PRACTICE POINTS - **2026 AWEI EMPLOYEE SURVEY**

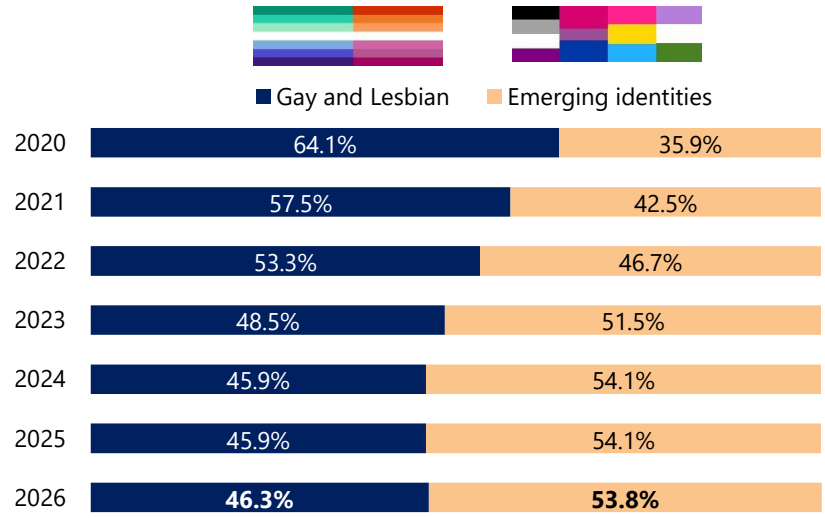
- The diversity of identified sexual orientation in the workplace is shifting rapidly, with over half of respondents of diverse sexuality no longer identifying as gay or lesbian.
- Employees with emerging sexual orientations are significantly less likely to be 'out' at work and report lower levels of wellbeing, belonging and inclusion.
- Psychosocial safety outcomes remain uneven.
- Employees with emerging sexual orientations are more likely to be younger, earlier in their careers, and in relationships that may be perceived as 'straight passing'.
- Employees in relationships perceived as LGBTQ+ are significantly more likely to be 'out' than those whose relationships are not recognised as such.
- Employees with emerging sexual orientations are less likely to believe that bullying and harassment would be addressed.
- Rates of self-editing differ significantly with the emerging identities cohort, highlighting a gap between inclusion intent and lived experience.
- Without deliberate action, organisations risk reinforcing a hierarchy that centres some ways of identifying while unintentionally excluding others.

Edition 5: Emerging identities: Sexual orientations

This practice point focuses on the differing experiences of people of diverse sexuality in the workplace, particularly concentrating on the experiences of gay and lesbian respondents compared to respondents identifying with the options provided within the survey of *pansexual*, *bisexual*, *asexual*, *queer* and *a different term*[i].

Over the past 5 years, we have seen a significant shift in the proportion of respondents who identify as gay and lesbian, so much so that this year, 53.8% of respondents of diverse sexuality **do not** identify with these two terms.

Compared to 2020 data, respondents are 27.8% less likely to identify as gay and lesbian, and 50.1% more likely to identify with another term provided.

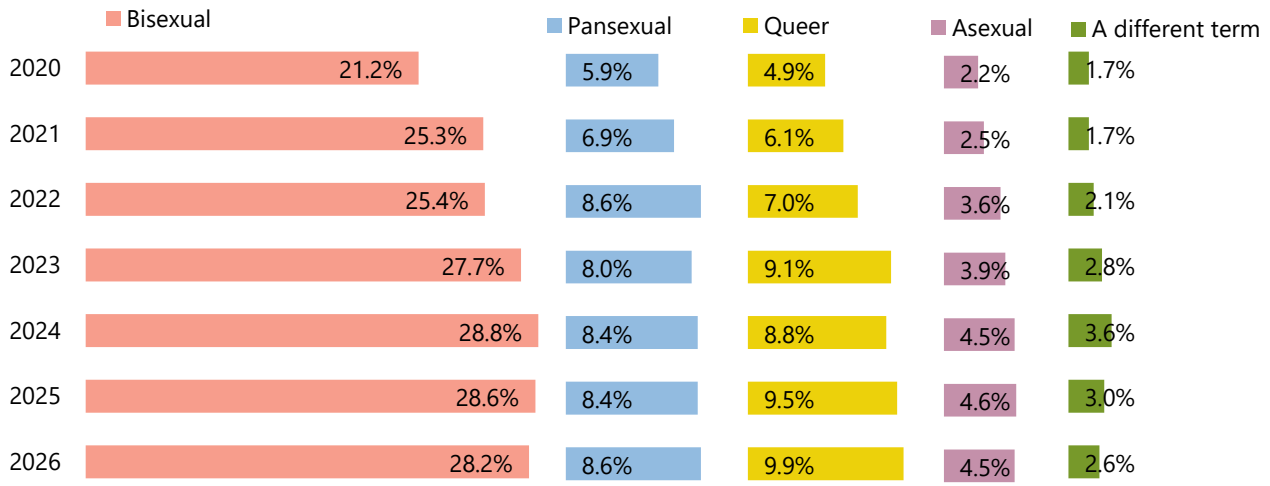


Through strategic initiatives, events, conferences, roundtables and executive leader network meetings, we have heard anecdotally that people who identify outside of gay and lesbian are not feeling as accepted in the workplace. This practice point explores this topic.

[i] LGBTQ+ terminology and definitions can be found here, and flags descriptions here

When we break down respondents by orientation, respondents of all sexual orientations increased between 2020 and 2024 and have maintained those proportions. Individually, comparing this year to 2020, the proportion of respondents has increased by;

- 33.2% for respondents identifying as bisexual,
- 45.9% for respondents identifying as Pansexual,
- 101.8% for respondents identifying as Queer,
- 106.2% for respondents identifying as Asexual &
- 53.2% for respondents identifying with a different term

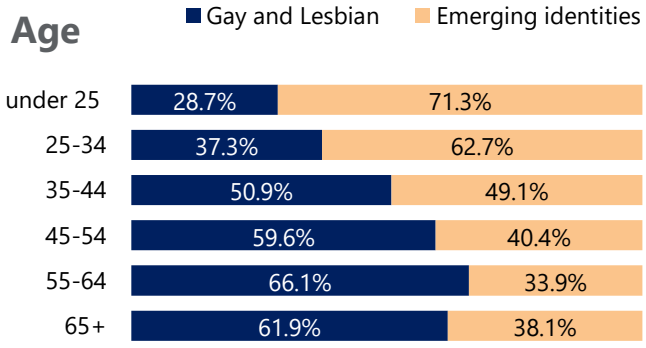


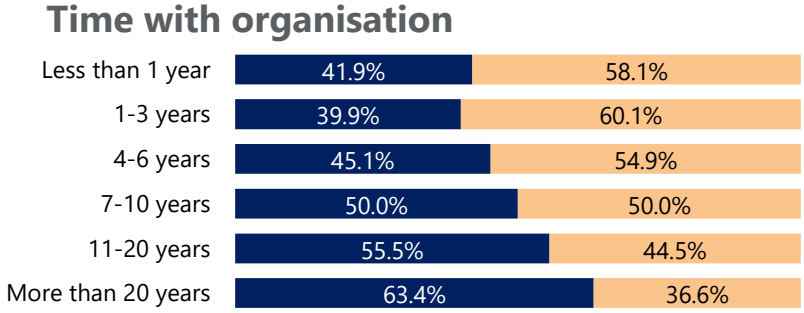
To begin to understand the shift in identities, it is important to understand the demographics of respondents in each cohort within organisations.

