Building an LGBTQ+ inclusive workplace:

A blueprint for Australia's construction industry

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GLOSSARY

BODIES, GENDER AND GENDER IDENTITIES

Gender identity: defined in the Act as 'the gender-related identity, appearance or mannerisms or other gender-related characteristics of a person (whether by way of medical intervention or not), with or without regard to the person's designated sex at birth'. For example, a person's birth certificate may include a marker which indicates that the person's designated sex is female when that person identifies as a man (in other words, their gender identity is that of a man).

Gender diverse: an umbrella term that includes all the different ways gender can be experienced and perceived. It can include people questioning their gender, those who identify as trans/transgender, genderqueer, non-binary, gender non-conforming and many more.

Cis-gendered / cis: a term used to describe people who identify their gender as the same as what was assigned to them at birth (male or female). 'Cis' is a Latin term meaning 'on the same side as'.

LGBTQ+: an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning and intersex. It is used to refer collectively to these communities. The 'LGB' refers to sexuality/sexual identity; the 'T' refers to gender identity; and the 'I' refers to people who

have an intersex variation. 'Q' can refer to either gender identity or sexuality.

Non-Binary: a term used to describe a person who does not identify exclusively as either a man or a woman. Genders that sit outside of the female and male binary are often called non-binary. A person might identify solely as non-binary, or relate to non-binary as an umbrella term and consider themselves genderfluid, genderqueer, trans masculine, trans feminine, agender, bigender, or something else.

Transgender: (commonly abbreviated to 'trans') is a general term used to describe a person whose gender identity is different to the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender is about how an individual describes their own gender. It is not necessarily about their biological characteristics. Trans people may position 'being trans' as a history or experience, rather than an identity, and consider their gender identity as simply being female, male or a non-binary identity. Some trans people connect strongly with their trans experience, whereas others do not. Processes of gender affirmation may or may not be part of a trans or gender diverse person's life.

SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS

Sexual orientation: refers to an individual's sexual and romantic attraction to another person. This can include, but is not limited to, heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual and asexual. It is important to note, however, that these are just a handful of sexual identifications – the reality is that there are an infinite number of ways in which someone might define their sexuality. Further, people can identify with a sexuality or sexual orientation regardless of their sexual or romantic experiences. Some people may identify as sexually fluid; that is, their sexuality is not fixed to any one identity.

Bi-sexual: an individual who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to people of the same gender and people of another gender. Bisexuality does not necessarily assume there are only two genders.

Gay: an individual who identifies as a man and is sexually and/or romantically attracted to other people who identify as men. The term gay can also be used in relation to women who are sexually and romantically attracted to other women.

Lesbian: an individual who identifies as a woman and is sexually and/or romantically attracted to other people who identify as women.

Queer: a term used to describe a range of sexual orientations and gender identities. Although once used as a derogatory term, the term queer now encapsulates political ideas of resistance to heteronormativity and homonormativity and is often used as an umbrella term to describe the full range of LGBTIQA+ identities.

Heterosexual (straight): an individual who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to the opposite gender.

(Pride in Sport, 2020)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To date, research to understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ employees in the Australian construction industry has been scarce. This research set out to improve understanding of the barriers and opportunities that LGBTQ+ employees face at work and contribute to improving the design and implementation of strategies that promote diversity and inclusion and provide relevant support and protection of LGBTQ+ rights at work.

THE RESEARCHERS WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND THANK THE PARTICIPANTS WHO SHARED THEIR LIFE STORIES AND EXPERIENCES WITH US. WE RECOGNISE THE EMOTIONAL LABOUR INVOLVED IN SHARING THESE STORIES.

IS THE AUSTRALIAN CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY IN TRANSITION?

How is the construction industry faring in relation to LGBT diversity and inclusion? Most LGBTQ+ employees felt that workplace attitudes were changing and that there was a positive trajectory overall, however, many noted it was coming off a very low base. Even though LGBTQ+ people in the stubbornly male-dominated construction industry gained confidence when same-sex marriage was legalised with a resounding 'yes' vote, there was also a sense of fragility and that for every advance, there was a set-back in another area. There were concerns that some sections of Australian society were being increasingly antagonistic, particularly towards transgender people. And, because workplaces are part of wider society, this sentiment could set back recent gains.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research finds there is significant variation across the industry regarding efforts towards being LGBTQ+ inclusive.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES

Participants acknowledged that some companies have established policies that support LGBTQ+ inclusivity, yet most participants thought more could be done. Progress often appears the result of sustained individual action to obtain institutional support and action in the form of formal policies and initiatives. Policies matter, as they act as a symbol of inclusion, a measure of acceptable behaviour and a mechanism for accountability. Policies also have to be enforced to ensure they are effective and alleviate the individual from the burden of advocacy for inclusion.

LEADERSHIP

The research found that leaders often lacked awareness of inclusive LGBTQ+ practices (for example, acknowledging the diversity of intimate relationships people in their workplace have), and in some cases leaders failed to act on homophobic or discriminatory behaviours in the workplace. In contrast, strong leadership on LGBTQ+ inclusion was described as the 'quickest win' for progress as well as a way to achieve sustained progress. Despite many examples of good leadership, participants also expressed frustration that leaders 'turned a blind eye' and failed to act or challenge homophobic behaviour and attitudes, especially from 'old school' men. Instead, there was a perception that instead of intervening, leaders were hoping that generational change would resolve these issues.

CONTEXT MATTERS

Workplace characteristics shape the experiences of LGBTQ+ employees. Office-based work and corporate culture were associated with perceptions of positive attitudes towards LGBTQ+ inclusion. The construction site and regional or remote locations were varied in their inclusivity. Larger companies and government agencies tended to have policy frameworks that supported inclusivity. Small businesses could also be a place where people thrive given the ability to have closer relations with people in the workplace however consistency of support among small businesses was seen to be less predictable than in large (e.g., multi-national) privately-owned businesses or government agencies (e.g., Transport for NSW).

Participants acknowledged the importance of larger businesses' influence on smaller businesses in relation to LGBTQ+ inclusion. The challenge of changing 'blokey and heterosexual' workplace culture remains in both large and small businesses. Precarious employment, apprenticeships and different types of work practices, such as fly in/fly out (FIFO), added to the challenge of coming out for LGBTQ+ workers. Participants perceived urban areas and major cities to be inclusive because of the exposure to different lifestyles. However, participants who had experienced working in regional areas were pleasantly surprised by the degree of inclusivity and acceptance.

INTERSECTIONALITY

There was considerable diversity and intersectionality among the cohort of participants in the study, particularly regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, age, racial/cultural background and religion. While this report highlights shared experiences of LGBTQ+ workers in the construction sector, it is to be noted that participants' different social identities (their race, gender, religious background) also shaped their experience as an LGBTQ+ worker. For

example, participants from ethnically diverse backgrounds reported racism as well as homophobia, and women reported sexism as well as homophobia.

LANGUAGE, TERMINOLOGY AND IDENTITY

Language matters and the use of it acts as a symbol of inclusivity. However, participants' knowledge and use of LGBTQ+ terminology varied. The sexuality and gender identity of participants was often fluid and temporal with participants crafting their own identity.

CALCULATING COMING OUT

Most of the LGBTQ+ employees had disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity to their immediate work colleagues, though not all. A person's position in an organisation's hierarchy often shaped their decision as to whether to express their diverse sexual or gender openly. For example, people described waiting until they had reached a level of seniority to come out because they perceived their position would protect them from any negative implications. Conversely, early career workers described being hesitant to be open about their LGBTQ+ identity until they had more experience, completed a necessary qualification or progressed within their organisation. They said they had waited until they felt comfortable that their job security, emotional safety or career aspirations would not be affected. Despite participants often growing up without LGBTQ+ peers, some had reached a place in their personal life of empowerment, confidence and acceptance. However, deciding to moderate the expression of their sexual or gender identity at work to 'fit in' or to avoid anticipated negative responses created a sense of powerlessness at work that was at odds with the strength and confidence they had gained outside work.

SAFETY AT WORK: PHYSICAL SAFETY, MENTAL WELL-BEING AND EMOTIONAL LABOUR

Determining whether it was 'safe' to come out during workplace encounters could be a constant source of anxiety. Some participants disclosed their sexual identity early, while others experienced significant anxiety in continually scanning their environment for emotional safety, which affected their productivity. While some participants felt empowered through contributing to policy development and advocacy activities, others experienced these as exhaustive demands, particularly those in the early stages of their career.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To build inclusion in the Australian construction sector, this report provides a variety of recommendations that include action by government and businesses, capacity building of construction leaders and greater visibility of LGBTQ+ leaders in the sector, sharing of effective formal policies and strategies that build inclusion, a dedicated helpline or support

for LGBTQ+ tradespeople and increased visibility of LGBTQ+ and Queer networks within the sector.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The research was conducted between September and December 2020 by researchers with expertise in gender, construction management and human rights. A review of international literature and consultation with UK researchers Professor Andy Dainty and Dr. Sarah Barnard informed the themes to be explored in the research. A researcher with expertise in LGBTQ+ issues and who also identifies as LGBTQ+ co-designed the semi-structured interview question guide and carried out all interviews. The research design was co-designed in conjunction with Mr. Aaron Spicer from Lendlease.

Researchers recruited participants via the Interbuild and Pride networks on Linkedin, Twitter and Facebook. In total, 23 in-depth interviews were conducted with participants from NSW, Victoria, Western Australia, Queensland and Tasmania ranging from tradespeople to senior executives of multinational companies. The reported gender identity of the participants was: 13 cis-male, 7 cis-female, one trans man, one queer and one non-binary. Reported sexual orientation was more fluid and is described in more detail in the findings section. Interviews focused on participants' career in the construction sector and their experience as an LGBTQ+ worker, how they have navigated identity at home and work, effectiveness of existing diversity and inclusion strategies in the workplace and opportunities for inclusion.

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Any errors or omissions are those of the authors only.

INTRODUCTION

The construction sector is Australia's third largest employer with projected employment growth in the future. Despite its prominence, the construction sector faces a skills shortage and remains Australia's most male dominated sector with women's participation tracking backwards in the last decade. While research has focused on gender equity in the Australian construction sector, there is little understanding of the experiences of LGBTQ+ workers in the sector. The focus of this research study is to document the experiences of LGBTQ+ workers in the Australian construction sector and the effectiveness of existing diversity and inclusion strategies - a focus of inquiry necessary to improve workplace inclusivity and diversity.

