Everyday prejudices: an intersectional exploration of the experiences of lesbian and gay entrepreneurs

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Abstract

Purpose – There is a gap in understanding with regards to the discrimination and prejudice experienced by gay entrepreneurs. To address this, an intersectional perspective is adopted to facilitate a better understanding of how lesbian and gay entrepreneurs may experience heterosexism.

Design/methodology/approach – This qualitative study uses semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of 14 lesbian and gay entrepreneurs as they navigate homophobia and heterosexism.

Findings – The study contributes novel insights to the field of entrepreneurship, extending the study of lesbian and gay entrepreneurs to include gender and a fine-grained analysis of the experience of heterosexism. Its inclusion of an intersectional perspective of the lesbian-female entrepreneur expands the emerging body of literature examining intersectional identities of minority entrepreneurs.

Originality/value – The authors provide a more nuanced understanding of the impact of heterosexism on LGBT+ entrepreneurial activities. This is facilitated by the authors' adoption of an intersectional perspective which shows how the different axes of identity influenced gender identity performance in relation to the model of perceived neutrality in LGBT+ entrepreneurship. The authors also make an original contribution to minority stress literature through the authors' exploration of one facet of minority entrepreneurship, namely the impact of heterosexism on LGBT+ entrepreneurial activities.

Keywords Lesbian and gay entrepreneurship, Intersectionality, Heterosexism, Minority stress, Minority entrepreneurship

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The profile of the quintessential entrepreneur has been represented as a heroic male (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Marlow and McAdam, 2015), who is driven solely by economic gain (Ahl, 2006). Indeed, the construct of the ideal entrepreneur as white, male, masculine and heterosexual (Ahl, 2004; Wood *et al.*, 2012; Rumens and Ozturk, 2019) is at the core of dominant discourses of entrepreneurship (Ogbor, 2000; Wood *et al.*, 2012). In efforts to combat the heteronormativity of entrepreneurship studies, an emerging body of research has sought to underscore gay entrepreneurship as a research topic worthy of attention (Galloway, 2008, 2012;

Marlow *et al.*, 2018; Schindehutte *et al.*, 2005; Shepherd and Patzelt, 2015; Varnell, 2001; Willsdon, 2005; Rumens and Oxturk, 2019; Ahmed and Hammarstedt, 2022; Essers *et al.*, 2023). Work to date within this area has primarily examined the experiences of gay male entrepreneurs, yet the terminology used in extant literature includes gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, and the inclusive acronym LGBTQ+. Within this article, the term "gay entrepreneurship" is used to describe the study of these minority groups within the field of entrepreneurship.

Despite these efforts which have focussed on the motivations and barriers impacting the gay entrepreneurial community (Lukenbill, 1995; Levin, 1998; Willsdon, 2005; Schindehutte *et al.*, 2005; Galloway, 2008, 2012; Redien-Collot, 2012; Wood *et al.*, 2012) and the relative propensity towards entrepreneurship of gay entrepreneurs in relation to their heterosexual counterparts (Marlow *et al.*, 2018), there is a gap in understanding with regards to the discrimination and prejudice experienced by gay entrepreneurs. The importance of addressing this gap in understanding has been underscored by calls for comprehensive investigations into the lived experiences of gay entrepreneurs (Wood *et al.*, 2012; De Souza *et al.*, 2016; Marlow *et al.*, 2018).

This article responds to these calls by specifically focussing upon lesbian and gay entrepreneurs' experiences of homophobia and heterosexism in the pursuit of their entrepreneurial endeavours. Accordingly, the underlying research question being addressed in this article is: how is heterosexism experienced by lesbian and gay entrepreneurs? In order to advance gender theorising in the context of gay entrepreneurship, an intersectional perspective is adopted to facilitate a better understanding of how lesbian and gay entrepreneurs may experience heterosexism. Intersectionality offers a multi-layered interpretive lens that allows researchers to identify potential nexuses of individual entrepreneurial disadvantage. As a theoretical framework, intersectionality examines how different axes of identity (e.g. gender, race, sexuality and class) and power relations are shaped in "mutually influential ways" (Crenshaw, 1997; Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016). This article argues that in order to recognise the intersectionality of the gay entrepreneur, a person not only has to challenge the axiomatic acceptance of a unitary gender analysis (focus upon women/femininity), but also the binary stance (feminism/masculinism; men/women). Through this approach, we seek to broaden the understanding of intersectionality in the context of gay and lesbian entrepreneurs.

The additional and distinctive challenges faced by entrepreneurs from different minority and disadvantaged communities in comparison to entrepreneurs who emerge from the mainstream population has been noted in the literature (Jones and Ram, 2012; Cooney and Licciardi, 2019; Cooney, 2021). Cooney and Liccardi (2019) propounded that entrepreneurs from minority and disadvantaged communities not only encounter idiosyncratic challenges because they are not part of the mainstream population, but they also endure distinctive challenges that are exclusive to their own specific community (e.g. gay, immigrant). Vorobeva's (2022) systematic review of articles, discussion papers, theses, and book chapters devoted to intersectional identity and minority entrepreneurship found that much of the existing work focussed on ethnic and women entrepreneurs. Focussing upon the gay community, a study by Pijpers and Maas (2014) of gay Filipino guesthouse owners in Amsterdam found that it was their sexuality, in conjunction with other identities such as ethnicity, which stood out as the key factor that largely shaped their life experiences. Despite the acknowledgement that entrepreneurs have multiple identities, which can overlap, complement or contradict one another (Essers and Benschop, 2009), understanding of the complexities of inequality and identity in relation to the experiences of gay and lesbian within an entrepreneurial context is in its infancy (Essers *et al.*, 2023).

Within this article, the following theoretical contributions are promoted: First, our specific focus on the impact of heterosexism on LGBT+ entrepreneurial activities provides a more nuanced understanding of the complex structure of opportunities and constraints into which the LGBT+ entrepreneur is embedded (Vorobeva, 2022; Essers *et al.*, 2023). We thus contribute to the discussion of what is queer and intersectional in entrepreneurship, displacing the heterosexual norm (Massaquoi, 2015), and enabling us to better understand the influence of

interlocking sexual orientation, gender, and entrepreneurship. Second, building on this, we contribute to the intersectionality literature (Essers *et al.*, 2010; Valdez, 2011; Knight, 2016) by highlighting how the different axes of identity influenced gender identity performances in relation to the model of perceived neutrality in LGBT+ entrepreneurship (Butler, 1990). Third, we contribute to minority stress literature (Meyer, 2003) through our exploration of one facet of minority entrepreneurship, namely the impact of heterosexism on LGBT+ entrepreneurial activities. Taken together, these contributions allow us to unveil complexities of discrimination at socio-political and economic levels which may lead to inequalities in entrepreneurship.

