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Raising the Bar: The Experiences of LGBTQ+ Women in the Workplace

Current Challenges and Future Opportunities



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Foreword

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LGBTQ+ women continue to make important contributions across workplaces, yet their experiences too often remain underrepresented, unheard and undervalued. Despite meaningful progress, many still navigate environments shaped by gender bias, heteronormativity and assumptions that limit visibility, belonging and opportunity. These barriers are not abstract, they affect how LGBTQ+ women show up, how they are perceived, and how far they can progress.

This report and the Women of Impact programme was created to bring these realities to light. Through honest conversations, participants shared the challenges they face, the impact of low visibility, and the power of role models, community and intentional allyship. Their voices remind us that inclusion is not achieved through policy alone; it is built through everyday behaviours, purposeful leadership and cultures where authenticity is not a risk but a strength.

This report provides clear evidenced base and a practical roadmap for organisations committed to doing better. By listening to lived experience and acting with intention, we have the opportunity to raise the bar creating workplaces where LGBTQ+ women are seen, supported and able to thrive as themselves. Thank you to Fidelity International for supporting and enabling this important piece of work.

Foreword



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Head of Enterprise Change & Project
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This report centres the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ women at work, creating space for voices that are too often unheard and perspectives that are essential to understanding inclusion in practice.

At Fidelity, we are committed to fostering a workplace where all colleagues can be themselves, are treated with dignity, and have equitable opportunities to thrive, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or any other personal characteristic. This report reflects our collective commitment by listening to people's lived experiences and using these insights to inform how we think about culture, leadership, and belonging.

The perspectives shared here are honest and, at times, challenging. They invite reflection on how inclusion is experienced day to day, and on the role organisations and leaders play in shaping environments where people feel safe to show up authentically. They remind us that progress is driven not by intent alone, but by everyday behaviours and leadership actions.

We thank everyone who contributed their time, insight, and experiences to this work. Sharing such deeply personal experience takes courage, and these voices are vital to building understanding and driving meaningful change. We encourage leaders and colleagues to engage with this report openly and thoughtfully, and to reflect on what it means for their roles in creating inclusive workplaces.

Executive Summary

LGBTQ+ women continue to face sustained, systemic barriers that impact their visibility, sense of belonging and progression in the workplace. Despite advances in legal protections and organisational commitments to diversity and inclusion, many LGBTQ+ women still report feeling unseen, undervalued, or unable to bring their authentic selves to work.

This research was undertaken to understand why these challenges persist, how they affect daily workplace experience, and what organisations can do to meaningfully address them. Through a series of interviews and a roundtable with LGBTQ+ women across financial and professional services, this research reveals the continued influence of sexism, heteronormativity, gender bias and LGBTQ+-phobias on workplace experience, whilst underlining the powerful role visible role models and intentional organisational action play in shifting the landscape.

The insights presented here highlight the key findings of our research, outlining the barriers that persist and the practical actions individuals and organisations can take to build cultures where LGBTQ+ women are represented, empowered and able to thrive.

Key Findings and Central Themes

1. Visibility and Representation Remain Critically Low

- Many LGBTQ+ women choose not to come out at work due to the fear of bias, exclusion, and/or hindrances to career progression
- The lack of visible LGBTQ+ women in senior positions sometimes reinforces isolation and suggests authenticity may be professionally risky
- Numerous participants reported not seeing other LGBTQ+ women within their organisations, even after years of employment

2. Role Models Transform Experience

- Visible LGBTQ+ women impact the day-to-day workplace experience of others, generating feelings of affirmation and belonging
- Senior-level representation demonstrates success and helps others to envisage their potential to progress and achieve more in their career
- Role models provide support, normalise diversity, and foster psychological safety



3. Sexism, Misogyny, and Gender Bias are Major Barriers to Inclusion

- LGBTQ+ women fear compounding marginalisation by being ‘out’ alongside existing sexism, contributing to many women choosing not to come out at work
- Participant reflections revealed widespread experiences of misogynistic and sexist treatment in the workplace, with conscious and unconscious gender bias shaping expectations, influencing behaviour, and affecting career progression
- Race, class, disability, and other facets of identity further compound barriers to inclusion; LGBTQ+ women with multiple marginalised identities face further potential for discrimination

4. Heteronormative Assumptions Continue to Shape Workplaces

- Heterosexuality continues to be reproduced as the ‘norm’ across workplaces, making LGBTQ+ women feel out of place
- LGBTQ+-phobic comments, stereotypes and microaggressions reinforce ‘otherness’ and require continual ‘coming out’, causing emotional and psychological strain for many

- LGBTQ+ women face unique forms of homophobia and biphobia, as the intersection of gender and sexuality see LGBTQ+ women’s identities and relationships sexualised, fetishised and devalued

5. Listening to Lived Experiences, Creating Affirming Spaces, Advocating for Inclusive Policy Practices and Enabling Senior Sponsorship Opportunities are Crucial Actions of Empowerment

- Open communication, listening to lived experience and celebrating LGBTQ+ women create awareness and provide essential educational opportunities
- Access to networks and safe spaces where LGBTQ+ women can connect enables them to be supported, represented and feel like they belong
- Implementing inclusive policies that recognise and support LGBTQ+ women was underlined as crucial in fostering empowering and inclusive workplaces
- Participant sentiment stressed that senior sponsorship significantly improves workplace experience and is a critical accelerator of career growth and progression

“*[Senior leaders] need to make sure that they’re embedding inclusion into every stage of the employee life cycle, and that means the recruitment, the development, the succession planning. They need to make sure they can create mentorship programmes for LGBTQ+ women and ensure that their policies are explicitly there to protect and empower them. And at the end of the day, inclusion should be measurable, not just an aspiration that they put into their company values.*”

Introduction

In autumn 2024, we asked the attendees of our ‘Levelling the Field: Empowering LGBTQ+ Women in the Workplace’ panel what word best described the representation of LGBTQ+ women in their workplaces; ‘underrepresented’, ‘invisible’ and ‘hidden’ emerged as the most commonly cited words. A further 75% of attendees felt that LGBTQ+ women leaders were not very visible or well represented in their organisations. Alongside systemic barriers and social norms, a lack of visible role models and representation of LGBTQ+ women at work were raised as significant obstacles to career progression.

Previous studies that consider the experiences of LGBTQ+ women in the workplace underscore that these are not unique findings, but are sustained and systemic issues that have impacted many industries for decades. Writing in 1995, Ruth Fassinger was amongst the first to highlight how, due to their double or triple minority status, lesbians in the workplace face increased levels of discrimination based on their multiple identities.¹ Over a decade later, Julie Gedro published one of the first studies to consider how the intersection of gender and sexual orientation shape the experiences of lesbians in organisational settings, describing the increased discrimination that they face as a result of their multiple identities as the ‘double bind’.² Subsequent studies have underscored that in order to counteract the increased potential for discrimination, many LGBTQ+ women choose to conceal their LGBTQ+ identities at work, as they are reluctant to ‘put their hands up twice’.³ This ultimately contributes to the sustained invisibility of LGBTQ+ women in many organisations, yet scholars have argued that the existence of visible role models has the potential to improve the career experiences of others.⁴

As the responses of our Empowering LGBTQ+ Women in the Workplace event highlighted, the visibility and representation of LGBTQ+ women at all levels continue to be limited in many workplaces. Consequently, in autumn 2025, we launched the Women of Impact programme to both challenge and understand these issues. We set out with three key aims in mind:

- 1. To understand and highlight the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ women in the workplace**
- 2. To address and underscore the challenges and barriers to inclusion they face**
- 3. To offer some practical organisational recommendations to help improve the workplace and career experiences of LGBTQ+ women**

¹Ruth Fassinger, ‘From Invisibility to Integration: Lesbian Identity in the Workplace’, *Career Development Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 2, 1995, pp. 148-67 (p. 154).

