

RESEARCH

Study finds LGBT workers feel less supported at federal agencies

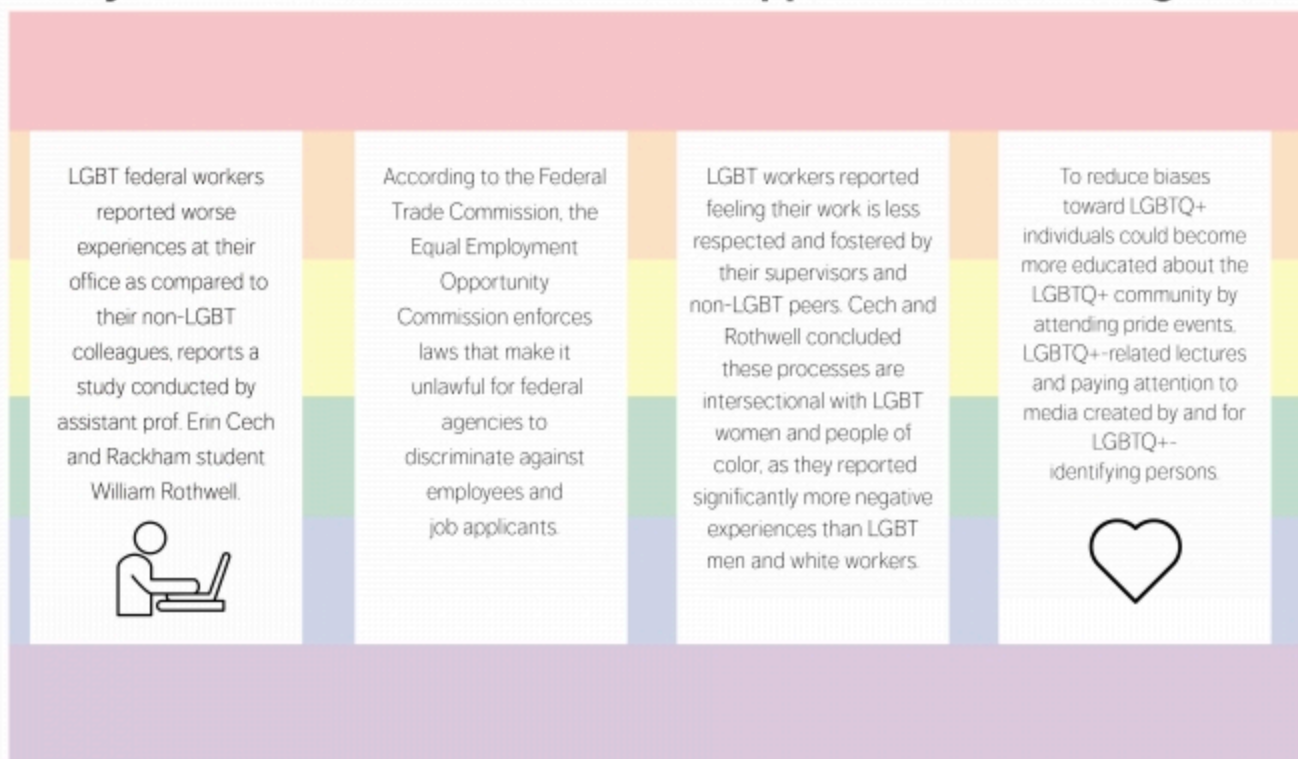
by Michal Ruprecht
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The infographic consists of four vertical columns, each with a distinct background color: light blue, light green, light orange, and light purple. Each column contains text and a simple icon. The background of the entire infographic is a light gray grid.

- Column 1 (Light Blue):** Text: "LGBT federal workers reported worse experiences at their office as compared to their non-LGBT colleagues, reports a study conducted by assistant prof. Erin Cech and Rackham student William Rothwell." Icon: A person sitting at a desk with a laptop.
- Column 2 (Light Green):** Text: "According to the Federal Trade Commission, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission enforces laws that make it unlawful for federal agencies to discriminate against employees and job applicants." Icon: None.
- Column 3 (Light Orange):** Text: "LGBT workers reported feeling their work is less respected and fostered by their supervisors and non-LGBT peers. Cech and Rothwell concluded these processes are intersectional with LGBT women and people of color, as they reported significantly more negative experiences than LGBT men and white workers." Icon: None.
- Column 4 (Light Purple):** Text: "To reduce biases toward LGBTQ+ individuals could become more educated about the LGBTQ+ community by attending pride events, LGBTQ+-related lectures and paying attention to media created by and for LGBTQ+-identifying persons." Icon: A heart shape.

