sapphire pride in diversity

CRACKING

the Rainbow Glass Ceiling: Insights from Social Science

Sapphire cohort – Academic case studies

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We recognise the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their experiences, cultures, languages and practices, and the richness of their contributions to the places where we work, live and play.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country across Australia and their continuing connection to lands, waters, skies and communities. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and extend this to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Made on Aboriginal land – always was, always will be.

Introduction

Lack of visibility and engagement of LGBTQ+ women within workplaces is an issue that has been identified and researched since before Pride in Diversity was created, with UK-based Stonewall publishing 'The double-glazed glass ceiling: Lesbians in the workplace'21 in 2008. Pride in Diversity's Sapphire initiative was launched in 2014, at the behest of members, to try and tackle this issue within Australian workplaces.

Pride in Diversity's Sapphire initiative has completed research and produced the "Cracking the Rainbow Glass Ceiling' publication in an ongoing effort to assist organisations further understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ women (and those perceived and treated as women in their workplaces), identify specific barriers they may face, and learn from the experiences of organisations that have made positive strides in improving the experiences of this cohort.

As part of this research, Pride in Diversity commissioned this series of academic case studies to study particular key areas of barriers to inclusion for this cohort.

Foreword

As a long-term academic consultant for Pride in Diversity, it is a real privilege to contribute to this landmark report, together with my colleagues Dr Nikita Sharma (project lead) and Dr Alice Campbell.

Using the 2020 AWEI Employee Survey, we have prepared a series of case studies that underscore the power of data in understanding workplace inclusion and wellbeing amongst employees in the Sapphire cohort.

The case studies cover a broad range of critical areas—including the factors that promote wellbeing at work, the consequences of workplace incivility, or the importance of being one's true selves at work—and engage with Sapphire employees' intersectional identities.

For a long time, academic scholarship has recognized the theoretical role that these and other workplace practices and behaviours play in shaping the experiences of LGBTQ employees. However, the power and uniqueness of the AWEI Employee Survey—coupled with the application of state-of-the-art statistical methods—offers us unparalleled opportunities to generate new and robust empirical evidence.

We hope that the findings that we document in these case studies make a compelling case for the value of organizations and other institutions investing in workplace inclusion. The data, we believe, speaks for itself.

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Outness in the workplace

Case Study 1

Background

Despite the progressive introduction of anti-discrimination laws, sexual and gender minorities still face frequent instances of workplace bullying and harassment (Ellison and Gustone, 2009; Drydakis, 2014; Hoel et al., 2014) as well as subtler forms of prejudice, discrimination and negative treatment (Zurbrügg & Miner, 2016). These stressors are collectively referred to in the academic literature as 'workplace incivility' (Cortina et al., 2013).

According to Pearson et al. (2005), workplace incivility is a low-key, low-intensity act that includes—but is not limited to—jokes, innuendo, insults, rude comments, use of inappropriate language, etc. Marco and colleagues (2015) found that, out of these, jokes appear to be the most predominant form of workplace incivility perpetrated by heterosexual employees against employees with diverse sexual and gender identities. Other studies have shown sexual-minority women are more likely to experience workplace incivility than sexual-minority men (Zurbrügg & Miner, 2016).

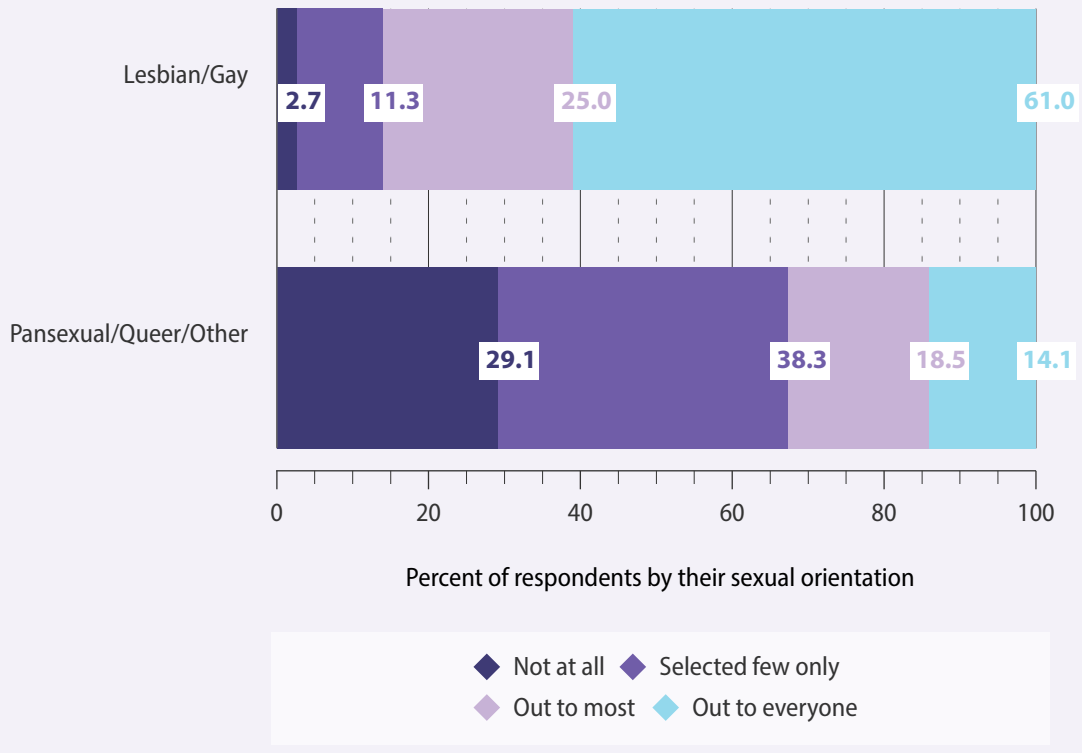
The reviewed literature suggests that fully understanding the workplace stressors faced by the Sapphire Cohort requires investigating both their experiences of conspicuous negative acts—such as bullying—and of more covert forms—such as jokes and innuendo. In the analyses presented below, we investigate the predictors of instances of bullying and jokes/innuendo against members of the Sapphire Cohort, and whether individuals with certain sexual and gender identities within that cohort are more likely to be the target of these aggressions. We also look at the costs of these aggressions for the employees and the organisation to offer insights into the effects of bullying and incivility.

Degree of outness in the workplace

The analyses use data from the 2020 Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) Employee Survey. The Sapphire Cohort sample consists of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) employees who identify, or may be perceived, as women (n=3087). This includes cisgender women, trans women, and non-binary people who may be perceived as female or feminine (regardless of their gender identities). Outness is measured as the relative amount of disclosure about one's sexual orientation in the workplace of people in the Sapphire Cohort, ranging from 'Not at all' to 'Everyone'.

The majority of the Sapphire Cohort (56.5%) is out to most or all of their workplace colleagues. However, as shown in Figure 1, there is substantial variation in the degree of outness by sexual orientation. Most lesbian/gay employees (86%) are out to most or all colleagues. In contrast, most bisexual, pansexual and queer employees (67.4%) are out to a few selected colleagues or not at all. These findings are consistent with recent research from the US showing that bisexual adults are less likely to be out than lesbian/gay adults (Brown, 2019).

Figure 1.1: Degree of outness at work



Source: 2020 AWEI Employee Survey

Predictors of outness in the workplace

To gain a better understanding of the individual-level factors that predict employees' degree of outness at work, we estimated a multiple regression model. In this model, employees' degree of outness at work is the outcome variable. The explanatory variables are sexual identity, gender identity, education, age, job level and the presence of role models who are out at work.

While bivariate analyses (such as those presented in Figure 1.1) can provide preliminary evidence on how a single factor is associated with outness, multiple regression models can incorporate several factors at a time and account for their interdependencies. These analyses, therefore, rule out the possibility of 'confounding' – that is, making erroneous assertions about the influence of a given factor due to a failure to account for its correlations with other factors. As such, multiple regression models offer more precise information than bivariate analyses that consider only two variables at a time.