²Julie Gedro, ‘Lesbians: Identifying, Facing and Navigating the Double Bind of Sexual Orientation and Gender in Organizational Settings’, *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, Vol. 112, 2006, pp. 41-50.

³Fiona Colgan, et. al., *Lesbian Workers: Personal Strategies Amid Changing Organisational Responses to Sexual Minorities in UK Workplaces* (London: Routledge, 2009); Nathaniel Miles, *The Double-Glazed Glass Ceiling: Lesbians in the Workplace* (Stonewall: London, 2008) p. 7.

⁴Sandra Fielden, Hannah Jepson, ‘An Exploration into the Career Experiences of Lesbians in the UK’, *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 4, 2016, pp. 281-296 (p. 289).

In order to achieve our aims, we conducted one-to-one interviews and hosted a roundtable in partnership with our member firm, Fidelity International, to gather insights from a range of LGBTQ+ women from across different organisations.⁵ The job roles of participants were wide-ranging in seniority, with some occupying senior leadership positions, some middle-management, and some in more junior roles. Centring on the personal experiences of participants, both the roundtable and the interviews explored themes of coming out in the workplace, barriers to inclusion, experiences of discrimination, the impact of visibility, career progression and journeys, and what organisations can do to build more inclusive environments for their LGBTQ+ women employees. This paper presents those findings; whilst it does not intend to account for the workplace experiences

of all LGBTQ+ women, it does seek to draw attention to some of the commonly recounted experiences, ideas and opinions of our participants to understand the contemporary barriers to inclusion that they face, their impact on visibility and representation, and the steps we can take to foster workplaces where LGBTQ+ women thrive.

The participants in this study identified in a number of different ways; lesbian, bisexual, queer, pansexual, gay, trans, masc, femme, LGBTQ+ amongst others were used by individuals to describe their identity. Where a participant has explicitly referred to themselves using one of these categories, we refer to them as such, but 'LGBTQ+ women' is used when speaking in generalities about those who took part in this research. All data has been anonymised, with names and identifying information redacted.



⁵The majority of participants in this study were based in organisations in the UK, and the experiences and conversations that this report reflects therefore primarily pertain to workplaces in the UK.

1. Coming Out, (In)Visibility, and the Importance of Role Models

This section considers how the environment of the workplace affects the everyday experiences of LGBTQ+ women. Exploring themes of coming out at work, the visibility of LGBTQ+ women and the impact that role models can have on improving the career experiences of individuals, this section aims to underscore the positive changes that have occurred over time, whilst highlighting the very real challenges that persist.

a. Coming Out at Work

Both the roundtable and one-to-one interviews began with participant reflections on entering the workforce; contributors were asked to discuss what the environment was like for LGBTQ+ women in the first organisation they joined. This question prompted similar responses amongst participants, as individuals contemplated their coming out journey at work. Numerous women recalled being reluctant, unable or unwilling to come out during the early years of their career. This was certainly the case for those who started their careers in earlier decades, as women described the workplace during the 1990s and early 2000s as somewhere that you shouldn't, or perhaps couldn't, bring your 'authentic self to work' due to fears of 'assumptions', 'biases' and potential discrimination. These fears were certainly not unfounded, as one roundtable participant described facing overt discrimination after being non-consensually outed at work.

20 odd years ago, I was outed at my organisation. I was heading a very large marketing team, suddenly everything changed for me...you knew people were talking about you, and then all my work got taken away.

Describing her experiences when starting her career in the mid-1990s, one interviewee expressed that 'I'm not sure

there was an environment for LGBTQ+ women then...there weren't any role models, nobody was kind of out in the workplace. So, it was a bit of a don't ask don't tell type environment'. Others reiterated this sentiment, explaining how they kept their sexuality and personal lives quiet; as one interviewee put it 'you kind of left your personal life at the door, you wouldn't really bring it to work, that was the kind of mentality'. Indeed, describing her experience in the 2000s, one roundtable participant explained that 'I never came out in the workplace. I had a very separate work life to my personal life'.

For a number of women, this perceived workplace culture of keeping your personal life quiet and leaving your sexual identity at the door was compounded by the lack of representation of, and conversation surrounding, LGBTQ+ women and the wider LGBTQ+ community. As one roundtable participant expressed, 'I was in my 30s before I came out because there were no role models, you just didn't speak about it'. For some, this perceived workplace culture was re-affirmed by the negative reactions of coworkers upon sharing their sexuality. One interviewee, outlined how this was certainly true for her when she started her career in recruitment. She explained that 'I remember telling a couple of my colleagues and they reacted a little bit weirdly and I thought, well...I'm not going

to push this, and of course there was nobody at all who was out, there were no... visibly queer women in the organisation that I worked in'. Faced with coworkers who were not accepting of her sexuality and seeing no representation of other LGBTQ+ women in her workplace, she chose to return to concealing her lesbian identity.

b. Change Over Time?

Considering how their experience had shifted over time, numerous participants agreed that the current environment for LGBTQ+ women in the workplace had certainly seen improvements since the beginning of their career journey. This was highlighted most prominently by those who had had careers spanning over 20 years, as comparisons were drawn between the environment individuals found themselves in during the 1990s and early 2000s, and what was deemed as the more inclusive present day. This is succinctly captured in the recollections of one interviewee, who drew out this change over time whilst recalling her early career experiences:

I felt cautious and conversations around things like LGBTQ+ inclusion were minimal, if indeed non-existent. And there was probably a sense that being open about your identity would – or could – impact your progression. And I think over time I've seen quite the shift...today there's probably more dialogue, more allyship, more visible role models, and certainly more in the way of allies, which does make a really big difference.

Such improvements in the workplace have undoubtedly been bolstered by the granting of workplace protections for the LGBTQ+ community following various legal proceedings and the campaigning efforts of LGBTQ+ organisations; the Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999, and the Employment

Equality (Sexual orientation) Regulations 2003, saw harassment and discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation prohibited under UK law.

Whilst the implementation of such policies has by no means eradicated workplace harassment or discrimination – as will be made clear in section two – participants noted that the existence of workplace policy, infrastructure and support had changed their experiences. Considering the homophobia she came up against in the past, one interviewee explained that '[now] I would certainly go to HR if I had some of the comments that I had in my early career, and would be confident that something would come from that. So, I think that is the key change'.

