(ICT) SURVEILLANCE AND IDENTITY MANAGEMENT OF LESBIANS IN THE WORKPLACE

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- Currently a large amount of technology-driven forms of surveillance have engulfed the workplace and they are often imposing various forms of social control on "whole classes of individuals who are deemed "at risk" for behavior" (Staples, 2000. p. 6).

- This project explores the ways that lesbian activities and identities are co-constructed by technological surveillance in the workplace.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- Because this is not simply a passive relationship, but rather an active role that people take in regulating their own identity presentation to others, I ask how, and to what extent do people resist these forms of surveillance and present a different face?

- With today's current influx of modernity this task can be further complicated by mounds of information communication technologies that have the ability to meld the personal with the public.

- This study draws on Sociologist Erving Goffman's concept of "impression management" that can minimize the dissonance experienced by socially stigmatized persons (Goffman, 1963).

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

NOTE: This study is a proposal/cursory exploration that was designed and implemented on a very small scale to determine whether a more extensive project would be prudent.

Three different methodological approaches:

1) **<u>Interviews</u>**

- The sample consisted of three women.

- Each participant was interviewed one time, individually, for a total of 3 interviews.

- Participants were recruited through friendship networks, and word-of-mouth referrals, etc.

- Two of the participants are White and one participant is Hispanic.

- All three women range in age from 35 to 40 years old.

- Participant #1 was a pharmaceutical sales rep for 5 years, she was out of work at the time of this interview, but would like to regain similar employment and become a manger.

- Participant #2 has been in the military for 16years and in her current job for 18 months. She is a squadron section commander in charge of all personnel functions and command jurisdictions for about 1,300 military. Her career goal is to complete her 20 years and get out.

- Participant #3 is in strategic sourcing with a fortune 500 company. Her position consists of managing the acquisition process, software, contract labor, consulting, and legal services for her company. She has been with them for 15 years and this particular job for 3 years. Her career goal is to be a vice-president in this company or another fortune 500 company.

2) **Field Observations**

- Four field visits conducted on different days and at different times of day at a breakfast establishment that is known locally to have a mixed client base that includes both heterosexual and homosexual people regularly.

- This location was chosen to purposefully observe an environment that contained an apparent mixture of both sexual identities in order to observe any similarities and or differences in identity presentation as well as any meaningful interactions between the two differing groups.

- This methodological approach adds yet another layer and perspective to the many issues that may affect identity management in the workplace as well as perceptions. It is here that the fourth overarching theme to this study became most apparent.

3) **Brief Document/Pictorial Analysis**

- Briefly traced an overall trend or changes in uniforms for men and women in the military. I entered into this analysis with the hypotheses that over time and in present day these uniforms will have also morphed and muted towards a neutrality of gender and sexual identity and that is exactly what I found.

NOTE: These three different methods were designed to approach the subject matter from several different angles and views thus exposing, illuminating, and piecing together a variety of aspects that could be occurring and influencing the research question.

DATA ANALYSIS

- Based on data "reduction" and "interpretation"-- information gained by interviews was reduced to certain patterns, categories, or themes and then interpreted into a final piece.

FINDINGS

1) **Identity-resistance/reconstruction** demonstrates the differing degrees that these participants choose to play it straight, neutral, or not play at all.

- Just within this small sample of three women there are varying degrees of "being out" both personally and professionally.

- All three women responded verbatim to the question please state your sexual orientation--*gay.*

- I organized the couples in this sample along a continuum based on their responses to all the questions relevant to this issue, as well as their voiced concerns over the issue of "being out," both personally and professionally. The continuum has two ends, but it is really a gradation of behavior with more uniform and consistent outwardly open behavior moving from left to right on the diagram. The continuum also includes their chosen category/description that they best fit into concerning their sexual identity at work.

- For all three participants their degree of being "out" at work seemed to match up closely to their degree of being out socially with regards to their personal lives.

Varying degrees of this sample's "being out," personally and professionally as a continuum

DEGREE ------------------ PERSONAL ------------------ PROFESSION	LESS				MORE
	Inside home	[Partially "out"	everywhere]	[Completely	"out" everywhere]
	Not "out" at all	Nondescript **Neutral**	Partially "out"		Work
Participant	← 2	3	1		→

2) **Informal social networking/privileges of the norm**,

discusses how the participants in this study maneuver work social

events and the resulting influence on their professional careers and

personal lives.

- All three of these participants felt an exclusion and

   disadvantage to the informal social work network. These

   participants listed it as there biggest challenge concerning

   identity management at work.