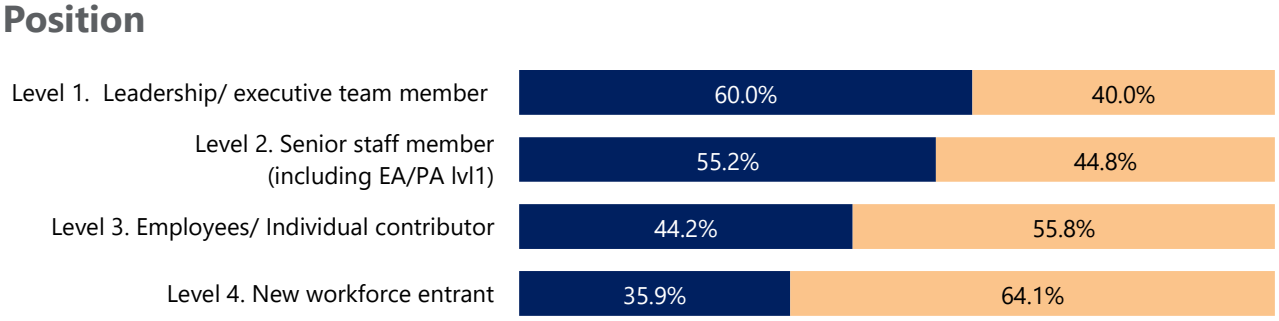
Respondents more likely to identify with emerging identities are;

- Under 35 years of age
- Have been with the organisation less than 7 years &
- In level 2 and 3 positions

This data shows us that the trend of increasing proportions of the workplace identifying as other than gay or lesbian is likely to increase into the future.





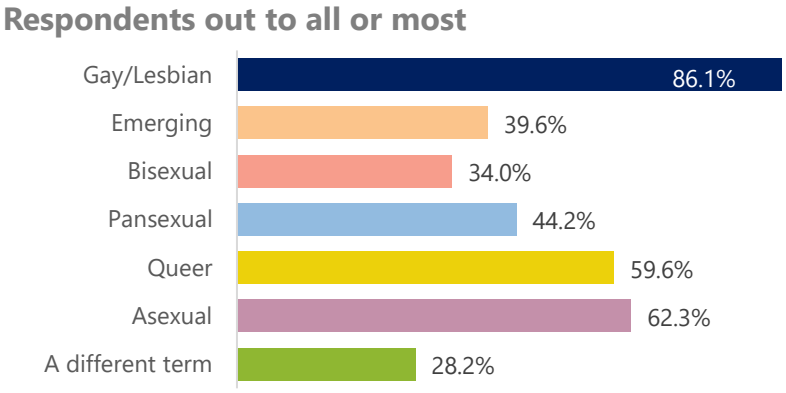


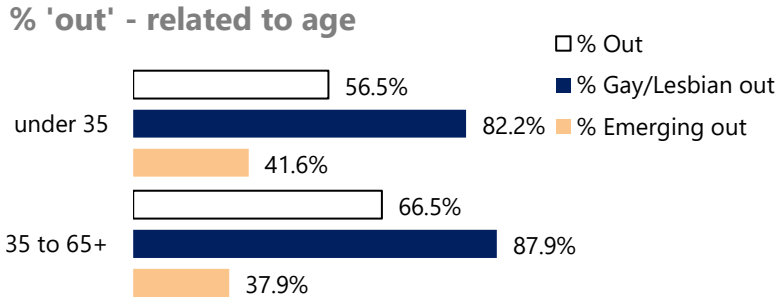
Being 'out' in the workplace

Overall, those who identify with emerging sexual orientations are 54.0% less likely to be 'out' at work.

The data shows that many factors contribute to an employee choosing to be 'out' in the workplace.

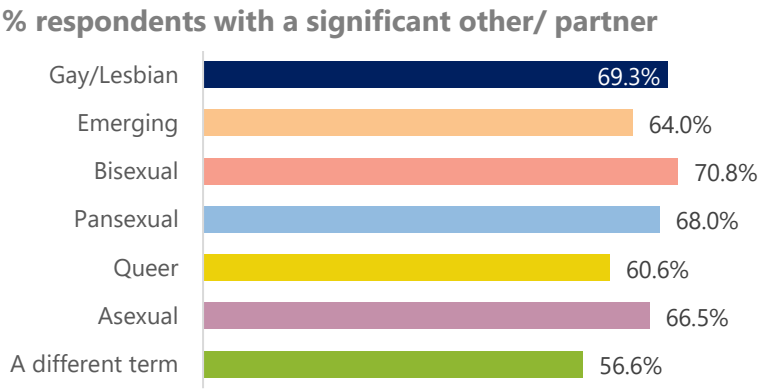
In this year's second practice point, "Out at work"[1], it was identified that age is a significant contributor. Respondents under 35 are the *least likely* to be 'out' in the workplace, as above, we can see that respondents under 35 are the *most likely* to identify with emerging identities.



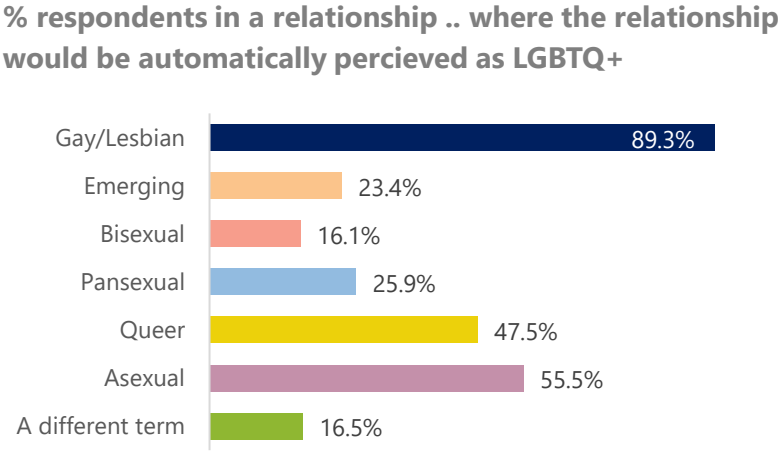


When we consider the impact of age & sexuality on outness, those under 35 are 97.8% more likely to be 'out' if they identify as gay or lesbian than if they identify with emerging identities. The difference is more significant in the older age group, with over 35 gay and lesbian respondents, 131.8% more likely to be 'out'.

