

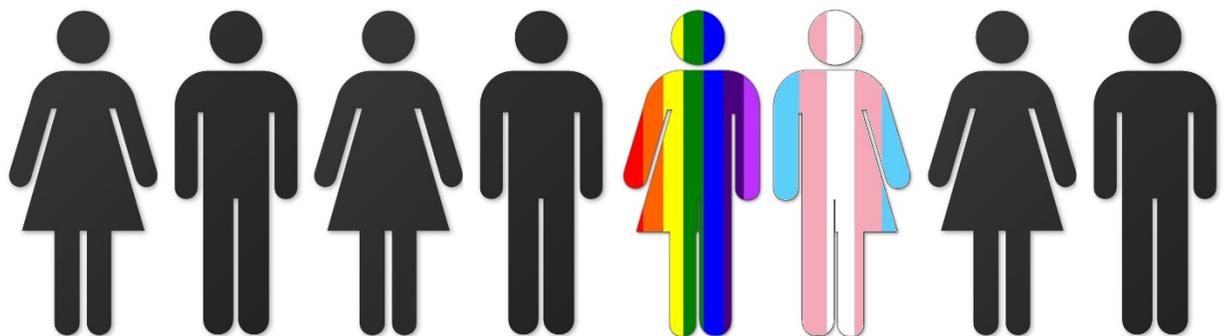


**Canadian** Centre for Diversity and Inclusion  
Centre **canadien** pour la diversité et l'inclusion

# In&out

Diverging Perspectives on  
LGBT Inclusion in the  
Workplace

produced in partnership with:



The Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion wishes to acknowledge the generous support of its **Founding 25 Employer Partners.**





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The authors of this report would like to thank all of the respondents who participated in the online survey on LGBT+ Self-Identification. Their willingness to offer personal insights into the Canadian landscape of work experiences for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans-identified (LGBT+) individuals made this report possible.

It is important to acknowledge that this report was developed and written by many voices, including individuals who identify as LGBT+, and heterosexual/cisgender. Because this report attempts to represent the shared experiences of participants of many identities (and the authors only represent a few), the authors have used direct quotations from respondents and constructed the findings based on the responses as much as possible. By doing this, the authors

are trying not to impose too much of their own privileged identities on the writing.

Some quotes have been truncated for space, or slightly modified for proper grammatical format or to remove potentially identifying information of respondents.

The authors would also like to acknowledge the support of many organizations and individuals who assisted in distributing our survey. Although too numerous to mention them all here, we especially want to acknowledge the support of: InMagazine, Out on Bay Street, Pride Toronto, and World Pride. Thanks to the tremendous response rate, this document represents one of the largest Canadian research studies of its kind.

## Authors and Editors.

This report was developed through the collaborative efforts of several individuals who assisted in the development of the online study, data management and analysis, and writing the report.

### Authors:

Thomas Sasso and Amy Ellard-Gray

**The Sexual and Gender Diversity Research Lab, University of Guelph**

### Editors:

Cathy Gallagher-Louisy and Michael Bach

**Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion**

Colin Druhan and Matthew Petersen

**Pride at Work Canada**

Questions regarding this report may be directed to [mail@ccdi.ca](mailto:mail@ccdi.ca).





## About the Authors.

### Amy Ellard-Gray

Amy Ellard-Gray is one of the co-founders of the Sexual and Gender Diversity Research Lab at the University of Guelph where she completed her undergraduate and master's degrees. She currently is a PhD student in the Applied Social Psychology program at the University of Guelph working with Dr. Serge Desmarais on the importance of LGBTQ+ allies in creating social and attitudinal change that decreases prejudicial behaviour. Her master's thesis explored institutionalized prejudice towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer teachers in Ontario. Amy's expertise includes gender perceptions of safety, identity and self-esteem, and social justice research. She currently serves on the board of directors of Out On The Shelf, a Guelph-based LGBTQ+ resource centre and library.

### Thomas Sasso

Thomas Sasso is a co-founder of the Sexual and Gender Diversity Research Lab. He received his master's degree at the University of Guelph, where he is currently a PhD candidate in Industrial and Organizational Psychology under the supervision of Dr. M. Gloria Gonzalez-Morales. He is an expert on sexual orientation and gender identity experiences in the workplace, workplace aggression and victimization, and work-life balance and integration. Thomas has served three years as a member of the LGBT committee of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, a division of the American Psychological Association. Formerly a practicum student at the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion, Thomas is the current vice president of the board of directors for HIV/AIDS Resources and Community Health (ARCH) in Guelph.

### Sexual and Gender Diversity Research Lab, University of Guelph

The Sexual and Gender Diversity Research Lab was co-founded by Amy Ellard-Gray and Thomas Sasso in December 2014 following an identified need for greater support for research related to sexual and gender diversity in Canadian contexts. The research lab is comprised of interdisciplinary faculty, graduate students, undergraduates, and community members interested in advancing high quality research locally, nationally, and internationally. The research lab is founded on the premise that researchers should strive to prioritize the importance of community and civic engagement with the pursuit of enhancing civil society.

The research lab became an affiliate with the Centre for Families, Work, and Wellbeing (the Centre) at the University of Guelph in January 2015. The Centre's mandate is to direct research to promote individual and family wellbeing, responsive and productive work environments, and strong sustainable communities. It provides an intellectual and operational home for individuals engaged in research, policy analysis, conferences, academic and community partnerships, and outreach and knowledge mobilization. More information can be found at [www.worklifecanada.ca](http://www.worklifecanada.ca).





## About the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion.

CCDI is a unique national charitable organization that has quickly become the trusted advisor on issues related to Diversity and Inclusion, and Human Rights and Equity management within Canada's workplaces.

Originally called the Canadian Institute of Diversity and Inclusion ("CIDI"), CCDI was founded in 2013 with one goal: to help employers create inclusive environments that are welcoming of all people. We help employers, business leaders, and HR and D&I practitioners effectively address the full picture of diversity within the workplace by providing innovative and proven strategies, research, tools, and educational supports with the goal of improving the overall inclusivity of their workforce.