Despite the general agreement that things are 'getting better' and the 'environment is definitely changing', the overwhelming consensus amongst participants was that the low visibility and representation of LGBTQ+ women remains a persistent issue across many organisations and



workplaces, indicating a continuation of the difficulties women identified as being significant in the early years of their careers. As one roundtable participant explained ‘there aren’t a lot of role models, lesbians in the workplace that are out. Like I can probably count on two hands the amount of lesbians that I know in the workplace, and I’ve worked at the same organisation for 15 years’. Another agreed, emphasising that despite improvements in networks, support and increased opportunity for building connections ‘the LGBT women visibility is low, you have to really seek out friends’.

c. The Importance of Visible Role Models and Mentors

As participants emphasised the sustained insufficient representation of LGBTQ+ women in their places of work, so too did they discuss how crucial visibility can be. Throughout the course of the interviews and the roundtable, numerous women talked through the impact and benefits of seeing themselves represented in their



places of work. As one interviewee explained, ‘I think visibility breaks isolation...it shows people that they’re not alone and success is possible’. Visibility as a means of role modelling success and possibility was conveyed by a number of women, as the adage ‘you can’t be what you can’t see’ was frequently re-iterated. One participant, spoke to this during her interview, as she underscored the power of visibility, and the message it sends when women see others like themselves in positions of seniority.

Visibility matters so much because it normalises the diversity and it creates those psychologically safe spaces that we’re seeking to [foster]. And seeing similar LGBTQ women in the workplace and in leadership, particularly now sends a really powerful message that you can succeed without hiding who you are.

This was further emphasised by another interviewee, who explained how when women join an organisation and ‘see that there are visible queer women in positions of leadership, then [they] think “okay, well my identity is being considered as well because this person can get to whatever level they are in their career.”’

The impact of seeing LGBTQ+ women in senior roles went beyond demonstrating success and shaping career goals, as participants spoke of the ways in which visible role models shaped their day-to-day workplace experience. One interviewee explained how having someone to look up to and identify with had a ‘huge impact’, making her feel seen, valued and supported in her work, which

consequently improved her day-to-day experience in her organisation. Talking about her first role model and mentor, she explained further:

She was a senior leader in the company. She had a big influence to bring more light to our community and visibility and credibility. She helped me tailor one of our events as well, and it's just priceless to have someone like her that not just supports the inclusion but also champions it...it made me feel seen and valued that finally we have someone that was representing the LGBTQ women in the workplace. And although she's not anymore working for [our company], she had a huge impact left that I will always remember.

This interview extract makes clear the substantial impact that LGBTQ+ women in senior roles can have, allowing others to feel better represented, more visible and advocated for. This participant is not alone in recognising the importance of role models in senior roles; 69% of the LGBTQ+ women surveyed as part of our [Seeing is Believing](#) research report, which explored the impact that role models have on LGBTQ+ talent, agreed that having visible role models at more senior levels was important. As one participant emphasised, when LGBTQ+ women are visible in senior roles, 'It sends a whole different narrative and a whole powerful message when you see the representation at the top'; she explained how this visibility was even more pertinent when it came to seeing other women of colour in leadership positions and in the wider workplace.

Especially for me as a person of colour it's even much more important to see more women in the POC spectrum that I can feel more seen and that I can identify myself with. Because it sends a message that

being authentic is OK and this is what I would love to see more of in the workplace.

Recognising the significant impact that visible role models can have, numerous participants recounted a sense of responsibility they felt regarding being out and visible within their organisations, especially when reaching more senior positions. This was explicitly underscored by one interviewee, who explained that her being out and visible in the workplace was important not only for herself, but for the wider community of LGBTQ+ women in and beyond her organisation.

As you get more senior, I've actually appreciated that my ability to do that [be out at work] is a platform for other people. So, it's not really about me, right? It's about the broader community...[and] realising that my visibility is like actually creating a road map for others...I feel like I've got almost a sense of responsibility now that I'm in the seat.

This was further emphasised by another interviewee, who spoke of feeling a sense of duty to be visible, citing the potential benefits it can have for more junior women joining a new organisation.

I do kind of feel like the only gay in the village being wheeled out, if it's lesbian visibility week or whatever. I've leaned into that and I'm happy to do that because if somebody who's joining the organisation can see me and say 'oh my goodness, look, here's an out queer woman, then maybe I can be out.'

2. Understanding the Barriers to Inclusion LGBTQ+ Women Face

This section outlines and addresses the challenges and barriers LGBTQ+ women face in the workplace. Significantly, it highlights how participant sentiment characterised gender bias and discrimination as being the biggest barrier to inclusion that LGBTQ+ women face at work, as the potential for double or triple prejudices continue to see women concealing their LGBTQ+ identities. Drawing from the experiences of our participants, it outlines the worrying issues of misogyny, sexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and lesbophobia, that continue to impact women at work.

a. The 'Double Bind' and its Impact on Representation

As outlined in the previous section, the visibility and representation of LGBTQ+ women within organisations has the power to significantly impact the workplace experiences of employees, generating feelings of support, affirmation and belonging amongst LGBTQ+ women. Just as participants recognised the importance of visibility – with this often being a motivating factor in individuals being out and vocal in their organisations – they likewise pointed to how the persistent limited representation of LGBTQ+ women in the corporate world remains a key barrier to their inclusion across workplaces and organisations. This was emphasised by one interviewee, who stressed that the sustained invisibility of LGBTQ+ women is one of the main factors limiting the inclusion of LGBTQ+ women at work.

The lack of representation – I mean, it's kind of like a catch-22 – but the lack of representation is certainly one of the main factors [affecting the inclusion of LGBTQ+ women at work]; there are still very few out women in the corporate space. I think for women as well, there is this feeling of having a double glass ceiling because still there is sexism in the workplace, whether we'd like to admit it or not. And this

explains also perhaps why there aren't so many women that want to come out because they think, 'OK, well, I've got this glass ceiling above my head anyway because I'm a woman. Why am I going to voluntarily add another glass ceiling by being out?' So, I think those two things are quite important.

Professor of business Julie Gedro has referred to the dual discrimination that LGBTQ+ women face in the workplace as the 'double bind', underscoring how the dual identity of being LGBTQ+ and being a woman can lead to increased experiences of discrimination.⁶ As the above extract elucidates, in order to minimise the dual



⁶Gedro, *The Double Bind*.

impact of misogyny and homophobia, some LGBTQ+ women decide not to come out at work. This emerged as a common experience amongst interviewees and roundtable participants, as the impact of misogyny on individual willingness to be out at work became clear. One interviewee emphasised this explicitly, stating that ‘the fact that there is a bit of sexism still in the workplace is why I wouldn’t want to add another layer of also being a gay woman on top of that’. This sentiment was reiterated by one interviewee, who underscored how this is further exacerbated by an absence of visible role models.

As women working in this still heavily heteronormative and white male dominated environment, it is far more likely that we will suppress a part of our identity if we don’t see people who look like us around. Now, you can’t really hide the fact that you’re a woman, right? So, guess which part of your identity you are going to sacrifice on the altar of conformity in order to blend in and feel like you belong?