A respondent's current relationship status and the perception of that relationship by others can also contribute to their choice to be 'out' at work. For some LGBTQ+ people, the outward perception of their relationship can be 'straight passing', meaning that they do not feel their colleagues would automatically know they were LGBTQ+ if they were to talk about or meet their partner.



Of all respondents who are in a relationship, gay or lesbian identifying respondents are between 60.8% and 453.5% more likely to be in a relationship that others would perceive as LGBTQ+ than those identifying with emerging sexual orientations.

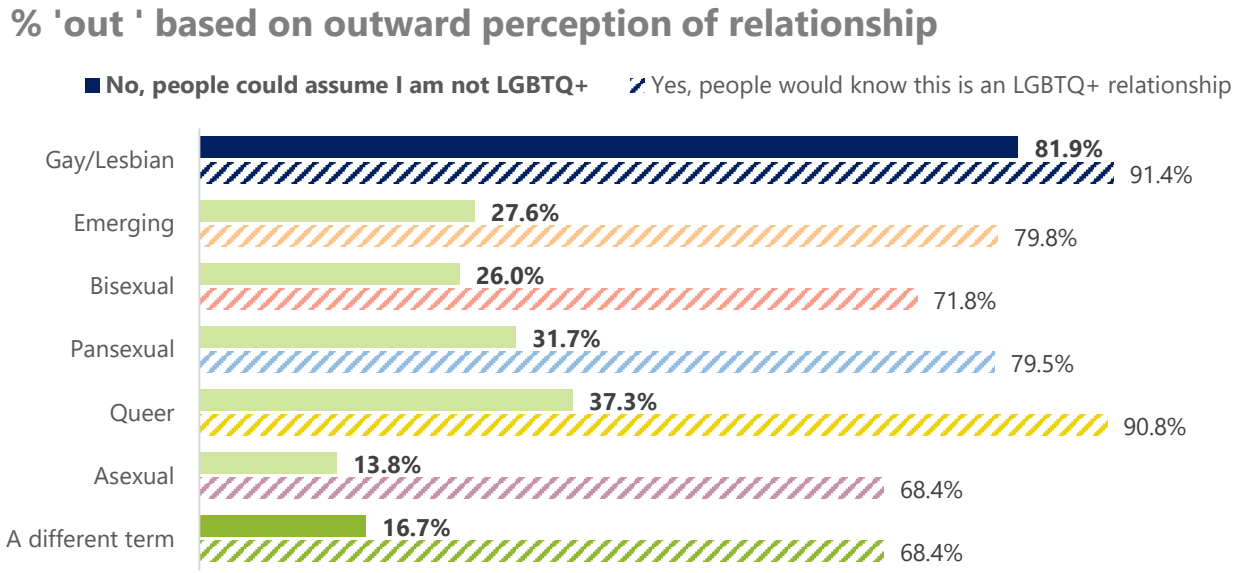


Respondents who are in a relationship which they believe would be perceived as LGBTQ+ are more likely to be out in the workplace; for those within the emerging orientation cohort, 79.8% of respondents are 'out' and for those respondents in relationships which would not be read as LGBTQ+, only 27.7% are out in the workplace.

[1] https://prideinclusionprograms.com.au/resources/index-data-reports/2026-awei-employee-survey-practice-point-2-out-at-work/

This aligns with anecdotal evidence gathered over the last 5 years that people in 'straight-passing' relationships are less likely to be out, as there is no need to be 'out' to talk about their current partner.

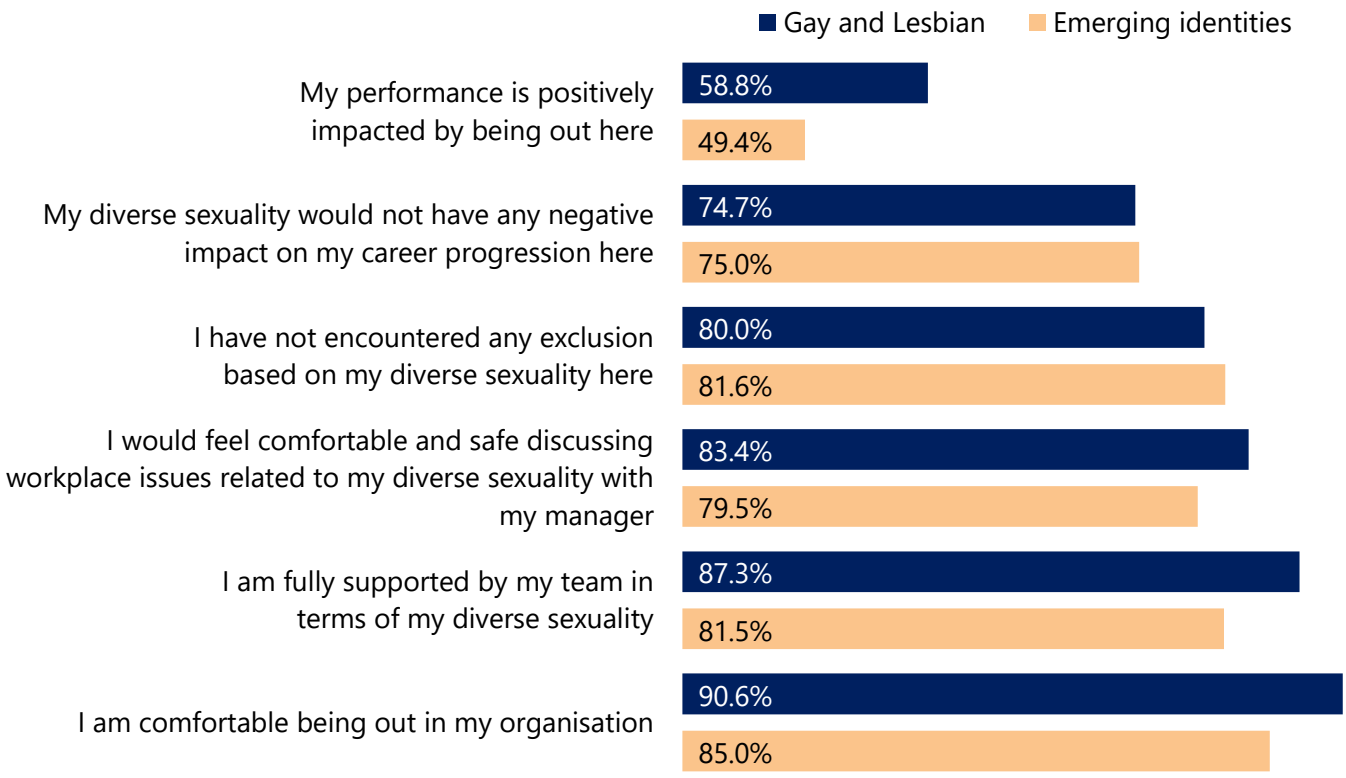
Respondents in a relationship which would be perceived as LGBTQ+ are 159.9% more likely to be 'out' (88.9%), compared to 34.2% of respondents in relationships which may not be perceived as LGBTQ+.