Table 1.1 reports the results of a multilevel ordered logistic regression model of the degree of outness at work using the 2020 AWEI Employee Survey data[1]. The odds ratios give the estimated effect of a given explanatory variable on the odds of being out to more colleagues. Odds ratios greater than one indicate that a given factor is associated with a greater chance of being out to more colleagues, whereas odds ratios smaller than one indicate that a given factor is associated with a lower chance of being out to more colleagues. Stars are used to denote those associations that were statistically significant.

[1] The specific model that we estimated was a multilevel ordered logistic regression model. Ordered logistic regression models are extensions of logistic regression models where the outcome variable can take more than two ordered response categories. A multilevel version of this model was applied to account for the fact that the AWEI Employee Survey has a multilevel structure, with employees (Level 1) nested within organisations (Level 2).

Table 1.1: Results from a multilevel ordered logistic regression model of the degree of outness amongst the Sapphire Cohort

Explanatory variables	**Odds ratios**
Sexual orientation	
Lesbian/Gay (*reference group*)	
Bisexual/Pansexual/Queer/Others	0.09***
Gender identity	
Cis woman (*reference group*)	
Trans woman	2.02**
Position in organisation	
Regular employee (*reference group*)	
Senior leader	1.40*
Middle manager	1.22*
Others	0.93
Age group	
<24 years (*reference group*)	
25-34 years	2.08***
35-44 years	2.18***
45-54 years	2.05***
55+ years	1.33
Education	
No university degree (*reference group*)	
Has university degree	0.84*
There are out role models in the workplace	
No (*reference group*)	
Yes	1.97***
There are out senior role models in the workplace	
No (*reference group*)	
Yes	1.43***
Number of employees	2,239

Notes: The model is also adjusted for residence in a regional area and whether the respondent was raised in an environment unsupportive of same-sex relations, none of which was significantly related to outness.

Source: 2020 AWEI Employee Survey
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

(con't) Predictors of outness in the workplace

The model results reveal some important findings on the demographic and workplace characteristics that influence degree of outness at work for the Sapphire Cohort.

Concerning *sexual orientation*, people who identify as bisexual, pansexual or queer are significantly less likely to be out to more people at work than those who identify as lesbian or gay – as evidenced by the odds ratio of 0.09. For *gender identity*, trans women are significantly more likely to disclose their sexual orientation at work than cisgender women, with an associated odds ratio of 2.02.

Position in organisation also plays an important role. People occupying senior leadership positions are more likely to be out to more colleagues than those who work as regular employees, with an odds ratio of 1.4. The odds of being out to more colleagues at work for those in middle management positions are 1.2 times those of people working as regular employees, holding other variables constant. The odds of being out to more colleagues at work for those in the 'other' group (comprised of consultants, support staff, contractors, interns and academics) are not significantly different to those of regular employees. A possible explanation could be low job attachment and low employment continuity of those who work in these positions.

In relation to *age*, older employees (between 25-54 years of age) are more likely to be out to more colleagues at work than employees who are under 24 years of age. Employees who are between 35 to 44 years old are the most likely to disclose their sexual orientation at work. The degree of outness of employees who are 55 years or older did not differ from that of employees under 24 years of age.

Surprisingly, employees with a *university degree* are less likely to be out to more colleagues at work. For those who completed at least a university degree, the odds of being out to more colleagues are 16% lower than for those who did not complete a university degree.

The model also accounts for the presence of *role models* and *senior role models* who are out within the respondent's workplace. Having role models who are out at work is a strong predictor of being out to more colleagues at work for people in the Sapphire cohort. The same holds true for the presence of senior role models who are out within respondents' workplaces.

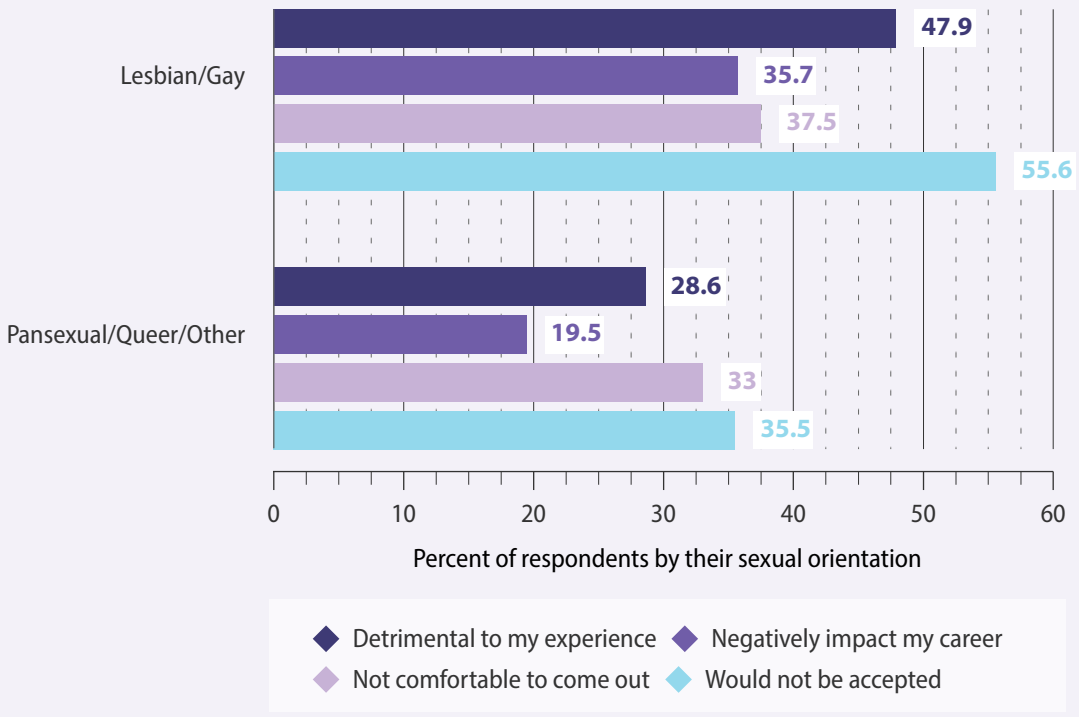
"If there are fewer of you in the workplace, it is an uncomfortable fact that you will be more conspicuous" (McWilliams-Tullberg, 1975, p. 60). Although this quote was used to explain the heightened visibility of women in the workplace decades ago, it also applies to the Sapphire Cohort today. Research, as well as anecdotal evidence, has pointed out the importance of visibility of women in leadership positions to inspire other women. The same argument applies to people with diverse sexualities. Having visible out role models is important to them; not only does it provide a support network, but it also signals that people like them can thrive in their workplace.

Concerns of sexual minorities in coming out in the workplace

Our results highlighted that the experiences of Sapphire Cohort members who identify as lesbian/gay could be very different to those who identify as bisexual, pansexual or queer. Indeed, their reasons for not being out at work could also vary by their sexual orientation.

The 2020 AWEI Employee Survey data can help us ascertain the reasons why these people were not out to more colleagues at work. Figure 1.2 below examines the responses of the Sapphire Cohort to a series of questions asking about their reasons not to be out at work.

Figure 1.2: Concerns of sexual minorities in coming out



Source: 2020 AWEI Employee Survey

A majority of Sapphire employees who identify as lesbian/gay expressed their feeling that they would not be accepted by their team members (55.6%) and that coming out could be detrimental to their workplace experience (47.9%).

Common reasons for Sapphire employees who identify as bisexual, pansexual and queer for not being out at work included feeling that they would not be accepted by their team members (35.5%), not feeling comfortable within themselves to be out (33%), and concerns that being out could be detrimental to their workplace experience (28.6%) or career progression (19.5%). Although fewer bisexual/pansexual/queer employees are out at work, their lower response rate to these questions suggests that their reasons for not being out are likely to be different from those of lesbian/gay employees. It shows that the experiences and challenges of bisexual, pansexual and queer employees are unique and other social-contextual or psychological factors could explain their lower degree of outness at work.