This report begins by providing an overview of the academic research conducted to date. The report then steps through the methodology applied in this study before outlining the critical findings from this research and asking the question 'whether the construction sector is in transition in relation to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ workers?' It concludes by offering recommendations to sector stakeholders including the government, construction companies and leaders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent Australian research into gender equity found evidence of homophobia in the Australian construction sector and forms of resistance to diversity and equality initiatives (Galea, 2018; Galea et al., 2018). Additionally, construction workers who differ from the norm in terms of race, gender and sexuality often found construction's workplace culture exclusionary and challenging (Galea et al., 2020; Powell and Sang, 2015). Feelings of dissonance made forming good relationships with other team members challenging. An emphasis on recruiting employees who are a good 'cultural fit' for the company was found to unintentionally act against diversity and inclusion and reinforce a heteronormative and masculine culture (Bridges et al., 2020; Chappell and Galea, 2017).

Empirical research recently conducted in the United Kingdom (UK) indicates there are marked differences in workplace culture and LGBTQ+ diversity and inclusion (Barnard et al., 2020; Barnard and Dainty, 2017). Specifically, construction sites are associated with hyper-masculinity behaviour and men, while professional office spaces are typically more diverse, including women, LGBTQ+ employees and people with disabilities (Barnard et al., 2020).

LGBTQ+ construction site workers feel the least comfortable to disclose their sexuality at work (Ramchurn, 2015). Barnard et al. (2020: 4) suggest that while office workplaces were 'less hostile' for LGBTQ+ employees, it does not necessarily mean they are without problems. The system of supply chains in construction makes consistency in a zero tolerance approach to discrimination a challenge (Barnard et al., 2020).

NEGOTIATING IDENTITY AT WORK: COMING OUT OR STAYING IN

Disclosing LGBTQ+ sexual orientation in the construction industry can have consequences, including dismissal and redundancy (Chan, 2013), bullying and harassment (Wright, 2013), and negatively impacting relations with colleagues and career prospects (Ramchurn, 2015). While not specific to the construction industry, Beauregard et al. (2018) found transgender individuals had mixed views about coming out at work. In some workplaces, trans employees may prefer not to reveal their trans experience because it means they can live authentically as their affirmed gender identity, while others may prefer disclosure to raise awareness and contribute to reducing stigma (Beauregard et al., 2018). As a result, occupational subcultures also influence whether LGBTQ+ employees are likely to disclose their sexuality. For example, in the United Kingdom, gay contract workers were considered to be less likely than gay engineers or architects to disclose their sexuality at work (Ramchurn, 2015).

For some LGBTQ+ employees, work can be a safer environment than at home (Barnard et al., 2020), underscoring the importance of an inclusive workplace for psychological safety. Barnard et al. (2020: 10) report that in organisations with established LGBT networks, "employees often feel a greater sense of recognition, acceptance and empowerment within the firm". Nonetheless, some employers may have little experience in responding effectively to homophobic forms of harassment (Wright, 2013).

VARIATIONS IN SEXUALITY AND GENDER AND THEIR EXPRESSION

To date, empirical research on LGBTQ+ construction workers is scant, though there are important contributions from the United Kingdom (UK) on experiences at work and inclusion (Barnard et al, 2020), on alternative masculinities (Chan, 2013) and the experiences of heterosexual and lesbian women (Wright, 2011, 2013). While being a minority in a male-dominated workplace can be challenging, it may present opportunities for difference that are advantageous. For example, Smith (2013) detailed the experiences of women who adopted 'safer' and 'smarter' work practices that deviated from those of men who relied on their

physicality. Here, women could 'feminise' work practices because they could more easily disconnect from the (male) norm (Smith, 2013: 868). Yet, some lesbians deliberately presented a 'tough' exterior to avoid sexual harassment seen directed at a more 'womanly' colleague (Wright, 2013: 840).

IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP

In 2013, Chan (2013) posited that sexual orientation was not likely discussed in construction management - although this may be changing. Some employers may also have little experience in responding effectively to homophobic forms of harassment (Wright, 2013).

POSITIVE CHANGE IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS DIVERSITY

In the 2020 UK study, some gay male construction workers felt that more progress towards LGBTQ+ diversity and inclusion had been made in the industry compared to the armed forces or police (Barnard et al., 2020). While some progress has been made in Australia with respect to anti-discrimination based on sexual orientation (e.g., legalised same-sex marriage), it is unclear to what extent, if any, these structural changes and localised efforts have contributed to creating a more inclusive workplace for LGBTQ+ employees in the stubbornly male-dominated construction sector. Consequently, investigating LGBTQ+ experiences in the sector is important for understanding, and then building and implementing strategies to promote inclusion and protect LGBTQ+ rights at work.

METHOD

This research aims to outline the barriers and opportunities faced by LGBTQ+ workers in the Australian construction sector and makes recommendations for how the sector can become more inclusive and protect LGBTQ+ rights at work.

The research was conducted between September and December 2020 by researchers with expertise in gender, construction management and human rights. A researcher with expertise in LGBTQ+ issues and who also identifies as LGBTQ+ co-designed the semi-structured interview question guide and carried out all interviews. The research design was co-designed in conjunction with Mr. Aaron Spicer from Lendlease.

The research adopted a qualitative methodology to gain insight into the status and experience of LGBTQ+ inclusion in the Australian construction industry. UNSW Research ethics was obtained to conduct the study (HC200699).

Researchers recruited participants via Interbuild (a network for LGBTQ+ individuals, their allies and employers in the Australian property and construction industry) and Pride in Diversity networks social media sites (including: LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook) in September and October 2020. Participants were required to submit an Expression Of Interest (EOI) to participate in the study via the Australian Human Rights Institute webpage. EOIs were obtained to ensure a cross section of respondents.

In total, 23 in-depth interviews were conducted with participants from NSW, Victoria, Western Australia, Queensland and Tasmania to understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ employees in the Australian construction industry. The reported gender identity of the participants was: 13 cis-male, 7 cis-female, one trans man, one queer and one non-binary (see Appendix 1). Interviews were undertaken over the telephone or via video teleconference and typically lasted 60-90 minutes. The sample size of 23 interviews provides a valid and nuanced, though not necessarily generalisable, view of participants' knowledge, experiences and perceptions. Time and budget determined the sample size, despite this, some participants were surprised by the small sample size of participants recruited:

> *I think the message needs to be out there that it's time – I know there's got to be more people like myself, I can't be the only one, or the only 25, did you say, that are around. I thought you would have had a bigger pool, to be honest. I was expecting in the hundreds. It shocked me a little bit, actually, so obviously there's still some people out there that aren't comfortable about it.*

> *(gay) male, 20s*

The interviews also provided an opportunity for participants who worked in human resources or were LGBTQ+ advocates in their organisation, to develop insights and reflect on their organisation's strategies. Several participants noted that the interview process had given them new insights about progressing LGBTQ+ inclusion within their current role. For example:

> *… sorry, you've given me an idea there. Part of my role is to write employer relations management plans, which is the guiding principles of how we're going to live our HRER [Human Resource and Employment Relations] on sites*

Interviews focused on participants' career in the construction sector and their experience as an LGBTQ+ worker, how they have navigated identity at home and work, effectiveness of existing diversity and inclusion strategies in the workplace and opportunities for inclusion. They were recorded with participants permission and then transcribed. To address concerns around confidentiality, all participant interviews were anonymised, and where necessary to protect the participants' anonymity, they were de-identified. A review of international literature and consultation with UK researchers informed the themes to be explored in the research, and an LGBTQ+ researcher co-designed the semi-structured interview question guide and carried out all interviews. The data was coded thematically (see Appendix 2) using Nvivo (a qualitative software that enables the organisation of context rich data text).

FINDINGS

1. RENDERING IDENTITY VISIBLE TO BLEND IN: MOTIVATIONS FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE RESEARCH

While there were a range of experiences among the research participants, almost all participants said they were motivated to take part in the research because they thought raising awareness about how LGBTQ+ people experience the construction workplace was important and needed. They valued the research being conducted.

A number of participants said they were keen to participate because there was either not enough or no research about LGBTQ+ people in their workplace and/or industry.

Some participants specified that they hoped sharing their story may contribute to ensuring LGBTQ+ people can feel a greater sense of belonging at work or that businesses may become more inclusive and productive.

I hope the results from this research can help our community, and [that LGBTQ+ acceptance and inclusion] just becomes the norm, I mean, that it doesn't need to be brought up anymore. Hopefully all this research will get us to a point where we become part of the social fabric, knitted in, melted

together, you know? Life will just progress forward, and we can spend our
time on researching and building better things. I wish we could get above it,
but we're still fighting to get to a better place for LGBT community.

Gay, male 30s

I've had some, I would say probably transphobic experiences at work in the
last two years and as a result of that I've gone back into the closet with how I
identify. I think I had it, and so I just wanted to be able to talk about it because
I think it needs to be discussed more … I think it's all about awareness, people
need to be more aware.

Queer, 40s

We know that it is great to have a support network and trying to be inclusive
and if this research benefits someone or some company, like absolutely, I
definitely want to be involved.

Gay/queer/lesbian female, 20s

I'm so excited … I think it is just mind-blowing [that research on LGBTQ+
employees in construction is being undertaken]… If this can come into
mainstream business in Australia, I think it's just fantastic.

Gay, male, 50s

2. INTERSECTIONALITY: SEXUAL AND GENDER IDENTITY OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

There was considerable diversity and intersectionality among the cohort of participants in the study, not only in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity, but also: age, racial/cultural background, religion and (dis)ability. While this report highlights shared experiences of LGBTQ+ workers in the construction sector, it is to be noted that participants' different social identities (their race, gender, religious background) also shaped their experience as an LGBTQ+ worker. For example, participants from ethnically diverse backgrounds reported racism as well as homophobia, and women reported sexism as well as homophobia.

I think there's a very big difference between males and females in our industry
and I also think there's a very big difference between blue collar and white

collar … White collar is different, more acceptable. But I also think that males are more acceptable. It's very hard for females in any industry.

Bisexual, female, 40s

I'm more open about my sexuality in this organisation than I am around the disability that I have, but I'm about to change that, because I'm about to say, why wouldn't I be open about that, when I'm comfortable with my sexuality in this environment?

Bisexual, female, 30s

3. FLUIDITY OF IDENTITY

Participants were asked about their sexual and gender identity. The responses included 'gay', 'lesbian', 'bi-sexual', 'queer' and 'transgender', as well as people with preferences for no label or descriptions that were less fixed. Those who identified as 'gay', were, in general, people who had been born male, and identified as men – their responses were typically short and direct. However, much more nuanced and descriptive responses were given by many others, for example:

I'm a woman and I have a long term relationship with a woman. I don't particularly like labels myself … I don't know, they're a bit pigeon-holey.

Female, 50s

[I'm] probably more gay than bi, but not as gay as some people, I suppose. I don't know, really.