Experiences of being out

Respondents from emerging identities are up to 35.6% less likely to agree with statements around positive experiences when 'out' in their organisations. Respondents who identify as Pansexual, queer or with a different term agree at lower rates than those identifying as bisexual or asexual.

The outlier to this is that only 44.7% of bisexual respondents agree that their performance is positively impacted by being 'out'.



Understanding the choice to not be 'out'

For respondents 'not out', those from the gay & lesbian cohort are more likely to be concerned about the negative aspects of being out in the workplace than the average of the emerging cohort, though there are some significant differences within the individual orientation responses where;

- Pansexual respondents are the least likely to not be comfortable with themselves, with 29.8% agreement, compared to 37.8% of gay and lesbian respondents, and 41.9% of respondents identifying with a different term.
- Bisexual respondents are the least likely to fear exclusion by colleagues within (18.7%) or outside (23.7%) their team compared to 37.4% and 47.9% of gay and lesbian respondents.
- 14.4% of bisexual respondents agree that being out would negatively impact their career progression, compared to 25.5% of gay and lesbian respondents.
- Queer respondents are the most likely to agree (41.7%) that the current negative media commentary around LGBTQ+ people has impacted their willingness to be out

This data shows that gay and lesbian employees are still feeling that the potential negative side effects outweigh the positive impacts of being out.

Reasons for not being out in the workplace

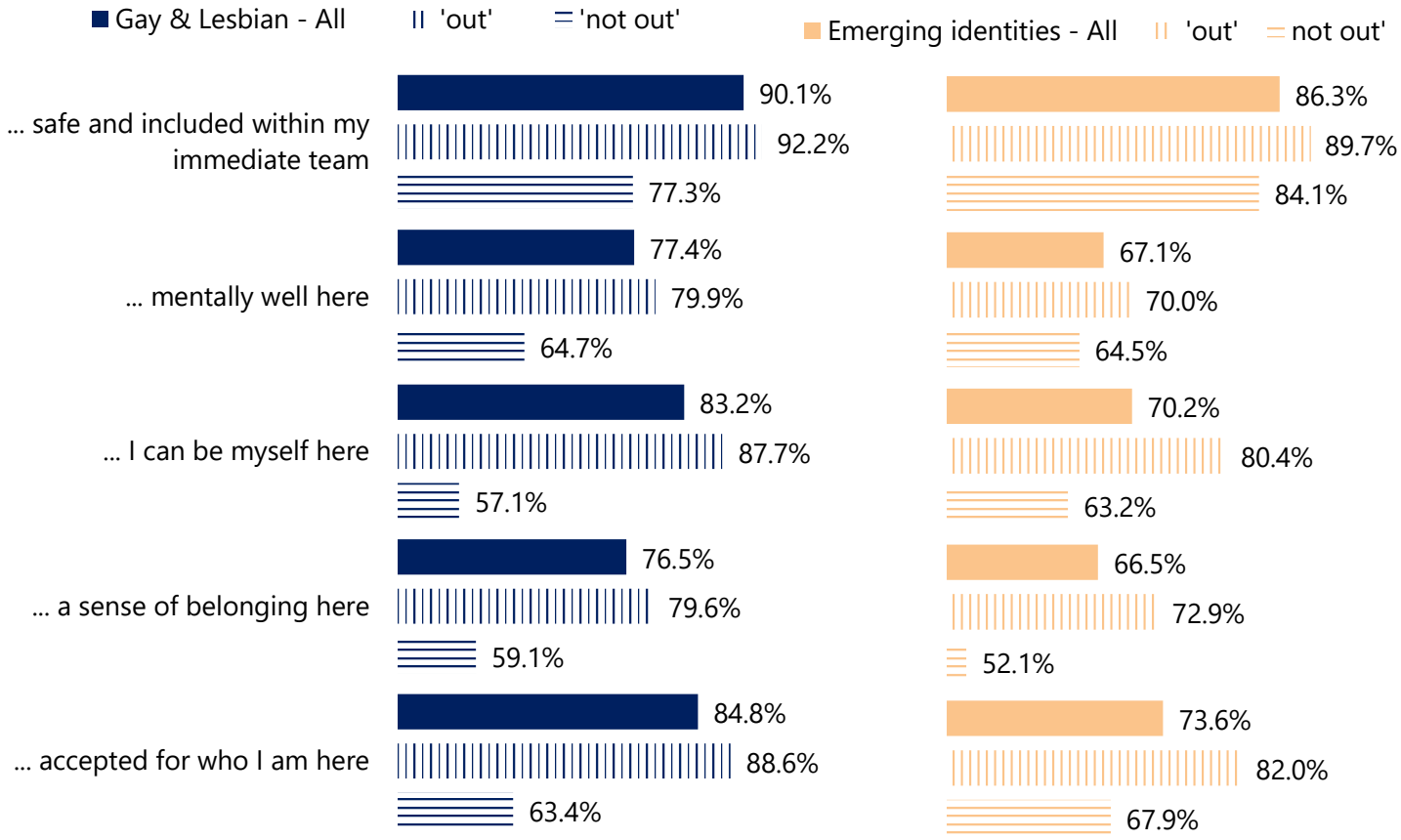
Wellbeing disparities

Respondents identifying with emerging sexual orientation as a whole are reporting lower levels of agreement across all workplace wellbeing and engagement measures, with the most significant differences being;

- 14.6% less likely to feel they can be themselves in the workplace
- 12.9% less likely to feel mentally well &
- 12.3% less likely to feel a sense of belonging or feel accepted for themselves.

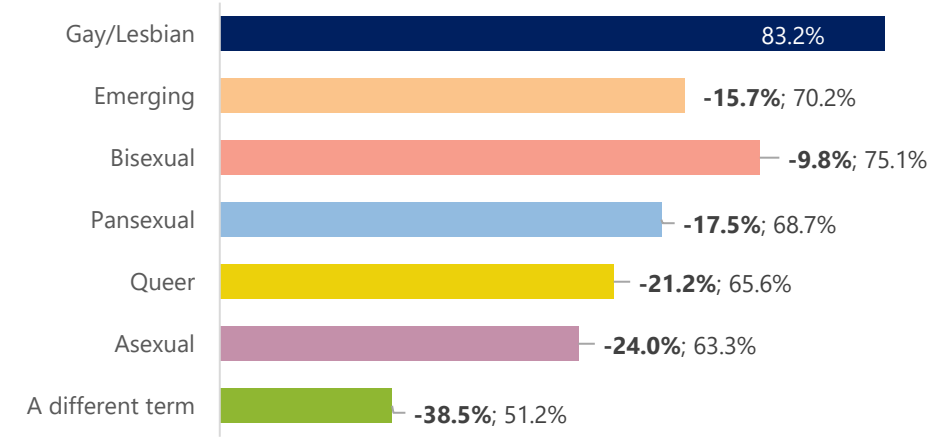
Organisations who proactively seek to understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ employees who do not identify as gay or lesbian now, can improve the environment not only for current employees but those who are yet to enter the workforce

Workplace wellbeing is lower for respondents with emerging identities



Taking just the idea of being able to be themselves in the workplace, we can see the differences between the individual orientations compared to gay/lesbian respondents, with disparity of agreement most significant amongst respondents who identify with a different term than those listed, being 38.5% less likely than gay and lesbian colleagues to feel that they can bring their whole selves to work.

