

The LGBTQ+ Workforce: Understanding their Experience

An understudied population. It is estimated that less than 20% of LGBTQ+ adults can be accounted for in the Current Population Survey - the basis for U.S. labor statistics - as it does not gather data related to sexual orientation and gender identity. Stigma, the fact that not all employees are out at work, and systems that are not set up to capture this information can also compromise the accuracy of data gathered by individual organizations.

A recent study by [BCG](#) in conjunction with NYC's LGBT Community Center found that among U.S. LGBTQ+ employees aged 45 and above, the largest share of the population identifies as gay, and among those younger than 44, the vast majority identifies as bisexual.

Coming out and feeling safe at work. The [BCG](#) (2020) report also revealed key findings related to the process of coming out at work. Most remarkably:

- 40% of LGBTQ+ employees are not out at work.
- Of those who are, 54% remain closeted to their customers and clients.
- 75% indicated having experienced at least one negative workplace interaction due to their LGBTQ+ identity, with 41% reporting that this has happened more than ten times in the past year.

It is important to note that the act of coming out is a lifelong process for LGBTQ+ individuals. It involves a constant assessment of safety in day-to-day interactions that many might consider inconsequential - e.g. answering questions about a significant other or spouse, the basic act of introducing oneself, or even choosing what to wear. Every interaction with a new colleague or client is a decision point for these employees.

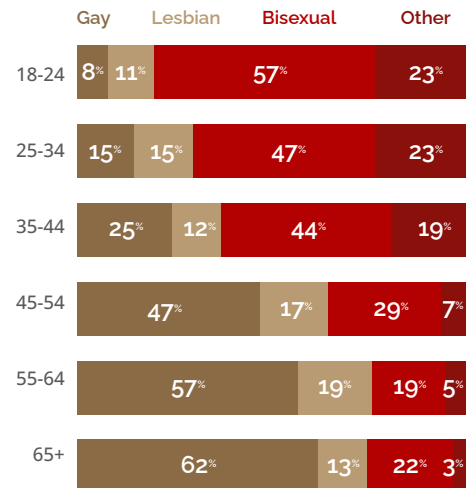
- According to data gathered by [McKinsey](#) (2020), 48% of LGBTQ+ employees have to come out at work on a daily or weekly basis.
- Women and junior-level employees are the least likely groups to be out at work.

All too often LGBTQ+ individuals face a work environment that can feel unwelcoming of their identity. These experiences can range from subtle microaggressions, to overt derogatory comments and harassment, as well as a lack of LGBTQ+-inclusive policies and benefits.

- In a survey by the [Williams Institute](#) (2021), roughly **7 out of 10 LGBTQ+ employees reported hearing negative comments, slurs, or jokes about LGBTQ+ people while at work.**
- The emotional tax of being constantly on guard and hyper-aware of how one's identity might result in discrimination, or even aggression at work, can undoubtedly have a detrimental impact on LGBTQ+ employee's engagement and productivity.

Categories of self-identification of LGBTQ+ adults by age

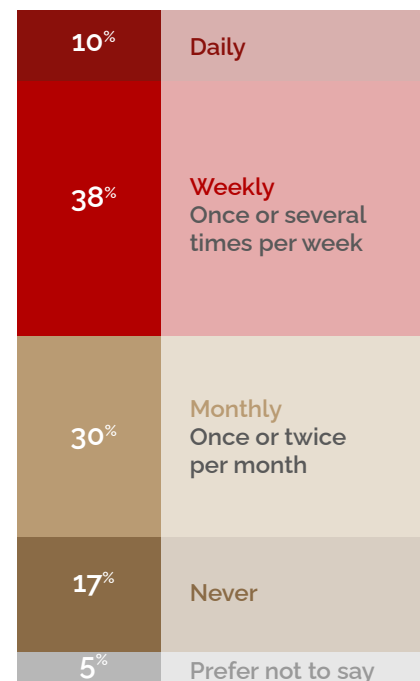
Source: [BCG, 2022](#)



*reported data was not broken down by gender identity

How often LGBTQ+ employees have to come out at work

Source: [McKinsey, 2020](#)



Intersectionality and the experience of "onlyness." Often, LGBTQ+ employees face the experience of being an "only" in the room, a feeling that is even more commonplace for those whose identities are further underrepresented in their places of work (McKinsey, 2020). Not only can this lack of representation feel isolating and stressful, but it can make these employees more susceptible to disparate career outcomes. LGBTQ+ individuals are already at a higher risk of unfair treatment at work, compared to straight and cisgender colleagues, and their workplace experience can vary considerably depending on their intersectional identities.