To develop these arguments, the article begins by outlining the rationale for the theoretical framing, which incorporates a discrete analysis of the key constructs – heterosexism, homophobia and minority stress and intersectionality. The article then draws these concepts together under the domain of gay entrepreneurship, which forms the basis of the empirical illustration of the analysis. In the following section, the methodological rationale and method are detailed. The article concludes with a discussion of the theoretical contributions and suggestions for further investigations.

Gay entrepreneurship

Gay entrepreneurship is an emerging stream of research within the broader entrepreneurship domain (Lukenbill, 1995; Willsdon, 2005; Schindehutte *et al.*, 2005; Galloway, 2012; Redien-Collot, 2012; Marlow *et al.*, 2018). Earlier studies have tended to focus on the distinction between gay entrepreneurs and their heterosexual counterparts (Lukenbill, 1995; Varnell, 2001), and the motivations and barriers impacting the lesbian and gay entrepreneurial community (Schindehutte *et al.*, 2005). More recently, academic work has explored issues such as political representation and the value of gay entrepreneurship (Schindehutte *et al.*, 2005; Willsdon, 2005; Galloway, 2012; Redien-Collot, 2012), and the role of heteronormativity in shaping the construction of gay male entrepreneurial identities (Rumens and Ozturk, 2019). However, compared with other entrepreneurial groups (e.g. immigrants, women), the gay community as a collective is still largely underrepresented within the entrepreneurship domain (Marlow *et al.*, 2018; Rumens and Ozturk, 2019; Kidney, 2021). Indeed, a persistent narrative in entrepreneurship literature until quite recently has been the perception that gay people may be more positively disposed towards entrepreneurship. This stemmed from Lukenbill's (1995) work which suggested that gay men were more likely to be self-employed. However, this narrative regarding the flight to entrepreneurship away from heteronormativity and inequality has been somewhat dispelled, making room for a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs beyond that of refuge for the non-conforming or minority group (Marlow *et al.*, 2018). Gay entrepreneurship research has found consensus with regards to a clear theme of coming out and identity (Levin, 1998; Schindehutte *et al.*, 2005; Redien-Collot, 2012). Thus, it emerges that gay entrepreneurs express their sexual identity in differing ways and that "outness" is a rudimentary lens with which to understand gay people in business – whether they are openly gay or not, and to whom have they been openly gay (Schindehutte *et al.*, 2005; Redien-Collot, 2012). Gay people can choose to pass as heterosexual, and reveal or conceal their sexuality across varied public-private spheres depending on one's preferred choices (Clair *et al.*, 2005). Schindehutte *et al.* (2005) referred to those who "identify" or are "independent" of their sexuality, whilst Redien-Collot (2012) found that gay entrepreneurs reconcile with, transcend, or resist their gay identity in their entrepreneurial activities (Redien-Collot, 2012). The literature underscores that coming out is not a one-time event but an ongoing decision-making process, wherein there are many groups to whom an entrepreneur comes out (Kidney, 2021).

The entrepreneurship domain has been criticised for its heteronormative assumptions which have had a detrimental impact on gay entrepreneurship (Galloway, 2012; Marlow *et al.*,

2018). There is a dearth of queer analyses upon entrepreneurial activities; as a field of study, entrepreneurship is remarkably conservative and embedded within heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is defined as "the view that institutionalised heterosexuality constitutes the standard for legitimate and expected social and sexual relations" (Ingraham, 2002: 76). Within queer studies or queer theory, a distinct approach is enabled that allows for the interrelation of layers of discrimination experienced such as gender and sexual orientation (Fotopoulou, 2012).

Marlow *et al.* (2018) have called for the "queering" of the entrepreneurial agenda through the deployment of queer theory to mobilise heteronormativity as an analytical category (Galloway, 2012; Schindehutte *et al.*, 2005; De Sousa *et al.*, 2016). Such deployment may also shed light on the discrimination (e.g. homophobia and heterosexism) (Herek, 2000, 2004; Kitzinger, 2001) encountered by gay entrepreneurs – for example, homophobic investors and suppliers, or discrimination from customers (Rumens and Ozturk, 2019). As Rumens and Ozturk (2019) explained, using queer theory perspectives to understand entrepreneurship forces a person not only to think about heteronormativity in the organisational context, but also about what is taken for granted each day or perceived as normative (Parker, 2002; Warner, 1993).

Heterosexism, homophobia and minority stress

In the lexicon of discrimination against gay people, homophobia and heterosexism dominate (Herek, 2000, 2004; Kitzinger, 2001). Heterosexism is underpinned by the belief that any sexuality other than heterosexuality is inferior (Temple, 2005), and the term can be used to refer to the systems that provide the rationale for homophobic discrimination (Herek, 2004). There are two distinctive forms of discrimination against gay people: generalised discrimination which is passive (such as that of heterosexism in culture), and atomised discrimination which is purposeful (for example, acute heterosexism taking the form of hate crimes) (Freshman, 1990). Although discrimination is common across the gay community, the risk of discrimination is even higher for individuals who belong to multiple marginalised groups, such as LGBTQ+ people of colour or those who are low-income. Casey *et al.* (2019) found that gay racial/ethnic minorities experience particularly high rates of gay-based discrimination in employment settings and when interacting with the legal system, while transgender adults experience considerable discrimination in both housing and health care. Recent versus lifetime experiences of sexual orientation discrimination impact the physical and mental health of gay people in different, but significant ways (Lyons *et al.*, 2021).

Scholarly research has linked the experience of discrimination with a range of individual-level negative outcomes, including minority stress and internalised homophobia (Smith and Ingram, 2004; Szymanski, 2005; Kelleher, 2009). Meyer (2003, 2007) theorised that "minority stress" is the result of experiences of heterosexist and homophobia, combining minority stressors that are common to many marginalised groups (e.g. discrimination, expectancies of rejection), with other minority stressors that are relatively unique to LGBT people (e.g. concealment of a non-heterosexual identity and internalised heterosexism). According to Meyer (1995), the psychological damage caused when an individual is excluded from normative structures because of a minority identity can deeply affect the individual and their outlook on the world around them. Tatum and Ross (2020) highlighted the issue of internalised homophobia, which is a negative attitude towards the self or other gay people. Internalised heterosexism occurs when negative views of one's own and others' queer identities develop (Puckett *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, internalised homophobia has been found to be self-sustaining in the absence of discrimination, which is a self-generating devaluation stemming from heterosexism (Meyer and Dean, 1998). Overall, Hoy-Ellis (2023) argued that the minority stress framework should be viewed from a life course or lifespan

perspective, and that it should be recognised that certain minority stress processes may be more complicated and non-linear than initially envisaged.

