.169
	(.276)	(.279)	(.277)	(.279)
Urban	1.103	1.208	1.103	1.207
	(.300)	(.312)	(.300)	(.311)
Applicant A	1.482***	1.480***	1.497***	1.483***
	(.144)	(.144)	(.147)	(.144)
Job source				
Craigslist	1.349	1.315	1.348	1.316
	(.329)	(.316)	(.330)	(.317)
Monster	.698	.687	.697	.689
	(.182)	(.179)	(.182)	(.179)
Washington Post	2.658	2.359	2.679	2.368
	(1.677)	(1.463)	(1.685)	(1.468)
Idealist	.848	.782	.845	.780
	(.343)	(.304)	(.343)	(.305)
Laws				
Law present		1.591*		1.826**
		(.321)		(.393)
Interactions				
Queer × New York			.512*	
			(.146)	
Queer × Tennessee			.465*	
			(.140)	
Queer × Washington, D.C.			.468*	
			(.141)	
Queer × Law Present				.732
				(.143)

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses and are clustered on job ad, because two résumés were sent for each ad. Virginia and CareerBuilder were omitted as reference categories.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

The interactions between state or district and the LGBT indicator variable in model 3 assess whether the effect of being a queer (rather than a straight) woman differed among regions. The results reveal that the effect of being a queer applicant is significantly more negative in New York, Tennessee, and Washington, D.C., than in Virginia. In fact, given that Virginia is the reference category in model 3 (containing the interaction), the nonsignificance of the LGBT indicator reveals that there was no discrimination in Virginia. This result is consistent with the descriptive data, as queer-identified résumés led to fewer callbacks than straight-identified résumés in every state except Virginia.[6]

In model 4, the interaction between the LGBT indicator and the presence of laws or protections is not significant, revealing that the two areas I chose that have relevant anti-discrimination laws for LGBT individuals in the workplace (New York and Washington, D.C.) are not less likely to discriminate against queer women. Given that discrimination did not differ across locations by whether

