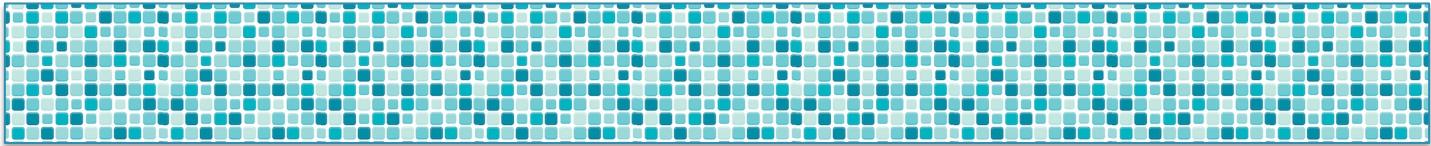


# Being Out at Work

## Cultural Implications for the “L” in LGBT

Sponsored by:





# Workplace Culture and LGBT

I am delighted to welcome you to our first in the series of reports on Managing Identities at Work. This report focuses on “Being out at Work” and we look at the LGBT experience through a gender lens. By conducting research and hosting career panels exploring career challenges for certain talent groups, such as LGBT employees, we aim to shed light on what companies can do better for diverse high performers.

After all, if culture can be defined by “the way we do things around here” then it is critical for leaders to understand how to engage and include different types of people so that every individual in the firm can bring their best selves to work. This research report is the first of its kind to explore specifically the workplace perceptions and experiences of professional lesbians in financial and professional services.

The Glass Hammer is perfectly placed to examine deeper issues around gender and identity at work and our goal is to empower women of all types to advance in their careers. Our research arm, Evolved Employer, is working hard to benchmark diversity so that the industry as a whole can better understand how to remove and reduce systemic biases. In my opinion, it is only when we work in this manner that we can truly further the dialogue around diversity – to start leveraging diversity as a business driver. Achieving inclusion is a cultural change project; changing culture is only possible when led with a vision and backed by compliance, not the other way around.

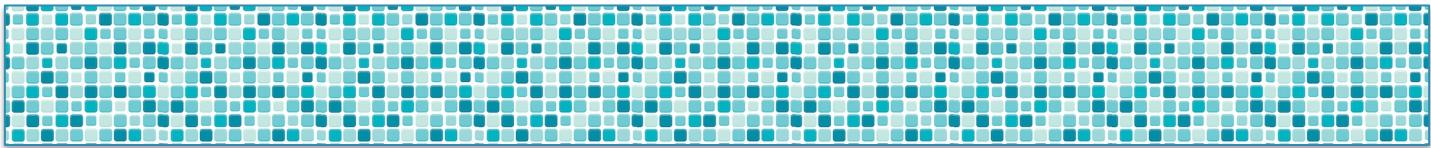
The most striking finding from this report is that many women, despite being out to everyone, are still uncomfortable in their immediate environment and would like their company to do more education around LGBT issues. Reassuringly, several companies were recognized as going above and beyond in their efforts to ensure organizational and managerial support, reinforced with strong networks and programmatic solutions.

I hope that you enjoy this whitepaper and share it with leaders, managers, employee networks, straight allies, and LGBT employees alike.

Sincerely,



Nicki Gilmour  
Founder and CEO  
The Glass Hammer  
Evolved Employer



# Lesbians in Financial and Professional Services

How do LGBT professional women from financial and professional services firms network? How supported do they feel at work? And what could their companies do better regarding the cultural aspects of their workplaces? We surveyed over 100 individuals in the professional and financial services to find out. Our study attempts to go beyond the LGBT label and zero in on the female experience within the larger group – the “L” in LGBT.

Recent research on the subject of LGBT employees has taken a broad tack, for the most part, examining the group as a whole across all industries. But LGBT is not a monolithic group. It is comprised of subgroups and individuals at different stages of their personal and professional journeys. By examining diversity from a more granular standpoint – the intersection of sexual orientation and gender – we hope to take the findings of this work and publish career strategies to help lesbians advance their careers by building stronger networks, while also identifying ways companies can better support their lesbian employees.

Out of about seven million LGBT employees in the private sector in the US, only about half are openly gay, reported The Center for Work-Life Policy in its 2011 study “The Power of ‘Out.’” In 2009, the Human Rights Campaign reported a similar ratio. And the 2011 Out and Equal Workplace Survey showed that while lesbians were about as likely as gay men to be out to their coworkers (62% vs. 60%), lesbians were significantly less likely than gay men to be out to their boss or manager (44% vs. 56%).

