

Diversity & Inclusion

Active allyship: Do your LGBTQ+ employees feel supported and included?

Companies highlight their outreach efforts during Pride Month, but LGBTQ+ workers persistently report microaggressions and feelings of isolation at work. Here's how LGBTQ+ employees report their workplace experience.

by Raelyn Jacobson, Monne Williams, and Jackie Wong



LGBTQ+ visibility has become more common in the media and across the private and public sectors in the United States in recent years. To keep up, businesses are becoming more adept at adopting inclusive-language practices and undertaking other allyship efforts to attract a more diverse workforce.

Despite these moves, there is a disconnect, as many members of the LGBTQ+ community report feeling vulnerable, underrepresented, and unable to bring their whole selves to the workplace, according to our research. And the issues that the community faces are as pressing as ever: there have recently been movements across the United States to limit the rights of the LGBTQ+ community and particularly those of transgender individuals.

McKinsey's studies have helped uncover nuances in the experiences of the LGBTQ+ population. Our research analyzed data from the United States and includes responses from more than 4,000 LGBTQ+ employees among the more than 60,000 employees surveyed across industries, occupations, and geographies. The results highlight the need for companies to gain better understanding of and provide support for the populations that they employ. The following are some of the most striking findings.

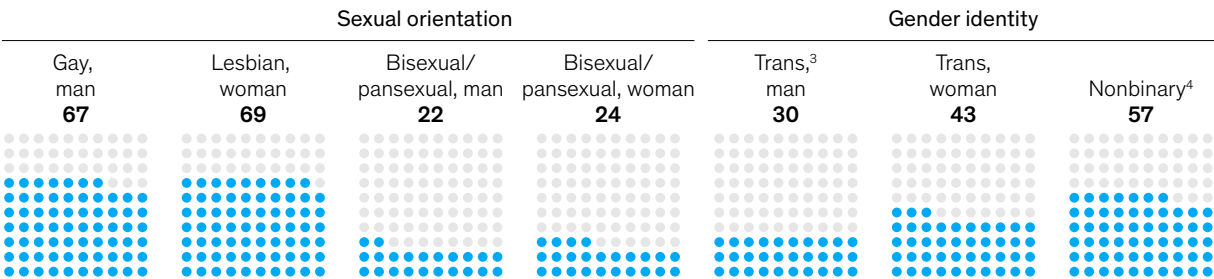
Many members of the LGBTQ+ community report feeling vulnerable, underrepresented, and unable to bring their whole selves to the workplace.

Often an ‘only’

Allyship plays a crucial role within a workplace to ensure that LGBTQ+ employees don’t feel excluded or isolated. Members of underrepresented groups often report feeling left out or alone among the majority in any setting. For LGBTQ+ employees, our research showed that more than half of gay, lesbian, and nonbinary employees had stronger feelings of being an “only” (only person, or one of the only people, of their sexual orientation or gender identity) in the workplace than other employees did. And 45 percent of surveyed workers who identify as LGBTQ+ said they felt they had to be careful about discussing their personal lives in the workplace. While our data suggests that transgender employees are not as likely to perceive being the only of their gender identity, being the only transgender person in the workplace is a phenomenon they would experience on a much more frequent basis.

Two-thirds of surveyed gay and lesbian employees report being an ‘only’ in the workplace.

Reported instance of often being an ‘only’ at work,¹ by sexual orientation and gender identity, % of respondents²