Ragins (2004) suggested a link between heterosexism in the workplace and the identification of self-employment as an alternative career path or opportunity for autonomy from discrimination. The existence of real or perceived discrimination against gay people in the workplace has been widely discussed in academic literature and has contributed to the development of the term "lavender ceiling" (Herek, 1996; Croteau and Bieschke, 1996; Ragins and Cornwall, 2001; Sears and Mallory, 2011). To understand the motivations of gay people for starting a business, Schindehutte et al. (2005) examined the concept of gay identity within an entrepreneurial context, together with their motives, attitudes, perceptions and management practices. They found that negative "push factors" were not the main motivation for gay entrepreneurs, but rather that such individuals were more likely to be motivated by "pull factors" such as freedom or financial independence. Similarly, Willsdon (2005) set out to establish whether homosexual entrepreneurs held the same entrepreneurial traits and motivations as their heterosexual counterparts, and concluded that, while the catalysts of entrepreneurship were similar (e.g. unemployment), the motivations (e.g. autonomy) to be an entrepreneur can differ. However, Wood et al. (2012) suggested that lesbian, gay and bisexual entrepreneurs' motivations and intentions may reflect their heterosexual counterparts and noted "like heterosexual business owners, the majority of LGBT entrepreneurs are male, Caucasian, work in the private sector and are likely to have had an entrepreneurial parent and have similar personality characteristics" (Wood et al., 2012:140).

Interestingly, Wood et al. (2012) highlight a further problem in the study of gay entrepreneurship – that the gay male entrepreneur may reinforce the hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) which supports the ecosystem of heterosexism and homophobia. Ozturk et al. (2020) found that gay men can project masculinities that safeguard them from heterosexism and homophobia (Ozturk and Rumens, 2014; Rumens and Kerfoot, 2009; Ward and Winstanley, 2006). Indeed, practicing and projecting heterosexual norms through passing as straight or non-disclosure are examples of gender identity performances that can be adopted by both men and women (Butler, 1990; 1999; 2004; 2011). However, while gay men can benefit from the cultural privileges ascribed to the white cisgendered male, lesbian women may face compounded heterosexist and gender-based discrimination (Nyeck et al., 2019). This intersection is yet to be examined in entrepreneurship literature and this study seeks to build a better understanding of this combination of potential disadvantages.

Heterosexism and homophobia are not exclusively experienced by gay people at the hands of heterosexual people. There is much research that shows other gay people can also be the source of this discrimination, including the self (Williamson, 2000; Herek, 2009). Rumens and Ozturk (2019) found that openly gay male entrepreneurs were in some cases actively denigrating and excluding other gay males in order to reconstruct their own identity within the discourse of traditional heteronormative entrepreneurship. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that LGBTQ+ people view gender as a heteronormative binary (Rocha Baptista and de Loureiro Himmel, 2016; Ferrari and Mancini, 2020; Kowalsky and Scheitle, 2020) with high levels of sexism, particularly where conservative ideologies are present (Tatum and Ross, 2020; López-Sáez and Platero, 2022). This outgroup favouritism can be understood as an alliance with the group-based stable social hierarchies (Ferrari et al., 2021) and in the case of the white, gay male entrepreneur – the male-dominated gender system.

The articulation of heteronormativity and heterosexism are conceptually linked to the study of feminism, gay and lesbian studies, and the later emergence of queer theory or studies (Warner, 1993). Foucault's History of Sexuality (1976) began a movement to better understand the social constructs of identity and sexuality. This body of literature resists the

gender binary and the rigidity of the stereotypes therein; gender in the view of Butler is performed (1990; 1999; 2004; 2011) and is flexible. Entrepreneurship in the context of queer and gender critical studies is naïve, and possibly incomplete not to recognise more fully the male/female and homosexual/heterosexual divide (Sedgwick, 1990). While we do not explicitly use queer theory or studies to frame this study of both fields, minority stress and internalised emotions are concepts commonly deployed in queer readings across a broad range of fields. Queer studies, like intersectionality, applies a lens through which we can view lived experiences outside of everything that is white, male and cisgendered.

Intersectionality and sexuality

According to Romero and Valdez (2016), research on minority entrepreneurship would significantly benefit from the application of intersectionality, as the approach enables a better understanding of the barriers to resources, networks, and clientele stemming from memberships in multiple minority groups. This "queering" through intersectionality seeks to understand what experiences lesbian and gay entrepreneurs have as a result of multiple identities, premised on exclusion and otherness, and how this influences their daily lives (Massaquoi, 2015). This study draws from the toolkit of intersectionality theory, to illuminate the layers of disadvantage apparent in the experiences of this cohort of lesbian and gay entrepreneurs. Intersectionality acknowledges the interplay between different markers of identity (Ashcraft, 2009). Hill Collins (1990) highlighted the socially constructed and interlocking dimensions of identity (Hesse-Biber *et al.*, 2004), and intersectionality has thus evolved beyond white and black women's differences to more broadly investigate the experience of marginalised groups. Intersectionality continues to be at the centre of debates looking at power dynamics from the perspective that argues interdependence between intersecting inequalities of gender, race, sexuality, age, disability, social class, religion, and nationality, in relation to subject positions and identities (Adib and Guerrier, 2003; Holvino, 2006; Vorobeva, 2022). Overlapping and intersecting markers of identities are informed by prevailing social stereotypes resulting in a narrowing of the characterisations available to one's enacted subjectivity (Butler, 1993; Gill and Ganesh, 2007). Accordingly, it is a useful analytical framework as it can aid the illumination of differences, contractions and ambiguities when multiple identities connect to construct the entrepreneurial identity (Crenshaw, 1997; Essers and Benschop, 2009; Abbas *et al.*, 2019; Martinez Dy, 2020).

Within the intersectionality framework, sexuality has been recognised as an important aspect of identity that intersects with other social categories (including gender, race, and class) and shapes individual's experiences of discrimination and exclusion (Crenshaw, 1997). Scholars have pointed out that the experiences of LGBTQ+ people are shaped not only by their sexual orientation or gender identity but also by other aspects of their identity, such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. For example, research has shown that Black LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to experience discrimination and violence than their White counterparts (Arlee *et al.*, 2019; Meyer, 2015). Similarly, individuals who belong to lower socioeconomic status are more likely to experience discrimination and stigma related to their sexual orientation and gender identity (Badgett, 2018). Essers *et al.* (2023) has recently expanded understanding of how sexual identity is an essential part of daily business for LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs and it is to this emerging body of literature that we seek to make a contribution. This study, while intersectional in nature, does not address the missing voice from the literature – LGBTQ+ entrepreneurs of colour – whose voices are seldom heard in mainstream studies, more exacerbated in the context of entrepreneurship. In homonormative discourses, "gay" reads as "white" (Sadika *et al.*, 2020) and this means that white individual's experiences are often viewed as being representative of all LGBTQ+ people (Lee, 2009).

