

# PRACTICE POINTS

2021 DATA ANALYSIS FROM THE AWEI NATIONAL SURVEY

BEST PRACTICE FOR THE INCLUSION OF PEOPLE OF DIVERSE GENDERS & SEXUALITIES IN AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACES

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## BI+ VISIBILITY

The annual Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) Employee Survey had its largest response rate ever this year, including 186 participating organisations. The 2021 Survey saw a response rate of 44,915 employees across Australia, of which 18.8% individuals (n7,930) identified as being of diverse sexuality and/or gender (LGBTQ).

Respondents were employees working within organisations active in LGBTQ inclusion, whether they be in the early or developmental stages of their inclusion journey or well versed in advancing and advocating workplace experiences for LGBTQ people and their allies.

This edition will focus on bisexual and pansexual respondents, and their gay/lesbian counterparts by examining the differences in perceptions, perspectives and lived experiences in their workplaces.

## RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Bi+ people represent the largest group within the LGBTQ community yet are disproportionately underrepresented in Australian workplaces and do not experience belonging to the same extent as other diverse sexualities. The term Bi+ serves as an umbrella term for individuals who experience attraction to more than one gender and includes the terms Bisexual and Pansexual.

Of the 5,560 respondents with a diverse sexual orientation, 24% identified as bisexual (1,578), 6.6% as pansexual (n430). There was a 4% increase in the number of bisexual respondents this year, and a 6% decrease in the amount of gay/lesbian respondents – though the latter still comprised a majority (54.7% - n3,586) of respondents with a diverse sexuality.

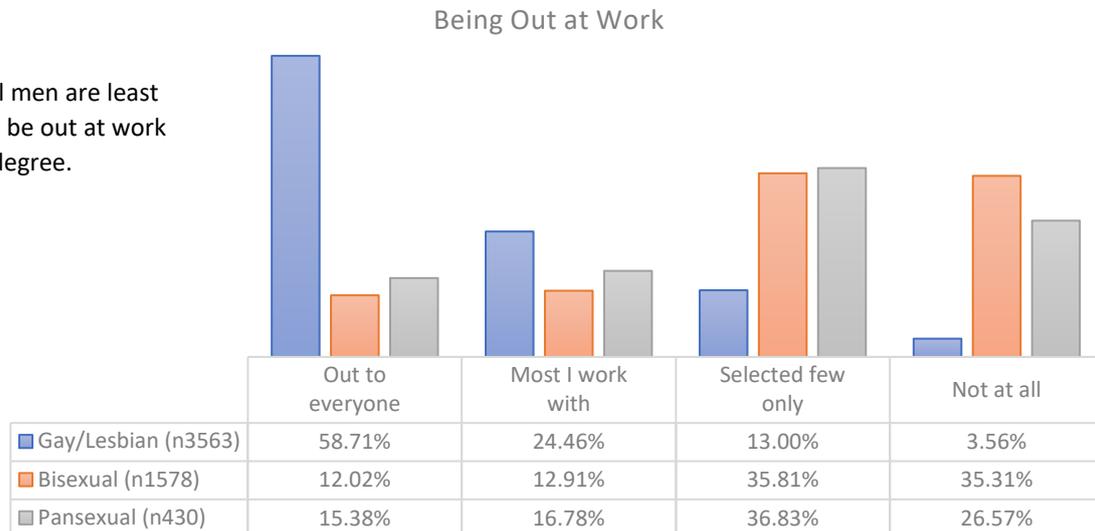
Regarding gender identity, 72% of bisexual and 70% of pansexual respondents were women; compared to 32% of gay/lesbian. Approximately 5% of bisexual and gay/lesbian respondents had a gender diversity; compared to 3% of pansexual.

When looking at ages of respondents, data showed that Bi+ employees are more likely to be a part of those under 35 years old, while those over 35 years were more likely to identify as gay/lesbian.

## BEING OUT AT WORK

We also know that the younger an employee is, the less likely they are to be out at work. This is a consistent finding every year in the AWEI Survey data – regardless of age, gender identity, and/or sexuality. However, when looking at outness at work based on diverse sexual orientation, **bisexual employees are the least likely to be out and mostly likely to be not out at all.**

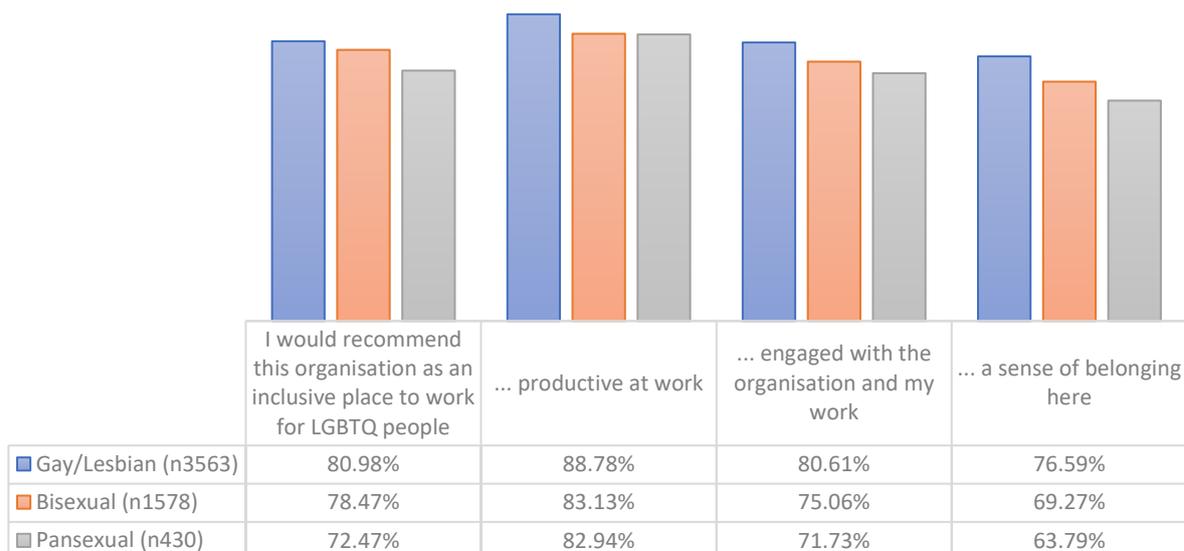
- Bisexual men are least likely to be out at work to any degree.