This pattern of results shows that the experience of coming out at work can be quite complex, with people often doing a 'risk analysis' of whether to disclose their authentic selves at work or not.

Highlights:

- Negative workplace interactions and prejudice towards sexual and gender minority employees not only manifest through explicit acts of bullying, but also through subtler forms of workplace incivility – such as being the target of jokes and innuendo.

- Trans women, non-binary and agender employees are all more likely to be at the receiving end of unwanted jokes/innuendo and bullying at work than cis women. Among these groups, non-binary and agender employees report the highest likelihood of experiencing these aggressions.

- Bisexual, pansexual and queer employees are less likely to experience both bullying and incivility than lesbian and gay employees because they are less likely to be out to colleagues.

- Inclusion initiatives and a supportive culture act as buffers against workplace bullying and incivility. Additionally, leadership support appears to signal to unsupportive employees that bullying and jokes/innuendo against Sapphire Cohort members will not be tolerated.

- Workplace bullying and incivility are negatively correlated with the engagement, productivity and wellbeing of Sapphire Cohort members, which underscores the business case for employers to intervene and stop these behaviours.

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Bullying and incivility in the workplace

Case Study 2

Background

Despite the progressive introduction of anti-discrimination laws, sexual and gender minorities still face frequent instances of workplace bullying and harassment (Ellison and Gustone, 2009; Drydakis, 2014; Hoel et al., 2014) as well as subtler forms of prejudice, discrimination and negative treatment (Zurbrügg & Miner, 2016). These stressors are collectively referred to in the academic literature as 'workplace incivility' (Cortina et al., 2013).

According to Pearson et al. (2005), workplace incivility is a low-key, low-intensity act that includes—but is not limited to—jokes, innuendo, insults, rude comments, use of inappropriate language, etc. Marco and colleagues (2015) found that, out of these, jokes appear to be the most predominant form of workplace incivility perpetrated by heterosexual employees against employees with diverse sexual and gender identities. Other studies have shown sexual-minority women are more likely to experience workplace incivility than sexual-minority men (Zurbrügg & Miner, 2016).

The reviewed literature suggests that fully understanding the workplace stressors faced by the Sapphire Cohort requires investigating both their experiences of conspicuous negative acts—such as bullying—and of more covert forms—such as jokes and innuendo. In the analyses presented below, we investigate the predictors of instances of bullying and jokes/innuendo against members of the Sapphire Cohort, and whether individuals with certain sexual and gender identities within that cohort are more likely to be the target of these aggressions. We also look at the costs of these aggressions for the employees and the organisation to offer insights into the effects of bullying and incivility.

Predictors of workplace bullying and jokes/innuendo

We first investigate the predictors of bullying and jokes/innuendo in the workplace for the Sapphire Cohort. The analyses use data from the 2020 Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) Employee Survey. The Sapphire Cohort sample consists of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) employees who identify, or may be perceived, as women (n=3,087). This includes cisgender women, trans women, and non-binary people who may be perceived as female or feminine (regardless of their gender identities).

In our study, experiencing bullying is measured by a variable that takes the value one when employees report that they have been the target of bullying/harassment targeting their gender diversity or sexual orientation in the past year, and the value zero otherwise. Similarly, jokes/innuendo is measured by a variable taking the value one when employees reported being exposed to unwanted jokes/innuendo targeting their sexual or gender identity in the past year, and the value zero otherwise.

To gain an understanding of the predictors of bullying and jokes/innuendo in the workplace, we estimated two multiple regression models. In the first model, the outcome variable is the measure of workplace bullying described above. In the second model, the outcome variable is the aforementioned measure of exposure to jokes/innuendo. The explanatory variables in these regression models are measures of sexual identity, gender identity, leadership support[2] and colleague support[3]. The variable measuring leadership support captures organisational initiatives and executive support aimed at fostering the workplace inclusion of gender and sexuality diverse employees. Meanwhile, the variable measuring colleague support captures colleagues' understanding and acceptance of, and engagement with, inclusion initiatives.

Table 2.1 below reports the results of two multilevel logistic regression models of bullying and jokes/innuendo using the 2020 AWEI Employee Survey data[4]. The odds ratios give the estimated effect of a given explanatory variable on the odds of being bullied (Column 1) and being the target of jokes/innuendo (Column 2), respectively. Odds ratios greater than one indicate that a given factor is associated with a greater chance of being bullied or being at the receiving end of jokes/innuendo, whereas odds ratios smaller than one indicate that a given factor is associated with a lower chance of these events happening. Stars are used to denote those associations that were statistically significant.

The results reveal important findings regarding the identity and organisational support factors associated with bullying and incivility at work. Concerning sexual identity, employees who identify as bisexual, pansexual and queer are significantly less likely to report being bullied at work compared with those who identify as lesbian or gay (odds ratios = 0.41). They are also significantly less likely to report being exposed to jokes/innuendo (odds ratio = 0.38). This may be because employees who identify as bisexual, pansexual and queer are less likely to be out at work, and hence less likely to be targeted by perpetrators. Additional analyses (not presented here) confirmed this explanation: in a regression model including only Sapphire-cohort employees who are out to 'most' or 'all' of their colleagues, the differences between gay/lesbian and bisexual/pansexual/queer employees in bullying and exposure to jokes/innuendo disappear.

[2] This is an index measure derived by combining information on variables capturing the presence of executive allies in the organisation, endorsement and communication of inclusion initiatives by leaders and executives, regular communication of inclusion initiatives and visible signs of organisation support for employees with diverse sexuality and gender. We combined these variables by taking the mean response for each employee.

[3] This is an index measure derived using individuals' response to a cluster of 15 questions asking about their support for inclusion initiatives, understanding the importance of active allies, being comfortable around people of diverse sexuality/gender and understanding their challenges, understanding that any jokes targeting diverse sexuality/gender and other unfavourable interactions are unacceptable in the workplace, etc. We first derived the average of each employee's score for these questions and then use this information to generate a mean score across all employees within each organisation.

(con't) Predictors of workplace bullying and jokes/innuendo

Table 2.1: Odds ratios from multilevel logistic regression models of being bullied and being the target of jokes / innuendo

Explanatory variables	Model 1: Being bullied	Model 2: Being the target of jokes /innuendo
Gender identity		
Cis woman *(reference group)*		
Transgender woman	3.24**	2.63**
Non-Binary/Agender/Other	4.46***	4.30***
Sexual identity		
Lesbian/Gay *(reference group)*		
Straight	0.69	0.43
Bisexual/Pansexual/Queer/Other	0.41***	0.38***
Organisational factors		
Leadership support index	0.62***	0.53***
Colleague support index	0.47	0.38**
Number of employees	**2,517**	**2,517**

Source: 2020 AWEI Employee Survey
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Concerning gender identity, bullying and jokes/innuendo are significantly and substantially more commonly experienced by trans than cis women – with associated odds ratios of 3.24 and 2.63, respectively. Further, those who identify as non-binary or agender are also significantly and substantially more likely to experience bullying and jokes/innuendo in the workplace compared to cis women (with odds ratios of greater than 4 in both models).

The analyses also revealed that some organisational factors act as buffers that reduce the likelihood of being bullied in the workplace or at the receiving end of jokes/innuendo. This applied to both leadership support and supportive colleagues. The incidence of bullying and exposure to jokes/innuendo was significantly reduced with greater leadership support (odds ratios of 0.62 and 0.53, respectively) and support from colleagues (odds ratios of 0.47 and 0.38, respectively). However, the odds ratio on the colleague support variable in Model 1 was not statistically significant.