As gestured towards above, this problem is a ‘catch-22’; concealing LGBTQ+ identities in order to minimise the dual impact of misogyny and homophobia contributes to the invisibility of LGBTQ+ women in institutional settings, ultimately perpetuating the problems that they face. As Gedro has posited, this consequently creates a lack of LGBTQ+ women role models, yet their presence could ‘be a critical factor in untangling lesbians from this bind’.⁷

This ‘double bind’ is further exacerbated for those LGBTQ+ women who occupy further marginalised identities; factors such as age, race, class and disability present further potential for prejudice and discrimination, beyond gender and sexuality. Scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, coined the term ‘intersectionality’ to refer to the ways in which different parts of identity intersect to impact an individual’s lived experience; the more intersections an individual possesses, the more obstacles to inclusion they may face.⁸ A number of women spoke of the need to consider how intersectional facets of identity shape the career experiences of LGBTQ+ women. As one interviewee explained:

If you think too about the intersectional piece – because as a woman you might have other kind of intersectional aspects to your identity. You could have a disability and you could be a woman of colour. All of these things. And I don’t think we think about that enough in terms of how this could impact our career progression.

Indeed, as Fiona Colgan et. al. found in their 2009 study of the experiences of lesbian workers, the potential for ‘triple prejudice’ based upon sex, race and sexual

⁷Gedro, Ibid., p. 48.

⁸Kimberlé Crenshaw, ‘Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color’, *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43, No. 6, 1991, pp. 1241-1299.

orientation had influenced the decisions of BME LGBTQ+ women to conceal their sexuality in their places of work.⁹ It is thus important to remain alert to the other factors – beyond gender and sexuality – that intersect to increase the potential for discrimination that LGBTQ+ women face at work.

b. Misogyny, Sexism, and Unconscious Gender Bias in the Workplace

Participant reflections revealed the persistence of sexism and misogyny in many workplaces and organisations. When asked to recall personal experiences of discrimination or feeling held back at work, the majority of participant responses raised gender bias and inequality as the most pressing and prominent barrier to inclusion at work, with sexism and misogyny cited most often as being the root cause of the discrimination they faced. Talking of her personal experience, one interviewee explained that ‘my biggest discrimination has just come from me being a woman. Probably not necessarily a gay woman’. This was re-iterated by a number of participants, one of whom also explained that ‘I haven’t ever felt discriminated because of being gay. I think I’ve felt more discriminated for being a woman’.

Participant recollections revealed that gender bias or misogyny shows up in a number of ways in the workplace. Some of the most overt examples of sexism manifested in the comments made and language used by colleagues. This ranged from condescending and misogynistic language used to address women such as

‘sweetie’ and ‘love’, to explicitly sexist remarks, like ‘who’s secretary are you?’ or ‘put the brew on love’. Other examples underscored how sexism and misogyny also show up in less explicit ways, as participants explained how male and female colleagues often face different treatment and are held to different standards at work. One interviewee captured this succinctly whilst narrating their personal experiences of facing sexism:

If I get angry about something, it’s like, ‘ok calm down’. Whereas if a guy gets angry, it’s like ‘ok we need to take this seriously’... So, I generally see a difference of treatment. Men can get angry on calls and it’s like ‘they’re senior and you need to pay attention’. If women do it, they’re generally disregarded as if they’re just having a bad day. And that is really frustrating.

Experiences such as these highlight the ways in which unconscious gender bias continues to impact women in the workplace. Unconscious gender bias often manifests when ‘someone unconsciously associates certain stereotypes with different genders’, leading to individuals being treated differently because of their gender.¹⁰ Scholars have demonstrated how such stereotypes stem from prevailing societal beliefs surrounding gender. As highlighted in the above interview excerpt, such beliefs often characterise men as decisive, strong, logical and unemotional, whilst women are viewed as nice, gentle, caring and emotional.¹¹ These stereotypes that contribute to the enacting of unconscious gender bias, can also influence individual

⁹Colgan, *Lesbian Workers*, p. 39.

¹⁰Yaşar Suveren, Unconscious Bias: Definition and Significance, *Psikiyatride Güncel Yaklaşımlar*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2022, pp. 414-426 (p. 417).

¹¹Amarette Filut, et. al., ‘The Impact of Unconscious Bias on Women’s Career Advancement’, *The Sasakawa Peace Foundation Expert Reviews Series on Advancing Women’s Empowerment*, 2017.

‘self-judgement and behaviours’, causing women to monitor their own behaviours and emotional regulation at work. Indeed, one interviewee described this self-censorship as ‘self-imposed barriers’ to inclusion.

Sadly, many women are still experiencing misogyny and unconscious gender discrimination. Study after study also shows that a vast majority of women are still trying to come to terms with a number of self-imposed barriers such as imposter syndrome, self-doubt and a lack of confidence.

This was certainly the case for one interviewee, who explicitly articulated her own worries about how her behaviours, actions and emotion may be perceived by others in the workplace.

I always have this fear of – maybe it’s an insecurity – but I don’t want to be seen as like difficult or too much or too preachy... it’s probably my own insecurity there, but that’s a real challenge. That’s a barrier, right? Because it affects how I show up. And I don’t know why that is deeply held, but it’s real.

Not only do societal power structures and prevailing norms and stereotypes influence how women are perceived and treated in the workplace through unconscious gender bias inflicted by others, but it is clear that they also impact individual behaviour and experience, as these stereotypes and biases are (often unknowingly) internalised. Consequently, this can impede career development and progression. As one interviewee attested:

Unconscious bias affects [workplace experience] if we want it to or not. It does affect promotion opportunities. And even if

companies have good policies, unconscious bias is something that sometimes cannot be controlled or monitored.

c. LGBTQ+ Discrimination and Exclusion

As the previous subsection has underscored, larger societal forces and systems shape the workplace experiences of LGBTQ+ women, as prevailing gender norms, stereotypes and biases impact the treatment, expectations, and behaviour of women. As one roundtable participant emphasised, ‘the system and society is set up as heteronormative, and patriarchal and gender conforming...and white as well. That is the base of our society. And that is the default’. These dominant forces are of course reflected at work, as the inequalities and prevailing assumptions that exist at large are reproduced in the workplace.

Participant reflections revealed the dominance of heteronormative assumptions in the workplace, as interviewees underscored how heterosexuality and being



cisgender were deemed to be the norm or 'default'. Indeed, a 2016 study into the career experiences of lesbians in the UK highlighted that despite protective legislation, one of the greatest challenges for lesbians is 'working in a heterosexist, heteronormative environment'.¹² As geographer Gill Valentine has argued in her work on the spatial dominance of heterosexuality, the workplace is structured according to heterosexual norms and is thus not experienced as an asexual environment, but as a heterosexual one.¹³ Valentine posits that through (hetero)sexualised signifiers, conversations and behaviour amongst heterosexual employees, lesbians are consequently made to feel 'out of place' at work. Pat Griffin has described this as 'organisational heterosexism', in which 'heterosexuality is privileged as the only normal and acceptable form of sexual expression' and LGBTQ+ identities are consequently stigmatised.¹⁴

Whilst Valentine's study pertained to the experiences of LGBTQ+ women in the early 1990s, the experiences of the Women of Impact participants indicate that workplaces continue to reproduce heterosexuality as the norm. This was raised by a number of women as manifesting in the continual coming out process that they go through at work, and the consequential reactions of shock communicated by colleagues. One interviewee explained that 'I have to come out all the time at work and...I get 'oh, you don't look gay' or 'you don't sound gay'. And I said what does that even mean? So,

how do we challenge those assumptions?...I think that's a real barrier for us.' Another participant recounted a similar experience:

The continual coming out, I find probably more challenging that it needs to be. And I guess, when I infer people's shock – if I say something about being gay and they're taken aback by it – I've had to learn to not be offended by that and like they're just challenging their own perceptions of what someone who's gay looks like.