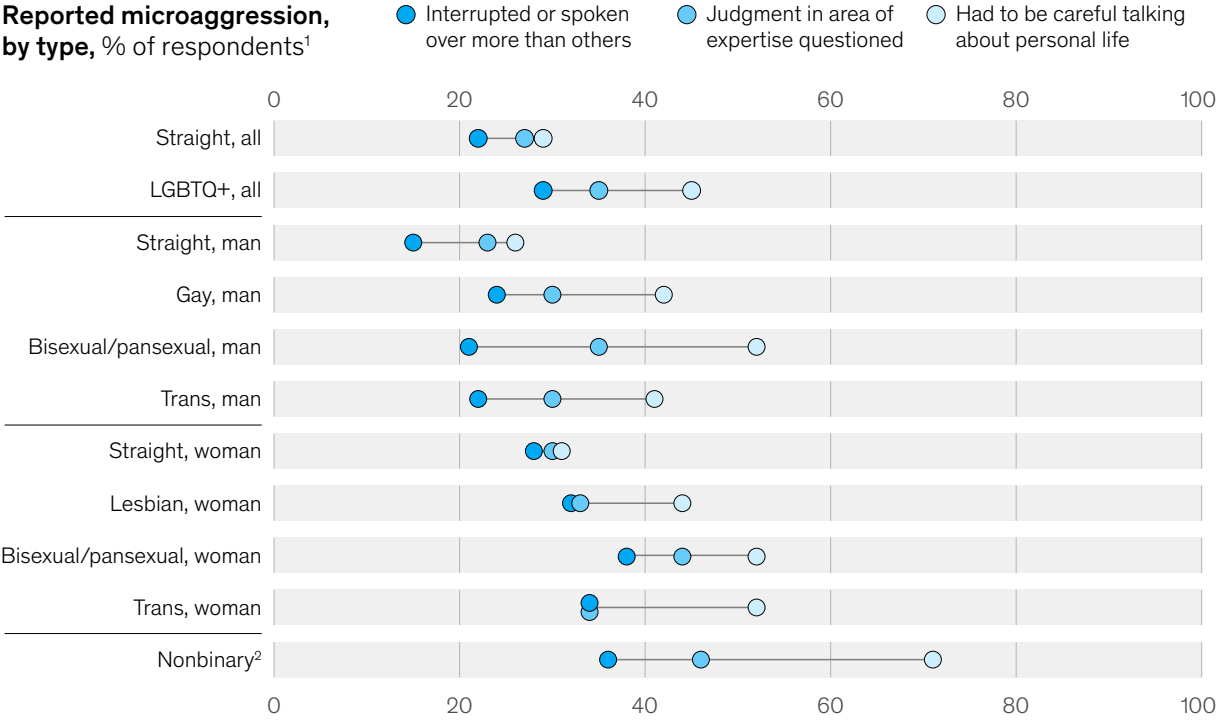
¹ Respondents who answered that they “often” or “almost always” find themselves to be the only person, or one of the only people, of their sexual orientation or gender identity in workplace situations.
² For gay, man, n = 1,147; for lesbian, woman, n = 732; for bisexual/pansexual, man, n = 344; for bisexual/pansexual, woman, n = 1,185; for trans, man, n = 27; for trans, woman, n = 44; for nonbinary, n = 84.
³ Transgender.
⁴ Employees whose gender identity does not fit solely within the binary of female or male.
Source: LeanIn.Org and McKinsey Women in the Workplace study, 2021

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On guard against microaggressions

Nearly one-third of surveyed LGBTQ+ employees reported experiencing a microaggression, such as being interrupted or talked over, at the workplace. This figure jumps, however, depending on the different subsets within the LGBTQ+ community. For instance, as with straight employees, gender intersectionality matters—LGBTQ+ women and transgender employees were more likely than gay men to report experiencing microaggressions in the workplace.

Bisexual and transgender employees are more likely than other surveyed employees to report experiencing microaggressions at work.