[4] The specific model that we estimated was a multilevel logistic regression model. Logistic regression was required because the outcome variables are on a binary/dichotomous metric. A multilevel version of the logistic model was applied to account for the fact that the AWEI Employee Survey has a multilevel structure, with employees (Level 1) nested within organisations (Level 2).

Leadership Support as a buffer

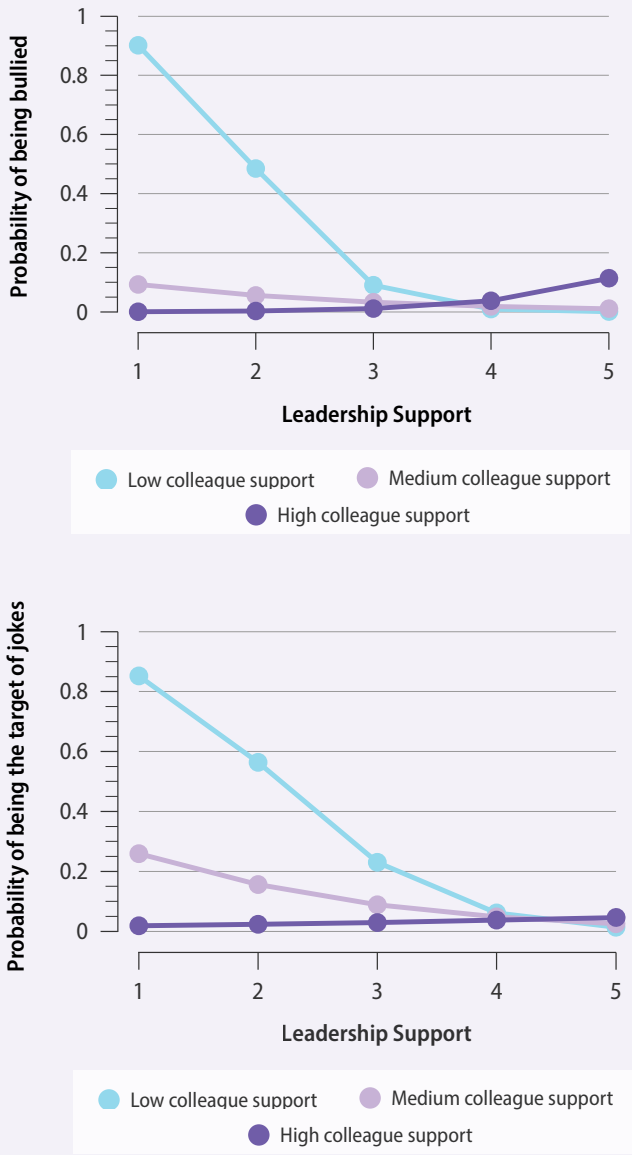
A second set of analyses was conducted to understand whether strong support for diversity and inclusion among leaders and executives could act as a 'buffer', preventing workplace incivility towards members of the Sapphire Cohort when employee support for inclusion initiatives was low. This was accomplished by fitting additional regression models similar to those presented in Table 2.1, but that also included interaction terms between the variables capturing leadership support and colleague support. For simplicity, we present the key results from these models in visual form (Figure 2.1).

Our results confirm that the level of leadership support makes a substantial difference to the probability of being bullied in organisations in which colleague support for diversity and inclusion is low. We find that when leadership support is high, the probability that members of the Sapphire Cohort will be bullied at work is low regardless of colleagues' attitudes. However, low colleague support results in high chances of being bullied at work when leadership support is also low.

We find the same pattern of results for jokes and innuendo targeting members of the Sapphire Cohort. When leadership support is high, the probability of being the target of jokes is low irrespective of the level of colleague support. However, when leadership support is low, there is a high probability of being the target of jokes and innuendo at work when colleagues do not support diversity and inclusion initiatives.

These results underscore the importance of leadership support in reducing bullying and jokes/innuendo within the workplace. Leadership support is not only beneficial in and of itself, it also exerts a positive effect by modifying the influence of colleague support. Specifically, when employees in an organization hold less supportive attitudes towards their gender and sexuality diverse co-workers, greater levels of leadership support appear to signal that bullying and jokes/innuendo will not be tolerated.

Figure 2.1: Predicted probability of being bullied and being exposed to jokes/innuendo



Source: 2020 AWEI Employee Survey

The costs of bullying and jokes/innuendo

Our regression results reveal that some members of the Sapphire Cohort are more likely to experience bullying and incivility in the workplace. A growing number of studies show that such unfavourable experiences in the workplace negatively impact employees' job satisfaction, their interactions with colleagues, and their intent to remain in the organisation (Jex, 2002; Bowling and Beehr, 2006; Rodríguez-Muñoz et al., 2009; Nielsen and Einarsen, 2012). Thus, these findings matter also from the employers' point of view. As explained by Drydakis (2019) and Porath and Pearson (2013), workplace bullying and incivility have tangible costs not only for the gender and sexuality diverse workers who are at the receiving end, but also for the organisation. For example, such unfavourable interactions may reduce work effort, quality of work, worker productivity and even staff turnover (Drydakis, 2019; Porath and Pearson, 2013).

In a final analysis, we empirically explored these tenets. Specifically, we analysed the associations between Sapphire Cohort members experiencing workplace bullying and jokes/innuendo and their productivity and wellbeing. To accomplish this, we examined the pairwise correlations between the variables capturing being bullied or exposed to jokes/innuendo and variables capturing worker productivity, engagement, and other indicators of workplace wellbeing.

The results, reported in Table 2.2, reveal negative and statistically significant correlation coefficients (ranging from –0.03 to –0.08) between being bullied and all of the indicators of workplace wellbeing. That is, Sapphire Cohort members who are bullied at work are less likely to feel productive, engaged, authentic, accepted, belonging and mentally well at work. We find similar associations between exposure to jokes/innuendo and the different indicators of workplace wellbeing amongst members of the Sapphire Cohort (with correlation coefficients ranging from –0.07 to –0.13). Taken together, these analyses provide strong evidence of the deleterious consequences that workplace bullying and incivility have on Sapphire Cohort members.

Table 2.2: Correlation coefficients between workplace bullying and incivility with measures of productivity and wellbeing at work

Variables	Being bullied	Being the target of jokes/innuendo
Being productive	-0.03***	-0.07***
Being engaged	-0.08***	-0.11***
Being authentic self at work	-0.06***	-0.07***
Feeling mentally well	-0.07***	-0.11***
Feeling accepted	-0.08***	-0.08***
Feeling a sense of belonging	-0.08***	-0.13***

Source: 2020 AWEI Employee Survey
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Highlights:

- Non-binary and agender employees report lower levels of workplace belonging than cis women. Employees who identify as bisexual, pansexual and queer report higher workplace belonging than lesbian and gay employees. In addition, being out at work fosters workplace belonging in a supportive workplace environment.

- Negative workplace interactions (e.g., being the target of jokes or bullying) diminish workplace belonging among Sapphire employees, whereas positive workplace cultures (e.g., supportive colleague and senior executives) enhances it.

- Employees who felt like they belonged at work reported greater mental wellbeing and higher productivity and were more likely to recommend the organisation as an inclusive place to work.

- Employees who felt like they did not belong called for greater effort to eliminate workplace incivility, recognise 'diversity within diversity', and establish channels to voice concerns.

Workplace belonging

Case Study 3

Background

Workplace belonging generally refers to feelings of connectedness with colleagues and social inclusion at work. Academic research has highlighted the importance of workplace belonging: feeling included at work reduces job turnover and improves employees' mental wellbeing (Rattan et al., 2021; Waller, 2020). Indeed, fostering belongingness at work is an important goal of many diversity and inclusion initiatives (Carr et al., 2019). In this case study, we focus on workplace belonging among members of the Sapphire Cohort. Specifically, we aim to understand the level of and variation in workplace belonging among these employees.