These examples underscore the ways in which heteronormativity continues to shape experience in the workplace. As heterosexuality is projected as the default, and LGBTQ+ stereotypes prevail in the assumptions and understanding of many, LGBTQ+ experience and identities continue to be othered, creating barriers to inclusion for LGBTQ+ women at work.

The dominance of LGBTQ+ stereotypes and LGBTQ+-phobic discourse and their impact on workplace inclusion was highlighted by a number of bisexual women. Talking about her personal experience of coming out as bisexual to her colleagues, one roundtable participant spoke of the biphobic comments she had been subject to:

You still get the comments 'well you're greedy', or 'it's a phase' or 'choose a side', and especially because I'm married to a man...[I get comments] like 'oh so that must've been your teenage years' or 'that was at uni', 'it's not who you are [now]'.

¹² Fielden, *Career Experiences of Lesbians in the UK*.

¹³ Gill Valentine, '(Hetero)sexing Space: Lesbian Perceptions and Experiences of Everyday Spaces', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 1993, pp. 395-413 (p. 402).

¹⁴ Pat Griffin, *Strong Women, Deep Closets: Lesbians and Homophobia in Sport* (Human Kinetics, 1998) p. 16.

Bisexual people experience specific biphobic stereotypes and discrimination. Associating bisexuality with confusion, indecisiveness, instability and promiscuity are common ways in which biphobia manifests.¹⁵ Such microaggressions contribute to bisexual employees being three times less likely to come out at work compared to their lesbian and gay siblings. Another roundtable participant spoke of her experience of coming out to a colleague who, in response, recounted similar biphobic discourse.

In a previous organisation I worked at I was speaking to the head of recruitment about why it was important to track diversity. And she said she didn't need to because she could tell if people were gay by looking at them. And I was like well no you can't, you don't know what sexuality I am. And she went 'yeah I do, you're married to a man.' And I said, 'actually I'm bi', and she said 'just 'cause you've had a threesome doesn't mean you're bi!'

Recent research has underscored how the recurrent sexualisation and objectification of bisexual women causes feelings of hurt, disempowerment and anger, and contributes to the invalidation and erasure of bisexual identities.¹⁶ Participant recollections further revealed the ways in which bisexual and lesbian women face sexualisation and objectification, with queer relationships between women devalued and fetishised. One interviewee spoke of her own experience of this, pointing to the sexualisation that she has faced as an LGBTQ+ woman: 'I can think of numerous times where people have

been like "oh hot, girl on girl"...like it just very quickly becomes really transactional, and it doesn't seem like it's always valued'. Indeed, this is a commonplace experience for LGBTQ+ women, who repeatedly have their sexual identities and relationships, trivialised and fetishised. Pointing to the compounded discrimination LGBTQ+ women face, one interviewee asserted that: 'Across many cultures, relationships between women have been trivialised or fetishised. That devaluation shows how deeply sexism shapes the experiences of LGBTQ+ women.'

Participant reflections also highlighted the barriers to inclusion that trans women encounter in their places of work. Speaking of the discrimination she had experienced during her career, one participant's recollections reveal the explicit transphobia she faced at the hands of her employer. Whilst she explained that the discrimination she encountered was not a 'single incident, but a sustained pattern' that ultimately cost her her job, she does point to one instance in particular where, during legal proceedings, it became clear that doubts regarding her professional competence had been tied to her gender identity. She explained:

One of the most revealing moments came from a lawyer in the family, who, upon reviewing my case, summarised it as the organisation was unable to separate my gender identity from my ability to make executive decisions, although I had almost three decades of exemplary performance in this manner before transition.

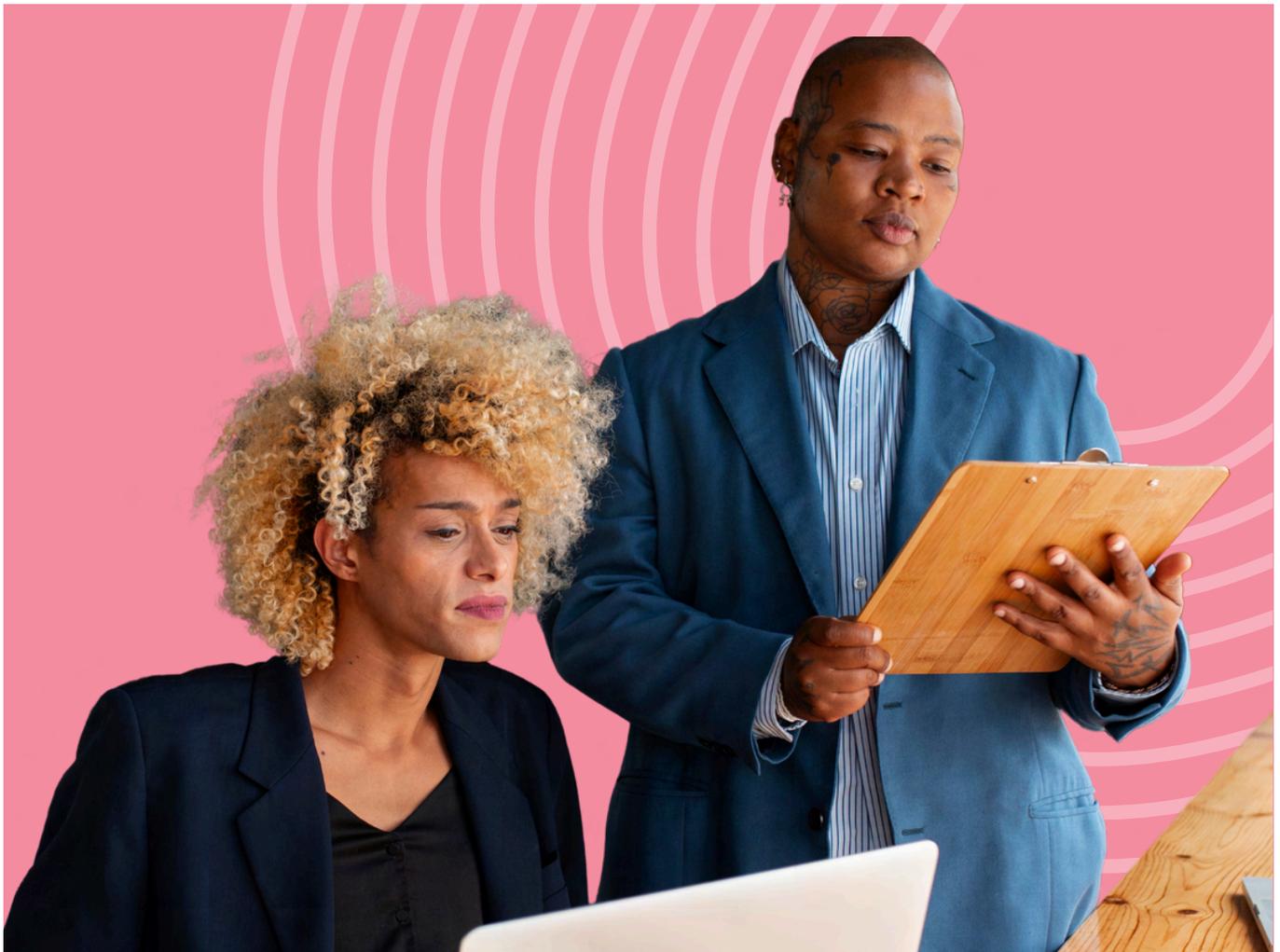
¹⁵Caroline Vonlanthen and Annie Roy-Charland, 'Biphobia: A Systematic Literature Review', *Canadian Psychology*, Vol. 66, No. 1, 2025, pp. 15-32 (p. 19).

