

CO-SEXUALITY: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF ORGANIZING AROUND
SEXUALITY

Cristin A. Compton

Dr. Debbie Dougherty, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Sex and sexuality are a core part of the human experience. What has been socially constructed as "normal" sexuality (e.g., acts, behaviors, preferences, conversation topics, vocabulary, etc.) has changed dramatically over time. Because sex and sexuality are fundamentally acts of power (Foucault, 1978/1990), human sexuality is a highly regulated construct that people organize around. This is particularly true in the context of the workplace, where policies and daily practices both explicitly and implicitly regulate performances of and communication about sexuality. This dissertation explores the process of co-sexuality: how "normal" sexuality is communicatively constructed in the modern Midwestern workplace as well as how people organize around the constructed norm. Participants identifying with a variety of sexualities, genders, and professions drew on the master narrative of the Midwest, the expectation of aggressive sexuality, and acts of silence/ing to describe the process of co-sexuality. Participants also described feeling simultaneously pulled toward and pushed away from the "normal" sexual center and the complex identity work needed to remain effective in the workplace. Implications for theory, sexuality scholarship, and political implications are also discussed.