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LGBT federal workers reported worse experiences at their offices compared to their non-LGBT colleagues, reports a study conducted by assistant professor of sociology Erin Cech and Rackham student William Rothwell. This disparity tends to lead to higher turnover intentions, Cech and Rothwell claim.

In an email to The Daily, Rothwell said he and Cech started the study in 2014 because they were inspired by data from the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. Rothwell hoped their work would bring light to the unobserved discrimination of LGBT individuals.

“We knew that there were likely important and interesting stories that we could tell with this data,” Rothwell wrote. “I think that these findings, in general, are especially daunting given that federal agencies and workers are actually protected under non-discrimination legislation meaning that these results may provide a somewhat conservative estimate of the extent of LGBT workplace inequality more broadly.”

According to the Federal Trade Commission, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission **enforces** laws that make it unlawful for federal agencies to discriminate against employees and job applicants.

Rothwell said it's rare to come across data on LGBT populations, but they were able to work with the FEVS data of 300,000 respondents because about 11,000 of those respondents identified as LGBT. Cech also noted their study uses the "LGBT" acronym because the FEVS survey contained questions that captured LGBT status. She added the "LGBTQ+" acronym is more fully inclusive of gender nonbinary and queer persons and was disappointed these identities were not accounted for.

The researchers also found LGBT workers reported feeling their work was less respected by their supervisors and non-LGBT peers. Cech and Rothwell concluded these processes are intersectional with LGBT women and people of color, as they reported significantly more negative experiences than LGBT men and white workers.

Although equality for LGBT-identifying persons has increased over the last three decades, Cech said she has seen greater instances of hate speech toward LGBT persons within the last five years. She added this study took place in a federal workforce with non-discrimination policies in place, so their conclusions may have been equal or worse in other employment sectors.

"Little research, up until this point, has been able to systematically document how LGBT persons are impacted by more subtle day-to-day experiences of devaluation and marginalization at work," Cech said. "We hope this study gives visibility to these issues and voice to LGBT persons who encounter these issues at work."

LSA and Music, Theatre & Dance senior Dylan Genouw, a member of the LGBT community, said in an email to The Daily he noticed gender and sexuality-based discrimination in his restaurant job. He claimed managers would assign straight men to tasks that were perceived as more manly like serving tables, while LGBT individuals like himself completed cleaning tasks.

"It was hard because I knew I was fully capable of being a server because I had worked there for just over a year and could be making more money, but my identity that I'm so passionate about hindered my ability to do so," Genouw wrote. "I definitely see this as something that is a problem in today's world. It's easy to tell from hearing others' experiences that working a job can include some sort of discrimination from employers. While not all jobs are like this, I certainly know of people who have been treated poorly due to their sexuality or gender identity."

Genouw said studies like this one are important for the public to understand the discrimination LGBT community members face to achieve institutional and policy change.

"Part of the issue is that there are no protections set in place for those of us in the LGBT and it not only hinders individuals ability to work, but also leads to fear while looking for employment," Genouw wrote.

“We, as a country, need to work together to create a safe work environment for everyone because at the end of the day, each employee has the same goal.”

Rothwell agreed with Genouw and hoped that the data from the study could lead to a push for non-discrimination laws being passed.

“I believe that this study can shed light on the importance of not only passing basic non-discrimination legislation for LGBT employees but also highlight how important it is for employers to take measures to foster an equitable work environment such as creating resource groups for LGBT employees and providing training aimed at reducing biases,” Rothwell wrote.

To reduce bias against LGBT individuals, Rothwell suggested companies could provide basic training. In addition, Cech suggested individuals could become more educated about the LGBT community by attending pride events, LGBT-related lectures and paying attention to media created by and for LGBT-identifying persons.

“I think one way to begin to accomplish this (educating the public about the LGBT community) would be providing trainings at work that are aimed at reducing biases toward LGBT persons/workers,” Rothwell wrote. “Employee resource groups for LGBT employees can also be helpful in certain contexts because greater visibility of LGBT people in the workplace may work to challenge biases that certain individuals hold about LGBT people.”

Although the study is completed, Rothwell said he and Cech will continue to conduct research on LGBT workers. The [full study](#) can be found in “Industrial and Labor Relations Review.”