3) **The impact of (ICT)** looks at the participants perceptions of

these technologies in the workplace and the varying strategies used

to resist surveillance.

- Here as well, the impact of technologies that could be used

   to monitor behavior or even discern/unearth the truth

   about one's sexual identity fell along similar lines, based

   on the degree that these participants are out at work—(the

   need to be completely secretive, nondescript, or partially

   out).

- The level of this technological intrusion correlated directly to their "out continuum level" and the methods they choose to resist or maintain identity management. The following quotes will be presented in the order of severity that this intrusion affects the participants from the most isolating and severe account by Jodie first:

At work with people in the communications squadron that look at the web sites people go to, key words, pornographic sites and gay and lesbian sites. And personal surveillance—can't go to the book store and pick up a copy of the advocate, because I don't know who is watching me. Like today at target I saw the L-Word video and I could not buy it.

- Jodie is limited both at work as well as in her personal life by many of these technologies.

- Additionally she responds:

With national security today—even though there is a don't ask, don't tell policy we see people getting kicked out. People get access to ex-spouses e-mail accounts and turn it in against them. This can be good and bad. There are lots of surveillance cameras on the base. They are within our building, but mainly for our safety. Security badges to get in the buildings. Soon (cat cards) will be needed to turn your computer on—it is your military id card and pin number. It is for increased security purposes so someone can't use your computer, but also to see what you are doing. **(Overall, the lie takes a toll on you and I want out.)**

- Jodie rates the worry level of her secret just short of paralyzing. She is not **_paralyzed_** by it, but it does control her life and it is always in the back of her mind.

- Angelina found the technology a problem overall, but not really in terms of her gay identity. She expounds:

   In terms of computer activity we are the most surveilled. The Pharmaceutical industry is scrutinized tightly by the FDA as to your samples, delivery, and accountability. But, it does not affect me in regards to my gay identity except when it comes to my e-mails.

- Finally, Jennifer acknowledges that these technologies are in place, but she does not really feel surveilled by them. Here again she looks at this in terms of a separate work life (professional) versus a personal (private) life and the two don't really mix. Because she keeps it all separate (ICT) is not really a worry or even noticed.

   I have never thought about a high level of surveillance, but when you ask me the question, I think about well what are all the ways they would surveil me and it would be the internet, my mobile phone, my card access to the building, cameras in the parking lot, but I don't know that I would choose to use the term that I feel surveilled.

4) An overall arching theme of **neutrality in sexual identity management**.

FINDINGS EXPLAINED FURTHER

Interview Results

- Within this small sample, three very different levels of the "out continuum" emerged with regards to how each participant presents themselves in their work (professional) life and private (personal) life.

- These seemed to correlate somewhat for each participant with some fluidity from one sphere to the next.

- This in turn seemed to shape their perspectives and the limiting/ intrusive affects of both the informal social network and (ICT) workplace surveillance.

- Identity-resistance/reconstruction was done differently by each interview participant and the methods chosen seem to produce very different levels of either frustration or resolved conflict.

- In my interviews this was a tool used in varying degrees by each participant interviewed so far. A neutrality of one's presentation of identity is not completely dishonest to one's self

or others nor is it an admission to one's status on this issue. It

may be the safest/easiest way to proceed, both

personally/internally as well as externally on this issue.

Field Observations

- From my field observations it is most evident that identity

  presentation be it gender or sexual identity has somewhat

  moved to a blurred not well defined state in some day- to-day

  public settings.

- Here again there seems to be a lot of neutrality in the way

  people present themselves today even in public.

- There is a morphing or blurring of both gender and sexual

  identity via mannerisms, groupings of people, clothing, haircuts,

  etc. that make it very difficult at first glance to

  categorize/discern just what gender or sexual identity someone

  may actually be today.

- This trend would most likely aid those who are purposefully playing the neutrality game as well because things are just simply less defined.

Brief Document/Pictorial Analysis

- Definite trend has emerged since the 70's towards a sameness and neutrality concerning uniform presentation in the military.

- This is exactly what was observed in the public sphere via the observational section of this paper.

CONCLUSION

- Neutrality was a recurring theme throughout each phase of this study. It was a tool used in varying degrees by each interview participant to resist disclosure of their sexual identity in the workplace.

- It would be nice to further explore whether this neutrality is a parallel to the myth of how technology can serve to mask something else about power and identity.

- Vulnerable populations may bear the brunt of this type of surveillance, but anyone with a secret could become the object of this gaze.