As for other underrepresented social groups, feeling excluded at work is a common issue for gender and sexual minority employees (Rattan et al., 2021). Heteronormativity and LGBTQ-phobia in the workplace mean that these employees are often type-casted, targeted or marginalised, particularly when there is a vacuum of policies and initiatives to protect and support them. Hence, people's sexual and gender identities can function as a key determinant of workplace belonging. As noted by Newheiser and colleagues (2017), individuals with stigmatised social identities often choose not to reveal their authentic selves at work. While this can offer some protection from bullying and other forms of negative attention, the decision not to reveal their sexual orientation often reduces a person's sense of workplace belonging (Newheiser et al., 2017). In other words, a greater degree of 'outness' at work can be associated with positive workplace outcomes. The organisational culture, including relationships with and support from colleagues, plays a key role in fostering workplace belonging among LGBTQ+ people (Brown, 2019; Peng & Salter, 2021; Waller, 2020). A negative organisational culture could inhibit LGBTQ+ people's ability to be themselves and make them feel less valued and engaged (Brown, 2019; Waller, 2019).

In this case study, we develop a measure of workplace belonging among Sapphire employees. We then investigate how gender and sexual identity, and organisational factors impact workplace belonging. To understand how organisations can foster workplace belonging, we also analyse the open-ended survey responses of Sapphire employees who reported low levels of belonging. Finally, we empirically demonstrate the value of workplace belonging for individuals and organisations.

Measuring LGBTQ+ workplace belonging

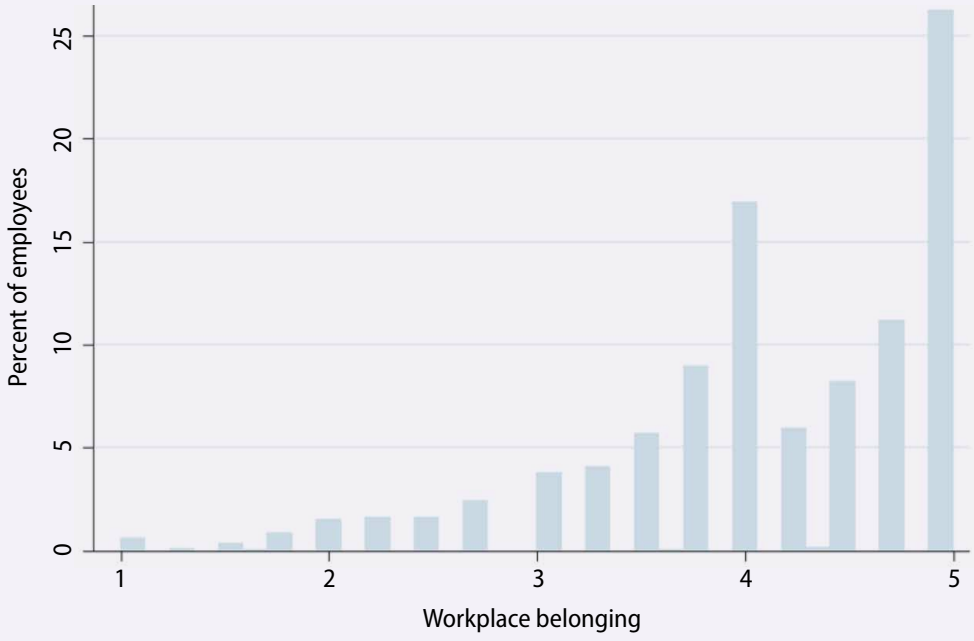
The analyses presented below use data from the 2020 Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) Employee Survey. We focus on the Sapphire Cohort, which consists of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) employees who identify, or may be perceived, as women (n=3,087). This includes cisgender women, trans women, and non-binary people who may be perceived as female or feminine (regardless of their gender identities).

Workplace belonging can mean different things to different people. For Sapphire employees it may mean that they feel safe, accepted and are able to bring their authentic selves to work. Hence, an appropriate measure of LGBTQ+ workplace belonging should not only include their perceived sense of belonging, but also whether they feel connected, are able to be their authentic selves and feel safe at work. Following these principles, we construct an index of workplace belonging using the information on different survey variables measuring these factors[5]. The resulting workplace belonging index ranges from 1 (lowest level of belonging) to 5 (highest level of belonging) and has a mean of 4.1.

The histogram in Figure 3.1 displays the variation in workplace belonging among Sapphire employees. The results are generally encouraging: a majority of the Sapphire Cohort had high levels of workplace belonging. Less than a quarter had belonging scores lower than 3.75 and less than a 1 in 10 had scores below 3.

Overall, employees in the Sapphire Cohort seem to feel that they belong at work. Yet some employees report stronger feelings of belongingness than others, and this may depend on their personal characteristics or the characteristics of their organisations. In the next section, we investigate the factors that are associated with greater or lower workplace belonging among the Sapphire Cohort.

Figure 3.1: Workplace belonging of the Sapphire cohort



Source: 2020 AWEI Employee Survey

[5] This index measure is derived by combining individuals' response to four variables – feeling a sense of belonging in the workplace, feeling that they can be themselves at work, feeling accepted for who they are, and feeling safe and included within their immediate team. We combined these variables by taking the mean response for each employee if at least three out of the four questions did not have a missing response.

Predictors of workplace belonging

To gain a better understanding of the individual- and organisation-level factors that foster workplace belonging among Sapphire employees, we estimated a linear regression model with the index of workplace belonging as the outcome variable. The explanatory variables in the model included measures of sexual identity, gender identity, degree of outness, being bullied, and being the target of jokes[6]. They also encompassed index measures capturing perceived support from colleagues and senior leaders.[7] A multilevel version of the linear regression model was applied to account for the fact that the AWEI Employee Survey has a nested structure, with employees (Level 1) and organisations (Level 2).

Table 3.1 reports the regression results. Stars are used to denote associations that were statistically significant.

The regression results reveal some key findings regarding the individual and organisational factors that improve workplace belonging among the Sapphire Cohort. Concerning *sexual identity*, employees who identify as bisexual, pansexual and queer report significantly higher workplace belonging than lesbian or gay employees (0.07). For *gender identity*, the workplace belonging of trans women is not significantly different from that of cis women. However, those who identify as non-binary, agender or 'other' report significantly lower workplace belonging compared with cis women (–0.27 units).

The *degree of outness* regarding one's sexual orientation is also a significant contributor to workplace belonging. Specifically, a higher degree of outness is associated with greater workplace belonging. For instance, the workplace belonging of Sapphire employees who are *out to everyone* is higher than that of Sapphire employees who are *not out at all* by 0.79 units. Therefore, our results align with the findings of Newheiser and coauthors (2017), confirming that, on average, revealing one's sexual orientation at work increases the feeling of belongingness. However, this result should be interpreted with caution, as outness itself is influenced by the workplace environment.[8] For instance, employees are more likely to be out in organisations with supportive policies and inclusion initiatives (Rostosky, 2002).

The organisational factors considered also influenced workplace belonging in a statistically significant way. Reporting negative interactions at work (such as *being bullied* or *being the target of jokes*) is associated with decreased feelings of belongingness (as evidenced by coefficients of –0.35 and –0.42 units, respectively). In contrast, receiving greater levels of *support from colleagues* and *senior leaders at work* foster workplace belonging (coefficients: 0.14 and 0.40, respectively). However, the coefficient for colleague support is not statistically significant.

[6] Experiencing bullying is measured by a variable that takes the value one when employees report that they have been the target of bullying/harassment targeting their gender diversity or sexual orientation in the past year, and the value zero otherwise. Being the target of jokes is measured by a variable taking the value one when employees reported being exposed to unwanted jokes/innuendo targeting their sexual or gender identity in the past year, and the value zero otherwise.