Male, 20s

I think queer is the best way of describing it and I feel like sexuality for me is a spectrum. I believe that like 99.8% of the time, I'm always going to be attracted to females, but there is like 0.2% that just like sneak in, when I feel like males are very feminine. And so that's why I don't like calling myself bi, because I'm not really 50/50 and it's, it's just a bit different. And I don't - can't call myself lesbian because I have been with a man in the past, um so I feel like queer is just, it's very open.

Female, 20s

One participant reflected positively upon seeing the results of a workplace survey which reported a percentage of employees of 'undetermined' gender, as follows:

> *I did see something recently actually when we were responding to a response for a client and they did actually say that they had, I think it's 0.48 per cent of undetermined gender when they were - a certain amount of female, male and then I'm guessing it's me. That was actually pretty nice to see and that's only something that happened a week ago. It's getting there and the government's pushing for it with all their projects and so eventually they're just going to have to get better at it.*

Non-binary, 20s

Nonetheless, while recognising oneself among workplace statistics contributed to a sense of inclusion, efforts to support diversity and intersectional identities required real and meaningful engagement which participants noted were sometimes tokenistic. As one participant explains:

> *I think unfortunately, I'm still a bit of a token person. Being Indigenous, you tick the box, you add to the statistics, you add to the percentage of people that they're providing employment for. At this company they really need to do better with their engagement and actually giving back to Indigenous people. Most people just don't think I'm Indigenous when they find out that I am or if I tell them. It's really hard in Indigenous culture to be a white black person.[1]*

The sexuality and gender identity of participants was often fluid and temporal with participants crafting their own identity and acknowledging that some people found fluidity of identity confusing.

> *I had an ex-girlfriend who had been engaged to a guy. We were together for five years and often she'd still run into people and they'd go "but you were engaged to a guy and" - then you sort of see the assumption that you are one or the other and I think people are quite comfortable when you're in a box now. It's when you stray outside of that box that people actually get a little bit like "Oh, how does that work? Oh my God, this is a little bit different".*

Lesbian, female 40s

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[1] Identity not disclosed to protect anonymity of participant.

When asked what they would like their colleagues to do if they were unsure how to address them at work, several participants said that people should 'ask' them, though one added that colleagues should not be repetitive or too intrusive when doing so. Additionally, participants suggested that their colleagues could ask a people how they identify rather than assume a colleague's gender identity and sexual orientation.

> *I try to be really open here and just say, "Ask me - if you've got any questions um ask me, send me an email". I've tried to equip HR with some good resources in case anyone asks them questions and things like that. I wish more people would ask because I'm really open to sharing. I think it gets hard at work I guess because a lot of people might think it's not the place to talk about things in your personal life, you're just here to do work stuff so - maybe one day people will start asking some more questions.*

> *Non-binary, 20s*

> *I haven't come across any issues with being an openly gay male in the industry, but at the same time, when I discuss it with people it's usually, "I'm surprised" or "I'm sorry, I just assumed you were straight". Having some kind of awareness, in that you are likely working with people that don't identify their sexuality or their gender the same as you, next to you, we might speak the same, we might do the same job, we might look the same, but just be aware of that.*

> *Gay, male 30s*

One participant changed the way they described their identity to others, not because they identified differently, but rather to simplify it for people to avoid misunderstandings or confrontation.

> *[P]eople don't get it because they don't, there's so much bad press…You only have to turn on the news and there's so much misunderstanding about transgender people and about it's something you felt at birth … Last year I did tell a couple of people I was - I identify as queer non-binary … But if people ask me at work I always say, I just say queer now because it's just easier.*

> *Queer, 40s*

Language matters and the use of it acts as a symbol of inclusivity. Notwithstanding, some participants, particularly those who were older, said they sometimes had difficulty keeping up with changes to terminology and how individuals prefer the terminology to be used. If people within the LGBTQ+ community have difficulty with their level of knowledge and use of LGBTQ+ terminology, it is likely that others will too, making education and awareness on this issue crucial.

4. CALCULATING COMING OUT

In this study, most of the LGBTQ+ employees had disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity to their immediate work colleagues, though not all. A person's position in an organisation's hierarchy often shaped their decision as to whether to express their diverse sexual or gender openly. For example, people said they had waited until they had reached a level of seniority to come out because they perceived their position would protect them from any negative implications. Conversely, early career workers described delaying being open about their LGBTQ+ identity until they had more experience, completed a necessary qualification or progressed within their organisation. These workers said they had waited to ensure their job security, emotional safety or career aspirations would not be affected. Despite participants often growing up without LGBTQ+ peers, some had reached a place in their personal life of empowerment, confidence and acceptance. However, deciding to moderate the expression of their sexual or gender identity at work to 'fit in' or to avoid anticipated negative responses created a sense of powerlessness at work that was at odds with how they felt outside of work. For example:

> *I feel quite sad about it now because at this point in time there's nothing much I can do. I'm going to wait until I finish my apprenticeship and get a permanent position … I definitely will be [telling people] how I identify. So, once I finish, I'll be very much asking the people I work with politely, 'Can you not address me this way' and I will not be having any ifs or buts about it.*
>
> *Queer, 40s*

> *I recently came out in the last 12 months, slowly. Been in the industry for 10 plus years and I think that there's a lot more people like myself out there, and it needs to be made a little bit more normalised in such a masculine industry, I suppose. You know, it's out there, and people are hiding it, and it doesn't need to happen anymore.*
>
> *Gay, male, 20s*

Transitioning gender while transitioning to a new workplace was a challenge for one participant, though it turned out to be a positive experience. They wanted to inform their colleagues and discussed ways to approach it with staff in human resources. They decided to draft an email to send to all staff and the human resources office offered to send it out on their behalf after the participant had gone home early.

I just didn't want to be walking around the office and see the email up on people's screens or people just have read it and then look at me or things like that. I didn't really want to be the centre of attention but I knew it was an important thing for me for that to be shared within the workplace. So, I did that and I also put a couple of resources at the bottom of the email and "If you wanted to find out more here are a couple of links that explain what non binary is" and a few different experiences which I found. A few people did tell me that they read them, which was really good and it did open up questions after that which was great. I'm more comfortable talking about it now than I probably was when I first came out. This is something that I needed for me to be able to live and be happy. So it was something that I was maybe even ready to experience. Being misgendered and not being known as non-binary, being thought of as a woman, I think, is probably the hardest part for me, is just people not knowing. I think it makes me more anxious than people knowing and using the incorrect pronouns.

Non-binary 20s

When an employee is transitioning, the process of disclosing a change in gender identity can be daunting, particularly as a relative newcomer to a large organisation. Yet, the importance of being recognised by co-workers for one's affirmed gender and using they/them pronouns outweighed the anxiety. Nonetheless, calculating when and how to share identity with colleagues can take considerable time and courage by individuals and an outwardly inclusive environment would contribute to reducing or eliminating the anxiety associated with these decisions.

I feel like broadcasting [my identity] with all these people that I don't really know a bit more daunting. I don't know if [making workplace announcements is] the best approach, it's probably the easiest approach because I find it hard to talk to people about it. But the idea of it going out to so many people makes me feel a bit strange.

[Sometimes during interstate conference calls] someone from far away says "Hello ladies" or something like that and it was only a few months ago that I got the courage to send a message and be, like, "Hey, you know, I'm non-binary and I use they, them pronouns. Using collective terms like ladies is not really fitting for me" and giving some examples on some other terms that they could use. But that took me a really long time to get up the courage to do that and that's people I talk to pretty often.

Non-binary 20s

Workplace characteristics shape the experiences of LGBTQ+ employees. Office-based work and corporate culture were associated with perceptions of positive attitudes towards LGBTQ+ inclusion. The construction site and regional or remote locations were varied in their inclusivity. Larger companies and government agencies tended to have policy frameworks that supported inclusivity. Small businesses could also be a place where people thrive given the ability to have closer relations with people in the workplace, however consistency of support among small businesses was seen to be less predictable than in large (e.g., multi-national) privately-owned businesses or government agencies (e.g., Transport for NSW). Participants acknowledged the importance of larger businesses' influence on smaller businesses in relation to LGBTQ+ inclusion. Participants perceived urban areas and major cities to be inclusive because of the exposure to different lifestyles. However, participants who had experienced working in regional areas were pleasantly surprised by the degree of inclusivity and acceptance.

The challenge of changing 'blokey and heterosexual' workplace culture remains in both large and small businesses. Precarious employment, apprenticeships and different types of work practices, such as FIFO, added to the challenge of coming out for LGBTQ+ workers.

I find in the office it's a lot easier … to roll out these [LGBTQ+ inclusion] initiatives, because it's corporate.

Gay, male, 20s

I came out as non-binary in June of 2018. I was working for a smaller company, I think we only had about 30 people in this construction company … And it was definitely more of a family environment and it was really, really good.

Non-binary, 20s

Blokey and heterosexual and straight. Footy club orientated type sphere.
[Company name] is trying but … it's still this blokey culture. It's not inclusive.

Gay, male 50s

A cis-gendered lesbian said she sometimes regretted coming out at work, particularly in relation to the response of one of her managerial level colleagues:

He says that he respects me as a person but doesn't respect my relationship
choices, and then just like constantly whenever we're in the office he'll rehearse
bible verses … I think it's a little bit trying to trigger the situation … and bringing up
trans gender issues and then talking negatively against it knowing that I'm part of
that community.
Lesbian, female 20s

Sexual identity is not necessarily visible to others and some participants argued they should not have to disclose their LGBTQ+ identity to anyone, especially colleagues. However, this perspective was often qualified by adding that while discrimination, homophobia and transphobia exist, raising awareness through visibility needs to continue. Furthermore, disclosing LGBTQ+ identity could contribute to colleagues refraining from making derogatory comments out loud, even if their discriminatory views remained unchanged. Several gay men said that if they were asked at work or a work-related social event if they had a wife or partner, they would respond by saying they had a 'husband' or say that they had a partner and 'his name is [X]'. Even though some men were concerned this could lead to the questioner responding negatively, they did so because any potential negativity was 'not my problem'.