Analytical summary
Our preceding discussion suggests that gay and lesbian entrepreneurs may face discrimination due to their sexual orientation, gender identity and lack of fit with entrepreneurial archetypes. Despite a nascent emerging thread of critical masculinity studies (Hearn, 2014), there is a generic and presumed notion of masculinity underpinning entrepreneurial stereotypes (Giazitzoglu and Down, 2017). Intersectionality allows us to examine concepts such as femininity and masculinity, along with gender, in a critical way. This concept closely aligns with what Bruni *et al.* (2004) termed "entrepreneurial masculinity," where entrepreneurship is guided by norms and values associated with hegemonic masculinity, that raises a cultural barrier against femininity and alternative forms of masculinity. It is thus important to develop a dynamic and multi-layered understanding of how hegemonic, non-hegemonic forms of masculinity, femininities, and non-binary practices manifest (or not) in entrepreneurship. This study draws from the toolkit of intersectionality theory, using the constructs of heterosexism and homophobia to examine the lived experiences of lesbian and gay entrepreneurs. Whilst there is some work in the entrepreneurial field which explores gay entrepreneurship (Marlow *et al.*, 2018), this has not been developed as a sophisticated contribution to intersectionality studies.

Methodology
Grounded in an intersectional framework (Collins, 2019; Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016), and in adherence to the underpinning research question, an interpretive methodology was deemed apposite to explore the experiences of lesbian and gay entrepreneurs who may have experienced heterosexism and homophobia (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The adoption of such an approach also aligns with calls from Marlow *et al.* (2018) for more qualitative research when researching gay entrepreneurship.

To identify gay and lesbian entrepreneurs for inclusion in this research, a purposive sampling strategy (Neergaard and Ulholi, 2007; Pratt, 2009) was adopted. Building a sample was frustratingly difficult as the gay business community was not visible and was without a professional association or network in Ireland. In order to address this, the first author formed the "Irish Gay Business Association" (IGBA) through the Dublin Institute of Technology (now Technological University Dublin) and hosted entrepreneurship seminars, debates, and a conference with more than 60 attendees. As a result of this activity, a sample of 14 participants was achieved. The context of the relationship with the first author was through the IGBA and resulted in an "insider" status fostering a sense of trust and less suspicion from the participants (Hayfield and Huxley, 2015). The selection of interviewees was based on the participant being self-identified as an entrepreneur and as gay or lesbian. The sample acknowledges age, gender, sexuality, phase of the entrepreneurial process, industry, years of experience, education, and "outness", and so it reflects the heterogeneity of the research participants (Marlow *et al.*, 2018). As such, gay and lesbian entrepreneurs who founded the business on their own or in cooperation with others, operating a minimum of two years, were interviewed in person, consisting of numerous meetings with subsequent telephone conversations to clarify and expand upon specific issues. Table 1 provides a summary of our participant's characteristics. All of our participants identified as White Irish.

The sample size (though a limited sample size) facilitated a deep and intensive engagement with the participants (Crouch and McKenzie, 2006). Small-N interview research is a well-accepted feature of LGBTQ+organisational scholarship, not least because these minority groups are difficult to access (Ozturk and Rumens, 2014; Riach *et al.*, 2014) and are deemed a sensitive research group (Ozturk *et al.*, 2020). As a result of the small sample size, the researchers were able to spend more time probing interviewees to generate rich data and reach data saturation. Through in-depth interviewing, a safe conversational space was

Participant	Gender	Age	Out	Education	Business skills training	Age of the business	Venture
Kira	F	43	No	Degree, Fine Art	Business seminars	3	Art gallery
Simon	M	39	Yes	Diploma, IT	Business seminars	2	Communications
Harriet	F	26	Yes	Degree, English Literature	None	2	Beauty
Graínne	F	38	Yes	Degree, English. Diploma, Catering	Start your own business course (SYOB)	1	Café
Penny	F	44	Yes	Degree, Arts. Masters, Management and Information Systems. Masters, Economic and Policy Studies	SYOB course	1	Café
Gary	M	35	Yes	Degree, Electronic Engineering. Diploma, Event Management	SYOB course	2	Technology consultancy
Paul	M	38	Yes	Degree, Languages. Masters, Marketing	None	2	Greeting cards
Leon	M	27	Yes	Degree, IT. Masters, Cyberpsychology	SYOB course	1	Technology consultancy
Betty	F	28	Yes	Degree, Dentistry. Masters, Orthodontistry	None	4	Chain of dentistry clinics
Gerry	M	29	Yes	Degree, Business Studies. Diploma Finance, Diploma Insurance	None	6	Financial services
Lily	F	56	Yes	Degree, Social Work. MBA	MBA, Mentorship	10	Health care
Finn	M	39	Yes	Diploma Gardening	None	5	Leisure and tourism
David	M	27	Yes	Apprenticeship	None	4	Beauty
Leisha	F	38	Yes	Degree, Psychology. Diploma, PR	Ongoing business consultancy	10	Marketing consultancy

Table 1.
Participants included in the study

Source(s): Authors

constructed in which to converse with the participants (Johnson, 2002; Ozturk *et al.*, 2020). The interviews which were conducted at the respondent's workplace or home, lasted approximately 90 min, were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The questions were semi-structured in nature which ensured that all participants discussed a common set of questions relating to their business, personal and professional history, and experiences as a gay or lesbian entrepreneur. There was an emphasis on open ended questions ensuring that participants were encouraged to elaborate on specific issues and emerging themes. The interview schedule can be found in Table 2.

Interview Introduction	Explanation of study, reaffirmation of agreement to participate, signing of consent form
Personal introduction	Gender, age, sexuality and other demographic questions
Business related questions	Tell me about your business
	Prompts related to business detail
	Prompts related to performance of business and finance
Participant experiences in professional life	Tell me about your career/employment history
	Prompts related to previous experiences, motivations, challenges and opportunities experienced in professional life
	Tell me about any role models that have influenced you
Questions related to being gay	Are you out personally/professionally?
	Tell me about your experiences
	Do you see yourself as a gay entrepreneur or an entrepreneur who is gay?
	Prompts related to emerging themes
Questions related to minority entrepreneurship	Have you ever experienced discrimination?
	As an entrepreneur, have you experienced any discrimination as a result of your sexuality?
	Tell me about any other challenges you have faced as a result of your sexuality
	Tell me about any opportunities you have experienced as a result of your sexuality
Interview summary	Review emerging themes
	Respond to any questions
Source(s): Authors	

In further aligning with an intersectional research approach, the co-production of gender and the researcher's role in the creation of gendered narratives and interpretation of data is acknowledged. This sentiment was extended to other identity markers such as race, sexuality, and class (Golombisky, 2006). The first author identifies as both female and lesbian, with a risk that this identity might hold implications on the participants and the resulting findings, so self-reflexivity was adopted to address any potential bias or assumptions (McDonald, 2013). Both Plummer (2011) and James and Platzer (1999) recognised the importance of accounting for the gay identity when undertaking research with gay subjects. A prominent tool in accounting for identity dynamics in feminist scholarship (Choi, 2006; McCorkel and Myers, 2003; McDonald, 2013; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012), self-reflexive research must account for oneself in the research process and undertake an examination of the resulting influence. Reflexivity was present at every stage of the research process (Gergen and Gergen, 2000; Hand, 2003; Sprague, 2016) through the adoption of several mechanisms such as reflexive metadata capture and bias analysis throughout the research process.