I feel I can be myself here



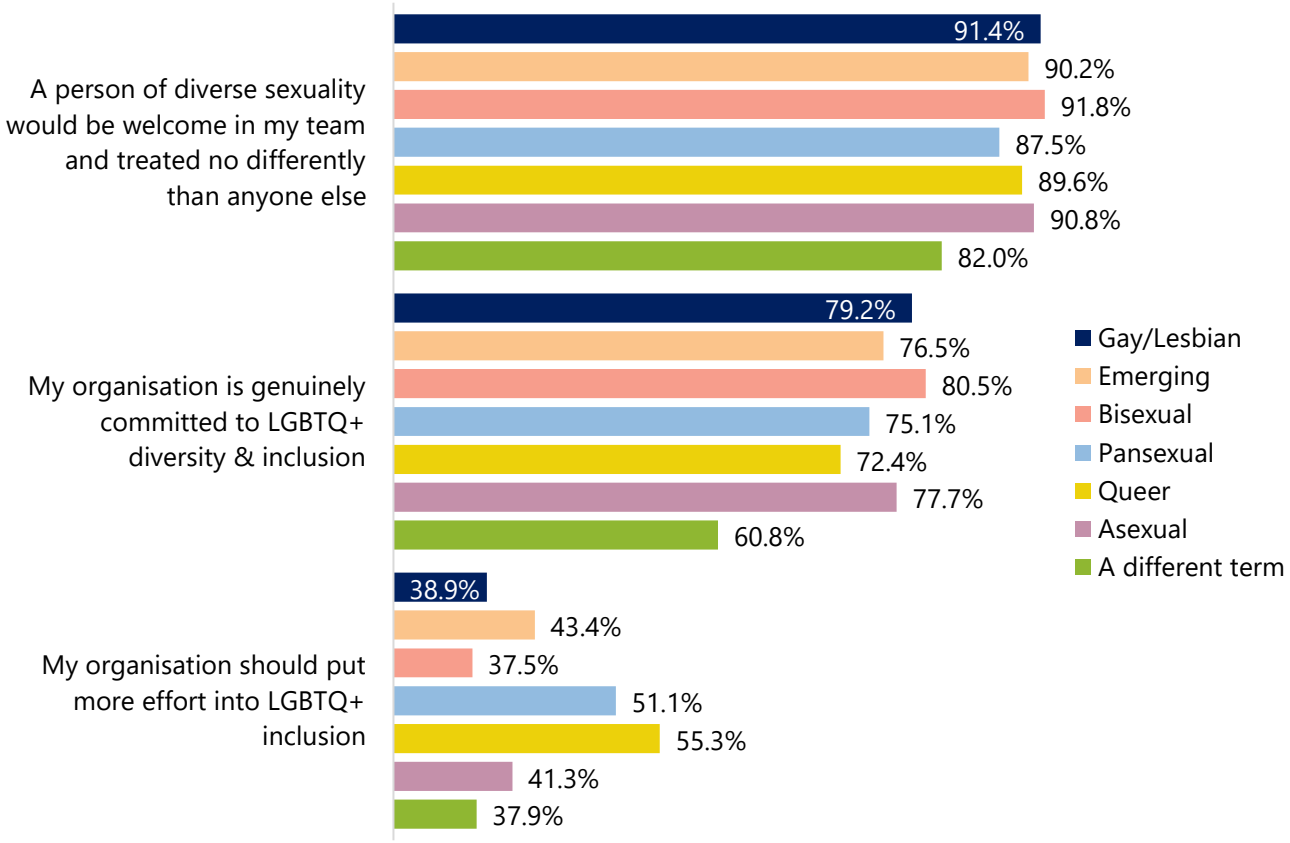
KEY: **%less likely than gay and lesbian**; Total %agreement for the cohort

Recognising these disparities is important but seeking to identify what is contributing to this. This is where combining wellbeing and outness can support action.

Organisation inclusion

Compared to respondents who identify as gay or lesbian;

- Agreement that "a person of diverse sexuality would be welcome in the team and treated no differently than anyone else" is
  - 4.3% less likely for pansexual respondents &
  - 10.3% less likely for respondents identifying with a different term
- The perception that their organisation is genuinely committed to LGBTQ+ diversity and inclusion
  - 8.6% less for queer respondents
  - 23.2% less likely for respondents identifying with a different term
- Agreement that the organisation needs to put more effort into LGBTQ+ inclusion
  - 31.5%more likely for pansexual respondents &
  - 42.2% more likely for queer respondents



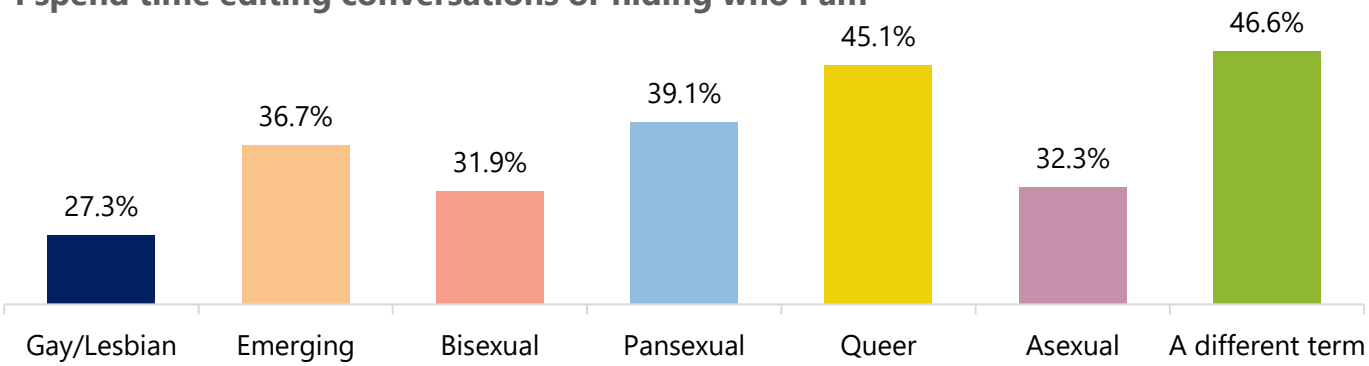
LGBTQ+ experiences of organisational inclusion

A key indicator of inclusion is whether people feel comfortable being open about their lives at work. This is not about expecting or encouraging people to disclose personal information, but about creating an environment where they feel safe to do so if they choose.