I've often had this conversation with friends – it's like, well, why the hell does who
I sleep with matter anything to my profession? It doesn't mean anything. What
does matter is that I don't want to go into the workplace and have people make
jokes, and that makes me feel uncomfortable.
Bisexual, female, 30s

A Trans/queer participant drew attention to the way the revoking of transgender rights abroad has international reach and the disempowerment experienced as a result of

workplace stigma and discrimination. Their comment also demonstrates the importance of work being a safe place:

> *You've come out and you're celebrating and it's like, "I'm finally so happy about how I identify and this means so much to me". Then suddenly you get slapped in the face by society, slapped in the face by workmates and you go, "Oh shit" and then you turn the news on and see what's happening in America with Donald Trump and what he's done with transgender people in the army and all their rights are taken away ... I feel like I've gone back in the closet a bit. I've had to really do some really hard core thinking about it. It's really sad. It makes me sad because I have such a supportive partner and such an incredibly supportive group of friends and straight friends, queer friends, collectively because I've lived in Sydney for 30 years. It disappoints me that I live in such a progressive immediate environment that I've created for myself and then I sort of can't be who I want to be at work.*
>
> *Queer, 40s*

5. INFLUENCE OF WORK ENVIRONMENT ON DISCLOSURE OF LGBTQ+ IDENTITY

A person's position in an organisation's hierarchy often shaped their decision as to whether to express their diverse sexual or gender openly. For example, people described having waited until they had reached a level of seniority to come out because they perceived their position would protect them from any negative implications. Conversely, people who were in the early stages of their career described delaying being open about their LGBTQ+ identity until they had more experience, completed a necessary qualification or progressed within their organisation. They described waiting to ensure that their job security, emotional safety or career aspirations would not be affected before feeling comfortable to come out.

SENIORITY

Seniority or duration of secure employment contributes to people feeling safe and protected to be open about their diverse sexual or gender identity at work. Most participants who described delaying 'coming out' at work did so because they were uncertain about the way their colleagues or people in their work environment would respond.

> *When I was telling that story, I call it the defining moment. I came to work one day and basically made a conscious decision that I'm not going to make up a*

story just to keep my camouflage on and feel kind of safe, I suppose. So, around the seven year mark I made a very brave decision to come out. I found that the core part of my decision making about coming out and feeling safe is cause I was in a kind of mid to senior exec level role. So, I kind of had the view that I'm now at a level where I've kind of got that seniority sitting with me that would protect me.

Gay, male 50s

One senior gay male leader said that even though he was very open about his sexuality and his husband in his immediate work environment, he was reluctant to share this aspect of his life with clients to avoid the potential loss of business from clients who may hold conservative or homophobic views.

In many cases, when participants came out at work after a period of time, they described it as a positive experience with a supportive or affirming response from colleagues. Indeed, in a number of cases, participants regretted delaying it for so long and that they would have preferred to have come out much earlier. Crucially, this shows the importance of creating an environment where employees are confident that they will be treated fairly and not face discrimination for who they are to enable people to disclose their diverse identity sooner.

Seniority, or lack of it, also influenced whether participants challenged homophobic, sexist or racist workplace conversations or commentary. Short-term contracts and precarious employment arrangements also undermined participant's confidence to intervene in bad behaviour as detailed below:

So, it is like trying to be part of the team, in that, I guess it is putting up with a lot of the opinions [of others] and it is difficult inside of myself because there's things that I'm not really okay with. But yeah, at the same time, I don't feel confident or strong enough to challenge it.

Lesbian, female 30s

APPRENTICES

The research found it was particularly challenging for apprentices to navigate the construction sector as an LGBTQ+ worker due to a lack of power, precarity of work and a desire to be accepted and 'fit in'. Construction's masculine work culture contributed to the

challenge. A labourer who identified as a lesbian, described the challenge of speaking up, as well as the way younger men, in this case an apprentice, was socialised into workplace behaviour that normalises being derogatory towards women:

> *It is tricky because I don't want them to be uncomfortable and feel like they have to completely change in front of me, but at the same time, I do wish there was more respect there. Not just towards me but just women in general. Just watching them, like the way that the older men are sharing their opinions with our younger apprentice. It is essentially like they're showing him how to be a man and in that, it is really showing a lot of disrespect to how men should treat women. It is quite eye opening.*

She also indicated feeling that she had to be careful not to upset her colleagues in case she got a reputation for being 'difficult' that might ruin her chances of gaining an apprenticeship.

Even so, she did have the courage to draw attention to the way men at her work site discussed women. Her recollection of a discussion with her supervisor demonstrates that some men have little insight into their own comments:

> *It was already slightly a personal conversation because he had started talking about his daughter and his experience with her mum and how he really values his daughter and puts her first a lot – which I found quite interesting given some of his comments around women. So, because we were opening up, I felt comfortable to be a bit more honest with him and he said that he doesn't say derogatory things about women and I said, "Actually, you do, sometimes you do. Like, some of the things that you say are quite inappropriate". And, this is you know, as a woman saying that which he didn't challenge. He just sort of took it and yeah … and he hasn't sort of brought it up since then in any way, but I think he has toned down some of the things he says. But, what I find with the guys is they're different, say, one-on-one with me than they are with each other. Like they tend to maybe put on a front a lot more and say I guess what they'd consider to be manly things with each other and they – what do you call it?– where one person will say something then the other guy will – they go off each other. Whereas one-on-one with me, they tend to be more open, honest and genuine.*
>
> *Lesbian, female, 30s*

An apprentice described refraining from sharing more about themselves with others because it was important to maintain good relations with colleagues for job security and future work.

I'm going to wait until I finish my apprenticeship and get a permanent position [before being more open about my identity], even though my role is considered permanent, but you have to go through the four-year apprenticeship and then you've got to go for a role, a more permanent role, just like a normal job. I feel like I need people to see that I do a good job and I'm an okay person, I'm a good person to be around. This is the stuff that takes precedent.

Queer, 40s

FITTING IN

Fitting in at work is important because it helps people feel confident, secure, understood and accepted by their peers. However, this research found that comments by heterosexual men within the sector which discriminated, stigmatised or trivialised LGBTQ+ people assisted them to fit in to the dominant masculine culture, while simultaneously excluding others perceived to be on the periphery. Crucially though, one participant emphasised the importance of recognising the diversity that does exist in the sector to disrupt the perception that it is not LGBTQ+ friendly.

I think if we can do anything to smash the perception that construction is not a LGBTQ+ friendly place to be it's probably going to help, because I think it is a perception. You know it is pretty much a generalisation and whilst there are still people in every industry that may not be accepting of it and whilst it is a - a predominantly blokey [laugh] type of stereotype, when you actually talk to these guys and you get them in a room and you're doing these front line leader courses that we're doing, they might look like someone's idea of a burley, blokey tradesperson, but when you actually talk to them, everyone has a softer side, right? … There's always the stereotypes and so if there's anything you can do to say this is what this industry is trying to do and yes we're still stamping it out, but it's not any worse than any other industries from that perspective, cause it's about individuals and teaching them a bit more tolerance I guess.

Female, 50s

Changing jobs and wondering about fitting in with new co-workers provoked anxiety in participants. One participant had a positive experience when he was concerned about coming out to male colleagues at a new job in remote Australia. His former boss said he could return if his new workplace did not accept him due to his sexual identity.

My boss that I just left on Thursday, he was just like, "I don't care [about sexual orientation], no one should care". He said, "If you go to this new job and they give you grief, you know, you're more than welcome back up here, but no one should give a shit". [And how did that make you feel?] It surprises you, and it's good, and it's the way it should be.
Gay, male, 20s.

When people are concerned they may be rejected from a future workplace, it may mean they stay in a role which limits their development or the potential of a business.

6. HOMOPHOBIA, BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

Homophobia, bullying and harassment exists in the sector and there were many examples experienced by participants. Even though this section is small, it does not reflect the magnitude of the issue because specific examples are included elsewhere in this report under different categories.

Homophobic behaviour was rarely sanctioned by employers and often employees who demonstrated derogatory language and homophobic behaviour, even bullying, were given advantages. For example, one participant noted that for temporary regional deployments where employees had shared housing, experienced employees who were homophobic or racist were more likely to be given preference to who they share with, even if it meant an LGBTQ+ employee could be disadvantaged.

[The employer will] quite often get a house with three or four people but they will look at the people that they put them with and consider background, attitudes … We know these people quite well. For example, if I was put on a job, if head office knew that someone would have a problem, they would discuss that with me and say, "Look, this person is old and racist and homophobic, so we're not going to [place you in the same accommodation]". Not that I've come across

anyone like that at this company,

they're quite good, but yeah.

Gay, male, 30s.

Some participants described feeling that they were being scrutinised more closely due to their sexual or gender identity, but were unable to make a direct link. Even though there may be different explanations for some interactions, it also speaks to the subtle and sometimes uneasy environment that LGBTQ+ employees experience when they are uncertain about the support they have at work.

7. IMPLICATIONS OF A CHANGING SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER IDENTITY AT WORK

For some participants, a change in gender identity meant they experienced, or anticipated experiencing different issues than previously. As an example, in what may have been an off-the-cuff remark, a participant's colleague speculated about how transitioning to a man may be an advantage due to the possibility of being taken more seriously at work:

I think as time goes on, with my facial hair, I think I'll start to get different reactions with people. I dress very masculine anyway and that's never been a problem. But I feel like, if I start to get facial hair, people will start to notice and it will be different. I'm not sure how that might change but I did actually have someone say, when I said, "Yeah, my voice will go low", and she's like, "Oh, maybe you'll start getting treated or taken seriously, you know, by the guys that I'm working with". And I'm, like, "Yeah, that would be nice". So, it will be very interesting how they attribute someone that knows what they're talking about with masculinity and being a man.

Non-binary, 20s

Nonetheless, another transgender man in the study described how norms and expectations for cis-gendered heterosexual men can be disadvantageous. He said that when he asked to reduce his hours to work part-time to care for his new baby, his boss refused and said the expectation was that they work full-time or not at all. So, he quit and found a job that accommodated his preferred level of engagement in equally-shared parenting with the baby's mother.

8. CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY SUB-CULTURES: WORK SITES, WORK PRACTICES, GEOGRAPHY AND EMPLOYERS

Participants described particular occupational categories and workplace contexts as having an influence on LGBTQ+ diversity and inclusion. For example, work sites were described as challenging places for diversity in general:

…boots on ground places um are generally not - not very pleasant for people who are of any diversity. You know there's - there's just your typical tradies walking around in their boots and they sometimes don't even realise that what they're saying is offensive to somebody.

Female, 50s

She added that office-based workplaces were likely to be more open and LGBTQ+ inclusive:

…when [our company] last asked specific questions about what people wanted to identify with, we found that there were less [LGBTQ+] people than we expected. We thought people should be pretty comfortable with [reporting] that. But I guess that led us to think well okay so maybe just cause we're at head office, [laugh] maybe it's the project offices even and the satellite offices and maybe it's those places where there's people in more remote locations and maybe it is different in other parts of the world. Like in Asia they're probably not going to be telling everyone either, so we did have to take [that] into account. Generally, office people are more comfortable.

I find in the office it's a lot easier … so most of our head office is quite easy to roll out these [LGBTQ+ inclusion] initiatives, because it's corporate. I think it's more difficult on regional jobs. I worked on a regional job and you get some quite conservative people working on those projects. You know they live out there or they've come overseas and they've struggled to find a job [in the city] and they end up getting a job in a regional area. So, they can sometimes be quite conservative.