In 2014, the then CIDI entered into a joint operating relationship with the Canadian Centre for Diversity ("CCD"); a 65+ year old charity with a focus on the elimination of bullying, bias and discrimination in Canadian High Schools. As of April 2015, CIDI and CCD have merged to form the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion.

Over the past two years, we have seen tremendous growth having signed nearly 70 Employer Partners as of the publication of this report. Clearly the uniqueness of our approach and the value of our offering is working for Canadian employers.

The CCDI's *Places of Work* mandate contains six key areas of expertise include the following:

- » **Partner Support.**  
Supporting our individual members and employer partners on their D&I journey. Providing engaging, productive networking and promising practice sharing events where business, HR and D&I professionals come together to share and learn.
- » **Education.**  
Practical, effective learning for leaders, management teams, Diversity Councils, Employee Resource Group leaders, HR and D&I professionals, and all people.
- » **Knowledge Repository.**  
A centralized eLibrary of D&I research, data, and promising practice information, exclusively available to CCDI members.
- » **Research.**  
Cutting-edge, exclusive research that will contribute to the Canadian conversation on diversity and inclusion.
- » **Legislative Support.**  
Providing practical experience to help employers with compliance related to current and future D&I related legislation (Employment Equity Act, AODA, etc.).
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Practical, credible, and sustainable consulting services specific to D&I in Canada provided by a team of subject matter experts with decades of experience delivering D&I work inside organizations.





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To learn more about the CCDI, please visit our website at [www.ccdi.ca](http://www.ccdi.ca).





## About Pride at Work Canada.

Founded in May of 2008, Pride at Work Canada was formed by a group of dedicated individuals with a vision: to improve the climate of inclusiveness for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-identified (LGBT) employees in Canadian workplaces. The founding partners of Pride at Work Canada sought to put the case for LGBT inclusion on the mainstream business agenda by winning the support of national and regional partners from across the country.



As a volunteer-led, not-for-profit organization, a Board of Directors, consisting of volunteers from across the country, governs the work of Pride at Work Canada. Two full-time staff members, based in Toronto, carry out the work of the organization, working closely with various committees and third party organizations to execute programs across Canada.

Pride at Work Canada is proud to work with over 65 employers that have made a commitment to LGBT inclusion. Pride at Work Canada supports that commitment through the following deliverables:

- » Advisory Services
- » Education, Awareness and Training
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- » Networking and Community Connections
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For more information about Pride at Work Canada visit [www.prideatwork.ca](http://www.prideatwork.ca).





## Introduction.

Produced thanks to a tremendous partnership with Pride at Work Canada, and the University of Guelph Sexual and Gender Diversity Research Lab, we are delighted to bring you this research report: *In & Out: Diverging Perspectives on LGBT+ Inclusion in the Workplace*.

The belief that sexuality and gender identity are not part of work experiences is a pervasive response from many heterosexual (and a few LGBT+) employees. Many people believe that sexuality and gender identity are private matters, and that is where discussion of that topic should end. The reality is that sexuality and gender identity are more complicated than whom one sleeps with or how a person presents, and it permeates work environments, often without conscious awareness.

Many people do not take into account the poignant linkage between sexuality and identity, nor how they bring their sexuality and identity to work with them every day without even realizing it.

Sexuality is present in the workplace when someone has a photograph of a significant other on their desk, when someone wears a wedding ring on their finger, and when someone talks about their family or what they did on the weekend with a partner. Sexuality is part of the workplace when we think about work-family policies, such as parental leave, partner benefits, and who is invited to social events. Sexuality is part of the workplace when we recognize that in many organizations there are institutionalized forms of discrimination embedded in our policies and practices, like gay men being paid less than heterosexual men, or a lesbian employee being passed over for a promotion.

Conversely, gender identity is often not talked about in the workplace at all, not because people believe gender does not exist in workplaces, but because many people have no sense about what



gender identity means. Employees and employers have been socialized to see the world as it relates to gender in binary – that is to say that there are only two genders – and when confronted with differing conceptualizations, many individuals are unlikely to engage. But discrimination in workplaces against individuals who do not identify as a cisgender man or woman is common. Trans-identified employees may not receive appropriate health benefits. They may not have access to a safe space or freedom to present their identity in a preferred fashion. Others may identify these employees by the wrong pronoun or name.

Sexual orientation and gender identity are important topics to be addressed within work environments, but most employers, coworkers, and clients are unaware of how to approach these topics. What can be asked? What are the best practices? How can employers talk about sexual orientation and gender identity in the workplace without infringing on people's privacy or making LGBT+ employees feel uncomfortable, in the spotlight, or tokenized?

This report seeks to provide organizations and individuals with information from the perspective of members of the LGBT+ communities across Canada, and to discuss the importance of creating a space within workplaces for LGBT+ employees to bring their full-selves to work, just as most heterosexual and cisgender employees do every day. It will





explore the topics of disclosure and self-identification at work, discrimination towards sexual and gender minorities in employment, and ways to create more inclusive and supportive environments for a group of employees who have often been marginalized to feel invisible.

Some notes about terminology. It can be confusing to keep up with the latest terminology when speaking about different groups of people in the diversity spectrum. In fact, there often is not agreement within these groups on the best terminology. For the purpose of this report, Pride at Work Canada has provided definitions of terms that will be used throughout the report, which we have captured in the next section. For the sake of clarity and brevity, throughout this report, we will refer to sexual and gender minority groups using Pride at Work's preferred abbreviation, LGBT+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans-sexual, Plus), recognizing that the '+' includes all the groups referred to in the Definitions section that follows.

Additionally, throughout this report, we have provided verbatim quotes from survey respondents to help illustrate and personalize some of the findings and to express individuals' lived experiences in their own words. For clarity, and to highlight the voices of our survey respondents, these quotes will be indented and in italic font.