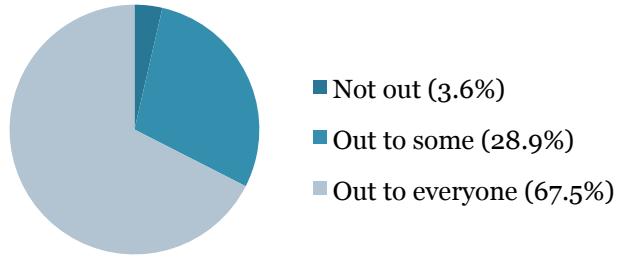
Why does this difference exist? The UK based organization Stonewall’s report entitled “The double-glazed glass ceiling: Lesbians in the workplace,” may provide an explanation. Lesbians often have two hurdles to overcome in a traditional work environment. Being both female and gay, many lesbians choose to stay in the closet, rather than live as a “double-minority.” Those who do come out have concerns and questions about others’ perceptions of them, where they fit in a heteronormative, male-dominated corporate culture, who their role models are, and how they can advance their careers.

Our small sample of lesbian professional women was diverse when considering age, experience, and geography. As such, their work experience varied widely as well – which was expected. Nevertheless, by and large, our respondents expressed the need to build stronger networks, sincerely wanted to see more “out” lesbians at the top, and desired more support from senior management in general.

# Being Out

In our survey of lesbian professionals in financial and professional services, the majority of our respondents were out to all of their coworkers (67.5%). Very few (3.6%) of our respondents were not out at all.

## Are you "out" or openly LGBT?



According to our survey, 27.3% of lesbians who had come out during their career felt that they had become more interested in career advancement since coming out.

Interestingly, and contrary to previous reports (like "The Power of Out"), the largest group of our respondents said that coming out had not changed their feelings toward career advancement (72.7%). This is possibly because The Glass Hammer community tends to be made up of career-focused women, who have already self-identified as ambitious.

In fact, in an open-ended question asking whether coming out has or would hurt prospects for career advancement, based on a qualitative analysis, the majority (55.4%) indicated it would not or has not – and almost one in ten (9.6%) indicated it has had a positive effect on their career. Nevertheless, about a quarter (25.3%) felt that coming out has or would hurt future career opportunities.

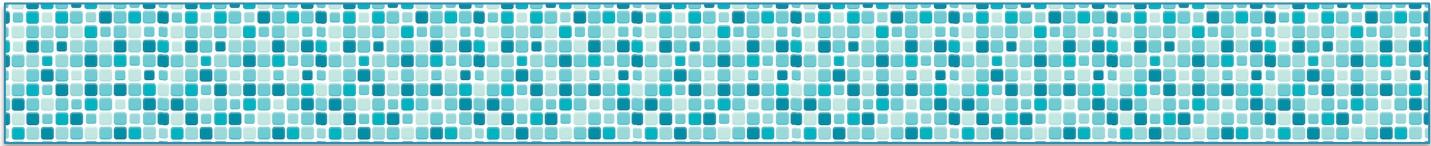
*"Being out has denied me access to certain in-groups within the firm. However, it has opened other opportunities, and provides me with confidence."*

*"It makes some people hesitate in conversations."*

*"[It hurts] to a degree, but about the same amount as being a female in the IT field at a financial company..."*

*"I thought it would hurt, but it has actually helped my advancement."*

*"It's helped tremendously by solidifying my professional relationships."*



# A More Inclusive Environment

When we asked our respondents the number one thing they'd like to see change in their workplace as it pertains to LGBT individuals, the most common answers described a theme of discomfort for lesbians at work. Over one in five (21.7%) responses to this question (the largest segment) suggested their environment simply didn't feel totally accepting of who they were.

*"I wish they would be more comfortable and positive about being out."*

*"Attaining a level of comfort across the organization so others will feel ok to come out."*

*"I would make it so that there is no difference between LGBT and straight workers and how they are viewed by their coworkers/managers."*

*"...it would be nice if maybe training/HR courses were taught and it expressed how highly inappropriate some comments are in the workplace."*

*"I wish I could feel more comfortable being out."*

*"Acknowledge and respect LGBT people with positive regard."*

As these statements show, there isn't always one specific thing to point out when it comes to a culture being not as inclusive as it could be.