Gay, male, 20s

A number of participants in the research described having positive experiences at work while being open about their sexual or gender identity. For example, one participant referred to

being surprised at the support they received in an enclave they considered more conservative than some communities:

I came out as non-binary in, I think July of 2018. I was working for a smaller company; I think we only had about 30 people in this construction company of workers that were full time or part time permanent. And it was definitely more of a family environment and it was really, really good. I was really lucky, they were really nice. It was on the [name of location] too, so it was kind of surprising that there were so many people that were accepting and willing to know more and figure out how they could support me. When I first started to experience a fair bit of distress when it came to gender dysphoria, they were really, really positive and supportive there.

Non-binary 20s

In another case, a woman reflected on her time as a plumbing apprentice in a small business just out of high school:

…most days I worked with the boss who hired me. So, he wanted me to be there. He wanted to encourage me, obviously. But, [I] was still treated the same as any apprentice, um, as in, it was still hard and I got yelled at and I was still made to do all the shit jobs but um, he was the one who hired me so it was obvious that he wanted me there and he wanted to invest in me.

Lesbian, female, 20s

Small businesses could also be a place where people thrive given the ability to have closer relations with people in the workplace, as described by a gay male participant:

[I]t is a lot easier to keep track of people when it is a smaller company. I feel like bigger companies might, you know … you tend to stick with you know, your department or your group of people and you might not have much interaction with a huge group of people in larger companies. I feel like I've got more of an opportunity in a smaller company to actually get to know everyone a lot quicker.

Gay, male, 20s

Even though there were people with positive experiences, there was also concern that the consistency of support among small businesses may be less predictable than in large (e.g., multi-national) privately-owned businesses or government departments (e.g., Transport for

NSW). As an example, even though a trans/queer participant had negative experiences working for a large government department, it was perceived as a safer option than the unpredictability of private or small business.

> *…hands down when I got work, working for the government, I knew people are a lot more accepting of queers and women in those environments … the place I work for, the government organisation is really inclusive. We're doing a lot of, they're doing a lot of pro-active work to get females in trades, I'm going to say from what I've seen so far, I think they are on top pretty much…*

> *Queer, 40s*

Even though government agencies were regarded by some as advanced in their approach to LGBTQ+ inclusion, this was not consistent Australia-wide. One participant described his experience working for a government in one of the country's less populated jurisdictions:

> *[X place] was strange, they are very old fashioned in a lot of ways. Just with the running of projects in general, it is with systems, your safety, environment quality. Attitudes on site are very much 10 or 15 years ago, like when I started in construction … the graffiti on the toilet stalls or the talk on site, kind of jokes that are made, racist, homophobic, all that sort of thing, is quite common there. And our project manager, she had quite a challenge to turn try and turn that around. Our job was for about two years there and we did spend a lot of time on culture and what's acceptable on site, what's not acceptable, especially chatter over the radios and things like that. We got not a lot of support from our client. They were saying, with regards to culture, with regards to safety, environment, "That's just the way it's done here. You're not going to change. These are small companies". Yeah, which was not great, and even by the end I don't think we ever really got through to them why this stuff is important.*

> *Gay, male, 30s.*

A participant from a large company described the challenge of changing the 'blokey and heterosexual' workplace culture.

> *Blokey and heterosexual and straight, footy club orientated type sphere. [X company] is trying but they haven't got a totally good track record … We've had women down in asphalt crews and things like that and a lot of them don't last because of that blokey culture. We're asking the guys to really change.*

They're in a culture that is talking about their weekend, whatever it was, shag or the like, and you just can't do that anymore. If you're going to integrate women into the workforce, or you've got this diverse and inclusive workforce, you've got to start with those guys and you've got to re-educate these guys. I mean, education is so core to it all.

Gay, male, 50s

A gay male participant described how the existence of a Diversity and Inclusion committee in his workplace influenced his decision to disclose his sexuality because it made him feel safe:

I've worked for a family business in an office environment, and I didn't feel safe to come out, um, and I also worked for a home builder, a top class home builder in New South Wales, and I still didn't feel safe to come out because there was no inclusion committee, or diversity committee. Whereas working for the developer, I felt that it was safe to do so eventually. In the first year and a bit I wasn't out 'cause there was no committee at the time. Yeah, definitely I think if I was working out on site, um, definitely have to stick to this macho, man, you've got to be straight and - and yeah, it - you don't feel safe to come out. You don't feel safe unfortunately.

Gay, male, 30s

Participants also described the importance of larger businesses in influencing LGBTQ+ inclusion among smaller ones, for example:

Sole traders, small businesses … that would be difficult, that really would because the business is such a personality of the owner as well. So, that will definitely be a different kettle of fish altogether and getting them across the line. Again, it's only through big businesses like ours that we could spread that word because we also hire small contractors to do jobs for us, so they're involved in what we promote. I think that's a good way…

Gay, male, 50s

A gay male reflected on his 'privilege' in the support he received from his workplace compared to one of his friends and emphasised the important role of major industry players in advancing LGBTQ+ inclusion across the sector:

I was kind of thinking about my current situation ... I work for a big organisation. I get paid reasonably well. I've got levels of security based around [LGBTQ+ inclusive] policies. But then I've got other friends that like won't – I'll just talk about one. He's Brazilian. The company has now moved from Sydney up to Newcastle. Kind of working in a factory type setting. He's definitely not out with his work colleagues. And I just feel like all the support that I'm getting indirectly –the morning teas, the policies, just the acknowledgement – you know, all the kind of indirect things I don't even think about. They're just part of my daily life. And I just think about him sometimes ... working there in the factory and then going home. He gets a lift with some of his Brazilian mates and he lives by himself and they not knowing he's gay. Sometimes I wonder about him and how privileged I am while other people, they're – I wouldn't say that the place he works in is homophobic but he's obviously not comfortable enough to tell them. But he's a very kind of a private person anyway. You know, I think there's a lot of other workplaces that could be just difficult for people ... maybe it is time to start trying to get into those other smaller organisations that really don't have the resources. They don't have HR teams, they don't have diversity groups and things within the workplace. So it is trying to get into those workplaces that I think would be the most benefit of this research.

Gay, male, 50s

9. SAFETY AT WORK: PHYSICAL SAFETY, MENTAL WELL-BEING AND EMOTIONAL LABOUR

While no-one in the study reported being physically injured at work due to homophobia, some participants described being seriously concerned that 'tense' discussions about LGBTQ+ issues or identity with colleagues could escalate to a point where someone was hurt.

[One day, a colleague was complaining about] the 'genders' and them getting special favours and LGBT whatever. I said to him, "as a white heterosexual male have you ever walked down the street and someone's abused you for being an f'ing queer?" and he goes "oh no". I said, "have you ever felt fear for your safety?" I said "You know what? Every day I want to come to work, I want to do a good job, I want to get along with everybody and I just want to go home alive". I work in high voltage. I work in a high risk work environment. But

I had to wait until I stopped working on this equipment to even have that conversation with him because I felt, I'm not getting riled up because of this crap you just told me. I'm going to wait until we're finished on this 1500 volt DC machine that could fry me in a second and I'm gonna just go over here and wait until we have lunch and I'm going to continue that discussion because that's not okay.

Queer, 40s

Onsite mental health support was identified as an area where businesses could improve, not only to support people in need, but to minimise compromising other gay people or LGBTQ+ allies if services were not available.

I have been utilised as a reach out person for the business, not advertised as such, but because I'm known to be gay, so I have had people reach out to me, especially on site. Guys have reached out to me in the past and said, "I need support". Well, I'm not a mental health professional myself, I can give you links and point you in the right direction, but I've been very careful that there's a barrier there. One, I don't wanna get caught in a situation, especially cause I live in camp, of me being seen to harass anyone. So, I've sort of been very clear on that.

Gay, male, 30s

The need for accessible and appropriate mental health support for men is important, especially when there is fear they may face rejection in challenging work environments.

[Fly In, Fly Out work] is hard enough as it is being a straight person, throwing in the mix that you're a closeted [gay] – it's a recipe for disaster. I know for a fact, me working away took a massive toll on my mental health, that's why I ended up giving it up. The money is just not worth it … there's lots of little tight knit groups, and if you're in one of them, and in the closet, I think you'd be shit scared to come out in case you got kicked out of it, and then that would just make your workplace a lot worse.

(gay) male, 20s

I think there's always going to be more room for like, MATES in Construction …
and that's obviously why I started following MATES in construction and the
MATES in Mining. But having a separate one for LGBT people might make
them open up more. Like, if you've got one that's just for tradies, they might
see it the same as talking to someone on site. Maybe not, I'm not too sure, but
having them in the same position, or similar position, might make people
more open and having some stuff on site.

(gay) male, 20s

Determining whether it was 'safe' to come out during workplace encounters could be a constant source of anxiety. Some participants disclosed their sexual identity early, while others experienced significant anxiety in continually scanning their environment for emotional safety which affected their productivity. For example:

[I realised] how much energy I was putting into what I call camouflage [i.e.,
pretending to have a female partner] when I was coming to work. You know,
20 per cent of my time was about hiding myself or pretending to be someone
I wasn't … and work was only ever getting 80 per cent of me or 70 per cent of
me. So, after that defining moment where I said the benefit of me being able
to come to work and give 100 per cent of myself far outweighed the
alternative where I previously was.

Gay, male, 50s

While some participants felt empowered through contributing to policy development and advocacy activities, others experienced these as exhaustive demands, particularly when employees were in the early stages of their career.

I feel like I'm trying to avoid the silly challenges of educating somebody on a
sexuality topic where I'm like, I don't want to have those conversations with
people anymore. I'm tired of it … I didn't come into this job to educate people.

Queer, 40s

It's like emotional labour. All the time.

Non-binary, 20s

I've been banging my head a little bit against the [leadership]. One of the problems we have is we don't have a dedicated D[iversity] and I[nclusion] manager like a lot of - some companies have … A lot of councils are made up of people that have their day job and they've got to try and do it part-time which to me is not a good model, because it says you don't take D[iversity] and I[nclusion] seriously. You're not resourcing it.

Gay, male, 40s

While some people liked keeping their personal life private at work, others preferred being more open and appreciated visible signs of support from others because it helped people feel a sense of belonging at work:

I'll bring in lots of Pride flags and people will put them on their desk, which is really cool, and that I think helps me. Whether or not it helps other people, I'm not too sure, but you can tell which teams support it and which don't, because you'll see Pride flags. I leave them in the kitchen and people take them and what not. It just feels like home. It's not home-home, but like it feels like I work in a diverse team – an inclusive team. Whereas if you go to all the other cubicles, they don't have anything on their desks, you know? You know that you're in a really good company when people put photos of their families on their desks and flags on their desk or certain memorabilia, because it shows that they're wanting to bring their personal life into work. That's when you know that you've built a really good culture and people can actually bring their personal lives into work.

