

Bond University  
School of Social Sciences  
Department of Psychology

Is it because I'm gay? The effect of sexual orientation on perceived discrimination –  
A cross-cultural study

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Sexual orientation and perceived discrimination

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Department of Psychology

I, Sarang Kim acknowledge that this research thesis, completed under the supervision of Professor Richard Hicks, results from my own work and the authorship of the document herein is mine.

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## Abstract

Previous research have theorized that causes of the psychological distress faced by lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals (LGBs) are stigma and discrimination they face in the society. Perceptions of discrimination, whether it actually occurs or not, also affect behaviours. This project investigated whether non-heterosexuals (LGBs) perceive more discrimination than do heterosexuals in the same given situations. In Study 1, LGBs' levels of perceived discrimination in non-discriminatory situations (those where no actual discrimination took place) were compared with the responses of heterosexuals. In addition, Study 1 also examined which psychological well-being related variables (internalized heterosexism (homophobia), marginalization, isolation, alienation, self-esteem, and satisfaction with life) contributed most to perceptions of discrimination. Five hundred and sixty adults (355 Korean, 205 Australian) participated in the study through an online survey. Major findings were: only the Australian LGBs but not the Korean LGBs showed significantly higher levels of perceived discrimination than did heterosexual counterparts. Using a priming stimulus did not increase the perception of discrimination; heterosexuals were more aware of others knowing their sexual orientation than LGBs. Alienation was the variable that most related to perceived discrimination. Study 1 had used only situations where no actual discrimination was included or intended. This study also showed that there were a number of differences between the Australian and Korean samples: Korean LGBs had significantly lower psychological well-being; and most of the Korean LGBs were in Stage 4 (acceptance) whereas the majority of Australian LGBs were in Stage 6 (synthesis). Further cross-cultural studies are needed. Study 2 examined the responses of perceived discrimination using an actual discriminatory scenario and a non-

discriminatory scenario. It also examined the relationships between outness and perceived discrimination; and between previous experience of discrimination and perceived discrimination. Sixty six Australian university students (44 females, 21 males, and one gender unidentified) participated in this second study. Major findings were: significant differences were found in perceived discrimination between the non-discriminatory and discriminatory scenario situations for all participants, between heterosexuals and LGBs, between lesbians and heterosexual women, but not between lesbian women and gay men. No correlation was found between outness and perceived discrimination in either the discriminatory or the non-discriminatory situations. However, previous experience of discrimination was correlated sharply with perceptions of discrimination in both scenarios.