[7] Support from colleagues is measured through an index measure derived using individuals' response to a cluster of 15 questions asking about their support for inclusion initiatives, understanding the importance of active allies, being comfortable around people of diverse sexuality/gender and understanding their challenges, understanding that any jokes targeting diverse sexuality/gender and other unfavourable interactions are unacceptable in the workplace, etc. We first derived the average of each employee's score for these questions and then use this information to generate a mean score across all employees within each organisation. Support from senior colleagues is an index measure derived by combining information on variables capturing the presence of executive allies in the organisation, endorsement and communication of inclusion initiatives by leaders and executives, regular communication of inclusion initiatives and visible signs of organisation support for employees with diverse sexuality and gender. We combined these variables by taking the mean response for each employee.

[8] Indeed, in an accompanying case study, we found that a favourable workplace environment (measured by the presence of visible 'out' role models) encourages employees to disclose their sexual identity to their co-workers. These findings align with academic research (see e.g., Legate et al., 2012; Markovic et al., 2022). We also found that Sapphire employees who felt that they 'would not be accepted by their team members' and that 'coming out could be detrimental to their workplace experience and career progression' were out to fewer colleagues at work.

Table 3.1: Coefficients from regression model of workplace belonging

Explanatory variables	Coefficients
Degree of outness	
Not at all *(reference group)*	
Selected few only	0.16***
Most colleagues	0.62***
Everyone	0.79***
Sexual identity	
Lesbian/Gay *(reference group)*	
Bisexual/Pansexual/Queer/Other	0.07*
Gender identity	
Cis woman *(reference group)*	
Transgender woman	0.03
Non-binary/Agender/Other	–0.27***
Being the target of jokes	
No *(reference group)*	
Yes	–0.42***
Being bullied	
No *(reference group)*	
Yes	–0.35***
Colleague support index	0.14
Leadership support index	0.40***
Number of employees	**2,387**

Source: 2020 AWEI Employee Survey
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Feedback from the Saphire cohort

To better understand the concerns of Sapphire employees who reported low levels of workplace belonging (i.e., index scores smaller than or equal to two), we analysed their responses to the open-ended survey question asking *'Is there anything in particular that you feel needs to be improved [in regard to inclusion initiatives for people of diverse sexuality and/or gender]?'.*

The feedback received from these employees covered many topics, including the need to improve workplace policies, culture, communication and active executive advocacy. The following quotes illustrate these points:

> *"Everything. From policies to workplace culture to executive leadership."*

> *"Compulsory / mandatory awareness training... face to face to ensure it is completed, not just a slide show."*

Some employees also reported that their gender and/or sexual identities were less recognised under the LGBTQ+ umbrella initiatives. For example:

> *"There is still not a lot of recognition for those who identify as asexual and who may be in relationships not deemed traditional."*

> *"Trans rights!! I had to do a talk in a team meeting about Trans rights week. I saw a bit of promotion in my workplace for Wear It Purple day - but nothing for trans awareness/rights... It made me feel like we ignore the T in LGBTQI+. I wouldn't feel safe in my workplace as a trans person."*

The feedback also accentuated the need to eliminate bullying and jokes against employees with diverse gender and sexuality, which made these employees feel unsafe. For instance:

> *"Yes, jokes & innuendoes need to be stamped out."*

> *"Yes. Action! I feel soooooo unsafe at work and recently due to constant bullying and inaction from my manager I noted that inaction to the issues I faced made it feel like it was 'open season'. In effect, I felt like prey!"*

The need to understand the multifaceted disadvantages faced by Sapphire employees with intersectional identities also emerged as a strong theme. For example, an employee said:

> *"More women and cultural backgrounds in diversity events. Most LGBTIQA+ events are still Caucasian and male-centric."*

Other employees noted the dual challenges of being LGBTQ+ at work and living with a disability, and/or requested more accessible support and improved communication within the organisation.

Overall, these qualitative findings highlight that more effort is required to eliminate workplace incivility, the need to recognise 'diversity within diversity', and the demand for channels through which Sapphire employees can voice their concerns and vulnerabilities. These are all factors that could help improve the workplace belonging of these and other employees.

The value of workplace belonging

According to Carr and colleagues (2019), workplace belonging is not only important for the psychological wellbeing of individual employees but can also benefit employers. In this final section, we demonstrate the value of workplace belonging for employees and the broader organisation. To accomplish this, we calculated correlations between Sapphire employees' workplace belonging and their reports of feeling mentally well at work, feeling productive at work and recommending the organisation as an inclusive place to work.[9]

The results, reported in Table 3.2, reveal large and statistically significant correlations between workplace belonging and mental wellbeing, productivity and external endorsement of the organisation (ranging from 0.60 to 0.73). That is, Sapphire Cohort members who report high workplace belonging are also more likely to feel productive at work, mentally well at work and recommend the organisation to others as an inclusive place to work. These results suggest that any failure to address workplace exclusion is likely to cause substantial issues not only for individual employees, but also employers.

Table 3.2: Correlation coefficients between workplace belonging and feeling mentally well and productive and recommending the organisation

Variables	Workplace belonging
Feeling mentally well at work	0.73***
Feeling productive at work	0.60***
Recommending the organisation as an inclusive place to work	0.70***

Source: 2020 AWEI Employee Survey
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

[9] Employee's mental wellbeing, productivity, and endorsement of the organisation are measured by their degree of agreement with the statements: 'I feel mentally well at work', 'I feel productive at work' and 'I'd recommend this organisation as an inclusive place to work'. employee.

Highlights:

- Non-binary and agender employees report lower levels of workplace belonging than cis women. Employees who identify as bisexual, pansexual and queer report higher workplace belonging than lesbian and gay employees. In addition, being out at work fosters workplace belonging in a supportive workplace environment.
- Negative workplace interactions (e.g., being the target of jokes or bullying) diminish workplace belonging among Sapphire employees, whereas positive workplace cultures (e.g., supportive colleague and senior executives) enhances it.
- Employees who felt like they belonged at work reported greater mental wellbeing and higher productivity and were more likely to recommend the organisation as an inclusive place to work.
- Employees who felt like they did not belong called for greater effort to eliminate workplace incivility, recognise 'diversity within diversity', and establish channels to voice concerns.

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Sapphire cohort workplace wellbeing

Case Study 4

Background

Mental wellbeing is an important aspect of a healthy and productive life. Unfavourable work environments and negative workplace incidents not only lead to psychological distress, but also diminish workers' wellbeing (Australian Human Rights Commission, n.d.). Similarly, it is widely acknowledged that minority stress and stigma lead to worse mental health outcomes for people with diverse gender and sexual identities (DiPlacido & Fallahi, 2020; King et al., 2008; Valentine et al., 2018). Moreover, employees from underrepresented social groups are overexposed to negative interactions with colleagues—such as bullying and rude jokes, and this includes employees of diverse genders and sexualities (Zurbrügg & Miner, 2016). Given the stressors that members of the Sapphire Cohort face at work, gauging their mental health and identifying the factors that affect it constitute important research endeavours.

Employees' mental health has spillover effects on their work performance and engagement with the organisation (Krekel et al., 2019). Given the adverse workplace experience of employees with diverse sexual and gender identities, Lloren and Parini (2017) found that their mental health greatly impacts their performance at work and their commitment to the organisation. From the organisation's point of view, improving employees' mental health fosters a culture of high engagement and productivity at work (Hafner et al., 2015). Indeed, a stronger focus on the wellbeing of employees with diverse genders and sexualities could help organisations reduce employee stress, enhance performance, minimise absences, and improve retention (Bozani et al., 2020). Hence, employees' mental wellness matters not only for the economic prospects of the organisation but also for the career outcomes of employees with diverse gender and sexual identities.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, n.d.), workplace wellbeing "relates to all aspects of working life, from the quality and safety of the physical environment, to how workers feel about their work, their working environment, the climate at work and work organization". Thus, mental health amongst Sapphire employees should be studied in conjunction with productivity and engagement. This research brief accomplishes this, examining the mental health, productivity and work engagement of the Sapphire Cohort. In line with the ILO's definition, we capture workplace wellbeing by considering employees' answers to survey questions on their mental health at work, productivity and engagement with the organisation.