Gay/queer/lesbian, female 20s

Another participant said it was 'really cool' to be able to set precedence for policies in relation to having a baby with her female partner:

But again, my workplace is very flexible and I drive a lot of that so in my portfolio to look after HR and those sort of things and because I'm the first person doing it so I'm getting to set some of the precedent for it which is really cool.

Bisexual, female, 40s

10. LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP: THE FOUNDATIONS OF INCLUSION

The traditional leadership pathways to power in construction that have been based on a lack of transparency around career progression, informal male networks and company tenure do little to promote leadership diversity within construction. The lack of diversity among senior leaders was frequently noted by participants as a barrier to change.

> *I think the greatest impediment to organisations is that you rely on people gaining a lot of experience over many, many years. You do need some trusted, stable, well-considered people. The reality of Australia today, they are now between 50 and 60-year-old males who have been given the privilege to have that exposure and experience to then land at the leadership position. What that means – and I personally believe it – there's a lot of pale, stale males. The boys' club is breaking up, but it hasn't moved on in the way or the speed it probably should.*

> *Gay, male, 40s*

The same participant outlined the benefits of diversity and changing the way construction projects are delivered to allow them to be more inclusive of different voices at the leadership table, such as young people:

> *I think businesses are understanding that they need better representation at the table, number one through women. If our society is 50-50 just organically, why can't we have that in the workplace? I think when you just have people going to work and then having a homemaker at home, that's not the natural order of things. So, what we need to break that up is flexibility, and different arrangements that allow different people to come to the fore. I do believe the LGBTI voice is a great voice. Often people, LGBTI people, have experienced a lot of adversity, or a lot of self-development, just to get out the door and because of that life experience, they bring an enriched opinion to the table. I think that younger people have this amazing way of looking at life. So, these young, often pure voices that are in a really idealist world should be at the table. Just as we have the chief risk operator, why don't we have the chief young person representative? And, that can be a roving seat, why not? And, just to have the young person challenge you, and go, but that doesn't make sense, because I bet your bottom dollar, a younger person will pick the ethical*

issues straight away, more than the seasoned veteran who is ready to take on
a less than satisfactory ethical position for a profit.

Gay, male, 40s

An early 20s female engineer who identified as gay/queer/lesbian supported the need for structural and attitudinal change in the sector (including the provision of basic amenities for women and LGBTQ+ workers and childcare services), adding that in its current form, the construction sector is doing little to attract LGBTQ+ workers or women.

I've worked so hard to become an engineer. To leave it really kills me, so I've literally been doing two jobs, which is not sustainable at all. But, I think my main purpose is to just help create a better future for the next generation. That sounds super cliché, like super fucking corny, but, it'd be nice if people actually wanted to work in construction, like females. Because at the moment, if I had a daughter, I wouldn't want her to work in construction. And, I'm sure a lot of the men wouldn't want them to either. There's not even bathrooms in some of our sites! And I believe that we need to become a nicer society to each other and with that you need down-to-earth leaders and leaders who understand. And you know, it'd be really cool to have a childcare centre at the bottom of your workplace for your employees. Build a tribe, not an organisation. I think that's the goal, I want to be able to lead a tribe.

The research found that leaders often lacked awareness of inclusive LGBTQ+ practices (for example, acknowledging the diversity of intimate relationships people in their workplace have), and in some cases leaders failed to act on homophobic or discriminatory behaviours in the workplace. In one case a participant had a manager – who was her peer – regularly repeat bible verses to her and make transphobic comments. His behaviour was well known in the business and even among clients. She said:

I obviously limit my time spent with him … like it probably is not necessarily affecting my growth, but I feel like it affects the company's growth … when you have someone in management that thinks that way, I think it can be very limiting on the development of the whole company.

Lesbian, female, 20s

I think probably the best way to get it through to him is that you know our major clients are Lend Lease, are Probuild, are all these major builders, Multiplex, that are moving in the direction of, they're supporting things like this study. They're supporting things that encourage this. And then if you keep preaching to them the complete opposite it just shows how backwards the company is. So I think the best way that management would get it across to him is showing him the movement in the construction industry and that we need to be progressive with that. And if we don't agree with that, it's probably not best to bring it up in the workplace. Because the rest of the industry is moving in that direction and you're only holding the handbrake on for us to move forward.

Lesbian, female 20s

In contrast, strong leadership on LGBTQ+ inclusion was described as the 'quickest win' for progress as well as a way for sustained progress:

When you look up the line, who are you seeing? So, this symbolic gesture, with teeth though, with someone who is able to make decision-making, and be seen to be making decisions, and have the trust of the board, or the trust of the leadership team, or the trust of your manager, even if your manager is the mailroom manager, provided they can see that person has an active role in the organisation, that is, I reckon, the quickest win.

Gay, male, 40s

One of the stories [an employee of company X was] telling me is that they had an incident years ago - where there was an individual in the company that had an opportunity to work in a foreign country. The problem was the country that he was going to had laws in place that he would go to jail because he was gay. So, one of the executives apparently - very straight, typical white male - took this on and embraced it and now LGBTI is a core pillar of their D&I structure. So, it's got gender, it's got Indigenous. LGBTI is a core pillar of their whole company and they really embraced it, drove the changes around policy, training, education, all those things that went with it.

Gay, male, 40s

Despite many examples of good leadership, participants also expressed frustration that leaders 'turned a blind eye' and failed to act or challenge homophobic behaviour and attitudes, especially from 'old school' men. Instead, there was a perception that instead of intervening, leaders were 'waiting for old school men' to retire and hope that generational change would resolve these issues.

Importantly, leaders are not only people who occupy senior roles in a business, but are found throughout the workplace. Even though some participants were facing their own struggles, they were also pioneering LGBTQ+ inclusion through sharing their own stories and pressing for workplace initiatives.

> *I said, "Hey, can we do Wear It Purple Day because I think it's really important to highlight that there's a lot of youth that need our help?". And I did do that this year and I was glad. I shared my story about coming out and how fortunate I was and how important I think it is to stand up for other people when you're in a more fortunate position. I got a lot of good feedback. People were like, 'Thank you so much for sharing your story'. It was really amazing, even my boss came up to me and said, "Wow, thank you so much for sharing your story and letting me know that and for standing up for people. It's really important".*
>
> *Non-binary 20s*

11. INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT, PROCESSES AND INITIATIVES

GAUGING EFFECTIVE LGBTQ+ INCLUSION STRATEGIES: GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT?

While all participants thought more could be done, the extent to which it was perceived as needed or how it could be achieved varied. Naturally, there were diverse perspectives among participants about how to advance LGBTQ+ rights or inclusion. Some participants thought that their organisations were largely doing well, although this did not mean they were immune to challenges outside the organisation. Some participants did not want their workplace to make LGBTQ+ issues 'tokenistic', although articulating what this meant in practice was difficult, because visibility and awareness raising campaigns could be perceived by people differently. Criticism regarding the commercialisation of LGBTQ+ issues was described as detracting from the importance of community organising, but at the same

time, the limitation or incapacity of the LGBTQ+ community and wider society to create events for people to come together created a vacuum for commercialised 'celebrations'.

A senior female leader said that although her organisation was among the leaders in LGBTQ+ inclusion in construction in Australia, more could be done:

I feel kind of like it's bland and neutral. I don't feel celebrated for my difference. It's almost like we're not negative … It's not particularly positive either. So, we're less shit than we used to be and we're not bad, we don't discriminate against you – at least not that you know of. It's certainly not a 'Wow, this is amazing, I feel so proud to work for this organisation'. I think there's some other organisations that have been a lot better at being way more overt and cutting edge and innovative, like whether it's Qantas or others. I think we fill in all the right forms and, you know, we're not bad … But, we're not also really celebrated either. I mean not that I need everybody to greet me in the office with a gay flag every day, but it would be nice if we were a little bit more [effort from leaders]. Whilst it was great [to legislate for marriage equality], it's kind of like 'Oh well, that's done and dusted now, but the issue is that you've got the religious freedom bill and you've got the right to discriminate in Australia.

Lesbian, female, 40s

One participant highlighted the concern that creating employee resource groups may have the unintended effect of creating more division in the workplace:

We were going to allow each group to go away and form their own kind of community group and I said "yeah, good. But what are you doing? Are you creating a silo? Are you saying women you'll go over there, men you go over there, gays you go over, Indigenous you go over there and form your groups." So, now there's a big focus - a shift from diversity to making environments all inclusive.

Gay, male, 50s

POLICIES AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Participants acknowledged that some companies have established policies that support LGBTQ+ inclusivity, yet most thought more could be done. Formal policies and initiatives often appeared to be the result of sustained individual action to obtain institutional support

and action. Policies matter, as they act as a symbol of inclusion, a measure of acceptable behaviour and a mechanism for accountability. Policies also have to be enforced to be effective and alleviate the individual from the burden of advocacy for inclusion.

I figured that because I was working [for the New South Wales government] … someone couldn't actually be blatantly homophobic to me or blatantly sexist to me … I feel protected working in government.

Queer, 40s

One participant said good leadership as well as institutional approaches, such as policies and diversity and inclusion committees, represented a very strong symbol of support which he referred to as 'backing':

Backing means 'power', but power in a good way. Backing gives you the strength or the power to stand up and feel that you're backed and that there are others that stand with you, and you're not having to kind of deal with [e.g., discrimination] on your own.

Gay, male, 30s

It shows that a company sees the value in [LGBTQ+] diversity by putting it in their policies. Why have a policy about maternity leave if you didn't care about it?

Gay/queer/lesbian, 20s

Some participants said that while their employers had standard policies prohibiting harassment, bullying, intimidation and discrimination, they were sometimes silent on LGBTQ+ issues specifically. Contractors and sole traders were in more precarious situations and described small business owners as less likely to have policies to protect LGBTQ+ rights. A female contractor who worked onsite for a builder said she was unaware of any policies to protect LGBTQ+ rights and that her boss "…doesn't have any problem with my sexuality, or anything. But, I'm not sure how he would handle a complaint" *(Lesbian, female, 30s).*

Being aware of policy needs and some participants feeling empowered pioneering new policy changes, as outlined below where two women had a baby and had to navigate getting pregnant, parental leave, the impact of gender wage gap and COVID-19.

...there's a lot of hormones that I had to take to be able to go through either egg collection or actually conceiving. It was pretty emotional as well. I think just the open book policy [worked] from my perspective. The only challenge was around coordinating injections and appointments with work. But that's just general normal stuff. In terms of parental leave I was always going to be the primary carer, 1) because I carried [the baby] and then went through the labour so needed some recovery time. I wanted to return to work quite quickly, but just obviously with two females there is a pay gap to a certain degree and whilst we're both pretty even on that, I probably have a lot more flexibility with my work. but COVID really impacted that unfortunately. So I had to decrease my [full-time equivalent] prior to going on maternity leave and then it was a bit more of a negotiation than what we'd originally intended.