This data suggests that respondents from the emerging cohort are more likely to modify or withhold aspects of themselves in the workplace;

- 34.5% on average,
- increasing to 65.2% for respondents identifying as queer &
- 70.7% for those identifying with a different term.

I spend time editing conversations or hiding who I am

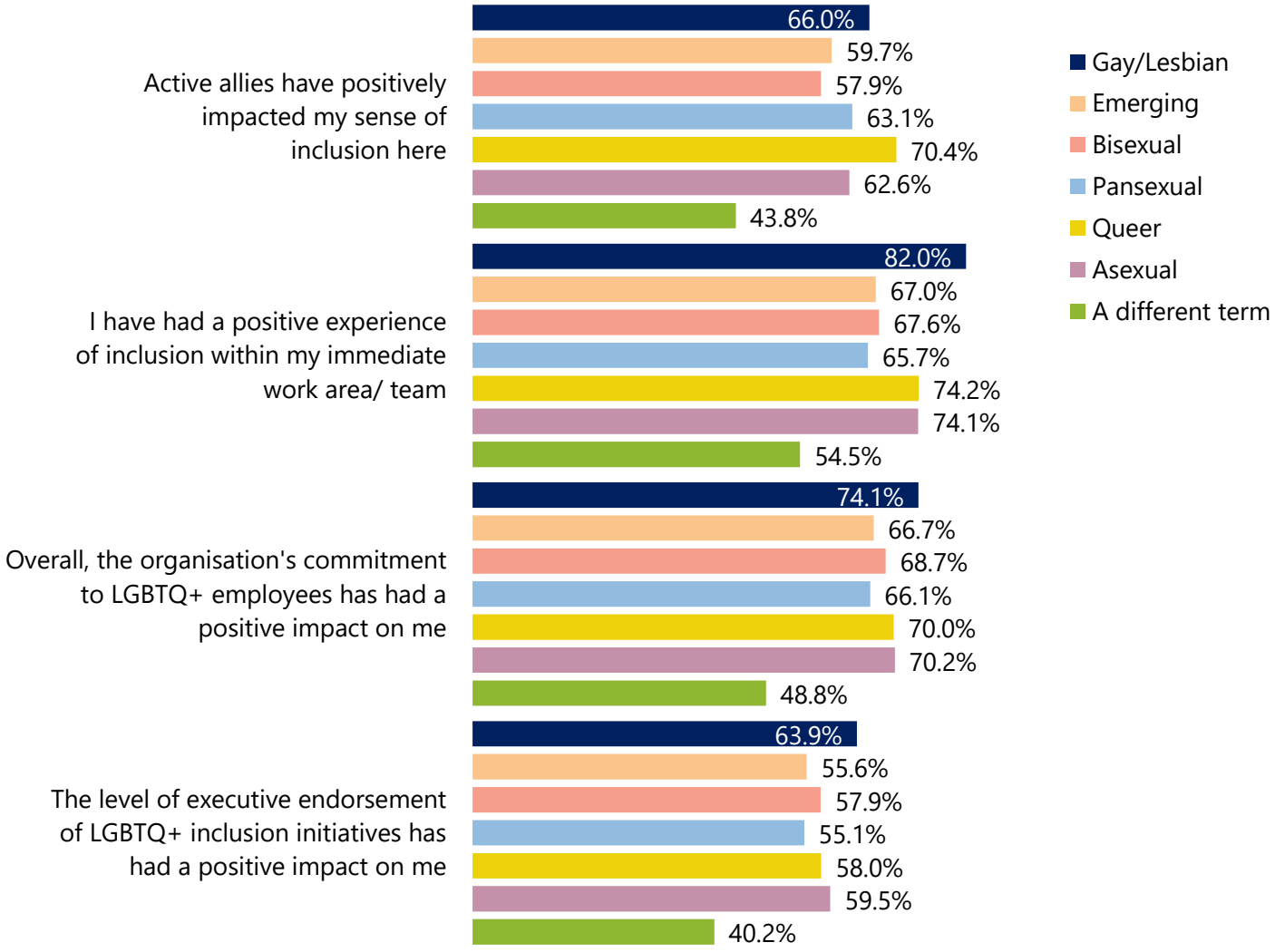


In areas where organisations have the most significant influence, such as the visible executive endorsement and active allies, gay and lesbian respondents are more likely to feel the positive impacts. Within respondents of emerging identities, this year;

- Queer respondents are the most likely to feel the positive impact of active allies and have had positive experiences of inclusion in their team.
- Asexual respondents were most likely to feel that the level of executive endorsement had a positive impact on them and that the organisation's commitment overall had a positive impact on them.

An impact of these positive experiences is that employees feel they do not need to edit conversations to hide parts of their identity in the workplace.

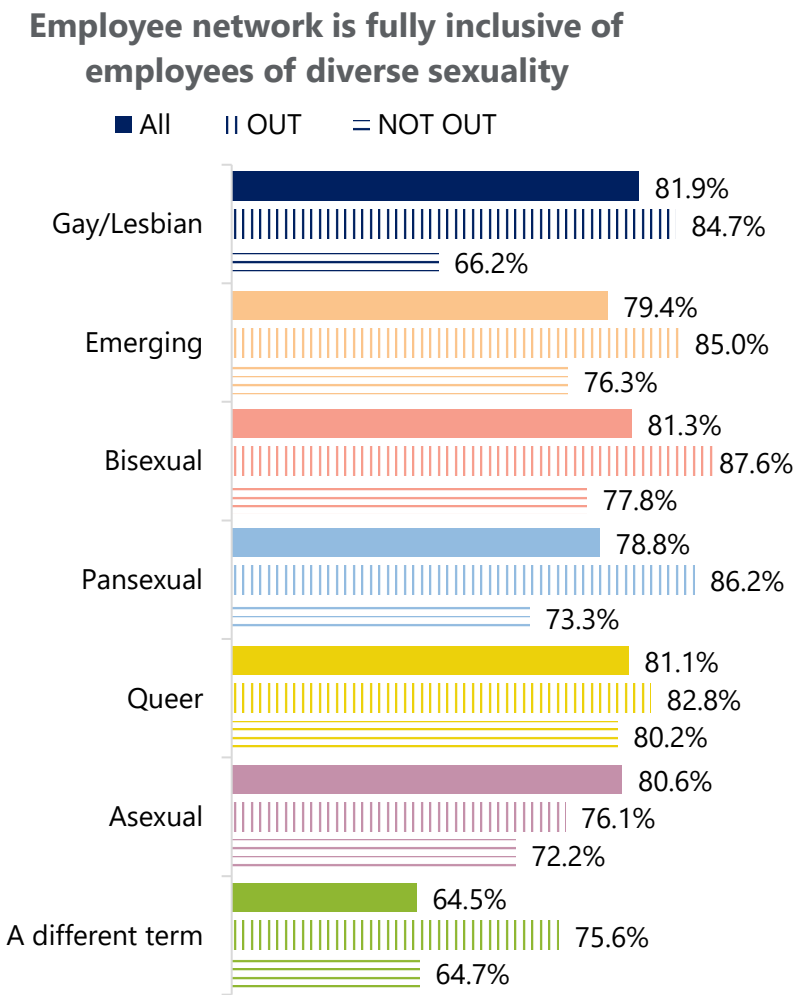
Differences in organisation impact



LGBTQ+ Network inclusivity

Respondents within emerging orientations are less likely to feel that their employee network is inclusive of all employees of diverse sexuality, possibly because they themselves do not feel that they would be welcomed or included.