- Only 4 CEO's (0.8%) of Fortune 500 companies identify as LGBTQ+.
- LGBTQ+ employees of color are more likely to experience employment discrimination as a result of their sexual orientation or gender identity than their white LGBTQ+ peers - 33.2% vs 26.3% - and are more likely to report experiencing verbal harassment at work - 35% vs. 25.9% (Williams Institute, 2021).
- Similarly, transgender employees report experiencing employment discrimination and verbal harassment at work at significantly higher rates than LGBTQ+ cisgender employees - 48.8% vs. 27.8% and 43.8% vs. 29.3%, respectively. They were also found to be much more likely to engage in "covering" at work (Williams Institute, 2021).
- LGBTQ+ women are twice as likely as cisgender and straight women to report being an "only" and 1.4 times more likely to experience workplace sexual harassment.
- LGBTQ+ women of color are eight times more likely than straight white men to report "onlyness" (McKinsey, 2020).
- Full-time LGBTQ+ workers overall make about \$0.90 for every dollar a typical worker earns. LGBTQ+ people of color and transgender and non-binary individuals earn considerably less (HRC, 2021).

Among LGBTQ+ individuals working in an environment that is unwelcoming of their identity:

25%

feel **distracted** from work

20%

avoid **special events** at work (e.g. lunches, holiday parties, happy hours)

20%

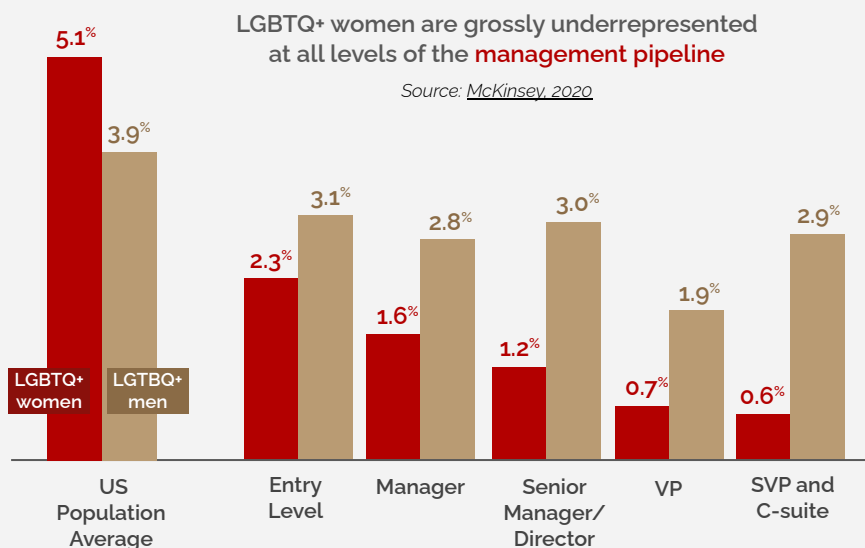
have been **absent** due to the unwelcoming environment

31%

feel **unhappy or depressed** at work

Source: HRC, 2018

WAGE GAPS AND DISCRIMINATION ARE WORSE FOR LGBTQ+ WOMEN AND SUBGROUPS



For every \$1 earned by a typical worker...

LGBTQ+ workers overall earn 90¢

Trans men earn 70¢

Non-binary workers earn 70¢

Trans women earn..... 60¢

LGBTQ+ American Indian/Alaska Native women earn..... 60¢

Source: HRC (2021)