An inclusive workplace culture is built on a combination of support – from the very senior levels through mid-management, within a team, and on an individual basis. Over the next few pages, you'll see that the majority of our respondents felt that their workplace is *mainly* supportive of who they are (by measures of senior management, mid-management, and co-worker supportiveness), yet in the open-ended question, the majority (84.3%) named *something* in their workplace or corporate culture that could be better when it comes to LGBT issues, like a desire for equal partner benefits or an interest in seeing more lesbians in senior management.

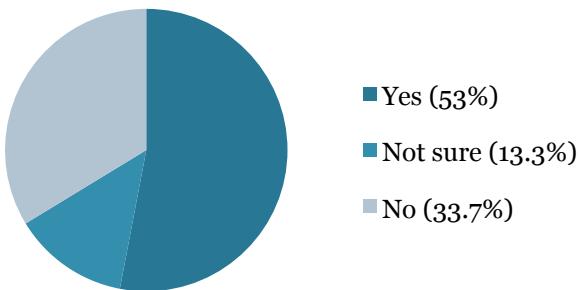
It should be mentioned that some of our respondents were very positive about their company. In fact, 15.7% of responses said they wouldn't want to change anything about their workplace regarding LGBT issues.

In the next few pages, we'll explore the parts of corporate culture that contribute to an inclusive environment and what seems to be working for lesbian professional women.

# The Tone at the Top

About half of the respondents (53%) said that senior management at their company does provide verbal or visible support for the LGBT community within the company. But over a third said it does not (33.70%). This question of support at the top is important because senior management's behavior sets the tone for cultural inclusion throughout the company.

## Does senior management provide verbal or visible support for LGBT initiatives?



Qualitative answers to this question were varied. How respondents defined "verbal or visible support" may reveal where their company is on the LGBT inclusiveness spectrum.

*"VP asked me to take him to PRIDE this year and three other managers joined us and then posted our pictures in company news letter."*

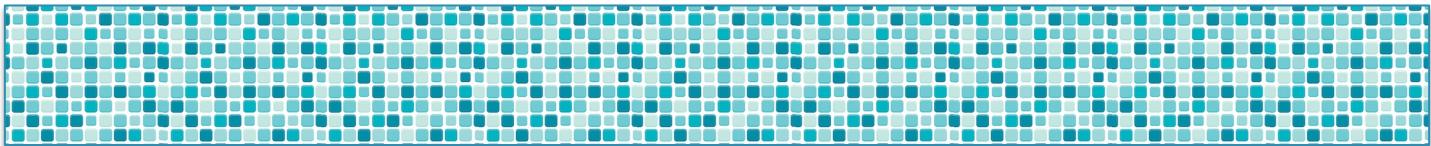
*"I recently married my partner of 12 and 1/2 years. A three-quarter page article appeared in the NY Sunday Times, Style Section. The senior partner of our firm asked me if he may place my wedding story in the company newsletter."*

*"Support HRC but I think it is more for the company's PR benefit."*

*"The very senior levels and CEO have been very supportive of the formation and development of our LGBT business professional network. However, the level directly below CEO has displayed sporadic support."*

*"Our corporate office provides marketing material to the LGBT community and we have an affinity group nationally."*

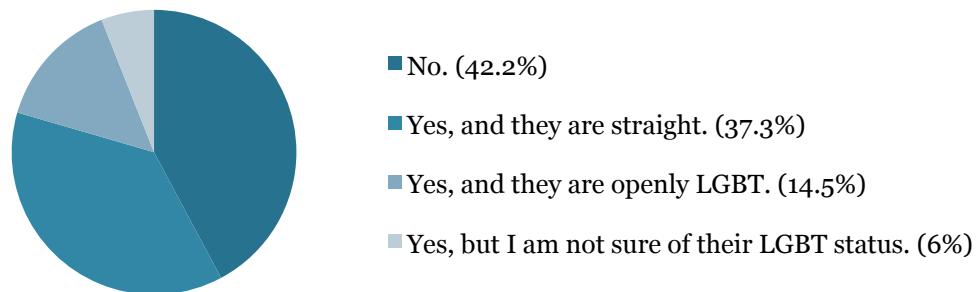
Experiencing senior management support for the LGBT workforce is one important aspect of working towards an inclusive workplace – and a visibly open and out representative of the population in senior management is one way of showing LGBT staff that there is a path to the top. Yet, according to the survey, over half of the respondents (55.4%) said they were not aware of any lesbians in senior management at their company. Almost two in five (38.6%) said they were aware of a lesbian at the top, and 6% said they weren't sure.