One final note: we cannot underestimate the effort that goes into creating a report of this magnitude. We would like to express our deepest appreciation to Thomas Sasso for his work in developing the original survey, and to both Thomas and his colleague Amy Ellard-Gray from the University of Guelph Sexual and Gender Diversity Research Lab, for their work on data analysis and the initial draft of this report. We would not be here without their dedication and hard work.

We hope you enjoy and find value in this report. We look forward to bringing you more research reports through partnerships with community and academic stakeholders working in different realms of diversity and inclusion in Canada.

Michael Bach, CCDP/AP  
Founder and CEO  
Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion

*May 20, 2015*





## Understanding the **LGBTTIQQ2SA** Alphabet.

There is significant debate within the wider LGBT+ communities about labels and terminology, and that debate was never more apparent than through the comments received as part of the research for this report.

The acronym, sometimes referred to as ‘alphabet soup’, is rarely consistent and sometimes encompasses a very wide range of both sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions. Is it LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQA (and what does the “A” stand for?), LGBT+, LGBTQIAAP, or LGBTTIQQ2SA, just to name a few variations. There is no definitive answer.

As the LGBT+ community became more visible in the 1970s and 1980s, the common term of reference was simply “the gay community”. That quickly evolved to be inclusive of Lesbians (the gay and lesbian community), followed by inclusion of Bisexuals, and then ultimately Transgender people.

The acronym has continued to expand as people have started to understand their own identities better, and felt they didn’t fit into the available umbrellas of LGBT.

Transgender, for example, is not an inclusive term for all people who do not identify as cisgender. It is a very specific term referring to a very specific group of people. In 2007, when Pride at Work Canada was established, after consultation with some members of the Trans community, the “T” was amended to represent “Trans-Identified” as it was viewed as a more inclusive umbrella term for the broader Trans community (Transgender, Transexual, Intersex and Agender people).

The ‘A’ is also a source of great debate. Does it stand for “Allies” or does it stand for “Asexual” or “Agender”. Should allies even be included? There are significantly varying opinions on the subject, but we have chosen not to make a statement either way. We choose to be inclusive of all people.

As part of the research, we deliberately provided limited options for people to self-identify by their sexual orientation (asexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, heterosexual) and gender identity (female, gender non-confirming, male, trans, trans female, trans male, two spirit). For both questions, respondents had the ability to select ‘other’ and provide a write-in response. You will see in subsequent sections of this report that many respondents did this and the results are interesting.

If nothing else, it is clear that there is not just one LGBT community. There are many *communities* within the umbrella of the acronym LGBT.

Throughout this report we have chosen to use the acronym LGBT+ to represent the broader LGBT communities. This use is not a statement or opinion, nor should it be viewed as the end of discussion on the subject. It is in no-way intended to diminish or trivialize the experiences and opinions of people who identify with a letter that is outside of the ‘L’, ‘G’, ‘B’, or ‘T’. Far from it. We believe that people should have the right to use whatever terminology they choose. That’s why it’s called “self-identification”.

The use of LGBT+ as an acronym in this report is for simplicity, and is intended to represent all people who identify as being part of the “alphabet soup”.





## Definitions.

The following definitions are provided to assist the reader as they review this report. The definitions are not intended to be definitive or absolute. These definitions are generalized and open to interpretation.

### General Terminology:

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#### **Sexual Orientation:**

Emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. It is the attraction felt for others that defines an individual's orientation. One's sexual behaviour or sexual history does not define one's orientation. Sexual orientation is fundamentally different from an individual's gender identity or expression.

#### **Gender Identity:**

Each person's internal and individual experience of gender. It is their sense of being a woman, a man, both, or neither. Gender identity may differ from an individual's birth-assigned sex. Gender identity is fundamentally different from an individual's sexual orientation.

#### **Gender Expression:**

A person's public presentation of their gender. This can include behaviour and outward appearance such as dress, hair, make-up, body language, and voice. A person's chosen name and pronoun are also common ways of expressing gender.

#### **Ally / Allies:**

An ally is a heterosexual and/or cisgender person who supports equality for LGBT+ people, and who challenges heteronormativity, cis-centerism, heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia and transphobia.

### Sexual Orientations:

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#### **Asexual (noun or adjective):**

An asexual person is someone who does not experience sexual attraction. Unlike celibacy, which people choose, asexuality is an orientation and an intrinsic part of identity.

#### **Bisexual / bi (adjective):**

The term bisexual is an adjective, not a noun, describing people who are emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to men and women. An individual does not need to have

had sexual experiences with both men and women to identify as bisexual.

#### **Gay (adjective) or Lesbian (noun or adjective):**

The term gay is an adjective, not a noun, describing people whose emotional, romantic, and/or physical attraction is to people of the same sex. Lesbian is often a preferred term for women who are gay.

### Gender Identities and Expressions:

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#### **Cisgender (adjective):**

A term used as the counterpart to transgender. It indicates someone who identifies with their

birth-assigned gender. It is preferable to talk about birth-assigned gender rather than the gender one was born with.





**Trans-Identified, Transgender or Trans (adjective):**

An umbrella term referring to people with diverse gender identities and expressions that differ from stereotypical gender norms. It includes, but is not limited to, people who identify as transgender, trans woman, trans man, transsexual, cross-dresser, gender non-conforming, gender variant, or gender queer.

**Genderqueer, Non-binary, or Gender Non-conforming:**

Catch-all terms that many use to describe gender identities other than those of man and woman. Implies an overlap of, or indefinite lines between, gender identity.

**Intersex:**

A general term used for a variety of medical conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male.

**Transition:**

The process one goes through to discover and/or affirm their gender identity. This can, but does not always include, taking hormones, having surgeries, or going through therapy. There is often an unfair focus on physical transformation, despite treatments and surgeries not being a prerequisite to identifying as trans.

**Terminology used in both Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities:**

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**Queer:**

An umbrella term used by some to speak broadly about people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Originally used exclusively in a pejorative sense, to describe LGBT+ people, it has been re-appropriated by some to establish a political identity. Although, as seen in this report, some sexual and gender minorities prefer to identify themselves as queer, it should be noted that some consider it to be a divisive and/or offensive term.