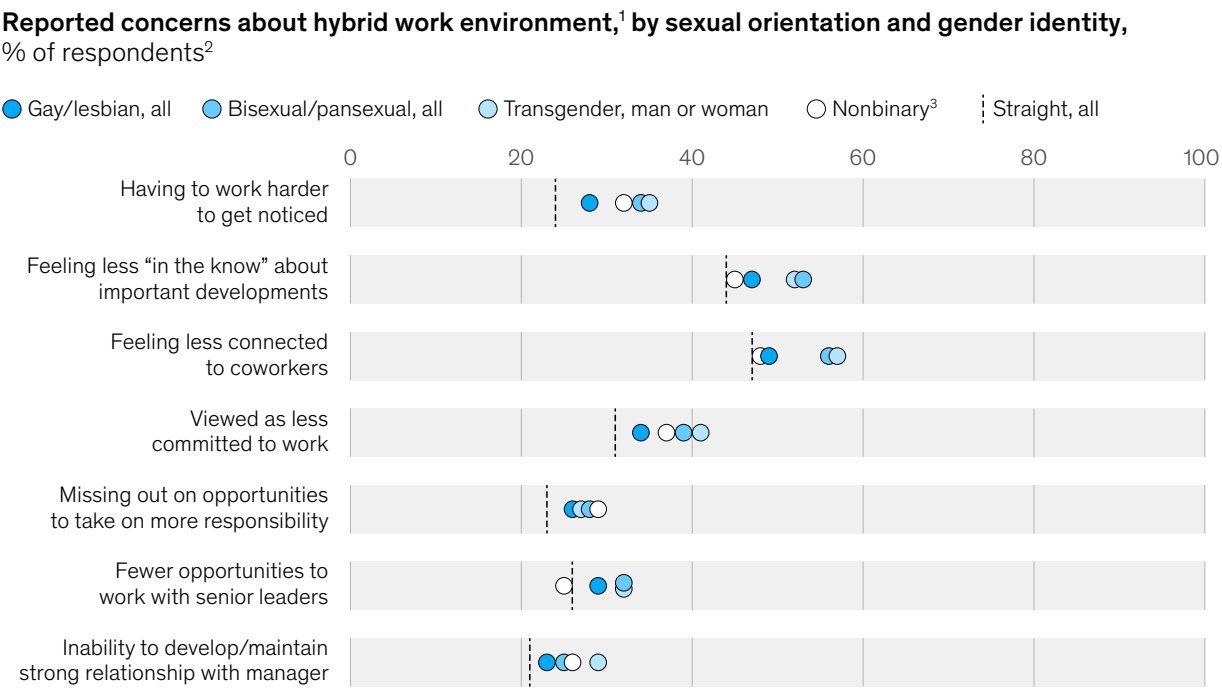
¹For straight, all, n = 59,009; for LGBTQ+, all, n = 4,065; for straight, man, n = 26,985; for gay, man, n = 1,147; for bisexual/pansexual, man, n = 344; for trans, man, n = 27; for straight, woman, n = 31,487; for lesbian, woman, n = 732; for bisexual/pansexual, woman, n = 1,185; for trans, woman, n = 44; for nonbinary, n = 84.
²Employees whose gender identity does not fit solely within the binary of female or male.
Source: LeanIn.Org and McKinsey Women in the Workplace study, 2021

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Hybrid work may pose additional difficulties

Hybrid work, a work model that blends in-office and remote work, has added a convenience factor for many employees, allowing workers to go to the office when it best suits their schedules. However, more companies have also begun to dictate when you have to be in-office rather than giving employees the choice. Members of the LGBTQ+ community, though, are less enthusiastic about the arrangement, according to our research. LGBTQ+ men, LGBTQ+ women, and nonbinary employees were more likely than their straight coworkers to indicate that they feel left out of important developments at work and less connected with others at work. More than one-third of surveyed transgender employees noted that it would be tougher in a hybrid environment to be noticed for their work.

LGBTQ+ employees, especially bisexual and trans employees, are more likely than other surveyed employees to be wary of hybrid work.



¹Concerns about working remotely while some coworkers work mostly on site.
²For gay/lesbian, all, n = 1,879; for bisexual/pansexual, all, n = 1,529; for transgender (trans), man or woman, n = 71; for nonbinary, n = 84; for straight, all, n = 59,009.
³Employees whose gender identity does not fit solely within the binary of female or male.
 Source: LeanIn.Org and McKinsey Women in the Workplace study, 2021