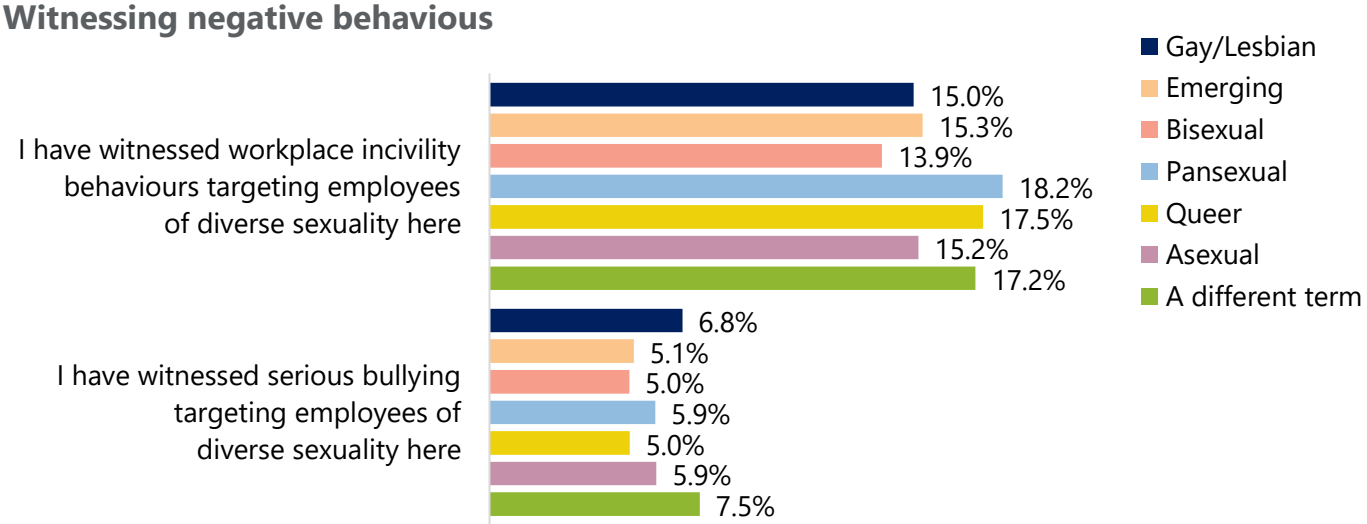
Without strong visibility of inclusion for people who sit outside the gay and lesbian cohorts, they may be less inclined to participate in networks, unless they are specifically invited, and feel safe outing themselves as part of the LGBTQ+ community rather than an ally for the community.



Response to bullying and harassment

Respondents who identify with emerging identities are more likely than gay and lesbian respondents (except for bisexual respondents) to have witnessed workplace incivility towards people of diverse sexuality, with up to 31% more agreement. This could include asking inappropriate questions of people of diverse sexuality, using terminology inappropriately, or questioning a person's sexuality and right to belong in LGBTQ+ spaces.

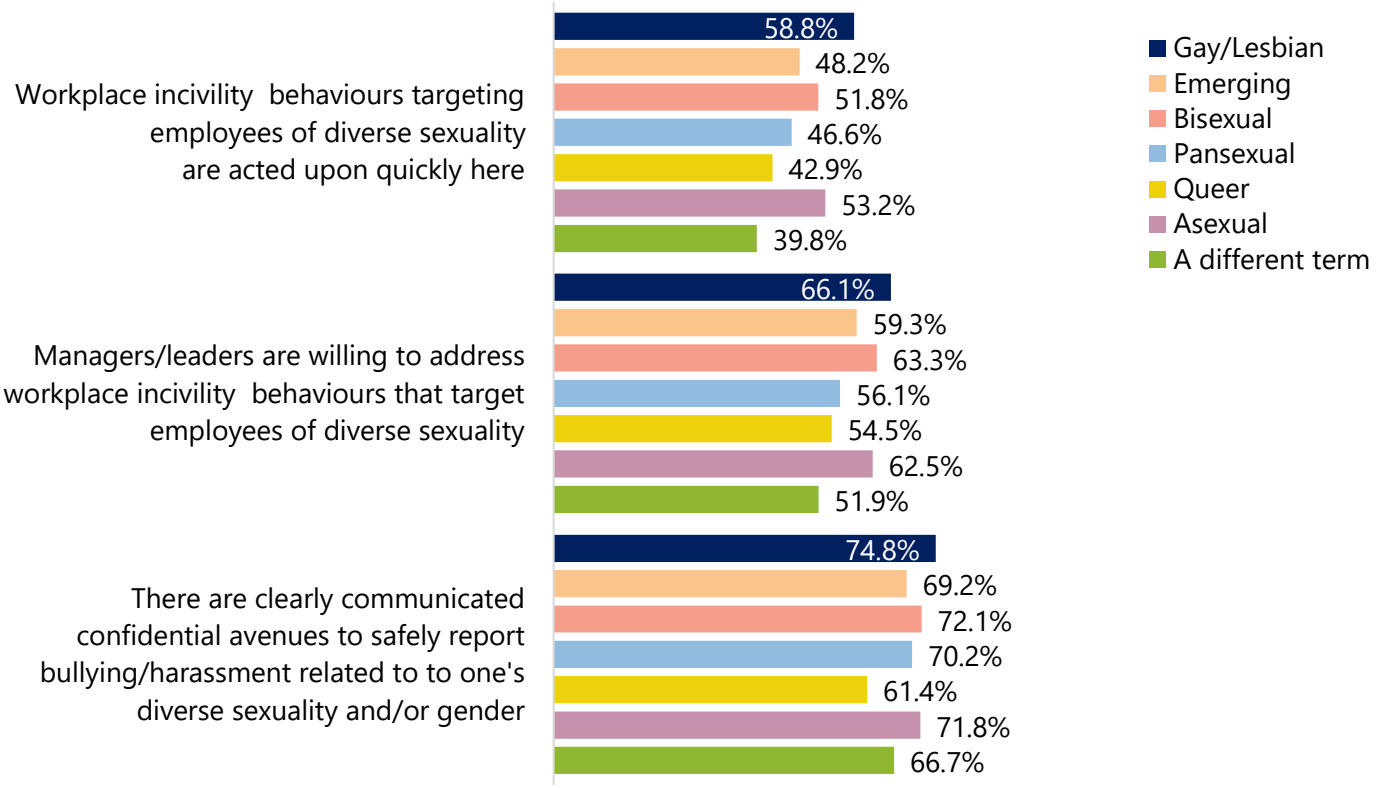
Regarding serious bullying targeting employees of diverse sexuality, only respondents who identify with a different term are more likely to agree they have been the target of negative behaviours than gay and lesbian respondents.