**Questioning (adjective):**

A term used to describe those who are in a process of discovery and exploration about their identity and can refer to one's sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof.

**Two-Spirit or 2-Spirit:**

A modern umbrella term used by some indigenous North Americans who also identify as being part of the LGBT+ communities.





## Research Methodology and Respondent Demographics.

Many of the research projects and toolkits produced by the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion start with a request from an Employer Partner. Our mandate is to serve the needs of our Partners, to help address the issues and challenges they are facing in their workplaces.

In late 2013, a CCDI Employer Partner asked if we could gather benchmarking information on the prevalence of employers collecting demographic data about LGBT+ employees, and if available, the percentage of LGBT+ employees in the workforce. We undertook a survey seeking information from employers, and although there was some useful information, we found many inconsistent and unverifiable responses. In 2014, the CCDI entered into a partnership with Pride at Work Canada, and the University of Guelph Sexual and Gender Diversity Research Lab to redesign and refine our approach to collecting this information, seeking responses from LGBT+ individuals on their experiences.

The research presented in this report emerged from an online survey conducted from December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014 to January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015. Respondents answered 24 open-ended and multiple-choice questions. The survey was available in both of Canada's official languages.

Advertisement for participation in this survey was distributed through the social media networks of the CCDI and Pride at Work Canada, our respective Employer Partners, community agencies, and academic associations. Following the completion of the online survey, participants were encouraged to forward the survey link to friends and colleagues to increase access of the survey across platforms and social

circles. Although the focus of the survey was to understand the experiences of sexual and gender minorities, individuals belonging to dominant groups (e.g., heterosexual and cisgender individuals) were also encouraged to participate as a comparison group.

In total, 1542 total respondents completed the online survey, of which 1410 identified as Canadian. For the purposes of this report, we have excluded the responses from those outside of Canada. This is to ensure that the data is reflective of Canadian experiences and not countries which may have different policies and protections related to sexual orientation and gender identity. The survey received responses from across Canada, although the majority of all respondents were from Ontario (57.5%).

Of the Canadian respondents, 896 (65.2%) identified as sexual minorities and 479 (34.8%) as heterosexual. In terms of gender identity, 117 (8.3%) individuals identified with a gender identity other than cisgender male or female. Figure 1 shows the proportion of sexual and gender minority respondents.

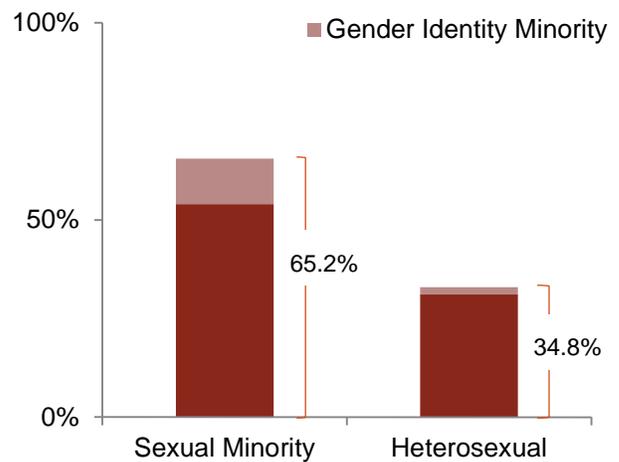


Figure 1: Respondents by Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.





In Figure 1 (previous page), the pink bar represents the proportion of sexual minority or heterosexual respondents who also identified as a gender identity minority.

When examining the demographics intersectionally (looking at individuals' sexual

orientation and gender identity together), 108 respondents identified as both a sexual orientation and gender identity minority. The full breakdown of respondents' sexual orientation and gender identity can be found below in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

**Table 1. Respondents by Sexual Orientation**

Asexual	31 (2.1%)
Bisexual	170 (11.6%)
Gay	414 (28.2%)
Heterosexual	491 (33.4%)
Lesbian	238 (16.2%)
Other	125 (8.5%)
Total	1469 (100%)

*Note: Of the total respondents, 35 chose not to respond to this question and 80 (5.4%) identified with more than one sexual orientation. This is why the total here does not equal 1410.*

Many respondents provided an “other” identity that was not listed in the survey. Other gender identities included androgynous, third gender, non-binary, genderqueer, and gender fluid. When asked about sexual orientation, 125 respondents provided an “other” identity.

**Table 2. Respondents by Gender Identity**

Female	785 (52.1%)
Gender non-conforming	64 (4.2%)
Male	565 (37.5%)
Trans	17 (1.1%)
Trans female	15 (1.0%)
Trans male	13 (0.9%)
Two-spirit	22 (1.5%)
Other	25 (1.7%)
Total	1506 (100%)

*Note: Of the total respondents, 6 chose not to respond to this question and 75 (5.0%) responded with multiple gender identities. This is why the total here does not equal 1410.*

Interestingly, the two most common labels written in were “queer” and “pansexual”. The written responses were organized into 22 unique identities, which are captured in the word cloud below.





### Race and Ethnicity

The survey also asked about other demographic characteristics of respondents. Less than a quarter of the sample identified as a racial or ethnic minority, and 3.6% identified as Aboriginal, First Nations, or Indigenous. Figure 2 shows the proportion of racial and ethnic minority, and indigenous respondents.

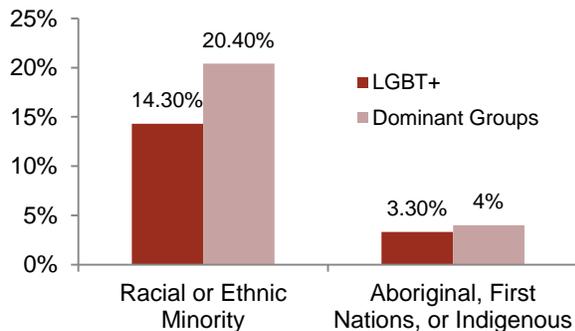


Figure 2: Proportion of Racial and Ethnic Identities.