The semi-structured face-to-face interviews, follow-up phone calls and written notes resulted in a "critical mess" (Gartner, 2010) of data. Accordingly, NVivo qualitative data analysis software (QSOS International) was used as an analytical tool in order to structure the material and to draw out salient themes. Analysis began by identifying repeated statements and grouping these into provisional categories and first order codes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The authors then engaged in axial coding, focussing on the ways in which these first order categories related to each other, in order to further condense the data into theoretical categories (Locke, 1996; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In the third stage of analysis, aggregate theoretical dimensions (Corley and Gioia, 2004; Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007) were developed. Moving from first order codes to the development of aggregate theoretical dimensions was not linear, but involved deep and recursive comparison of the data with emerging codes, resulting in the development of a robust understanding of how the data related to the

theoretical constructs of our theoretical framing. The final data structure is illustrated in Table 3 which summarises the key themes upon which the findings and discussion sections are based.

Findings
This section presents the emerging themes (Table 4), illustrated with fragments of the narrative in the form of power quotes. Power quotations represent the most compelling and insightful evidence available and their usage has been advocated in the representation of qualitative data (Lee, 2014; Coviello, 2014; Fawcett *et al.*, 2014). The findings reveal that heterosexism is embedded in the everydayness of the study participants' entrepreneurial activities. The participants described varied and profoundly negative experiences of heterosexism and homophobia, and depicted a shared understanding about the pervasive nature of discrimination as experienced by lesbian and gay entrepreneurs. In some cases, the participants showed a pervasive expectation of heterosexism, both atomised and passive. Participants reflected on gender unprompted throughout the interviews, with a natural understanding of the axes of gender and sexual identity evident.

Feminine lesbian entrepreneurs
From discussions with Leisha, who tended to pass as straight and only identified as lesbian when she sought it to be beneficial, the idea of the courageous gay person was apparent – "So I suppose I shouldn't be hesitant and I believe we all have a responsibility. I do believe that the more of us that come out, it's the Harvey Milk thing, if they know us they can't fear us". Throughout our discussions with Leisha, it was clear that she felt it necessary to be brave as discrimination towards her was a given. The challenge as articulated by her was to control who, when, and how people realised the business owner was gay and limiting the damage that this could potentially cause. Leisha also gave an example of a client making homophobic jokes in front of her employees – "I was thinking I have to tell him because he is going to

First order codes	Second level codes	Aggregate themes
Statements about concealing sexuality and revealing sexuality (coming out). Statements about experiences of atomised discrimination and passive discrimination. Statements about prejudiced views of others. Statements about expectation of rejection from others. Expression of negative attitudes toward self. Expression of negative attitudes towards other gay people	Concealment Atomised Discrimination Passive discrimination	*Feminine lesbian entrepreneurs, masculine gay men*
Statements about being identifiable as gay. Statement about unknown homophobia. Statements about passive, institutionalised heterosexism. Statements about using gay stereotypes to their advantage	Inability to separate the identity of the entrepreneur from their businesses Everyday prejudices	*Masculine lesbians, feminine gay men*
Statements about avoiding being seen as a victim of discrimination. Statements about normalised heterosexism. Expression of negative attitudes toward self. Expression of negative attitudes towards other gay people	Internalised homophobia Minority stress	*Minority stress*

Source(s): Authors

Table 3.
Data structure

Passive discrimination	Atomised discrimination	Gendered discrimination
Looking after vulnerable children in care, there would be an assumption that there would be something sexually wrong about the company and that we wouldn't be safe to look after children. *Lily*	I mean when I started it was illegal. You felt, "oh God how am I going to get through this". *Simon*	I don't think people associate gay women with the beauty industry. *Harriet*
What if they are thinking that the therapists are gay, and if they are getting waxed down there. People are ridiculous, but this is it. *Harriet*	He made complaints to the HSE and Ministers [a parent of a child in care] but he started a public campaign which would impact not only on that kid but all the kids in our care and on the company. *Lily*	Sometimes I think there is a lack of security in being two women as well. That you don't have the muscle or whatever. *Penny*
That is a minority thing, maybe it is a little more difficult to find common ground with people enmasse if you are from a minority. *Harriet*	Every time we go into the park "Lesbians!" comes across the park. We have a dog so we would be in the park 4 times a day. *Lily*	I had two women who are in charge of the biggest scheme and they absolutely love me because I put it on. Not in a bad way, in a nice way. That a straight guy wouldn't be able to. *Gerry*
It's ok if two guys get together but they would be afraid if they put a child in that environment that the child is going to get molested. Now that's the elephant in the room and nobody wants to say that. *Simon*	I have been beaten up. I was beaten up by a guy in London a few years ago for walking down the street with my girlfriend. I have been called a "dyke" so many times. I have had men proposition me in really violent, vulgar ways. A lot of kind of verbal abuse, mainly from men. You kind of stop counting, don't you? *Harriet*	Most of my customers would be women, ones that have been coming here for years and there is a comfort there. *Finn*
Being gay [business owner] and going to a small village. Like I grew up there and I know what it's like and it's not easy. *Penny*	[A man] Was going to start making kind of mincing kind of motions and just pulling the piss about being gay and obviously he was doing it at me. All the other guys started laughing and I was really upset and really angry. I was more upset because I didn't say anything. *Gerry*	I realised then looking at the Irish system that there was no way that women are going to be anywhere in it until something serious shifts. *Gráinne*
So, I'm just speaking from my perspective as a gay man. Everything that represents us is hyper sexualised. *Paul*	Years ago, when I was 20 [beaten for being gay] but that was in the town. *Finn*	I have always found it a great advantage being a senior manager and being a lesbian because you mix almost exclusively with men, and you are not a threat to their wives. *Lily*
We all use the word married but it's just not is it. *Finn*	There is one guy down there [living nearby business premises] who gave me a lot of hassle at one stage. *Finn*	[In a business development meeting] when I spoke (bar my client) the men in the room directed their responses back to my [male] account executive. *Leisha*
People definitely don't see it the same as with a girlfriend isn't the same as having a boyfriend. *Blathin*	I was walking down the street with my arm around my girlfriend and we had an egg thrown at us. *Leisha*	Very simple things like dealing with builders and work men don't take you as seriously as they would a man talking to them. *Penny*

(continued)