Workplace wellbeing

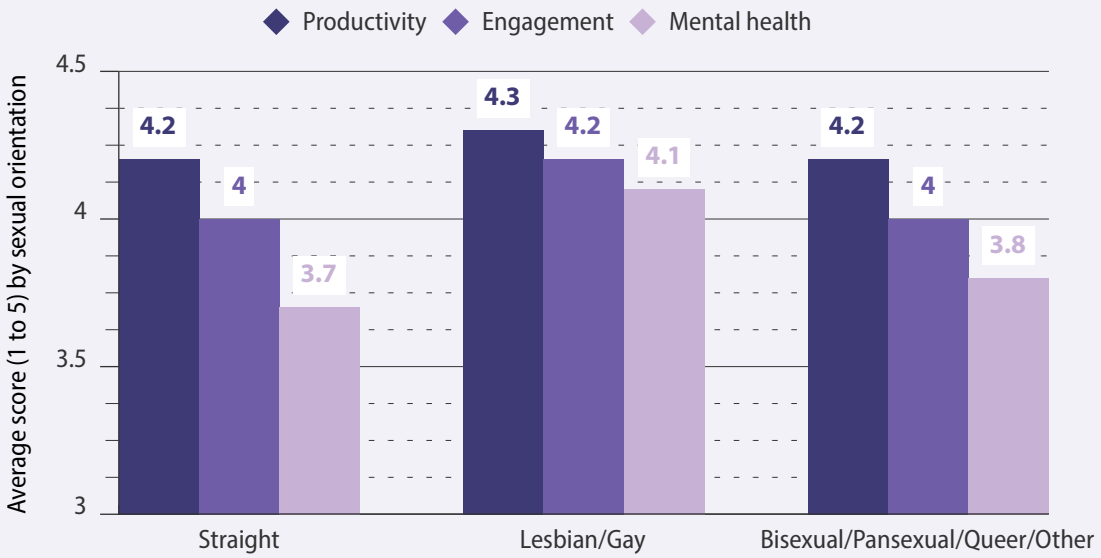
This case study utilises data from the 2020 AWEI Employee Survey. The Sapphire Cohort sample consists of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) people who identify or may be perceived as women in the workplace (n=3,087). This includes cisgender women, transgender women, and non-binary people who may be perceived as female or feminine (regardless of their gender identities).

Figure 4.1 depicts differences in the mean scores for mental health, productivity and engagement by employees' sexual orientation. We find that employees who identify as lesbian or gay report slightly higher levels of mental health, productivity and engagement than employees who identify as straight, bisexual, pansexual and queer. The mean mental health, productivity and engagement scores of straight employees are similar to those of bisexual, pansexual and queer employees.

Figure 4.2 shows differences in the mean scores for mental health, productivity and engagement by employees' gender identity. Cis women exhibit higher levels of mental health, productivity and engagement than trans women and those who identify as non-binary and agender. Trans women report the lowest mean scores for all three indicators of workplace wellbeing amongst the three groups.

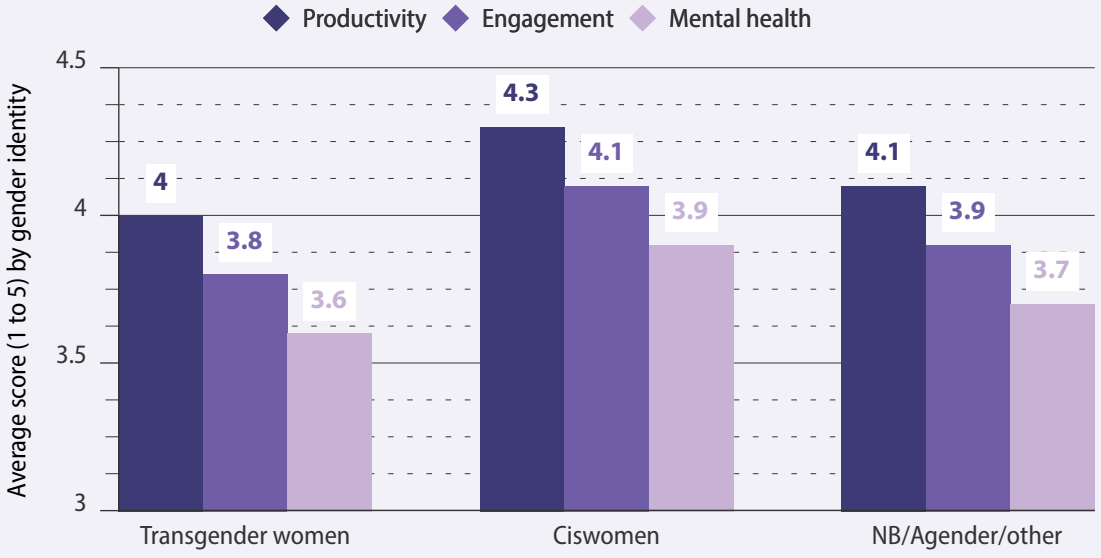
Overall, the figures reveal that employees from diverse sexual and gender identity groups within the Sapphire Cohort report high levels of mental health, productivity and engagement. However, these statistics do not take into account individual characteristics and organisational factors. While bivariate analyses (such as those presented in Figures 4.1 and 4.2) can provide preliminary evidence on how a single factor is associated with workplace wellbeing, multiple regression models can incorporate several factors at a time and account for their interdependencies. We accomplish this in the next section.

Figure 4.1: Workplace wellbeing by sexual orientation



Source: 2020 AWEI Employee Survey

Figure 4.2: Workplace wellbeing by gender identity



Source: 2020 AWEI Employee Survey

Predictors of workplace wellbeing

To understand how sexual and gender identities impact workplace wellbeing, we estimated three regression models with mental health, productivity and engagement with the organisation as the outcome variables. Besides variables that capture sexual and gender identities of employees, age, education, being raised in an unsupportive environment[10], being bullied and being the target of jokes[11] are included in all the models.

Table 4.1: Odds ratios from multilevel ordinal logistic regression models of workplace wellbeing

Explanatory variables	Model 1: Mental health	Model 2: Productivity at work	Model 3: Organisational engagement
Being the target of jokes			
No *(reference group)*			
Yes	0.43***	0.55***	0.49***
Education			
No university degree *(reference group)*			
Has university degree	1.17*	1.05	1.14
Age			
25-34 years *(reference group)*			
<24 years	1.07	1.06	1.15
35-44 years	1.03	0.99	1.08
45-54 years	1.04	1.24*	1.23*
55+ years	0.77*	0.82	0.82
Gender identity			
Cis woman *(reference group)*			
Transgender woman	0.78	0.71	0.84
Non-Binary/Agender/other	0.76	0.70*	0.72
Sexual identity			
Lesbian/Gay *(reference group)*			
Straight	0.51***	0.63*	0.63*
Bisexual/Pansexual/Queer/Other	0.48***	0.60***	0.63***
Number of employees	2,485	2,485	2,485

Notes: The models are also adjusted for bullying, being raised in an unsupportive environment, and location of work in a regional area, none of which were significantly related to any of the indicators of workplace wellbeing. Being bullied is correlated with being the target of jokes and hence not statistically significant in the models.

Source: 2020 AWEI Employee Survey
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

[10] This variable informs whether the employee was raised in an environment where diverse gender and sexual identities were not accepted.

[11] Experiencing bullying is measured by a variable that takes the value one when employees report that they have been the target of bullying/harassment targeting their gender diversity or sexual orientation in the past year, and the value zero otherwise. Being the target of jokes is measured by a variable taking the value one when employees reported being exposed to unwanted jokes/innuendo targeting their sexual or gender identity in the past year, and the value zero otherwise.