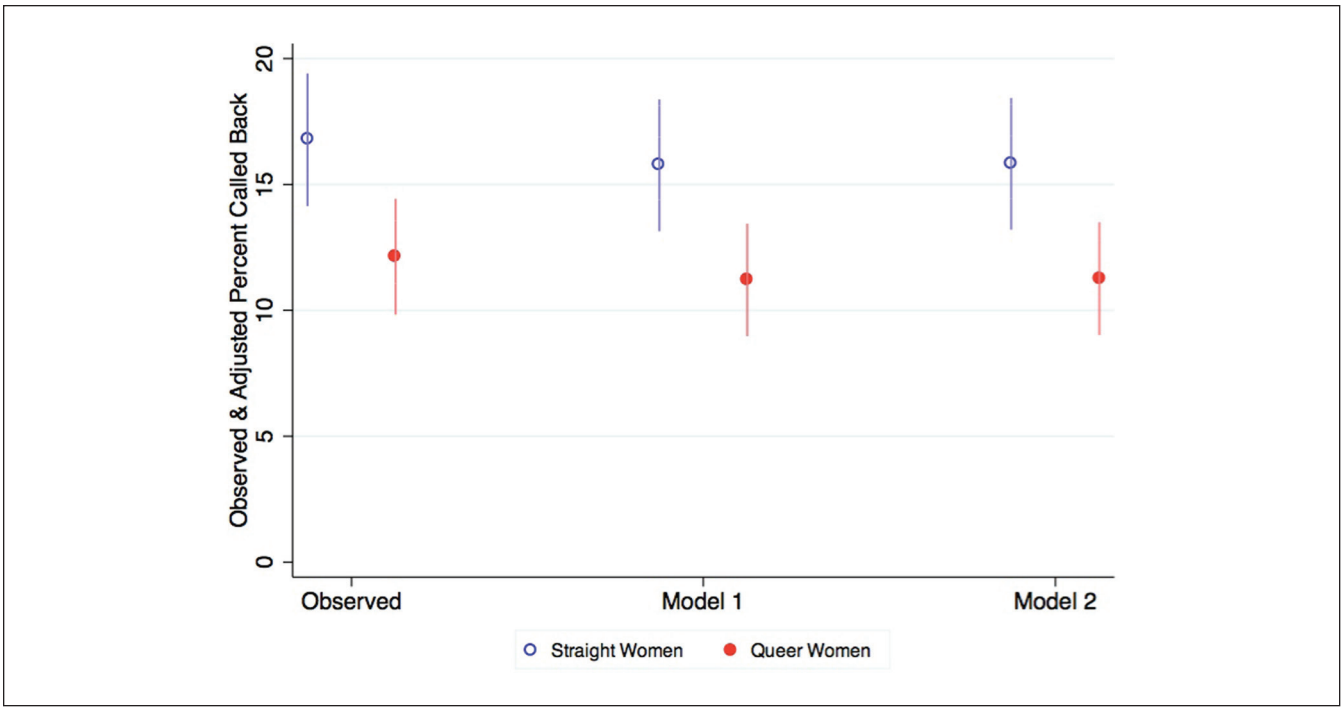

Figure 2. Observed and Predicted Probabilities of Callbacks.
Note: Predicted probabilities correspond to logistic regressions. Bars indicate confidence intervals at the 95 percent level.

antidiscrimination laws were present, and that it is unclear why Virginia had less (in fact, no) discrimination, I focus on the additive models.

For a visual summary of the main findings using the additive models, see Figure 2, which displays the observed callback rate by queer status, the predicted probability of receiving a callback by queer status, holding constant the main controls as well as state or district (regression model 1), and the predicted probability of receiving a callback by queer status, holding constant the main controls as well as relevant antidiscrimination laws (regression model 2), and includes confidence intervals. As the figure illustrates, in sum, this audit experiment found clear evidence of discrimination against queer women who apply to administrative jobs in the United States compared with straight women of equal qualifications.

Discussion

Like Tilcsik's (2011) study of hiring discrimination against gay men, my study revealed significant discrimination against queer women who apply to jobs in the United States. My results differ from Bailey et al.'s (2013) findings, however, as their study found no significant discrimination against either gay male applicants or lesbian applicants compared with their straight counterparts after applying to positions in San Francisco, Chicago, Dallas, and Philadelphia. The reason these results differ is hard to pinpoint, because of design differences. It could be because Bailey et al. used four cities that are large, metropolitan, and gay friendly, where hiring managers may be less likely to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation, as mentioned previously. However, this explanation is not entirely consistent with my results, because even in the gay-friendly metropolitan areas where I applied (New York and Washington, D.C.), the queer female applicants in my study were still called back significantly less often than the straight women. Yet another possibility is that the difference in the results of our two studies stems from the LGBT indicator, as my indicator was more comprehensive, including women of any queer identity. Because Bailey et al. used a student organization that just used the phrase "gay-lesbian," instead of "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender" as I did, inferences of the women as bisexual or transgender in my study, not necessarily just lesbians, could be a factor in the difference in our results. Furthermore, the difference could be attributed to the job sites used to apply to positions, also as mentioned previously. Bailey et al. used only one job website (CareerBuilder), whereas I used five different job websites (CareerBuilder, Idealist, Craigslist, the *Washington Post*, and Monster), since the companies that advertise on certain websites but not others may differ in

size, conservatism, or other relevant factors. Overall, it is difficult to conclude how differences in results among Tilcsik's, Bailey et al.'s, and my audit study using queer female candidates should be interpreted, given the design differences. Nonetheless, my field experiment fills a gap in the audit study literature with a focus on discrimination against queer women specifically, while also establishing an actual effect size of discrimination against queer women who apply to administrative jobs compared with straight women of equal qualifications, the magnitude of which is large.

General strengths of this study include the audit methodology, a research design that allows for the direct measurement of discrimination against queer women in a real-world setting, and the random assignment of the LGBT indicator, which allowed me to make the causal inference that the information that a woman was part of an LGBT organization in college was what caused reduced callbacks. This study provides clear evidence for real-world discrimination against queer female applicants who apply to administrative jobs in the United States, as overall, they were about 30 percent less likely to receive a callback compared with the straight female applicants of equal qualifications. Moreover, the insignificant interaction in model 4 of LGBT with the presence of antidiscrimination laws or protections suggests that queer women are not less discriminated against in the areas where relevant laws are in place protecting LGBT individuals from discrimination in the workplace.

Although this study serves as a vital contribution to hiring discrimination research in the U.S. workforce, it is not without limitations. The audit study design does not allow data collection on the specific inferences hiring managers made about the women with the LGBT indicator on their résumés, in terms of what specific member of the LGBT community they envisioned these queer women to be, nor does it provide insight as to why discrimination occurred against the queer women. That is, it was not possible to collect the employers' thoughts about how competent they believed queer women are, about how moral they believed queer women to be, how committed they thought a queer woman would be to her job, or their general thoughts on working with an out queer woman. Thus, although this audit study established an actual rate of discrimination against queer women who apply to jobs in the United States, it is not possible to understand or measure the mechanism underlying this discrimination (Correll et al. 2007).