Table 4.
Heterosexism,
homophobia and
gender experiences

Passive discrimination	Atomised discrimination	Gendered discrimination
Before I was out, my boss over in the UK would say things like "hippie dykes". *Harriet*	We've had things shouted at me you know walking down the street, when we have been holding hands. *Gráinne*	I'm not a typical woman, I have to say in a very stereotypical way. I can talk to a guy about sport. Ok I might know how to use a wrench in a particular situation but you know it's about creating a bit of empathy with a person. And they no longer see you as someone who knows nothing and can be taken advantage of. *Kira*
You know, nothing really positive is going to come out of being gay other than maybe the odd good conversation – but a lot of negative things could happen. *Harriet*	[Heterosexist] bullying in the playground especially when I was a teenager. *Paul*	They [women] talk to me more easily, they talk to me about their relationships and how they feel. How their lives are going than they would to a straight guy but no I wouldn't imagine it has any major advantages or disadvantages. *Finn*
	A friend of mine was kissing his boyfriend on O'Connell street and some German guy, probably about 5 '1, said that if he didn't stop kissing his boyfriend in front of them that he was going to slit their throats. *David*	I have been told that the reason I haven't gotten a certain job is because I'm not a guy, not a drinking buddy, you know. *Kira*

Table 4.   **Source(s):** Authors

humiliate himself if he keeps going down that route". In this case, despite feeling an obligation to be an out gay person, the entrepreneur felt that the business could suffer from its association with its lesbian owner. Leisha acknowledged that she could pass as heterosexual and was perceived as being quite feminine by others. As such, the entrepreneur was able to enact what she deemed an appropriate gender identity performance depending on the situation or context (Butler, 1990). While the perpetrator of homophobic or heterosexist remarks may not realise the impact of their words, it was evident that the experience was still harmful to Leisha. Some of the other participants who also opted to pass as straight (i.e. Kira, Betty and Harriet) also mentioned that they felt they were being discriminated against by people in ways they did not know and worried about how their businesses would be perceived by people. Indeed, this sense of inevitable, everyday prejudice was prevalent across all the interview narratives. Betty described unknown homophobia as "everyday prejudices" and said that she "just knew it would affect the business" and as a result chose to transcend her sexuality or pass as straight in the context of her entrepreneurial endeavours. This expected or anticipated discrimination was often linked to a story of experiencing heterosexism or homophobia in the workplace or business.

Harriet is a feminine lesbian; while she often passes as heterosexual, she describes herself as open in most situations about her sexuality. Harriet experienced violent, atomised and passive discrimination. She had been affected by seemingly passive discrimination in the workplace where she had decided not to come out as she had heard homophobic slurs from senior management. Harriet had been physically assaulted in a homophobic attack several years prior to the interview as she walked down the street with her girlfriend. She recalled many times when she had been verbally abused and said that this mainly came from

heterosexual men, and emphasised that this was often vulgar and sexual in nature. "I have been called a "dyke"' so many times. I have had men proposition me in really violent, vulgar ways. A lot of kind of verbal abuse, mainly from men. You kind of stop counting, don't you?" Harriet reflected on the risk of coming out in the workplace versus any potential benefit from revealing, such as customer referrals or networking opportunities. These experiences led to Harriet choosing to pass as heterosexual rather than become potentially vulnerable to the reactions of others by identifying herself as a lesbian.

In some cases, passing lesbians described typical experiences of gendered discrimination. For example, as described by Leisha "[In a business development meeting] when I spoke, bar my client, the men in the room directed their responses back to my [male] account executive". On the other hand, some participants worried about being lesbian women in their industry. For example, Harriet described concerns about the perception that there would be something sexually deviant about her business if she were out as a lesbian woman to her clients – "I'm a little concerned about that [being out] in the workplace, I don't think people associate gay women with the beauty industry. What if they are thinking that the therapists are gay, and if they are getting waxed down there. People are ridiculous, but this is it".

Masculine lesbians, feminine gay men
Lily spoke about her sense that there would be people talking about her – "I"m sure there are individuals that might say things, in a management context, behind my back, but I've never heard it, so I don't really care'. Lily felt that she was identifiable as gay, explaining that she "looked like a lesbian" but that she had experienced discrimination on the basis of her sexuality in the workplace on many occasions. In one workplace, she experienced harassment from a colleague who sent messages around her office accusing her of having an affair with a senior married female colleague. Later, when Lily was an established entrepreneur, her business was targeted with homophobic abuse and accusations of sexual impropriety. The experiences described by Lily were extreme, targeted abusive homophobia directed at her personally in the workplace and later as an entrepreneur. There was no separation of the identity of the entrepreneur from the business – while Lily did not pass as heterosexual or feminine, neither did the business.

As an effeminate gay man, Gerry felt that his perception as "camp" would have a negative effect on his business. He described facing discrimination throughout his life for this reason and appeared to expect similar treatment when it came to business. This reinforced the inseparability of the identity of the entrepreneur from their businesses, especially in the case of non-conforming gender presentations. Like Lily, Gerry explained that being a camp gay man would undoubtedly "chase away some customers", but that he had no way of knowing who and how many potential customers would be lost. A pattern emerged amongst the participants which suggested that those who were more likely to be identifiable as gay expected their respective businesses to suffer as a result.

Graínne described herself as "masculine in many ways" and felt that this would help her business. She spoke about how she expected men not to treat her like she "didn't know what she was talking about". Conversely, for passing/transcending lesbian entrepreneur Penny, the experience of being a female entrepreneur was more pronounced – "Very simple things like dealing with builders and work men who don't take you as seriously as they would a man talking to them". More unique to the lesbian experience at the intersection of gender and sexuality, Lily offered insight into how being a lesbian can be of benefit in a male dominated work environment – "I have always found it a great advantage being a senior manager and being a lesbian because you mix almost exclusively with men, and you are not a threat to their wives."

David, Gerry and Finn explained how women trusted them more because they were gay men and perceived them to be a non-threatening male ally for heterosexual women. As illustrated by David "they [women] talk to me more easily, they talk to me about their relationships and how they feel", which emphasised that trust between gay men and straight women was good for business. Gerry described how he leveraged his gay identity in some work situations – "I had two women who are in charge of the biggest scheme and they absolutely love me because I put it on. Not in a bad way, in a nice way. That a straight guy wouldn't be able to." Finn also explained that he found his strong relationships with female clients a benefit for his business – "Most of my customers would be women, ones that have been coming here for years and there is a comfort there". David explained that he was seen as having a better eye for fashion than his heterosexual counterparts and that this also led to him being seen as more skilled in his profession – "The only advantage [of being a gay hairdresser] is that women trust my style and fashion sense, and love being complimented by me". This pattern in the data illustrated that lesbian and gay entrepreneurs may benefit from gay stereotypes and resultant discrimination against their business simultaneously. A strong indication from the findings is that gay people may transcend traditional gender roles, but not enough to make them immune from discrimination as a result of their sexual orientation.