(con't) Predictors of workplace wellbeing

Table 4.1 reports results from multilevel ordered logistic regression models using the 2020 AWEI Employee Survey data[12]. The odds ratios give the estimated effect of a given explanatory variable on the odds of higher workplace wellbeing, as measured by mental health, productivity and organisational engagement. Odds ratios greater than one indicate that a given factor is associated with greater workplace wellbeing, whereas odds ratios smaller than one indicate that a given factor is associated with lower workplace wellbeing. Stars are used to denote those associations that were statistically significant.

The regression results reveal significant variation in the workplace wellbeing of Sapphire employees. For Sapphire employees who are the *target of jokes,* the odds of reporting higher mental health are 0.43 times that of employees who were not the target of jokes. Thus, being the target of jokes is associated with significantly lower mental health. Similarly, being the target of jokes lowers the chances of feeling productive and engaged at work—with odds ratios of 0.55 and 0.49, respectively.

Education positively impacts the mental health of Sapphire employees. The odds of reporting higher mental health for those who have a university degree is 1.17 times that of employees who do not have a university degree. In relation to age, older employees (45-54 years old) are likely to feel more productive and engaged at work compared with those who are 25-34 years old with odds ratios of 1.24 and 1.23, respectively. Employees who are older than 55 years report lower levels of mental health compared with 25-34 years old employees (odds ratio = 0.77).

Concerning *gender identity*, we find that workplace wellbeing indicators for trans women are not significantly different from those of cis women. This is likely due to the small number of trans women in our Sapphire sample. On the other hand, employees who identify as non-binary or agender are less likely to feel productive at work compared with cis women (odds ratios = 0.70).

For *sexual identity*, employees who identify as bisexual/pansexual/queer are significantly likely to report lower levels of mental health, productivity and engagement compared with lesbian and gay employees (odds ratios of 0.48, 0.60 and 0.63, respectively). This finding is consistent with studies that report poorer mental health outcomes for people who identify as bisexual (DiPlacido & Fallahi, 2020; Dyar, 2019). Sapphire employees who identify as straight (including gender diverse employees) are also likely to report lower levels of mental health, productivity and engagement compared with those who identify as lesbian or gay—with odds ratios of 0.51, 0.63 and 0.63, respectively.

Our findings imply that we have to exercise caution when interpreting the workplace wellbeing outcomes of Sapphire employees. For one, the lack of statistical significance observed for some Sapphire employees such as transgender women could be attributed to their small number of observations. Additionally, the diverse gender experience of straight employees in the Sapphire Cohort could explain their significantly lower workplace wellbeing. As Figure 4.3 shows, Sapphire employees who identify as straight report lower mental health than non-Sapphire employees because of their diverse gender experience. However, the disparity in wellbeing outcomes of such intersectional groups such as transgender straight women is difficult to study due to the relatively small number of these employees in the 2020 AWEI Survey.

[12] The specific model that we estimated was a multilevel ordered logistic regression model. Ordered logistic regression models are extensions of logistic regression models where the outcome variable can take more than two ordered response categories. A multilevel version of this model was applied to account for the fact that the AWEI Employee Survey has a multilevel structure, with employees (Level 1) nested within organisations (Level 2).

Feedback from the Sapphire cohort

To better understand the concerns of Sapphire employees who reported low levels of workplace wellbeing (i.e., scores smaller than or equal to two), we analysed their responses to the open-ended survey question asking, 'What it is like working for your organisation as a person of diverse sexuality/gender?'.

The feedback received from these employees covered many topics, including dismissal, judgement and lack of acceptance from colleagues, and disappointment in senior leadership and the organisation in general. The following quotes illustrate these points:

"Miserable. I work with some really bigoted people who constantly joke about my orientation and even though my boss is gay he does nothing to stop it."

"I don't really talk about it because the few times I have, I get judged or told I'm just young and things will change. No acceptance from the team or my manager for me being who I am."

"I feel like there are a few very strong voices and many silent judgers."

"Disappointing. It is largely disingenuous and riddled with reverse-biases."

The analysis also revealed that Sapphire employees look for new employment opportunities if their current work environment is detrimental to their wellbeing. This is consistent with academic research that highlights the relationship between mental health and employee turnover (Australian Human Rights Commission, n.d.; Bozani et al., 2020). The following feedback highlights this:

"Often it is good, but lately it hasn't been great and I am seeking other employment."

"I am the only publicly out trans woman with any profile in my organisation. The organisation has no internal mechanism for reporting transphobic behaviour much less acting upon it. My mental health has eroded year after year working here and I am now looking for employment elsewhere"

The feedback also highlighted how difficult it is for some Sapphire employees to fit in the organisation and how isolated they feel in an unsupportive work environment. This is accentuated by the following quotes:

"Abject loneliness and constantly surrounded by close mindedness."

"Lonely"

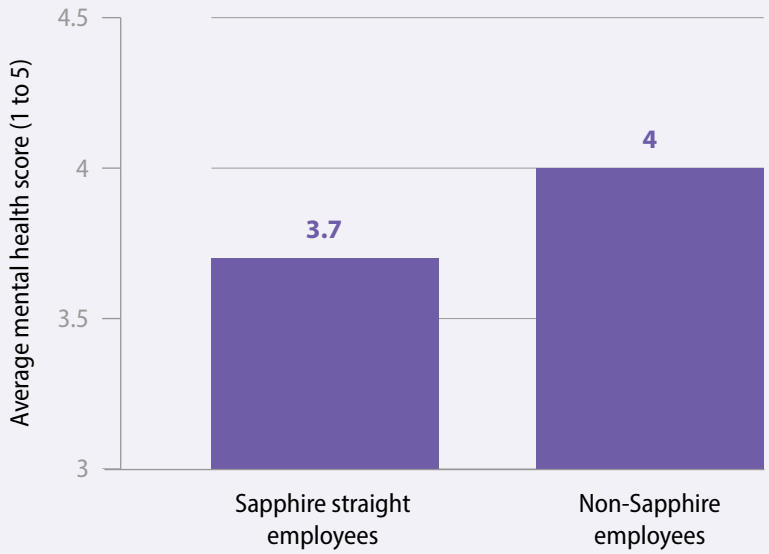
We also find that Sapphire employees in male-dominated careers are more exposed to stigma and need greater organisational support. For example, one employee said:

"Isolating, no support and scared to ever raise an issue as it makes you an even bigger target in a male dominated profession."

Overall, these qualitative findings highlight that Sapphire employees experience distinct disparities in workplace interactions and treatment. Thus, these employees report lower wellbeing and express turnover intentions. More effort is required to improve the workplace wellbeing of Sapphire employees through stronger support from colleagues and action from senior leaders so that organisations are truly inclusive. These are all factors that could help improve the workplace wellbeing of Sapphire and other employees.

(con't) Feedback from the Sapphire cohort

Figure 4.3: Mental health of Sapphire straight versus non-Sapphire employees



Source: 2020 AWEI Employee Survey

Highlights:

- Trans women report the lowest average scores for mental health, productivity and engagement with the organisation amongst the various groups within the Sapphire Cohort. However, these differences were not statistically significant in multivariate models reflecting the small number of trans women in the Sapphire Cohort.
- Non-binary and agender employees feel less productive at work than cis women.
- Employees who identify as straight as well as those who identify as bisexual, pansexual or queer report lower mental health, productivity and engagement than those who identify as lesbian or gay.
- Being the target of jokes significantly reduces workers' mental health, productivity and engagement with the organisation.
- Employees who have a university degree report higher mental health than those without a university degree.
- Employees who reported lower workplace wellbeing articulated their difficulties and feeling of isolation and expressed turnover intentions. They called for more support from colleagues and senior leaders.

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PRIDE
INCLUSION
PROGRAMS

We're here to help make the places where our community members live, work, study and play more inclusive of LGBTQ+ people. We do this by working with a range of organisations to help ensure that LGBTQ+ people feel welcome, included and supported.