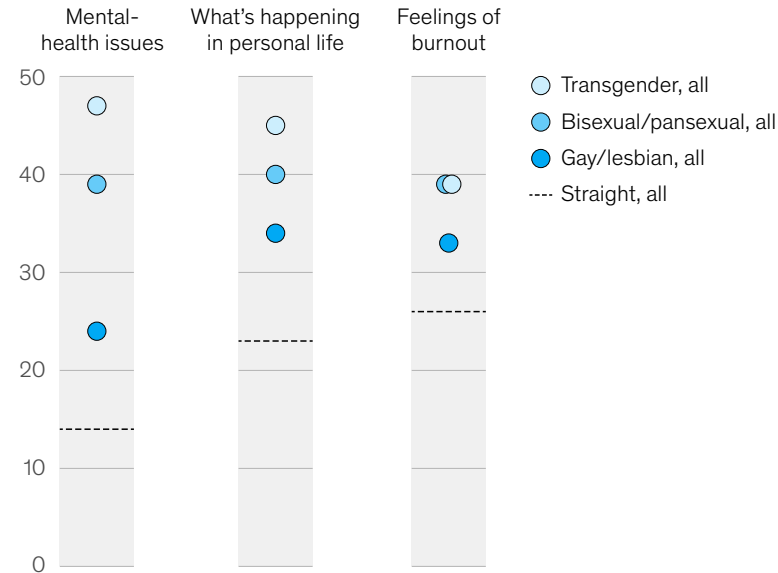
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Mental-health discussions off limits

Burnout and mental health can be sensitive topics for any employee. They feel especially off limits for members of the LGBTQ+ community, according to our findings. Even though all responding employees reported experiencing similar levels of burnout, only 14 percent of surveyed straight employees said they were uncomfortable with sharing mental-health concerns with coworkers, compared with 29 percent of their LGBTQ+ counterparts. This figure soared to 47 percent for transgender employees.

LGBTQ+ employees are less likely than other surveyed employees to feel comfortable talking about mental-health issues.

Reported discomfort with sharing information with coworkers, by sexual orientation and gender identity, % of respondents¹



¹For transgender, all, n = 155; for bisexual/pansexual, all, n = 1,529; for gay/lesbian, all, n = 1,879; for straight, all, n = 59,009. Source: LeanIn.Org and McKinsey Women in the Workplace study, 2021

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Workplaces fall short on LGBTQ+ inclusion

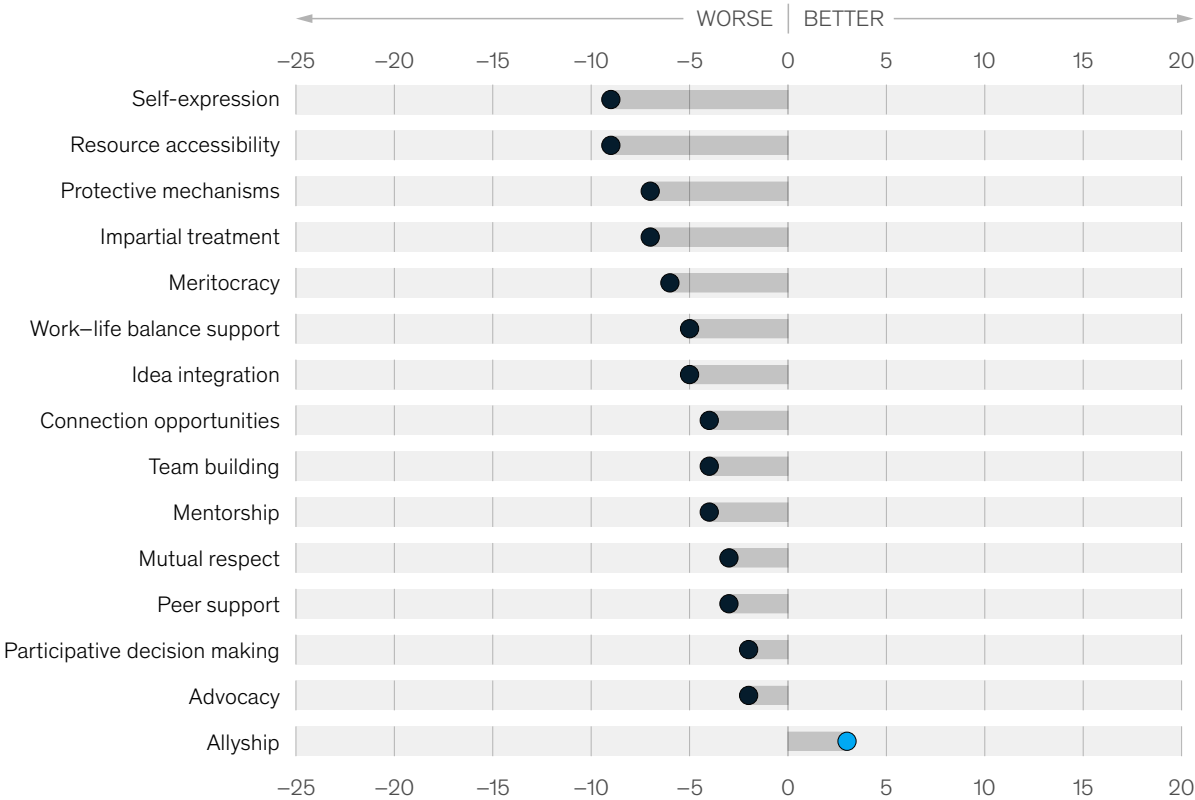
Surveyed LGBTQ+ employees reported a significantly lower level of inclusion compared with their straight counterparts. Bisexual and nonbinary employees in the study reported feeling even less inclusion than gay and lesbian respondents did, particularly as it relates to feeling connected to others at work. The largest reported gaps in the inclusion experience related to self-expression, resource accessibility, and protective mechanisms.