One may theorize about the causes for discrimination, some of which were described earlier, such as a perceived lack of competence or judgment that homosexual relations or gender identity transformation are immoral. In addition, some research shows that hiring managers are likely to hire someone with a perceived similarity to themselves. In other words, they are likely to hire someone they like, which is, in turn, someone who looks like them on paper (Lackey 2014; Rivera 2012). By that theory, if only 3.5 percent of the population identify as LGBT (or even if we estimated the percentage as several times this), the odds of getting an LGBT hiring manager to review a résumé are very low (Gates 2011).

Other limitations of this study include the states sampled and a possible power issue. Although the four regions selected represent a diverse sample of the United States, there is always the possibility that results would differ if other states were used. Additionally, although the significant interactions between state or district and the LGBT indicator in model 3 reveal a different effect of being queer across regions, the differences are hard to interpret, and a larger sample with more states would provide more purchase on what types of states have less or more discrimination against queer women.

Furthermore, potential conflations associated with either race or university may be present, as applicant A was called back more than applicant B. Although Columbia and Cornell are both Ivy League schools that were rated similarly according to a recent national university ranking board, some hiring managers may see one university as more desirable than the other. Additionally, although common white names were chosen for the fictitious female applicants (applicant A was Sarah Collins and applicant B was Ashley Mitchell), the U.S. Census Bureau (2014) reported that an estimated 22 percent of Collinses and 32 percent of Mitchells are black. Future studies specifically designed to assess how university or race interacts with queer status would be needed to know for sure.

Moreover, although the hiring companies varied from large marketing firms to small local businesses, this audit study looked only at administrative and clerical work. The results might have differed if jobs in other fields were applied for. This study may thus also facilitate future research of discrimination against queer women across different types of positions. For example, it would be interesting to see if hiring managers for a blue-collar and stereotypically "masculine" type of position, such as a carpenter, would be as likely to discriminate against queer women as the hiring managers for administrative positions.

Last, and important to note, is that the public's favorability of lesbians increased by 19 percent from 2003 to 2013 (Pew Research Center 2013), while support of marriage equality increased more rapidly from 2013 to 2014 than any other year (Flores 2014). Thus, it would be beneficial if audit experiments such as this were conducted on a more regular basis to keep up with the fast pace at which the public's opinion is changing in support of LGBT rights and in the changing perceptions of the LGBT community.

Notes

1. The acronym *LGBT* has been in use since the 1990s. The terms *lesbian, gay*, and *bisexual* represent sexual orientations, referring to the object of a person's emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction. *Transgender* is a term describing people who express their gender identities differently from what most people expect. The acronym has many variations, such as *GLBT* and *LGBTQ*, but for this study, I use *LGBT*, because it is the acronym most commonly used at sexuality- and gender identity–based community centers, media centers, and advocacy organizations. *LGBT* is also interchangeable with *queer* (Human Rights Campaign 2015a).
2. The term *queer* was historically used as a derogatory term for homosexuals. Over time, it has become an umbrella term for anyone identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. It is most often used by younger generations, activists, and academics. A person of any LGBT identity could identify as being part of the "queer community." Thus, in this study, I use the phrase "queer women" as a way of including women of any LGBT identity (Harper et al. 2012).
3. I refer to the women without the LGBT indicator on their résumé as "straight" for the sake of brevity, but to be precise, these applicants could be defined as "nonqueer applicants" or "the fictitious women who were not assigned the LGBT indicator on their résumés" (see Correll, Bernard, and Paik 2007; Tilcsik 2011).
4. To be believable, résumés need to list a plausible address and list a degree at an actual school. I chose to make the fictitious candidates from New York, with their work experience and college experience based in New York. I had them apply to jobs in New York in addition to Washington, D.C., Virginia, and Tennessee, because applying to jobs in multiple states is a common strategy for young adults who are looking for jobs and are open to relocating. Cover letters stating the women's strong desire to move to the state or district where the job was located were included for jobs in Tennessee, Washington, D.C., and Virginia, and cover letters without this line were included for jobs in New York.
5. Names were chosen by using a directory of the most common names for whites in the United States located at http://names.mongabay.com/data/white.html.
6. Why Virginia was the sole state where the callback frequency between queer and straight women was not statistically different can only be speculated. It is unclear why discrimination would be more pronounced in seemingly more liberal locations than in Virginia.

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