### Age

The survey captured the experiences of individuals from all age groups (i.e., young adult to senior). More than half of respondents were between the ages of 25 and 44. Few respondents were younger than this (13.1%) and even fewer were 55+ (8.6%).

The 65 and over age group was underrepresented (0.5%), but this reflects the expected drop in workforce participation among individuals aged 65 and older. Figure 3 shows the age distribution of survey respondents.

### Occupations

In terms of the type of occupations represented, respondents worked in a cross section of Canadian employment sectors, although most were in business (34.3%), education, law, or social and government services (29%) or sales (9.4%). Over three-quarters of respondents identified as working full-time, but only 15.7% were in management roles.

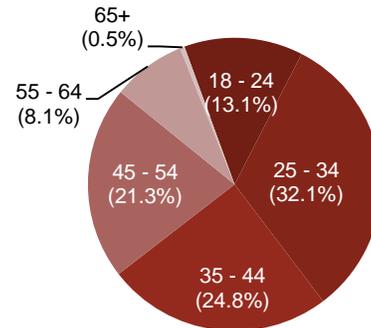


Figure 3: Age Distribution of Respondents

### Education

When asked about the highest level of education achieved, over 90% of respondents had completed some form of post-secondary education, including 42% completing a college or university program, and nearly 30% working on or having completed a professional or graduate degree. Figure 4 lists the educational level of survey respondents.

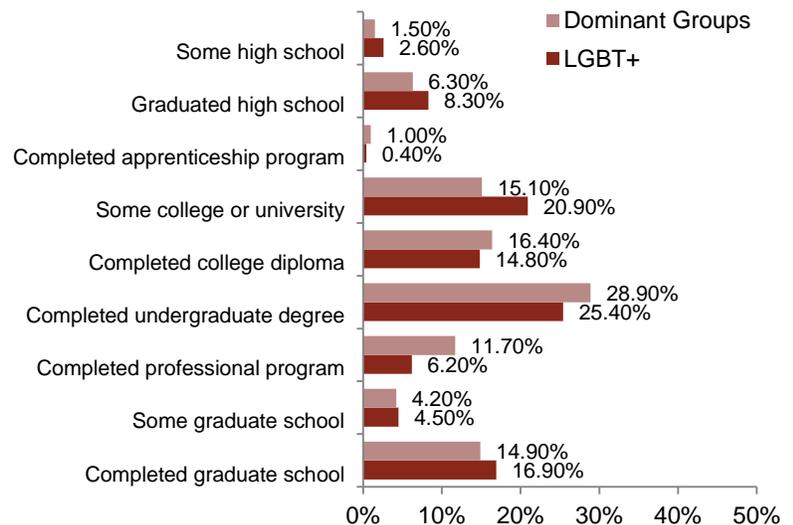


Figure 4: Respondent Education Level.





## Research Findings.

Based on the responses to the survey questions, several issues were identified as areas that require greater attention or improvement within the Canadian work context. These responses have been synthesized into the following themes.

### Disclosure and the Importance of Being “Out” at Work.

“I had steady employment for 40 years, then I was "outed" and unemployed for the past five years due to Transphobia. I hope that my gender identity is slowly becoming a "non-issue", but I don't say anything anymore.”

Location: *Ontario*  
Gender Identity: *Trans Female, Gender Queer*  
Sexual Orientation: *Bisexual*  
Racial Identity: *Caucasian*  
Age: *45 to 54*  
Status: *Canadian Citizen*

Yet, most who identify as heterosexual or cisgender are already inadvertently “out” with their identity, likely without even knowing it. They may wear a wedding ring, have a photo of their significant other on their desk, talk openly about their spouse, or display other indications of their heterosexuality and cisgender identity. Because heterosexuality and cisgender identity are normalized in our society, for many in these dominant identity groups, it would never occur to them to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity or even have to consider whether to disclose.

There was significant divergence between the dominant groups – heterosexual and cisgender – and LGBT+ identified individuals on the importance of being out. As illustrated in Figure 5, many people in the dominant groups downplayed or did not understand the importance of being out at work.

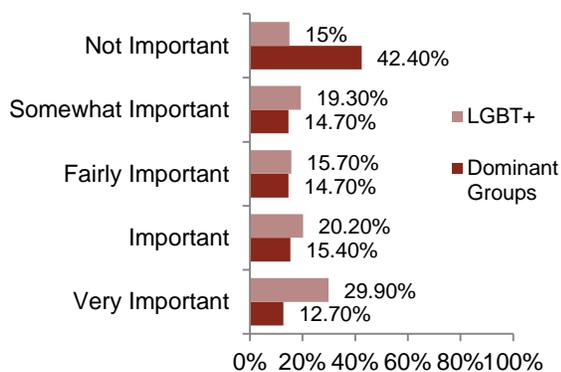


Figure 5: Importance of Being "Out" at Work.

For those who are LGBT+ identified, whether to disclose at work can be a daunting consideration. If the workplace is not inclusive or welcoming of LGBT+ individuals, they may

“There are often many work functions during the year and it's nice to be able to bring a partner. If you don't feel you can, or it is assumed you have a partner of the opposite sex, then you feel different and left out of being able to fully participate in the function. As well, having to hide talking fully about your partner and trying to leave gender out of conversations with co-workers and bosses [is difficult].”