For a deeper dive, see our February 2021 article, "Inclusion doesn't happen by accident: Measuring inclusion in a way that matters."

LGBTQ+ employees experience lower inclusion across almost all dimensions compared with straight colleagues.

Inclusion score gap, by sexual orientation and gender identity, points (score of all straight employee respondents indexed to 0)¹

Gay/lesbian, all



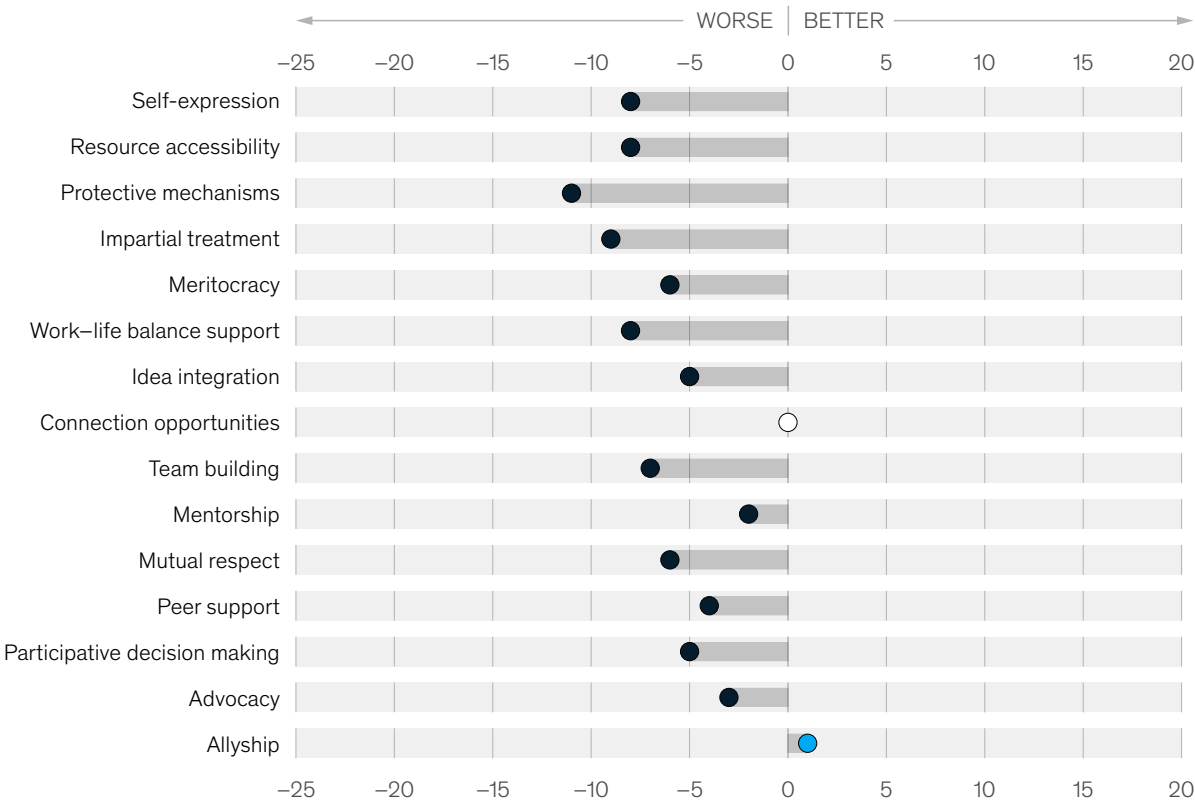
¹Measures employees' perceptions of their companies on 6 outcomes that make up inclusion (acceptance, authenticity, belonging, camaraderie, fairness, and meaningful work) and how often they experience associated workplace behaviors based on listed inclusion practices (eg, self-expression, resource accessibility). Gap is difference in identified population's inclusion score from inclusion score of all straight respondents. For gay/lesbian, all, n = 908; for bisexual/pansexual, all, n = 603; for transgender, man or woman, n = 32; for nonbinary, n = 61; for straight, all, n = 21,854. Source: McKinsey Race in the Workplace study, 2021