Bisexual, female, 30s

Even though a policy in writing does not mean it will be followed or implemented, policies prohibiting discrimination are an important resource which communicate the responsibility that employers have to act upon:

When I was sexually harassed in my workplace and I went to my employer, I said "this is what's been going on" and he said "well give him shit back." I went "yeah, but I have and that isn't working. It's just provoking him more" and I said "I need you to talk to him" and he didn't talk to him and then it got worse and then I said "I'm going to resign" and he [asked me not to return to work for a few weeks and then he] quickly implemented a policies and procedures book ... then this guy just made snide jokes about as if he would ever sexually harass me and blah, blah, blah and then as soon as the employer was offsite he just launched into a racial tirade about [race] people and about me and all this stuff and I was just so sick of fighting that I just packed up my tools and I just walked offsite and I just never went back. I didn't work in the industry for a number of years ... I left the industry because I just couldn't cope with it. I worked in hospitality and then I was on the dole for a long time, well, about a year – that's long enough. So it just felt like a long time. Then I started running my own business, but I had pretty bad mental health issues and stuff after working for him and resigning like that and everything.
It was a really hard time.
Trans man, 30s (incident happened when identifying as a lesbian)

QUOTAS FOR WOMEN AND LGBTQ+?

A gay male manager from a regional area said quotas can be useful in some circumstances and recounted a time when he was recruiting for a position and short-listed only men:

I was interviewing for somebody in my team. I went through the CVs. I picked four that I was going to interview and I was sharing this with my director at the time and she said oh, there's a new policy now that you should include at least one female while you're interviewing. So I'd chosen four males. So I interviewed five people. And the person that got the job who is still with us, in my team, is [the woman I interviewed]. You know, she ends up getting the job and only for that policy was in place and it was just in time, I would have missed on [her]. And [she] is great. Like, she's a great worker. So, those policies can make a difference. Well, they literally did a make a difference ... I would have interviewed four people. I probably would have chosen one of them and that would have been a missed opportunity.

Gay, male, 50s

He added that quotas for LGBTQ+ people would have challenges because people may not be open about their identity and it could be difficult for some businesses, especially small businesses.

EDUCATION TO CONVEY EXPECTATIONS

Education and training at various stages of employment was considered essential to ensure employees were up-to-date with workplace standards. Induction training was highlighted as an important opportunity to convey expectations.

More education on why the general language around people being 'gay' isn't okay and why it is offensive. I really do think a lot of them just think it is normal and they don't realise that it is not okay for LGBTIQ people to have that in everyday language.

Lesbian, female, 30s

12. VISIBLE SUPPORT FOR LGBTQ+ INCLUSION

There were a range of perspectives about businesses and workplaces and the extent that LGBTQ+ issues should be given prominence. Some participants were concerned that rainbow flags or posters might be provocative and counter-productive; however, when questioned further most participants said visible support for LGBTQ+ inclusion would contribute to positive changes in workplace cultures.

A number of participants said that seeing rainbow stickers, lanyards, laces and flags were an important source of comfort that signalled an inclusive workplace. In one case, a participant said these gestures went beyond being symbolic and gave them confidence that a business was inclusive.

I briefly worked at [a Government department in Queensland] and they were quite vocal about LGBT people. They had lanyards for allies, which was great. So, that was actually a great initiative, to walk in there and see a lot of people with a rainbow lanyard to very visually say, "I support you, we don't even need to have this discussion".

Gay, male, 30s

Some participants mentioned the significant effort that sometimes went into convincing their employer to agree to what they saw as small gestures, but which were perceived as having important impact:

We have a TV upon entrance and it's just got our [company] logo on it, sometimes it has a slideshow. I convinced them to put a rainbow flag on it for Mardi Gras this year. But that was a lot of effort, like, they were going on about trademarks and how you can't change the logo and we were, like, "We're not trying to change the logo. We're just putting a rainbow background and putting the logo on top of it, you know". And that was a big deal. But now that I think I've been here a while they're starting to see that others in the industry are quite supportive and a lot more vocal about it and about that support than - than the company here.

Non-binary 20s.

According to participants, visible signs of support for LGBTQ+ inclusion do not necessarily have to include rainbows, indeed, the absence of rainbows could also make powerful statements.

I'd love to see a poster of just men and women in [personal protective equipment], construction gear on site, the real stuff and everyone looks the same, but they're all different people … That's what I'm trying to get across, you can't actually tell [their differences], if everyone's dressed the same you can't tell. And you know it'll be some sort of tag line you know "We all recognise as being LGBTI" you know very simple …There's no flags, there's no ribbons, there's no nothing.

Gay, male 40s

A discrete rainbow sticker on a supervisor's folder or desk could communicate to employees that they are receptive and approachable to discuss LGBTQ+ concerns.

While updating workplace forms to enable people to identify as LGBTQ+ was seen as validating for individuals who wanted to more accurately report their identity, it was also described as a way of 'normalising' gender and sexual diversity more generally. Giving this option on documentation also communicated to everyone that it was not necessary to conform to one specific social identity and gave people more "freedom to explore a lot more about themselves then they might have otherwise" *(Gay, male, 40s).*

I think these days in a lot of situations we're starting to find a lot more allies within the construction industry. So, I'm really passionate about driving this as well for gay men who are in the industry and they must feel really horrible. And I think that's part of the reason that we have such a high rate of suicide in the industry as well is because there's people that can't be themselves and constantly worrying that they'll be outed.

Non-binary, 20s

13. LGBTQ+ NETWORKS AND ASSOCIATIONS

The existence of LGBTQ+ networks or employee resource groups were important indicators of LGBTQ+ inclusion and contributed to employees feeling safe to come out.

I would feel safe coming out when there is a Diversity and Inclusion committee in a company, otherwise I wouldn't feel safe to come out.

Gay, male, 30s.

Notably though, multiple subcultures exist in large organisations and different parts of the business can approach LGBTQ+ inclusion differently.

[I noticed] there was an employee resource group, only for LGBTI. I participated with them, and I got involved heavily with activities. I find that their value proposition to be an all-inclusive workforce, to – if you look at the way they're driving now for gender equity and female financial security, and having signed the marriage equality letter, looking, at least, to be able to try and work in the transgender space, to understand how people of transgender identity are able to work seamlessly in an environment, but also, if they were to transition, how they would do on that platform. In my mind, they're sophisticated ways of working in the workplace, and they seem to have the appetite to really stretch their bandwidth.

Gay, male 40s

LGBTQ+ employee resource groups across various companies recently collaborated to establish Interbuild, a network that will take a sector-wide approach to LGBTQ+ inclusion:

[Interbuild comprises] businesses with a LGBTI [employee resource group] presence and LGBTI groups, forging relationships between organisations to drive change and inclusivity, to focus on events, activities, to build that network and do what I understand is to bring building businesses together, because there's not an overwhelming sense of representation across the sector.

Gay, male 40s

Social media is important for LGBTQ+ networking in national companies operating across urban and remote areas:

I'm trying to reach out as much as I can with LinkedIn there. 'Cause that's the only thing, I'm not in the office environment, I'm remote. I'm 9 hours away from Sydney … I don't have that opportunity to get to the cities. So, I'm just trying to send out communications via LinkedIn really.

Gay, male, 30s.

Concerns or anticipation of negative reactions to disclosing transgender or non-binary identity can be a barrier to building supportive peer networks, in part because it was difficult

to find peers. This was especially difficult for transgender sole traders who did not have institutional support to facilitate LGBTQ+ networks, working groups or committees.

…like being a transgender person in the construction industry, like wow! It's like trying to find a needle in a haystack. Where are they? I know they're somewhere, but people aren't talking about it because there's so much transphobia out there, it's worse than homophobia…

When I was on SALT (Supporting and Linking Trades Women) some women had even said 'Oh, but if you're a non-binary [person] you shouldn't be a member of SALT and you shouldn't be on this group". Women who are in SALT are [usually] so progressive.

Queer, 40s

*I actually even thought about creating a group on Facebook, Queers in Trades, not just Gay Tradies. I know there's one on Facebook called Gay Tradies, but just where people who are transgender can network. Because we're out there, I know we're out there, it's just we don't, we can't, because we're such a small percentage and we can't find each other. So, I think that social groups, like it could be Instagram it could be Facebook, a point of call where they can contact each other and maybe get together,
just socially.*

Queer, 40s

When asked what type of network they would find useful, a female participant said she would prefer a broader network, rather than one just for lesbians:

I think I'd like the broader network because it opens your mind to so many other people's different stories and different people.

Lesbian, female, 20s

14. LGBTQ+ INCLUSION AND PRODUCTIVITY

Businesses that had adapted their work practices, for example around building a good safety culture, were described as being more open to changing other aspects of their work culture to improve efficiency and productivity.

The big challenge for us was that we found safety was quite lacking and what I've seen in the companies I've worked for and worked alongside is, if their safety is lacking, to change culture in any other aspect is very, very difficult. When you're showing a good safety culture, that means you understand things, you think about it, you're accepting of a change to "this is the way we've always done it", therefore you can have those conversations about inclusivity in other areas as well and they're more switched on and able to understand that things change. And that just because I've always done this, doesn't mean I should continue doing it.

Gay, male, 30s

Participants noted that companies were openly discussing the links between workplace culture, inclusivity and staff retention and productivity.

I've only been in the industry about 10 or 15 years and I've seen a big change in attitudes in general. I always use the story for the young engineers, when I first started I was in estimating and tendering, and we used to literally put in a cost for fatalities. If it was a $100 million job, you would cost in two fatalities for the job, and you would obviously never do that now. And I don't think the idea was ever, people are going to die on here, but it was, the highest risk was someone could die, this would cost this much. Whereas the attitude now is, you don't even think about the cost of someone dying. You have to think about risk very differently … So, we do think about staff turnover and the factors or the risks that might lead to turnover, and we do talk about culture, inclusivity. What are some factors that would lead to you leaving? And a lot of it does come down to culture, in general. Are we working people too hard? Are we under-resourced? Is it desirable to live here? Especially in north Queensland, you're flying in, flying out, drive in, drive out. Are people going to want to continue doing this? Then, we explore the factors of why or why not?

Gay, male 30s

Being a smallish company, we try and limit turnover. It, it is a big cost to train people and when I did the interview, something we discussed and they were quite clear to me, that they want to hire people who will be here in 10, 15, 20 years, so yeah, they would like everyone to retire here, which is great.

Gay, male, 30s

Inclusion is good for productivity because employees feel confident in themselves and they can do their best at work. Feeling less valuable than a heterosexual employee can erode confidence in LGBTQ+ employees.