Location: *British Columbia*  
Gender Identity: *Female*  
Sexual Orientation: *Lesbian*  
Racial Identity: *Caucasian*  
Age: *35 to 44*  
Status: *Canadian Citizen*



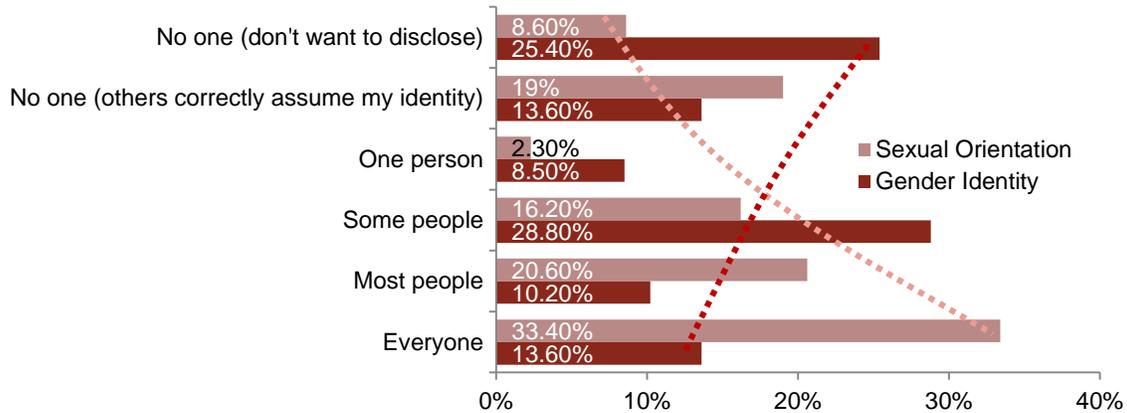


Figure 6: Disclosure of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity at Work

not feel comfortable disclosing. Figure 6 illustrates the responses of LGBT+ individuals when asked to whom have they had disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity at work.

The dotted ‘trend lines’ in Figure 6 denote the trend of a higher level of self-disclosure of sexual orientation and less self-disclosure of gender identities. Although gender identity minorities are more likely to keep their identities hidden than to fully disclose in the workplace, there is a peak in the number of gender identity minorities who have disclosed to “some people”.

A consideration for employers: while there is no definitive research on exactly how many LGBT+ people there are in Canada, let alone in the world, if you have a significant number of employees and no one is “out” at work,

employers should ask themselves what about the culture or environment of their workplace is deterring people from disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity. A few things to consider:

- » Are there potential barriers in place for LGBT+ people in gaining employment with the organization?
- » Are your recruiting processes such that people do not feel comfortable coming out during the interview and then continue to be closeted once they get hired?
- » Does your organization have an external reputation as not being open and inclusive for LGBT+ people, and as such, people from different sexual orientation and gender identity groups choose not to apply?





## Oversimplification of LGBT+ Identities.

Identity is a complex topic for individuals, particularly when the identities we are talking about have been marginalized from inclusion in our education systems and public dialogues, as has been the case with LGBT+ individuals. Some people in our workplaces may have never had a discussion about sexual orientation or gender identity or even knowingly interacted with someone who identifies as LGBT+. Because people may be unfamiliar with these issues, their first encounter might be uncomfortable and might not be handled well. When these experiences occur, they can create confusion, exclusion, or even hostility. That is why it is so important that employees be educated about sexual orientation and gender identity in the workplace.

Many respondents noted that the ignorance about these topics is often a reason that people do not talk openly about sexual orientation or gender identity, because they want to avoid inadvertently offending someone else. Furthermore, asking about something like sexual orientation or gender identity may be perceived as an invasion of privacy.

Additionally, because the expression of sexual orientation and gender identity may appear to be less visible in the workplace than other identities, people may be more likely to assume that supervisors, coworkers, and customers/

clients are cisgender and heterosexual because it is easier than questioning long held beliefs or assumptions.

This entire issue can be boiled down to a lack of knowledge within the workplace regarding how to be inclusive, how to communicate about diversity, and how to challenge one's assumptions about "normalcy." This lack of understanding in the workplace is illustrated by one of the study's respondents, who commented:

"...I'm out at work as a 'lesbian' to those who know me, but I don't actually identify as such. It'd just be way more complicated to explain that I'm married to a trans woman and I identify as queer..."

Location: *Ontario*  
Gender Identity: *Female*  
Sexual Orientation: *Queer*  
Racial Identity: *Caucasian*  
Age: *Not Specified*  
Status: *Canadian Citizen*

Education can be as simple as sharing the definitions of different sexual orientations and gender identities (as seen earlier in this report) with your workplace to help them understand the variances that exist beyond their own personal experiences.





### Fear of Discrimination.

“In education, especially in rural areas, [ORGANIZATION NAME REMOVED] studies have found that fear of harassment prevents teachers from being out, despite legal and policy protections.”

Location: *Ontario*  
Gender Identity: *Male*  
Sexual Orientation: *Bisexual*  
Racial Identity: *Caucasian*  
Age: *45 to 54*  
Status: *Canadian Citizen*

It is important to realize that when we talk about discrimination towards LGBT+ people, there are two primary issues we need to consider. The first is the fear of discrimination occurring based on one’s identity (discussed here) and the second is the experience of discrimination (discussed in the next section).

When we address fear of discrimination we need to realize that LGBT+ individuals have historically been the victims of systemic and interpersonal discrimination and violence, and much of that discrimination persists today in all areas of one’s life. Focusing solely on workplace

experiences, despite human rights protections, individuals have been fired for being LGBT+ identified (or even for being perceived to be LGBT+). They have been passed over for promotions, mentoring opportunities, and certain work tasks. LGBT+ employees have received lesser pay for their work, experienced harassment and violence in the workplace, and social rejection and isolation. These situations continue to occur around the world and across Canada.

Existing in a world where such forms of discrimination occur, there is little wonder why LGBT+ individuals may continue to fear identity-based discrimination. Not knowing how someone will respond to the disclosure of an LGBT+ identity can lead to anxiety and stress. Before every interpersonal interaction, LGBT+ identified individuals must ask themselves if there is a risk of being subjected to physical, relational, verbal, or institutional aggression from coworkers, supervisors, or clients. The experience of one respondent underscores some of the most intense fears faced by LGBT+ individuals.

“I work in an industry that is primarily males, therefore I keep my sexuality to myself in fear of discrimination among coworkers and superiors but also out of fear of corrective rape that has been threatened before in most of my heteronormative jobs.”

Location: *Ontario*  
Gender Identity: *Female*  
Sexual Orientation: *Pansexual*  
Racial Identity: *Caucasian*  
Age: *25 to 34*  
Status: *Permanent Resident*

“... I am out to all my colleagues but I do not disclose to all my clients because I do not know them all very well. While my employer is LGBTQ + friendly, a negative reaction from clients could affect my work in negative ways that my employer cannot necessarily control.”