Our survey also revealed a correlation between the presence of out lesbians in senior management and visible support for LGBT individuals by senior management. Respondents who said they were aware of senior lesbians in their organization were more likely to say senior management was visibly or verbally supportive of their LGBT workforce than those respondents who had no lesbians in senior management. Three-quarters (75%) of respondents who could identify lesbians in senior management said senior management was supportive of them. But only 39% of respondents who do not have lesbians in senior management said the same.

Another aspect of inclusion is the extent to which individuals feel they have someone in their company to look up to. Over half of our respondents (57.8%) said they viewed someone in their company as a role model, and 42.2% said they did not. Only 14.5% said they had a role model who was openly LGBT.

### **Do you have someone you look to as a role model at your company?**

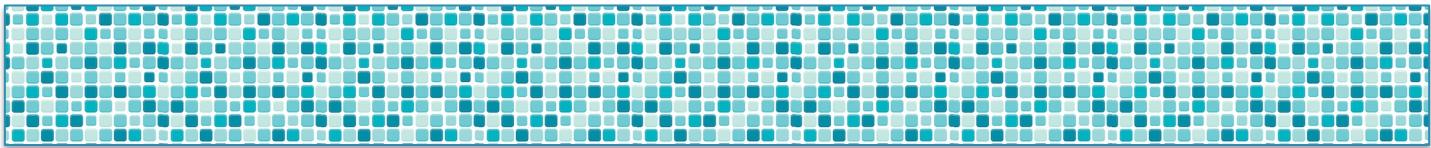


It was initially surprising that, although two in five of our respondents could identify a lesbian in senior management, significantly fewer said their role model was LGBT. This may illustrate that LGBT status is not viewed as a prerequisite when it comes to choosing a role model.

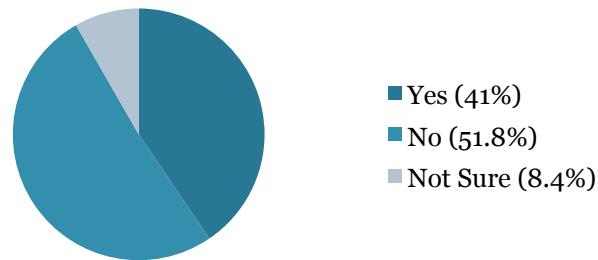
Nevertheless, our respondents desire to see more out LGBT individuals at the top. In the open answer “if you could change anything” question, 8.4% indicated they would want to see more out LGBT individuals in senior management.

## **Day-to-Day Environment**

Overall, our respondents were relatively positive about their day-to-day environment when it comes to the ability to be themselves at work. Nevertheless, almost half (41%) said they had been made uncomfortable in the last two years because of something said or implied about LGBT people by a team member. Half (51.8%) said this situation hadn’t come up for them, and 8.4% were not sure.



**In the past 2 years, have you ever been made uncomfortable because of something said or implied within your team about LGBT individuals?**

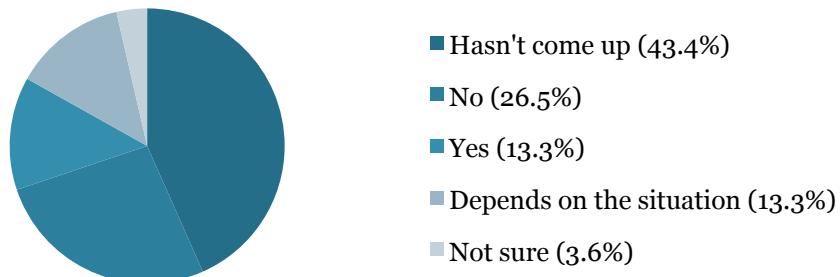


Almost three in five of our respondents (59%) said they felt their manager was supportive of LGBT team members, and only one in ten (10.8%) said their managers were not at all supportive. We also noted a correlation between verbal/visible senior support for LGBT employees and line management support of LGBT team members. Respondents were more likely to say their manager was supportive of LGBT team members when senior management provided visible support for LGBT individuals. In fact, 70% of women who said their line manager was supportive of LGBT team members also had supportive senior management.

Colleagues' behavior toward lesbian coworkers was fairly mixed in terms of support. Most respondents said they feel they can be themselves around all of their coworkers (42.2%), but 13.3% said they could not talk about being gay at work, even after coming out.