Exhibit (continued)

LGBTQ+ employees experience lower inclusion across almost all dimensions compared with straight colleagues.

Inclusion score gap, by sexual orientation and gender identity, points (score of all straight employee respondents indexed to 0)¹

Bisexual/pansexual, all



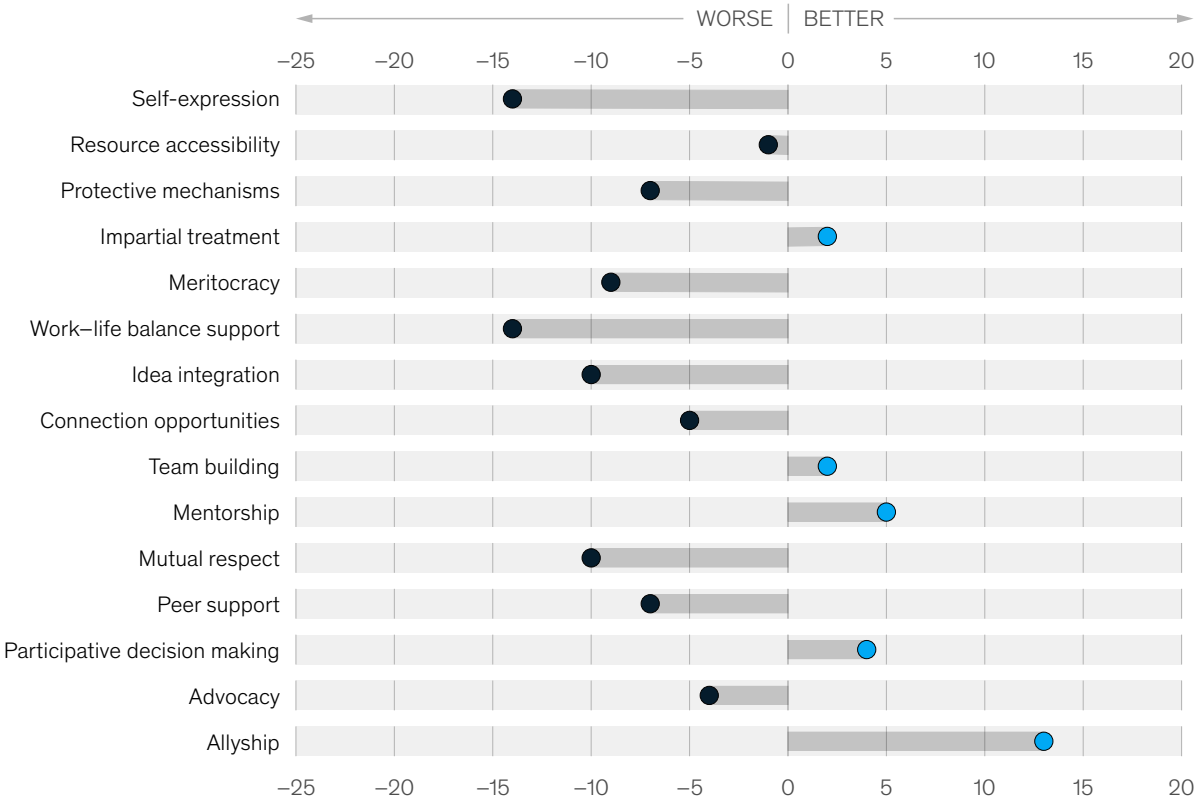
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LGBTQ+ employees experience lower inclusion across almost all dimensions compared with straight colleagues.

