



Attitudes in the Workplace

As described above, societal attitudes toward the LGB communities are divided. In some ways, Americans are becoming more tolerant and in other ways heterosexist beliefs are thriving. Within the workplace, the attitudes of coworkers of LGB employees tend to be more negative than that of the general population. This is exemplified by The Williams Institute on Sexual Orientation Law and Public Policy report that found up to 43% of LGB workers verbally or physically abused or had their workplace vandalized, and approximately 90% of transgender workers experience workplace harassment (as cited in Burns & Krehely, 2011). It seems that although heterosexual workers may view themselves as accepting and tolerant of LGB colleagues, the

research shows that this is not in fact the case. Embrick, Walther, and Wickens (2007) found that among heterosexual workers who express liberal viewpoints, especially as they relate to LGB issues, these same individuals often demonstrate actions that are inconsistent with their words. For example, a heterosexual employee may express that she has "no problem working with gay men," but during her lunch hour with colleagues she tells anti-LGB jokes. One explanation given for this behavior is that it maintains **heterosexual privilege**.

There are three themes that have been identified related to the negative attitudes of heterosexuals toward their LGB coworkers (Embrick et al., 2007). The first theme is blatant detestation of LGB individuals. This could be due to a lack of exposure to LGB individuals, personal beliefs, negative past experiences with LGB individuals, or homophobia. The second theme is "don't ask; don't tell." This means that some heterosexual coworkers' negative attitudes are a result of LGB visibility in the workplace. These individuals would rather have their LGB coworkers not disclose their sexual orientation in the workplace. Disclosure in the workplace for LGB individuals is risky because being open about one's LGB identity has been linked to direct physical threats and sexual harassment (Williams, Giuffre, & Dellinger, 2009). The third theme associated with why some heterosexuals have negative attitudes toward their LGB coworkers is ostracism and fear. When a dominant cultural group experiences fear as a result of another cultural group, it is often because the dominant group feels its privileges are being threatened. Additionally, lack of awareness and knowledge of the nondominant group can lead to ostracism and fear. With all of this knowledge about what contributes to the negative attitudes toward LGB workers, HRD practitioners are in a good place to begin working with employers to create work environments that are safe, both psychologically and physically, for all employees.