Minority stress

The hallmarks of minority stress were evident across many of the interviews, most notably with Kira. This participant normalised heterosexism and stated that she had never experienced discrimination, but also noted that she expected people to be prejudiced. She said that she is "always surprised by people" who are not "homophobic". She grew up in an environment which was hostile towards people who were gay and explained that "she can see where prejudice can stem from". Sympathising with homophobic views, she expressed a dislike towards what she described as "real campy men". Kira felt strongly that masculine women, and feminine men should expect to experience homophobia and engage in either passing as straight or transcending sexuality in order to mitigate against negative outcomes for the business. These views are homophobic and heterosexist, yet are directed at gay men and lesbian women by a lesbian woman who chooses to pass as straight.

The assertion that there is something wrong with being perceived as "dykey" or "camp" was a recurring theme (also with Gerry, David) and is an explicit form of internalised homophobia towards self and others. Other participants indicated similar views about being out in the workplace, which Simon referred to as a balancing act – "you have to be sensitive to people, you don't want to ram things down people's throats. I try to get the balance right". David felt that by not being overtly gay that he did not attract heterosexism or homophobia – "I'm not very camp and I'm not a screaming queen. That's why I wouldn't get a lot of hassle. I would say that maybe people who provoke it would get a lot more hassle." Many participants repeated the use of words that are derogatory towards other gay people reinforcing heterosexism and homophobia, creating an "other" of lesbian and gay people.

In many instances, our participants were reluctant to acknowledge heterosexist discrimination in what appeared to be an attempt to transcend the experience, despite frequently describing such discrimination in an effort to seemingly avoid being victimised by this experience. The most striking signal of minority stress was negative attitudes towards other gay individuals and empathy for heterosexist discrimination. Internalised homophobia was apparent across the experiences of the entrepreneurs. For example, it seemed that Gerry reinforced heterosexist values in the workplace for his own employees, a clear signal of minority stress that could potentially be based on fear that his business would suffer if it were perceived as non-traditional – "One of the girls was saying she might do a shopping centre for a week and I was going no; I don't think that she is very approachable. I think the same thing

if I was overly camp, absolutely camp as Christmas, there would be no way that I would be as successful as I am today. Because no one wants to do a deal with a campo sissy". He also displayed a strong dislike for overtly gay stereotypes such as "dykey" women and "camp" men, which he associated with failure and generalised about the lack of professional success in the gay community based on his own group of friends. As Gerry remarked – "Many people in this world have a perception of the gay community that gay people are mincy queens, whereas that is not the case in a lot of the business world because a lot of business people are very successful". He went on to describe how he avoided putting a "butch" female employee in a position where she could speak to customers. In this example, Gerry suggests that feminine gay men and masculine women cannot be successful in the business world and are perceived as unprofessional.

A pattern also emerged which suggested that the participants wished to avoid being seen as victims of discrimination. Several of the participants referenced workplace bullying or intimidation but would not directly link this with their sexual orientation (despite anecdotal evidence to suggest it was such). David spoke about how he had personally never experienced prejudice and suggested that it was because he was not "flaunting it". However, he also described being "hassled" by other boys for being gay when he was at school and had recently witnessed a friend being threatened with having his "throat slit" by a stranger for being gay. Other participants concurred; for example, Leon said that he had never experienced any form of discrimination but also explained that he had been "very lucky". This was a clear pattern that emerged in the conversations with the participants and it was most notable due to the use of the word "lucky". Several participants described experiences of violent and verbal discrimination, such as being screamed at on the street, threatened or even targeted and harassed. Despite this, these participants described themselves as "lucky" not to have experienced heterosexist discrimination (see Table 1).

Discussion
This research builds on the existing literature related to gay entrepreneurship, offering a perspective of the lesbian and gay entrepreneur with an emphasis on the negative experiences related to being gay manifest through heterosexism and homophobia. The ongoing theme of outness and gender identity performances (Kidney, 2021) to understand gay people in business – whether they are openly gay or not, and to whom have they been openly gay (Schindehutte et al., 2005; Redien-Collot, 2012) persists in the findings of this study. Outness intersects with how discrimination is experienced, particularly the experiences of those who are visibly or openly gay versus the experiences of those who can pass as straight or transcend purposefully. This work responds to the criticisms of entrepreneurship literature (Galloway, 2012; Marlow and Martinez-Dy, 2018) and advances the work of Herek (2000, 2004) and Kitzinger (2001) into new contexts. The findings provide support for the idea discussed by many scholars who have addressed the topic (Lukenbill, 1995; Willsdon, 2005; Schindehutte et al., 2005; Galloway, 2008, 2012; Wood et al., 2012; Rumens and Ozturk, 2019) that gay entrepreneurs may face real or perceived heterosexism and homophobic discrimination from clients, supplier and customers. This study examined these experiences and brings a detailed view of the axes of discrimination, in addition to uncovering new insights on the intersectional experiences of lesbian and gay entrepreneurs. The application of this lens to entrepreneurship is aligned with calls to use queer theory (Rumens and Ozturk, 2019) and queer the agenda in the field (Marlow et al., 2018).

Throughout the interviews there was consensus that heterosexist discrimination is embedded in society with all the participants describing experiences of heterosexism and homophobia, thereby emphasising the findings of Kitzinger (2001) and Herek (2004). These findings go further than extant studies, examining the perceived nature of these experiences

and uncovering that the lesbian and gay entrepreneurs felt this was a "normal" or "everyday" experience with prejudice. In many cases, the participants described experiences of harassment, violent abuse, verbal abuse, passive homophobia, and hypersexualisation. When they were questioned on this, they did not link their previous experiences with prejudice or discrimination. There was a reluctance to link these experiences with being gay or lesbian, despite the explicit connections that the participants described. The denial of victimisation reflects the notion of transcending association with sexual orientation, which echoes the work of Redien-Collot (2012). A key insight from the participants is that the option of transcending sexual orientation is a strategy reserved for those who are not identifiably gay or who break from the masculine/feminine traits typical of their gender.

The participants demonstrated the ordinariness of heterosexist discrimination in their lives. This research found lesbian and gay entrepreneurs perceive prejudice as a commonplace occurrence. It was clear from the data that this perception of everyday prejudice stemmed from a pervasive experience of heterosexism and homophobia. Interestingly, the established entrepreneurs worried more that the business would be discriminated against rather than themselves as an individual. The experiences of lesbian and gay entrepreneurs suggested that to be in control of potential prejudice becomes a strategic choice and indicates that various gender identity performance approaches are utilised to minimise the impact of heterosexism and homophobia on both the person and the business (Butler, 1990, 2004). It also emerged that due to the expectation of discrimination, lesbian and gay entrepreneurs may be reluctant to identify themselves as gay or lesbian in the workplace, and in some cases choose the path of entrepreneurship as a strategy for achieving an autonomous career trajectory and management of minority stress. These findings build on the work of Schindehutte *et al.* (2005), Galloway (2012) and Redien-Collot (2012) highlighting the significance of gender identity performances in the experience of the lesbian and gay entrepreneur.