¹⁶Amy McCole, et. al., "'An Extra Set of Bits for Your Fantasy': A Qualitative Exploration of Bi+ Women's Fetishization Experiences', *Journal of Bisexuality*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 2025, pp. 696-718.

Research conducted by the NHS Confederation in 2023 reveals that this is not a unique or standalone experience. Of the trans and non-binary healthcare staff surveyed, 41% of respondents said they had faced questions regarding their professional competence based on their gender identity. The above example highlights the detrimental impact that such deep-rooted transphobic prejudices can have on the workplace experiences and career progression of trans women.

In recent times, the changing political landscape has had a direct and damaging

impact on the workplace experiences of trans women, seeing them encounter additional and intensified barriers to inclusion to those that cisgender-LGBTQ+ women face. The ongoing erosion of trans rights has exacerbated these challenges, causing uncertainty for many, altering how trans women access and experience their places of work, and consequently affecting psychological safety and feelings of belonging in the workplace. These exacerbations reiterate the importance of embracing intersectionally inclusive workplace practices that address these unique challenges equitably.



3. Enabling Change

When asked what senior leaders and organisations can do to help close the gap in representation and increase the visibility of LGBTQ+ women at all levels, participant responses generated four clear themes. These can be broadly construed as listening to lived experience; the importance of networking and creating space; implementing inclusive workplace policies that enable career growth; and being intentional about sponsorship and inclusion. This section explores these four themes before moving on to offer practical actions to create more inclusive workplaces where LGBTQ+ women are empowered.

a. Listening to Lived Experience

Both roundtable participant and interviewee reflections made clear that listening to the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ women was an integral first step in creating more inclusive workplaces where LGBTQ+ women are more visible. As one roundtable participant explained, ‘Some of the experiences that I’ve heard today I haven’t heard before, which has actually shocked me as well... [highlighting these experiences] is absolutely critical to understand what’s actually happening, otherwise we can’t obviously tackle them’. Another roundtable participant agreed, stating that ‘this [Women of Impact] platform is really key as well to bring [light to] these insights and say “this could be happening. You may not know about it, but it could”’. One interviewee spoke of this further:

I often get, you know people say to me, ‘oh, but we’re, but we’re really good, we’re really good with all this stuff [LGBTQ+ inclusion]’ and [they] just can’t get their heads around why somebody might not want to be out or you know, that something might have happened because they’ve never seen it. So, I think being really honest about sharing some of those stories and those circumstances.

For this interviewee, open communication and listening to the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ women is vital in creating awareness about workplace

microaggressions and prejudicial treatment, providing essential educational opportunities amongst employees. She went on to explain, however, the reluctance of organisations to address difficult conversations.

I think some organisations really struggle with that because they don’t want to say, ‘Oh yeah, somebody said the wrong thing’, but I think that’s what you need to do. You need to confront it and learn from it and have an open environment where people can discuss it.

This was also highlighted during the roundtable, as one participant explained that:

I think one of the things that, particularly corporate, workplaces are guilty of, is anytime there’s any kind of contention in the workplace between people, genders, networks, race, whatever it might be, they’re very quick to shut down the conversation to stop it escalating, which is sensible, but it also removes all of those educational touch point conversations that you can actually sit down and have with a group of people, an individual, whatever it might be. To just listen and understand, accept humans for humans.

In operating from a place of openness and transparency by being upfront about the negative workplace experiences of LGBTQ+ women, greater understanding is

promoted as conversation and education are enabled.

Alongside using these moments as learning opportunities, participants also spoke of the benefits of creating spaces where the lived experiences and stories of LGBTQ+ people can be heard. Interviewees and roundtable participants once again outlined the important role that this can play in increasing awareness about what it is like to be an LGBTQ+ woman both in the workplace and wider society. One interviewee shared an example of the powerful impact this can have:

I was talking [at a workplace education breakfast] on world Bi Visibility Day, about how bisexual women, including me, are being fetishized very often and bisexual men are often dismissed as just gay. And those conversations aren't easy. I'm aware of that. But I realised what a big impact that they had on people...[when you] share more personal insight and speak about it openly, it creates a space for honesty and change and conversation.

This interviewee went on, explaining that when someone tells her that events such as the above helped to 'change their perspective or helped them to understand more, that means everything to me. Those moments remind me every time how important it is to never stop this conversation and never stop educating people'.

Participants also underscored the importance of using these opportunities to spotlight, champion and celebrate LGBTQ+ women, in turn raising the visibility and increasing the representation of LGBTQ+ women in the workplace.

I think that the most important thing here is around kind of storytelling and championing people within the organisation that are open and out and proud. Because like I said, it's about representation and then things like this. But yes, storytelling and championing these people is really important.

One participant spoke to this in her interview, asserting that 'I think as well that [we] should be more celebrated. We are not being celebrated enough – [I think] success stories and LGBTQ voices should be heard more'.

b. Creating Safe and Affirming Spaces

Providing LGBTQ+ women with the opportunity to connect, network and take up space in which they are the majority was highlighted by interviewees as having a clear impact, enabling women to feel



supported, represented and offering a space in which they feel like they belong. One interviewee spoke of the benefits of providing safe spaces for LGBTQ+ women:

Having dedicated spaces, for queer women, and I'm including trans women in this space as well, it's really important to have again, you know, a space where we can all share our stories, where we can all share our challenges. I think that's really important and you know, it is quite an easy way – because you're not going to tell just by looking at a woman if she's queer or not – so having these spaces and you know it's private, people can join and nobody's going to know outside of that small space whether they've joined or not. I think that's quite important.

Drawing on her experience as a chair of an inter-organisational LGBTQ+ women's network, one interviewee spoke of how inter-organisational networking and community building is an effective way of bringing LGBTQ+ women together.

And through the power of networks that we thankfully have here in London, we have managed to build a critical mass of women that was needed to create a snowball effect, which in turn has given birth to this community where people now feel like they belong.

While participants reported low levels of LGBTQ+ women within their own organisations, as outlined in section one, they also underscored that external opportunities for connection can be incredibly affirming experiences, offering LGBTQ+ women with the feelings of belonging and the visible role models and community they may not have within their internal organisations.

I didn't have any role models in my organisation, but I remember to this day, we had a panel event and Inga Beale was invited in, and she was sitting there and talking about being bi and she was CEO of Lloyds. And I was like 'Oh my God, it is possible!' Like it might not be my organisation but [examples like this]...help people realise 'fine, it might not be happening in my organisation, but it is out there'.