The top reasons why bisexual employees were not out at work were “I do not feel it would be accepted by some members of my team” (33%) and “I am not comfortable enough within myself to be out at work” (38%).

## ENGAGEMENT, HEALTH + WELLBEING

There is a clear trend when comparing the engagement, health + wellbeing of these three diverse sexualities. Gay/Lesbian employees are more likely to recommend their organisation and an inclusive place to work. Likewise, they are more likely feel productive, engaged, and a sense of belonging.



However, bisexual employees felt their overall engagement was positively impacted by being out at work this year (6% higher than last year).

## BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

Compared to last year, bisexual employees were more likely to witness inappropriate workplace behaviours and more serious bullying this year. They were also more likely this year to be the target of such inappropriate workplace behaviours and more serious bullying (4% increase from 2020). However, gay/lesbian and pansexual employees were less likely to experience any of these instances when compared to last year.

Despite this, gay/lesbian and bisexual employees were twice as likely as pansexual employees to be targets of more serious bullying and harassment.

## DIVERSE DEMOGRAPHICS AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation or another diverse identity, all respondents are still more likely to experience such discrimination based on their sexual orientation.

65% of LGBP employees with another diversity identity feel most valued for their diverse sexual orientation. While this response rate appears positive, it is important to note that they have also experienced the highest rates of exclusion (49%) and stigma (52%) based on their diverse sexual orientation. 39% also believe it is the least accepted aspect of their identity.

In the workplace, gay/lesbian employees experience higher rates of value (74%); stigma (65%); exclusion (62%); and acceptance (46%) compared to bisexual and pansexual employees. They are almost twice as likely to feel excluded for being gay/lesbian than bisexual and pansexual employees.

Neuro-diverse employees with a diverse sexuality were almost three times more likely to identify as bisexual and six times more likely pansexual, than identify as gay/lesbian. This same trend showed for employees who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; and those who said they were living with a disability.

**“THE FOCUS IS STRONGLY LESBIAN OR GAY. FOR THOSE WHO ARE BISEXUAL OR PANSEXUAL, THERE ARE MORE SHADES OF GREY.**

**IT WOULD BE GOOD TO FOCUS MORE ON SEXUALITY BEING A SPECTRUM RATHER THAN A LABEL.”**

## IMPACT OF INCLUSION INITIATIVES

Every year, the AWEI Employee Survey illustrates the huge impact that workplace LGBTQ inclusion initiatives have on employees, including and overall positive impact of general organisational culture (93%).

Further, a positive track record in this space is important to all LGBP employees.

However, bisexual employees are least likely to be positively impacted by active allies (46%). Pansexual employees are least likely to see visible signs of support for LGBTQ inclusion (68%). A majority of respondents believe their organisation should put more effort into LGBTQ inclusion (65%).

## IN CONCLUSION

The AWEI Survey has consistently reported over the past several years that Bi+ employees are significantly less likely to be out at work and are less likely to feel productive, engaged and a sense of belonging in their workplace when compared with Gay/Lesbian employees.

The concern of acceptance among fellow team members is still a top reason for employees not to be out at work, regardless of their sexual orientation.

Bisexual employees show a significant increase of engagement with their work, when they are out at work. However, they also experienced more instances of inappropriate workplace behaviours, bullying and harassment this year when compared to last year.

LGBP employees with multiple diverse identities are most valued for their diverse sexuality but this aspect of their identity still experiences the most stigma and exclusion and least acceptance.

While LGBTQ inclusion initiatives have an overwhelming impact on general organisational culture, this does not translate for bisexual employees, who continue to feel overlooked when discussing “gay and lesbian” inclusion work.

## ACTION POINTS – WHAT CAN YOU DO?

It is crucial to curate the *education, inclusion and visibility* for Bi+ employees when discussing LGBTQ inclusion work, and to especially utilise inclusive language when referring the “gay and lesbian” community.

Have you considered celebrating Bi+ *Days of Significance*? **Bisexual Visibility Day**, or Celebrate Bisexual Day is held on 23 September annually.

Do your *policies* include specific examples for Bi+ employees? For example, do you have specific examples of what constitute *bullying or harassment* for bisexual and pansexual employees – beyond that of general diverse sexual orientation?

Have your *executives or leaders* communicated their support of the Bi+ community?

Does the leadership structure of your employee *Pride Network* reflect the diversity of the LGBTQ community and have Bi+ representation?

Doing any of the above will facilitate increased engagement and productivity as Bi+ people are enabled to bring their whole self to work and realise their full potential.

**Please speak to your Relationship Manager regarding how to use this information to influence your activities and promote a more inclusive workplace for LGBTQ employees.**

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