Interestingly, the same percentage (13.3%) said negative comments or behavior directed toward LGBT people is tolerated by their manager. While it was not a direct relationship, this could illustrate the influence a manager has on the day-to-day life of an employee. But this percentage is small. The largest segment of our respondents (43.4%) said this kind of situation had not come up on their team. About a quarter (26%) confirmed this kind of behavior is not tolerated by their manager.

**Does your manager tolerate negative comments or behaviors directed against LGBT people?**



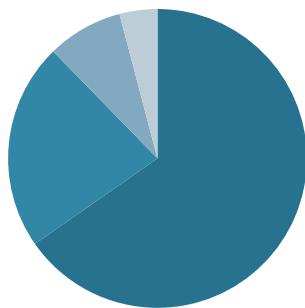
# Networking

Networking was a popular activity within our sample. The vast majority (83.3%) actively participates in internal or external LGBT networking events, at least a few times per year. And, in fact, the majority of respondents (61.4%) said they were members of their company's LGBT network. But surprisingly, a large segment (28.9%) said their company did not have a network.

It should be noted that over half (55.4%) of respondents in our sample were women working in their organization for five years or less. This does not mean that they are only 0-5 years into their careers, and warrants further investigation into why and how LGBT employees change jobs. Interestingly, networking at LGBT events doesn't seem to be tenure-specific according to our survey, which draws a parallel to the attendees at The Glass Hammer's career panel and networking events for LGBT women.

According to respondents who were members of their company's LGBT network, women are not the majority of members.

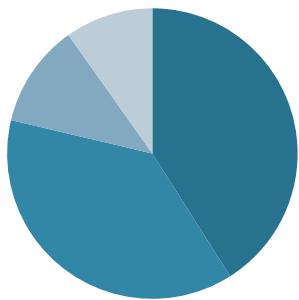
## If you are a member of your LGBT / Pride network, do you see many women at events or meetings?



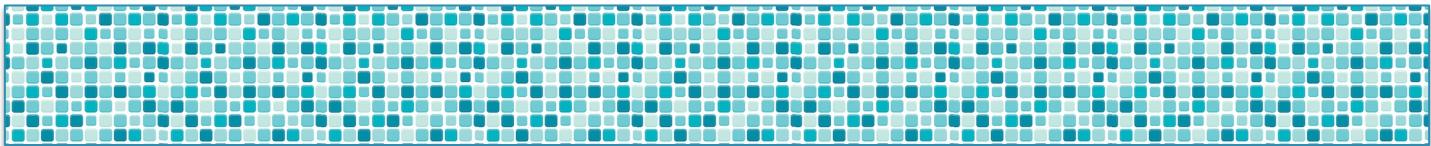
- Very few - on average, less than 20% of attendees are women. (65.3%)
- Some - on average, 20-40% of attendees are women. (22.4%)
- About even - on average, 40-60% of attendees are women. (8.2%)
- Many - on average, 60 - 80% of attendees are women. (4.1%)

A qualitative review of open answers to the question "Do you feel that Lesbians' interests are represented in your LGBT network's programming?" produced mixed results. Over half of LGBT network members (51%) indicated that their group did not cater to lesbians' interests.

## Do you feel that Lesbians' interests are represented in your LGBT network's programming



- No (51%)
- Yes (46.9%)
- Not sure (14.3%)
- Somewhat (12.2%)



We did see a slight correlation between the percentage of women in an LGBT network and the likelihood that lesbian's interests were represented in its programming. When there were more women present in a respondent's LGBT network, respondents tended to say lesbian's issues were better addressed. Participation appeared to be linked with representation, but it is difficult to extrapolate more due to our sample size.

## Straight Allies

In his book *Allies at Work*, David M. Hall discusses the importance of allies for creating a “safe environment” for LGBT colleagues, and this strategy has grown in popularity over the past few years. While almost one in five (19.3%) of our respondents had not heard of the term “straight allies,” most of our respondents were positive about them.

A qualitative review of answers to an open-ended question on the topic showed that 42.2% felt straight allies are a nice-to-have group, using words like “great” or “positive.” In fact, 21.7% went so far as to indicate that they are “critical” or “important.” And 16.9% indicated they felt straight allies were “helpful” or “useful.” Less than 10% felt mixed or negatively about straight allies.