Emphasising the impact of inter-organisation networks further, some participants urged senior leaders to be more proactive in promoting, facilitating and supporting external networks for LGBTQ+ women.

Maybe it's like, you know, continuing to support external network communities. I think, you know, we can't build everything internally, but we can help the industry as a whole, right? They've got that power, they've got the funds, they've got the reach to go do that. So, I'd probably recommend just be a little bit more proactive on that front.

Participants also spoke of the ways in which the visibility of LGBTQ+ women could be increased internally. Discussing the dominance of men in LGBTQ+ ERGs and pride networks, roundtable participants stressed the need to think of different ways to bring LGBTQ+ women together. Having a specific 'purpose' for connection was re-iterated as being successful in encouraging LGBTQ+ women to take part in initiatives and networks. One participant asserted that 'I think from my experience – you know in the past trying to bring LGBT women together – the things that have worked are really around

having a clear purpose'. Another spoke of this 'clear purpose for connection' further:

Offering opportunity for visibility in different ways, I'm just reflecting on what [another participant] said before about do women like to be visible in different ways to men? Because I think it's really true. And when we try to get people for storytelling we really struggle with women, but if it's a buddy scheme...it wasn't a challenge to get women to step forward for that because it was being visible with a purpose that was about helping others...I think it's something about helping people to make that visibility without calling someone a role model but instead doing it for a different purpose and then they're probably gonna be a bit more comfortable with that visibility, but it will have the same impact.

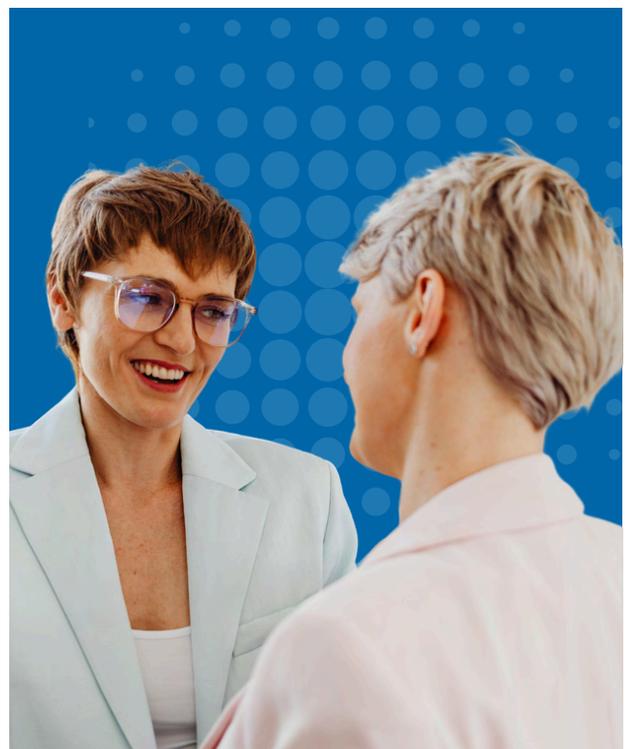
With numerous participants highlighting how LGBTQ+ women are often more willing to be involved and more comfortable in being visible when there is a clear purpose behind their involvement, it is important that organisations don't only support and fund ERGs, but also facilitate internal buddy schemes, mentoring programmes, and other similar initiatives to help bring LGBTQ+ women together. LGBT Great runs specialist LGBTQ+ mentoring and role modelling programmes. To learn more, [click here](#).

c. Implement Inclusive Workplace Policies and Target Career Growth

Implementing inclusive policies that recognise and support LGBTQ+ women and their workplace experience and career progression was underlined as an integral step in fostering inclusive workplaces where LGBTQ+ women are represented, supported and, crucially, able to achieve career growth. One interviewee spoke of

the gender imbalance of workplaces, particularly at senior levels, underscoring that despite recruiting on an almost 50/50 basis at more junior levels, organisations in the financial services industry nevertheless struggle to recruit and retain senior women due to workplace barriers and a lack of supportive policies.

Organisations tend to recruit kind of more or less 50/50. But you have more women leaving and organisations often struggle to recruit senior women. And so, despite the best of intentions, it's not getting any better. People think it will get better because it'll work out over time because you recruited more women and it doesn't because women leave and you struggle to recruit senior women. And you know, part of women leaving is around, things like work life balance and maternity leave.



Participants also spoke of the policies that have benefited them during their careers, and those that they would like to see implemented in order to address the systemic barriers affecting the career growth of LGBTQ+ women. Flexible maternity and paternity leave, the use of inclusive language, equal healthcare benefits regardless of sexuality or gender, menopause policy, hybrid and flexible working patterns and remote management schemes were raised as being vital policies that can help support and foster career progression amongst LGBTQ+ women.

Auditing policies and employee benefits to ensure inclusive language is used, and provisions are offered equally, was raised as being of particular pertinence when considering healthcare coverage and benefits. One participant spoke of this during her interview, pointing to the need for organisations to ensure their health insurance coverage is offered equally regardless of sexual identity.

[Organisations need to] audit all policies and benefits for inclusive language...ensure also that what is getting offered to LGBT women in the same as straight women. Like having the same [health] coverage and the same benefits without making it gendered. I was looking in a company once and was really taken aback – in a good way – when I was reading through their HR policies and it [said] the birthing parent gets this much time off, the non-birthing parent gets this or that. And I was like wow, this is great.

Adapting maternity and paternity leave policies, whereby the two provisions are more equally matched, was also raised by a number of participants as a way to level the field. As ‘the people who have the

most time away from work is women’, implementing more equal and flexible maternity and paternity leave offers more freedom and works to challenge the stigma that exists around taking career breaks. As one interviewee explained:

I think your maternity and paternity leave should match more. So, obviously as a person who’s bearing a child, you’ll probably need more leave from a medical standpoint, but there needs to be more flexibility given to men so that they feel empowered to take it. Because there needs to be, and I think that this is [the same] with career breaks in general, there needs to be less of a stigma around taking time away from work.

Participants further outlined how challenging the stigma around career breaks can also be embedded in hiring practices and policies, with job postings for senior roles including language that ensures ‘returners’ or those who have had time out are included and considered.

The provision of menopause policy and healthcare benefits was likewise underscored as being essential in supporting women at work and enabling career progression. As research has highlighted, a quarter of those going through the menopause are more likely to retire early. As one interviewee explained:

I realised there was no menopause policy in place...I was like this is silly – at least 50% of our workforce are going to experience this. So I asked for one. Nope, didn’t have one. So I helped write one and about eight months later it got implemented.

Flexible and hybrid working opportunities were also discussed as important accommodations, highlighted as enabling parents to care for children whilst still being able to do their job. As one interviewee explained:

Work from home and hybrid [working] – I think that's really important. To be able to allow more flexibility for school pickups, sick children, whatever, and still be able to deliver on your job. I think that is really important.

Additionally, remote management opportunities were raised as being of particular significance for LGBTQ+ women, enabling them to take on new roles and responsibilities and progress in their careers whilst mitigating potential risks to safety. One interviewee spoke of the ways in which this had helped in their career journey, opening up the opportunity to gain seniority whilst residing in a city or country where they felt safe.