A pattern also emerged relating to participants suggesting that they had been *"lucky"* to avoid serious physical or verbal homophobia. These findings suggest that many of the lesbian and gay entrepreneurs felt that they must be *"courageous"* or *"brave"* to be open about their sexuality as it carries a distinct risk of being subject to discrimination. The data clearly illustrated that negative experiences related to sexuality permeated the experience of the entrepreneurs and had consequences for them at discovery, exploitation, and execution of entrepreneurial opportunities. In other words, the participants'" transition from personal experience of "everyday prejudice" to the business experiencing "everyday prejudice". The interviewees frequently contradicted themselves and appeared to do so as a mechanism to avoid victimisation due to discrimination. This reinforces the notion that prejudice is a normal occurrence which is a customary part of life for the lesbian and gay entrepreneurs interviewed.

There was some evidence to suggest that heterosexism had influenced the motivation to become an entrepreneur for some participants, contrary to Schindehutte *et al.* (2005) and Willsdon (2005) who found no influence on the motivations of gay entrepreneurs. Yet, the entrepreneurs spoke about typical motivations such as autonomy which is in line with Willsdon (2005) and Wood *et al.* (2012) who depicted a gay male entrepreneur with stereotypical white cisgender privilege supporting their endeavours. Indeed, this was supported by the comments from some gay male entrepreneurs who reinforced hegemonic masculinity. This clearly supports the work of Rumens and Ozturk (2019) and Ozturk *et al.* (2020), yet goes further to show how this was mobilised against lesbians and visibly or openly gay men. The findings show that lesbian entrepreneurs experience discrimination related to both gender and sexual orientation, including from other gay entrepreneurs. The women in this study who tend to pass as straight or transcend their sexual orientation appear to reflect many of the experiences known to be typical of female entrepreneurs in general. Building on

what is known about gender identity performances of gay and lesbian entrepreneurs, this study provided evidence that being identifiably gay was linked to femininity and masculinity by the participants. This axis of sexual minority identity and masculinity or femininity is a new intersection in the study of entrepreneurship.

The findings also indicate that the entrepreneurs were experiencing homophobic or heterosexist thoughts about themselves and negative thoughts about other gay people which is indicative of minority stress (Meyer, 2003, 2007). These homophobic views were expressed through ideas and language that diminished the ability or character of the person concerned based on their sexual orientation. Rumens and Ozturk (2019) found negative attitudes towards other gay males in their work, while the findings of this study showed that this was more pervasive with homophobic or heterosexist views expressed by both lesbians and gay men. Herein lies an intersectional opportunity to examine how and why gay men employ the same heterosexism and homophobia that discriminates against them. This provides evidence that gay people can be the source of heterosexism and homophobia as a result of minority stress (Williamson, 2000; Meyer, 2003, 2007; Herek, 2009) through internalised homophobia (Tatum and Ross, 2020) or heterosexist views. Strikingly, for the lesbian participants, "everyday prejudice" often manifested itself in aggressive sexual harassment from heterosexual men. The women recounted with ease stories of leering, suggestive or vulgar comments, and harassment which they had experienced. The findings show that lesbian entrepreneurs experience discrimination related to both gender and sexual orientation.

Conclusion

This article explored the "everyday prejudices" as experienced from the perspective of the 14 lesbian and gay entrepreneurs. It was clear from the data that heterosexist discrimination, as a pervasive context, was common in the lives of the participants as minority stress was evident across every interview undertaken. Additionally, the entrepreneurs described passive and atomised experiences with discrimination from the violent to the subtle. In many cases, non-conforming masculinity/femininity played a role in the experiences of the entrepreneurs, often triggering homophobia. Further analysis of this trend revealed that lesbian and gay entrepreneurs would avoid discrimination, and in some cases attempt to assimilate or pass as straight, in order to minimise the negative impact of this. This is a very different response from some minority groups who have greater difficulty in "passing" as majority, such as some ethnic communities and people with visible disabilities. It is important to note that the sample in this study was of Irish entrepreneurs who are White and were only distinguished by their sexual orientations. This approach avoided a potential confounding factor of racial differences or perceived immigration status. This research employed what might be described a queer intersectional approach – both queering in our view of lesbian and gay, but also in our understanding of gender identity performances (Butler 1990, 2004).

Within this article, we make the following theoretical contributions. Our key contribution to existing knowledge is positioned within LGBT+ entrepreneurship research (Galloway, 2008, 2012; Marlow *et al.*, 2018; Schindehutte *et al.*, 2005; Shepherd and Patzelt, 2015; Varnell, 2001; Willsdon, 2005). This article adds further depth to the limited research on the impact of heterosexism on LGBT+ entrepreneurial activities and builds a better understanding of the gendered experiences of on LGBT+ entrepreneurs. In particular, our intersectional perspective of the lesbian-female entrepreneur, underscores the various ways that gendered-heterosexism and homophobia can be experienced by the entrepreneur. Second, we contribute to the intersectionality literature (Essers *et al.*, 2010; Valdez, 2011; Knight, 2016) by illustrating how variations in LGBT+ entrepreneurs' attachment to a model of perceived neutrality in business influenced their gender identity performances (Butler, 1990). Different axes of identity influenced the selection of *when, who to and how to* be queer in business.

Third, by highlighting the issue of minority stress in entrepreneurship, we advance the minority stress literature (Meyer, 2003, 2015 Kelleher, 2009). In particular, we highlight the impact of minority stress on LGBT+ entrepreneurs, who face unique challenges and stressors related to their sexual orientation.

The discussion suggests a number of possibilities in terms of future work to address some of the limitations of this research. While this article offers a better understanding of how lesbian and gay entrepreneurs experience heterosexism, there is additional room for a significant investigation of the varied perspectives, such as race or industry context. Little is known about queer entrepreneurs who are not white gay cis men or lesbian cis women – for example, the entrepreneurial activities of trans women of colour, who are often disproportionately active in the beauty, entertainment and sex work industries (Mock, 2014). This is likely due to the heightened marginality of their identities, general lack of mainstream social acceptance, and the vulnerability this precludes (Grant, 2016). This means that their businesses may be particularly economically constrained and relatively hidden, situated in grey economies and outside markets where the bulk of research is conducted. Such speculation raises issues of potential interest but, to date, lack theoretical interrogation and empirical evidence. Therefore, exploring gender multiplicities within the context of entrepreneurship offers considerable potential. To this end, qualitative research will undoubtedly prove particularly informative in exploring gender multiplicities and entrepreneurial behaviour and furthering one's understanding of the same, with much scope for intersectional studies to illuminate the combined influence of different positionalities.

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