> *[People might feel] threatened, or have just a sheer values-driven dislike that [being LGBTQ+] is not right, or it's not normal, that you're somehow lesser of a person. And that the worst is, you know, that your opinion doesn't count. I think in a workplace, you're being employed to contribute. So, when you're trying to do your very best work, but it doesn't really matter, because no matter how good that work is, it will never be as good as a heterosexual's, that does erode your confidence, and erodes your perspective of who you are.*

> *Gay, male, 40s*

15. WORKPLACE CHANGE: IS THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY IN TRANSITION?

In Barnard et al's (2020) UK study, some gay male construction workers felt that more progress towards LGBT diversity and inclusion had been made in the industry compared to other traditionally male dominated work sectors including the armed forces or police. While it is difficult to make a comparison, as well as taking into consideration the diversity of the construction sector, one participant's experience was that the defence force in Australia was more advanced than construction as he outlines below:

> *I think the maturity curve of the defence force now is far greater than when I was back then right? I mean talk to some of the guys and girls that come out of that space now. It's a completely different experience. They hear my story and they go 'Wow'. I guess they feel sorry that I had to experience that. They say, 'Now we just wrap around the individual and support them as a team member and it is a non-issue." [Some people asked] 'Why didn't you promote the wear it with purple day through the Defence alumni?' And actually it's 'cause I had a fear factor that those guys coming out of that space - guys and girls - would have this kind of old traditional military view which I had. They actually said 'No, we don't.' You know, they've been in the defence force or come out of it when it matured really well, and it was refreshing.*

> *Gay, male, 50s*

Some participants had a strong sense that change towards a more diverse and inclusive workforce was being driven in some quarters, but that the pace of change would be slow.

There is an unspoken word about they want the environment changed and they want – they don't want it to be an old male heterosexual workplace. They don't talk about it but it's very visible with the programs that are in place … but you've got to start somewhere. I think it's going to take a long time, a long, long time, so I'm probably going to be retired by the time I start seeing some progress [laughs].

Queer, 40s

The demands and preferences of younger workers may drive businesses to change to stay competitive to recruit the best talent. When asked about what they would like to see in a future employer, LGBTQ+ inclusion policies rated highly among the participants. For example:

[LGBTQ+ diversity and inclusion] would even be something that would probably sit higher on my priorities than what money they were offering … I'm seeing there is a bigger picture and there's so much to change and there's so much to do – because you want to be a part of change. Like, who doesn't want to be a part of something that's going to make the world better? And that's more my mentality now.

Lesbian, female, 20s

LGBTQ+ inclusion was described as an indicator that a business is adaptive and able keeping up with change. As one participant pointed out, it may simply require a leap of faith.

You've just got to keep up with the change. You can't keep thinking traditionally anymore. Like there's new technology that comes out every six months and that's just the generation that we're living in. And so, in order to keep up, you need to keep up and see what other companies are doing…. Maybe just take a leap of faith, just do it, acknowledge it.

Gay/queer/lesbian, female 20s

Even though many participants saw progress on LGBTQ+ inclusion in the construction sector, there was a sense among some that it could be temporary and that gains should not be taken for granted.

Certain people say, oh, your fight's over now, just shut up, no more pride, blah blah blah, but it's not about that. It can go backwards at any time, like any time – we're the first people to be picked on and have our rights taken away. Gay marriage could be rescinded, if it becomes popular enough. I think it's important to stay loud and stay proud, and stay visible.

Gay male, 50s

RECOMMENDATIONS

GOVERNMENT AND BUSINESS ACTION

Government clients, as well as construction companies, play a critical role in shifting behaviours in the construction sector.

- Adopt different project delivery models to ensure a range of people are able to successfully work in the sector. Build flexibility into project roles.
- Government and construction company procurement processes to require contracting companies to demonstrate substantive action towards the inclusion and safety of LGBTQ+ worker.
- Government clients and construction companies with existing LGBTQ+ policies to share these policies with their supply chain and build inclusion capability.
- Procurement and subcontracting agreements should be co-designed with diversity and inclusion specialists (see for more information WGEA Gender Equitable Procurement).
- Collaboration between industry and universities on LGBTQ+ inclusion to build a pipeline of talent.
- Make better use of available resources through ACON or Pride in Diversity to learn more about how to build an inclusive workplace.
- Make LGBTQ+ inclusion policies publicly available to attract the best talent during their job search.
- Businesses and projects should budget in diversity and inclusion initiatives and expert resources.
- Actively recruit LGBTQ+ candidates into apprenticeship positions to normalise having LGBTQ+ people in blue collar roles and accelerate culture change

EDUCATION

- Sexism, homophobia and transphobia should be part of leadership training and training kits, including: online training, scenarios, teaching techniques established and shared with broader supply chains.
- Company and site safety Inductions to recognise the diversity of workers and that this is an LBGT+ friendly business/construction site and homophobic and discriminatory language will not be tolerated.

- Respectful engagement is encouraged for example, training people to ask others how they identify and to respect the response. Important for employees who may not otherwise learn or be exposed to LGBTQ+ people and issues

LEADERSHIP

- Highlight LGBTQ+ role models within the Construction sector
- Leadership training on LGBTQ+ inclusive work practices
- Call out homophobic and discriminatory behaviours

POLICIES

- Policies matter, as they act as a symbol of inclusion, a measure of acceptable behaviour and a mechanism for accountability. Policies also have to be enforced to ensure to be effective.
- Policies can't stand alone; they must be accompanied by engagement and education.
- Human Resource to play an active role in supporting people in their calculations and execution to come out to others in their business.
- Some businesses recruit and promote based on a notion of 'cultural fit'. This practice can inadvertently act to exclude diversity and inclusion especially if the culture values heteronormative masculine behaviours. Businesses could review 'informal' business values to ensure they do not perpetuate masculine heteronormative values.
- Formalise and codified progression pathways and promotions within their organisations to address informal male networks.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

- Helpline and mental health service for LGBTQ+ tradies with qualified counsellors who understand the construction sector (for example, link with MATES in Construction).
- Be age inclusive, especially for older LGBTQ+ people.
- Support the establishment of peer support groups, so transgender employees can "find each other", otherwise they may remain isolated despite being in the same industry.

COMMUNICATIONS & VISIBILITY

- Storytelling, posters, podcast series for accessible, on-demand storytelling
- Social media e.g., Queers/Transgenders in Trades.
- Emphasising transgender people in communications.
- Ask Transgender/queer people if they would like to be involved in advocacy campaigns e.g., posters, presentations.
- Interbuild: grow collaboration across intranets.
- Lanyards, rainbow laces, pride stickers.
- Translation to different languages.
- Celebrate days of significance such as IDAHOBIT (International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia) or Wear it Purple
- Have a diversity and inclusion committee, or series of committees to provide expert guidance and support the organisation to become more inclusive

CONCLUSION

While some progress with respect to anti-discrimination based on sexual orientation has been made in Australia (e.g., legalised same-sex marriage), it is unclear to what extent, if any, these structural changes and localised efforts have contributed to creating a more inclusive workplace for LGBTQ+ employees in the stubbornly male-dominated construction sector. This research illustrates the importance of work being a safe place for LGBTQ+ people. Although most participants in this study felt that workplace attitudes were changing and there was a positive trajectory overall, many noted that the construction sector was coming off a very low base and it still has some way to go in respecting LGBTQ+ people's human rights. Despite efforts by some construction companies to address inclusivity of LGBTQ+ workers, homophobia, bullying and harassment still continues often in full view of bystanders and leaders. Ongoing action, ownership and leadership is needed from government and businesses engaged in the construction sector to recalibrate industry behaviours and value the engagement of all workers in the construction sector.

While this report focused on documenting the experiences of LGBTQ+ construction workers from across Australia, it is evident that more research is needed. Future studies could quantify the number or LGBTQ+ people working in the Australian construction sector, specifically mapping where they work and their professions. An evaluation of the effectiveness of policy interventions by business and government to support the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people could also be undertaken.

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APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANTS

	Gender	Sexual identity	State	Place	Work	Out?
1	Queer	Queer	NSW	Metro	Trade	Sort of
2	Male	Gay	NSW	Metro	Professional	No
3	Male	Gay	Vic	Metro	Professional	Sort of
4	Male	Gay	QLD	Metro	Professional	Yes
5	Trans man	Attracted to women	NSW	Rural	Trade	Sort of
6	Male	Gay	QLD	State wide	Professional	Sort of
7	Female	Lesbian	NSW	Metro	Professional	Yes
8	Male	Gay	Tasmania	Rural	Professional	Yes
9	Male	Gay	NSW	Metro	Trade	Yes
10	Female	Lesbian	WA	Metro	Trade	Sort of
11	Male	Gay	NSW	Metro	Professional	Yes
12	Male	Gay	NSW	Regional	Professional	Yes
13	Male	Gay	NSW	Regional	Professional	Yes
14	Male	Gay	NSW	Regional	Professional	Yes
15	Female	Prefers no label (but lesbian if had to select a category)	NSW	Metro	Professional	Yes
16	Female	Lesbian	NSW	Regional	Trade	Yes
17	Male	Gay	NSW	Metro	Trade	Yes
18	Female	Prefers gay, queer and lesbian.	NSW	Regional	Professional	Sort of
20	Female	Bisexual	Vic	Metro	Professional	Yes
19	Male	Gay	WA	Remote	Trade	Yes, recently
21	Non-binary	Attracted to women	NSW	Metro	Professional	Yes
22	Female	Bisexual	Vic	Metro	Professional	Yes
23	Male	Gay	Vic	Metro	Professional	Yes

APPENDIX 2: SUB THEMES EXPLORED IN THE RESEARCH INCLUDE

Context:
- Importance of the research
- Australian and other national cultures
- Same sex marriage
- National government and policies
- Working in a global environment and international workplace challenges
- Reflections on overall trajectory of LGBTQ+ inclusion

Business:
- Productivity and return on investment
- Managing client interactions
- Tendering
- Infrastructure, e.g., toilets
- Workplace subcultures
- Workplace culture change
- Education and training

Employee experiences:
- Experiences in changing workplaces
- Considerations regarding prospective employers
- Changing self-presentation to fit in
- Job security
- Career aspirations
- Differential treatment due to LGBTQ+ identity
- Role of or support from colleagues, e.g., bystander issues
- Experiences of homophobia, bullying and harassment
- Reporting homophobia or discriminatory behaviour

Employee experiences (cont.):
- LGBTQ+ parenting and work
- LGBTQ+ networking, associations and peer groups
- Physical safety
- Mental ill health, stress and emotional labour
- Sources of support e.g., unions, MATES in Construction, Interbuild, SALT
- Things participants may do differently in future, e.g., sense of empowerment and agency to contribute to change