I manage Europe, the Middle East and Africa, and I've been asked many times to move to Dubai, because they want someone locally on the ground. But I think the ability to empower your staff to be based in hub countries that are safe for them to live in, but still have the responsibility of the regions that they don't want to live in – for whatever reason – allows for career growth and opportunity and safety for that person whose hub base could be London or Dublin or New York... [and that's] helped me to manage multiple clusters.

The sentiments explored above are further corroborated by our 2025 research which indicates that embedding inclusive workplace policies which empower LGBTQ+ women can contribute to higher levels of productivity, psychological safety and talent retention rates. To read more, click [here](#).

d. Senior Leader Sponsorship

Workplace policy, however, can only go so far. Participant reflections repeatedly revealed discrepancies between the tone communicated by the leaders of an organisation and the actual culture experienced on the ground. As underscored by one participant:

Inclusion is not a policy. It is a practice. Policies can signal intent, but they do not change behaviour. You cannot dismantle sexism, misogyny, or homophobia with policies alone. Inclusion only happens through behavioural change.

Senior leaders being intentional and committing to inclusion and belonging was reiterated as being a key driving force behind creating inclusive workplace cultures and encouraging behavioural change. As our 2025 research highlighted, senior leaders set the tone within organisations; their commitment to inclusion is thus critical. One interviewee asserted: '[Leaders need to] be intentional; representation doesn't happen by accident. Leaders need to support their talent. They need to amplify their voices and challenge the bias that exists in recruitment and the promotion processes.'

Participant sentiment revealed that a key way of demonstrating intentionality and commitment to creating inclusive workplaces for LGBTQ+ women is through senior leader sponsorship. As one roundtable participant explained, 'If we don't have sponsorship, it's [inclusion for LGBTQ+ women] not going to work...It needs direct action'. For a number of women, this meant going beyond mentoring or allyship and involved committing to facilitating the career progression of LGBTQ+ women.

I think that is a big gap that I see – sponsorship. Not just allyship. Not just advocacy. But going beyond that, and

actually 'I'm going to advance this person's career'.

This was further emphasised by another interviewee: 'I think sponsorship is really important and...leadership accountability. [so saying] "as a leader I'm going to make sure that I'm going to sponsor – but really sponsor somebody who doesn't identify the same way as me"'. It is this, another asserted, that has the power to break down the systemic barriers that prevent LGBTQ+ women from achieving career growth: 'Mentoring is valuable, but sponsorship is what changes careers. LGBTQ+ women deserve both.'

Participants reiterated the importance of senior leaders being intentional about sponsorship, underscoring the need to put formal structures in place to ensure commitment and follow through. This was raised as being of particular importance; as one participant emphasised 'What I've found is that we all talk about sponsorship, but there's no actual structure to it'. Implementing official sponsorship programmes, where women are paired with senior leaders who actively advocate for their career advancement, enables leadership to demonstrate commitment and intentionality to sponsorship, and ensures that LGBTQ+ women are offered opportunities that contribute to their career progression. One interviewee outlined the

kind of sponsorship she'd like to see from senior leaders.

Pairing LGBT women with senior sponsors, not necessarily other LGBT women – though that would be really fun as well – but just ensuring that you're with someone who sponsors you as an individual and your work and you just happen to be gay and like [having] somebody above you to ensure that will not inhibit you in any way. And someone who can just read the room for you, and if you're uncomfortable you can make the eyes and be like 'this is an unsafe room' and then they'll sort it out. Those sorts of things are actually really, really important and go really far.

Speaking of her own experience of receiving sponsorship from senior leaders, one interviewee highlights the impact that such actions can have.

I've had sponsorship which has been really meaningful...not because of who I am individually, but because of how I show up for work and my performance which speaks for itself. Which has led me to build great relationships with really instrumental people who will support and back me for me because I go the extra mile for my job. Not because I'm gay, [but] because I'm awesome at my job and they want to support me as a human. So, that's been really positive.



4. Five Practical Strategies to Empower LGBTQ+ Women

1. Build Inclusive Cultures

- Actively address discriminatory behaviour and treat exclusionary incidents as learning opportunities
- Equip leaders and allies with the skills to challenge harmful assumptions: read our allyship guide [here](#) to gain practical tips
- Educate employees on what prejudicial language, stereotypes and microaggressions look like, setting clear parameters for unacceptable behaviour

2. Elevate Lived Experience Through Storytelling, Visibility & Recognition

- Create regular, safe opportunities for LGBTQ+ women to share their experiences
- Use intentional storytelling to increase awareness, promote learning and deepen empathy across teams
- Nominate LGBTQ+ women for role-modelling programmes, awards and visibility platforms

3. Strengthen Community Through Safe Spaces, Networks & Connection

- Establish confidential, psychologically safe spaces for LGBTQ+ women to connect and support each other
- Promote participation in external networks where internal representation may be limited
- Offer structured alternatives to ERGs, such as buddy schemes, mentoring circles and purpose-led small-group forums

4. Design Policies That Reflect the Needs of LGBTQ+ Women

- Audit all policies to ensure inclusive language and equitable access to healthcare, insurance, menopause, maternity, paternity and adoption benefits
- Build flexibility into leave and family-related policies to support all parents equally
- Provide hybrid working options and remote management/leadership pathways to support safety, wellbeing and career mobility

5. Commit to Sponsorship That Supports Career Progression

- Move beyond mentorship by pairing LGBTQ+ women with senior sponsors who advocate for their growth
- Create formal sponsorship structures with accountability and follow-through
- Ensure sponsors open doors, influence decisions and help LGBTQ+ women navigate organisational systems



Conclusion

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Centring the voices of 32 LGBTQ+ women from organisations across financial and professional services, this paper has sought to shed light on how LGBTQ+ women experience and navigate the workplace. Utilising the data we collected during the Women of Impact programme, this paper has drawn out the unique barriers to inclusion that LGBTQ+ women face, underscoring how they are compounded and impacted by their intersecting identity positions. With gender inequality persistently impacting women at work, participant sentiment revealed that individuals continue to conceal their LGBTQ+ identities to mitigate further potential discrimination. Indeed, for those that do come out, participant recollections have revealed the shocking accounts of LGBTQ+-phobic microaggressions and discrimination that continue to occur, working to further invalidate, other and exclude LGBTQ+ women in the workplace.

As this paper has highlighted the impact that the (in)visibility of LGBTQ+ women has upon the experiences of others at work, it is crucial that allies, leaders and organisations take steps to create more inclusive environments where LGBTQ+ women feel safe, supported, and able to bring their authentic selves to work. Whilst we cannot eradicate the misogyny, sexism and LGBTQ+-phobias that exist at large, we can implement measures to lessen their effects at the individual scale. This paper serves as a starting point, offering a platform from which to stage conversations around, and providing recommendations that individuals and organisations can take to help improve the workplace and career experiences of LGBTQ+ women. By listening to lived experience, creating safe and affirming spaces, advocating for inclusive policies and enabling senior sponsorship opportunities, we can build more inclusive and psychologically safe places of work where LGBTQ+ women feel empowered.

We help workplaces become authentically inclusive. Because when your people prosper, everyone thrives.

Get in touch and find out more:



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