Inclusion score gap, by sexual orientation and gender identity, points (score of all straight employee respondents indexed to 0)¹

Transgender



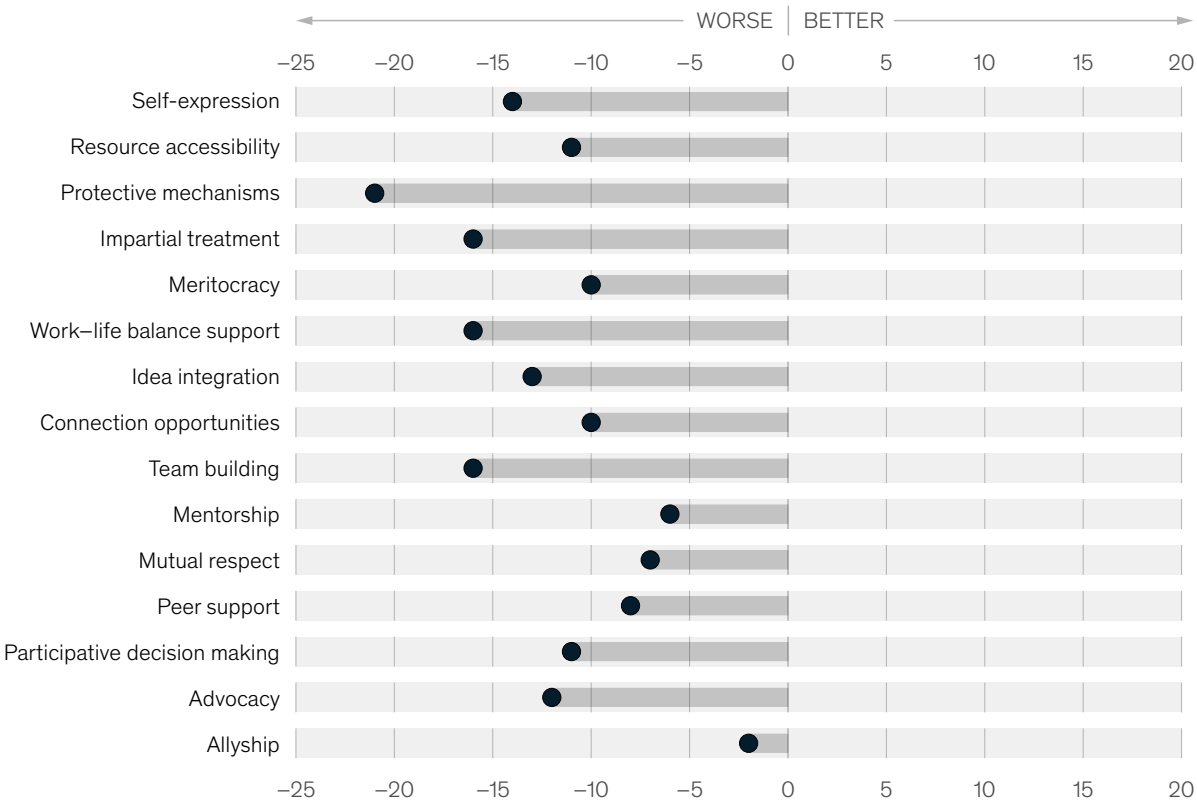
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LGBTQ+ employees experience lower inclusion across almost all dimensions compared with straight colleagues.