Location: *Ontario*  
Gender Identity: *Male*  
Sexual Orientation: *Queer*  
Racial Identity: *Racial Minority*  
Age: *18 to 24*  
Status: *Temp. Foreign Worker*





## Homophobia and Transphobia versus Heterosexism and Cis-centrism.

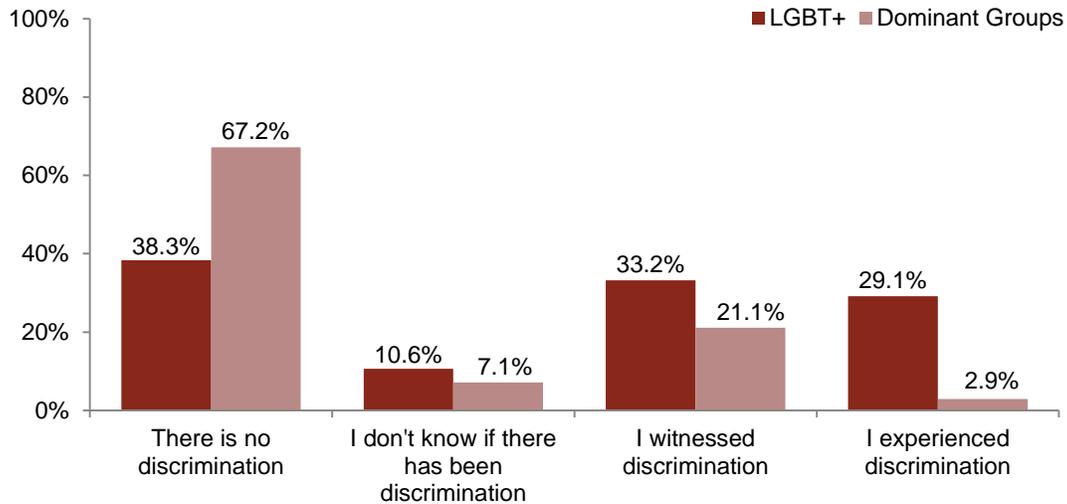


Figure 7: Discrimination: Awareness and Experience

Not surprisingly, respondents who identify with a dominant sexual orientation and gender identity reported that they experience less discrimination (2.9% vs. 29.1% among LGBT+ individuals). As illustrated in Figure 7 these respondents also reported witnessing less discrimination (21.1% vs. 33.2%), and were almost twice as likely to report that there is no discrimination in their workplace (67.2% vs. 38.3%).

These findings suggest that individuals who are part of dominant identity groups are overall less aware of the systemic discrimination faced by sexual and gender minorities.

More sexual minority respondents reported that there is no discrimination within their workplace (38.3%) than those who reported experiencing discrimination (29.1%). However, it is important to consider that many who have not directly experienced discrimination are still witnessing discrimination against others. Furthermore, those who have not been discriminated against also may be protecting themselves from

discrimination by choosing to not disclose their orientation.

Of those who have experienced or witnessed discrimination toward LGBT+ people, approximately one third of LGBT+ employees reported it happening at least a few times a month. Figure 8 (next page) displays the frequency of discrimination reported by survey respondents.

“I feel that being out at work has resulted in the termination of my contract at two different social service agencies. Both positions were high-level advocacy roles. Both times it felt as though my termination was rushed through by unsympathetic employers.”

Location: *Ontario*  
Gender Identity: *Female Gender non-confirming, Two Spirit*  
Sexual Orientation: *Queer*  
Racial Identity: *Aboriginal*  
Age: *25 to 34*



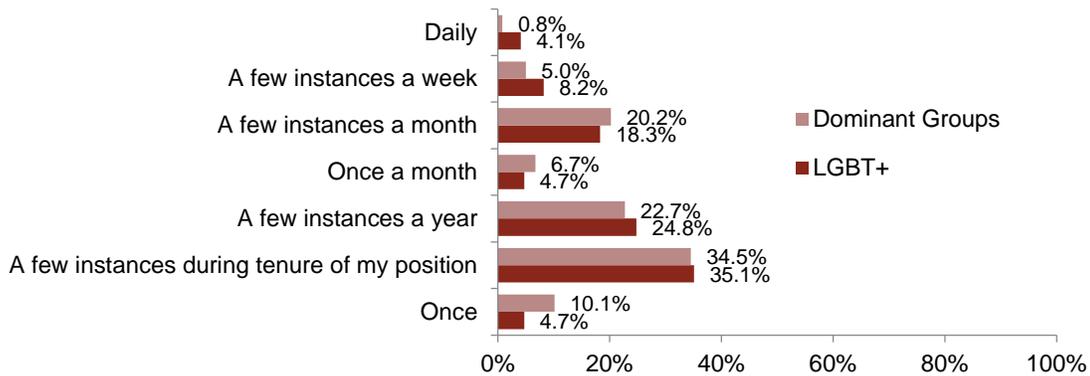


Figure 8: Frequency of Discrimination

Additionally, the open-ended responses highlighted that issues of heterosexism (the assumption that individuals are heterosexual) and cis-centrism (the assumption that individuals are cisgender) are becoming more of a concern to LGBT+ employees.

Many who are part of dominant identity groups are not recognizing their privilege and how this marginalizes and discriminates against sexual and gender minority populations. A quote from one heterosexual survey participant highlights this phenomenon:

“Everyone has the right to be who they are whether straight or LGBT+ . I don’t feel that anyone should feel the need to tell everyone they are not straight. Who cares what people’s sexual interests are as that should not matter at all. I do not run around saying I am heterosexual to everyone...this should be a non-issue.”

Location: *Ontario*  
Gender Identity: *Female*  
Sexual Orientation: *Straight*  
Racial Identity: *Caucasian*  
Age: *25 to 34*  
Status: *Canadian Citizen*

The comment illustrates a common sentiment in our society. Individuals who are part of dominant groups often do not see that their

“There needs to be more training in organizations and the workplace on heteronormativity and heterosexual privilege because I have never experienced intentional homophobia. It’s more just ignorance and little things said here and there that bother me in the workplace.”