The perception of organisations' action shows all emerging identities are less likely to feel that bullying behaviours will be addressed quickly (between 9.6% and 32.3% less likely), that managers are willing to address behaviours (between 4.2% and 21.5% less likely) and that there are confidential avenues in which to report bullying (between 3.7% and 17.9% less likely)

Employees, particularly managers and leaders, need to understand the evolving nature of sexuality and, therefore, what may constitute bullying, specifically incivility in the workplace.

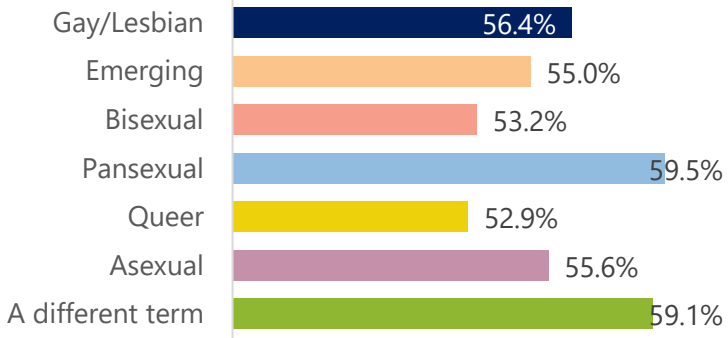
Organisation inclusion



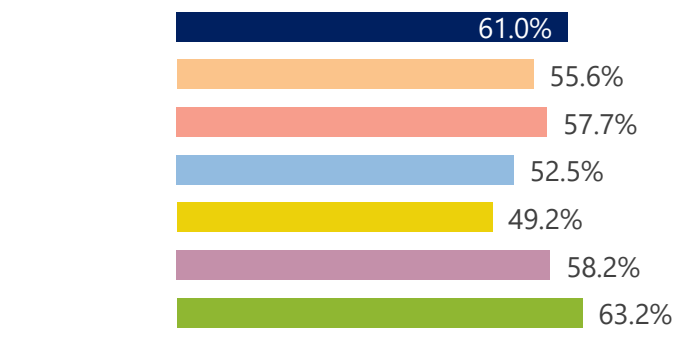
When it comes to calling out or reporting bullying and harassment behaviours, compared to the average of all respondents from emerging identities, gay and lesbian respondents are;

- 2.5% more likely to personally call out and/or report workplace incivility behaviours
- 9.8% more likely to personally call out or report serious bullying behaviours

Action taken - incivility behaviours witnessed



Action taken - serious behaviours witnessed



There are some individual differences within the emerging identities cohorts. Pansexual respondents are more likely than gay and lesbian respondents to have called out incivility behaviours, and respondents who identify with 'a different term' are more likely than gay and lesbian respondents to have called out incivility or more serious bullying behaviours.

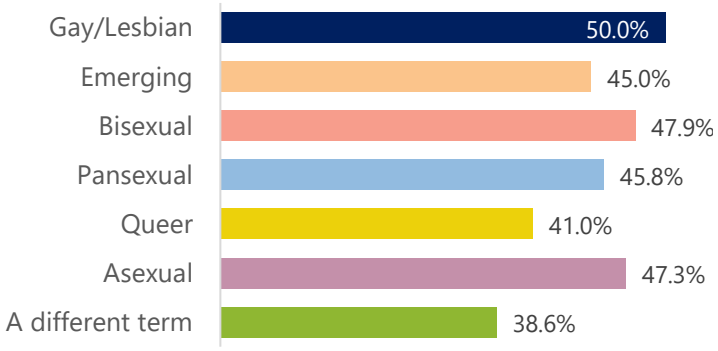
Visibility of role models

Over many years, data has shown that LGBTQ+ employees with LGBTQ+ role models in their organisation are more likely to feel comfortable bringing their whole self to work.

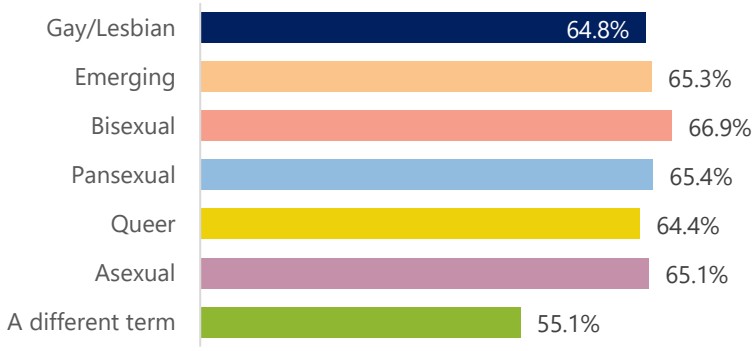
Overall, respondents with emerging orientations agree that they have role models in areas other than their executive or leadership Team at similar rates to gay and lesbian respondents, apart from those identifying with a different term.

However, visibility of a role model in the executive is less likely across all emerging orientations, with up to 22.8% lower agreement.

Visability of role models in executive



Role models elsewhere



Actions

1. **Explicitly include emerging identities in all LGBTQ+ inclusion work**: Ensure language, communications and programs directly reference bisexual, pansexual, asexual, queer and other identities, rather than relying solely on umbrella terms.
2. **Actively invite participation in networks and initiatives:** Move beyond passive inclusion by explicitly inviting employees with emerging sexual orientations into networks and events, recognising that visible inclusion drives engagement.
3. **Review and update inclusion frameworks:** Audit policies, training and communications to ensure they reflect the full diversity of sexual orientations and do not unintentionally centre only gay and lesbian experiences. For example, avoid framing inclusion solely through "same-sex relationships", which not only limits the understanding of diverse identities and experiences but conflates sex and gender.
4. **Build capability across managers and leaders:** Equip leaders with practical understanding of evolving sexual orientations, including how to respond to disclosure, challenge assumptions, and create inclusive team environments.
5. **Challenge assumptions linked to 'straight-passing' relationships:** Embed inclusive language practices that do not rely on perceived identity, particularly when discussing partners, relationships or personal lives.
6. **Increase diverse visibility and representation:** Ensure role models, speakers and network leadership reflect the diversity of LGBTQ+ identities, including those outside gay and lesbian cohorts.
7. **Strengthen organisational responses to incivility and bullying:** Build confidence in systems by ensuring inappropriate behaviour is addressed consistently, visibly and effectively, and that reporting pathways are trusted.
8. **Improve visibility of executive commitment:** Encourage leaders to clearly and explicitly communicate support for the full spectrum of LGBTQ+ identities and experiences, reinforcing organisational accountability.
9. **Use data to identify and respond to emerging gaps:** Regularly assess differences in experience across sexual orientations and tailor inclusion strategies to address identified disparities.

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Pride in Diversity (2026). Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) Employee Survey. ACON's Pride Inclusion Programs