A few qualitative examples include:

*“I think they're very welcome. It's also encouraging to have people identified in the workplace who you know are supportive of the LGBT community. My main concern is not knowing which of my coworkers would be uncomfortable, especially knowing that some are.”*

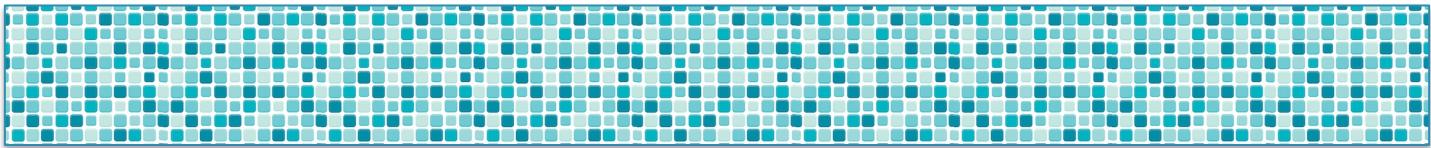
*“Straight allies are half of our LGBT network membership. The support has been amazing.”*

*“I believe that sometimes, the LGBT group is TOO FOCUSED on straight allies. Sometimes it is more important to celebrate the fact that you are LGBT than to constantly be looking to gain, or include straight allies.”*

*“I am not sure what their function is, but I could guess. I think it is a terrific idea.”*

*“The more, the better - no minority group in history has succeeded in gaining equal rights on their own.”*

Over a quarter of respondents (26.5%) said someone on their team had referred to themselves as a straight ally. But, the majority (67.5%) said they had not, and 6% said they were not sure.



# Conclusion

Our research shows the experience of being a lesbian in the workplace varies from person to person – even within the same company. For instance, women at one company gave different answers when asked about the percentage of women in their LGBT network. And when asked if being gay is a taboo subject on their team, various women from another company answered “yes,” “no,” and “depends,” highlighting the difference a manager or colleague can have on an LGBT woman’s daily work life.

Nevertheless, we have identified factors that contribute to an overall increase in satisfaction and motivation for lesbian professionals. In order to capitalize fully on the talents of their lesbian employees, companies should:

- Set the right tone by having leaders talk about LGBT diversity frequently and publicly.
- Educate the straight majority about how they can support their LGBT colleagues.
- Support affinity groups that allow gay and lesbian employees to network and connect with one another.
- Invite straight allies to participate in LGBT employee networks.
- Highlight senior lesbian employees so they can be role models for others.
- Sponsor external events and organizations to demonstrate corporate support.

Finally, empowering lesbian women to strengthen their networks by providing more content-focused employee resource groups may also help them to leverage key relationships along the corporate ladder as they advance in their careers.

By aligning managerial and peer level support with corporate initiatives like sponsorship, mentoring, and equalized partner benefits, real ground can be made in the journey from diversity to inclusion.



## References

- Griffith, Kristin H. and Hebl, Michelle R. (2002). "The Disclosure Dilemma for Gay Men and Lesbians: 'Coming Out' at Work." *Journal of Applied Psychology*.
- Hall, David M. (2009). *Allies at Work*. Out & Equal Workplace Advocates.
- Hewlett, Sylvia Ann and Sumberg, Karen (2011). "The Power of Out." Center for Work-Life Policy.
- Human Rights Campaign (2009). "Degrees of Equality."
- Miles, Nathanael (2008). "The double-glazed glass ceiling: Lesbians in the workplace." Stonewall.
- Out & Equal Workplace Advocates (2011). "2011 Out and Equal Workplace Survey."
- Saks, Alan M. (2006). "Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement." *Journal of Managerial Psychology*.
- Thomas, David A. and Ely, Robin J. (1996). "Making Differences Matter: A New Paradigm for Managing Diversity." *Harvard Business Review*.

## About Us

The Glass Hammer is the leading career management site for women in financial and professional services and we realize that informing, inspiring, and empowering women via our advice and events is useful for all kinds of women in the industry.

This whitepaper report is written as part of our think tank research arm, Evolved Employer, and aims to investigate how professional lesbian women perceive their workplace experience.

Report Author: Melissa J. Anderson

We would like to thank the readers of The Glass Hammer for their candid and detailed responses to our Workplace LGBT survey. This research was presented at our Managing Identities: Being Out at Work event. We would like to thank the sponsors of the event, who made this report possible: Bank of America Merrill Lynch, Goldman Sachs, and PwC.

© Evolved Employer, 2012  
[www.evolvedemployer.com](http://www.evolvedemployer.com)  
[www.theglasshammer.com](http://www.theglasshammer.com)