Inclusion score gap, by sexual orientation and gender identity, points (score of all straight employee respondents indexed to 0)¹

Nonbinary²



¹Measures employees' perceptions of their companies on 6 outcomes that make up inclusion (acceptance, authenticity, belonging, camaraderie, fairness, and meaningful work) and how often they experience associated workplace behaviors based on listed inclusion practices (eg, self-expression, resource accessibility). Gap is difference in identified population's inclusion score from inclusion score of all straight respondents. For gay/lesbian, all, n = 908; for bisexual/pansexual, all, n = 603; for transgender, man or woman, n = 32; for nonbinary, n = 61; for straight, all, n = 21,854.

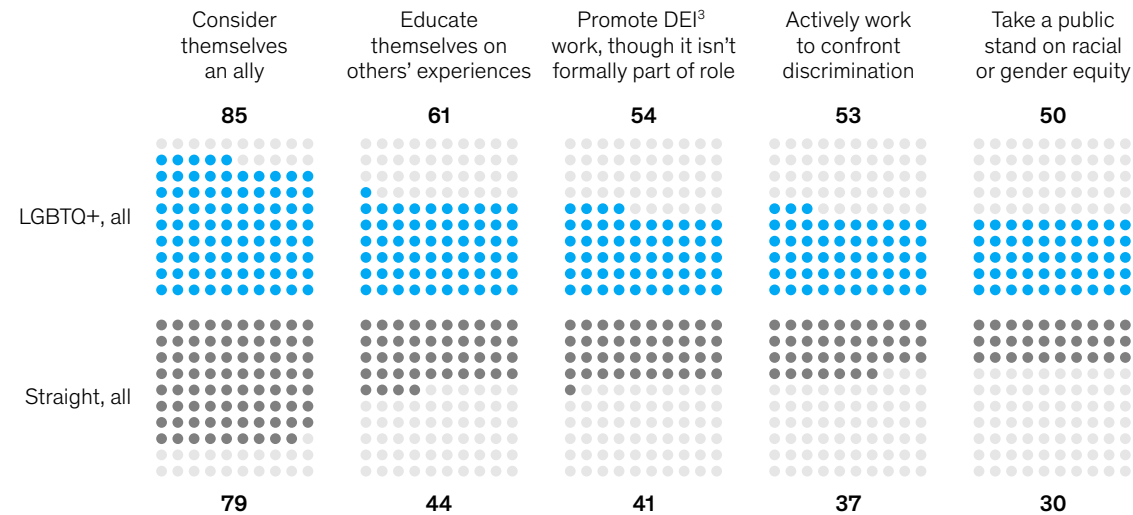
²Employees whose gender identity does not fit solely within the binary of female or male.
Source: McKinsey Race in the Workplace study, 2021

Straight allies can help through stronger allyship actions

Active allyship is a necessary element in creating an inclusive environment. LGBTQ+ workers are more likely than their straight colleagues not only to consider themselves allies but also to take actions toward that commitment, per our study. In addition to usual job duties, 54 percent of surveyed LGBTQ+ employees spent time promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the workplace. In comparison, 41 percent of straight employees reported participating in DEI efforts along with their regular work.

LGBTQ+ employees are more likely than other surveyed employees to consider themselves allies and practice active allyship.

Allyship actions as an employee,¹ % of respondents²



¹Specifically referencing allyship for women of color, defined as Alaskan Native, American Indian, Asian, Black, Latina, mixed-race, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander women.
²For LGBTQ+, all, n = 4,065; for straight, all, n = 59,009.
³Diversity, equity, and inclusion.
Source: LeanIn.Org and McKinsey Women in the Workplace study, 2021

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