Location: *Ontario*  
Gender Identity: *Female Gender non-conforming*  
Sexual Orientation: *Queer*  
Racial Identity: *Caucasian*  
Age: *18 to 24*  
Status: *Canadian Citizen*

identities are normalized, and frequently being enacted even without the labels of heterosexual or cisgender being stated. Thus, they are “out” without even being aware of it. When a cisgender female needs to use a washroom and does not consider that the gender identity she presents to others in the office makes it easier to use a gendered washroom, she is ignoring cisgender privilege. Every time a heterosexual male mentions his “wife” at work he is broadcasting his heterosexuality.

When heterosexism and cis-centrism are reinforced, and the privilege of these identities is not acknowledged, it makes it potentially harder for LGBT+ individuals to feel safe to disclose or enact their identities.





### Misunderstanding of Gender Identity.

“People are sometimes openly transphobic because trans people are the ones who it is still socially acceptable to ridicule.”

Location: *Ontario*  
Gender Identity: *Female*  
Sexual Orientation: *Queer*  
Racial Identity: *Caucasian*  
Age: *Not Specified*  
Status: *Canadian Citizen*

Many respondents expressed that gender identity is still a topic that employers, coworkers, and clients do not understand, and also indicated that there is a lack of awareness or knowledge regarding what gender identity is and how it is expressed. Out of convenience, gender identity and sexual orientation have often been discussed together, but in doing so, we are losing sight of the uniqueness of these separate identities. There is a significant difference between the experience of someone who identifies as trans or with another gender minority, as compared to someone who identifies as cisgender and as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or with another sexual orientation minority group.

The lack of education around gender identity issues in the workplace is concerning as these forms of ignorance further perpetuate forms of exclusion or discrimination against people with a minority gender identity. These forms of exclusion might include, but are not limited to, an inability for someone to present as the gender they identify with, or an employer being unwilling to offer individuals the opportunity to use their preferred pronoun or preferred name on documentation or during interactions.

It is important for organizations to educate their workforce around the complexity of gender identity for the sake of understanding and inclusion. Not to do so is to allow ignorance and exclusion to fester. The quote to the left captures the unique experiences for individuals with a minority gender identity perfectly.

It also should be noted that LGBT+ Employee Resource Groups need to pay attention to whether or not they are being inclusive of the broader communities or if there is too much focus on sexual orientation and not enough on gender identity. LGB people (who identify as cisgender) need to step outside of their experiences and understand the specific challenges of their trans-identified colleagues.

“Being secretly trans-identified, and wondering if I’ll be fired when I eventually start hormone therapy, being told by past professionals at school that I’ll never be able to be openly transgender at work, worrying that I’ll never find a job in my field because of my gender identity... it’s been the most isolating thing I could ever imagine. It has left me feeling more alone and prone to depression/anxiety than ever before.”

Location: *Quebec*  
Gender Identity: *Gender non-conforming, Trans male, Female-assigned-at-birth, genderqueer*  
Sexual Orientation: *Queer*  
Racial Identity: *Caucasian*  
Age: *18 to 24*  
Status: *Canadian Citizen*





### Organizational Resistance to Disclosure.

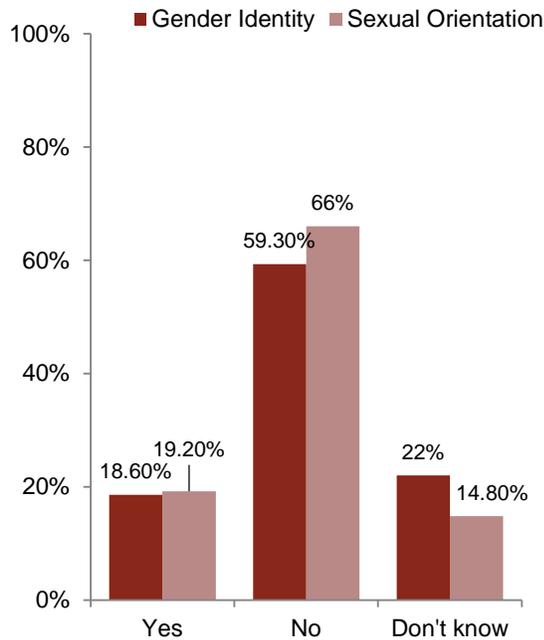


Figure 9: Opportunity to Disclose

A large majority of both sexual orientation minority and gender identity minority respondents reported that their workplace did not formally provide them with an opportunity to disclose their identities. A much smaller percentage (less than 20% of both groups) said that their workplaces did provide an opportunity for disclosure.

Particularly in the case of gender identity minorities, the lack of opportunity to formally disclose may explain in part why so many of these respondents are not “out” at work (25.4%), or have only disclosed to a small number of individuals. Figure 9 shows LGBT+ respondents’ reports of whether their employer provided a formal opportunity to self-identify.

When asked why employers do not provide the opportunity for self-identification at work, participants overwhelmingly indicated privacy concerns as the most significant barrier. The

second most prevalent response was an unwillingness of organizations to acknowledge the LGBT+ populations in their workplaces, followed by fear of legal reprisal, legal limitation to data collection in different jurisdictions, and limited resources for data collection. Figure 10 outlines the responses.

Many respondents indicated that they felt employers are often ignorant about the importance of gender identity and sexual orientation as a component of diversity and inclusion programs. Another consideration raised was that employers are reluctant to ask, because knowing the stats will require some form of organizational change.

Many employers already dedicate resources to collecting demographic data about their organization. However, CCDI’s 2013 report on diversity measurement in Canadian organizations (*What Gets Measured Gets Done: Measuring the ROI of Diversity and Inclusion*) found that – of those that measured – most employers were only collecting demographic information about the four categories protected under Employment Equity legislation: women, Aboriginal people, visible minorities, and people with disabilities. Thus, although the resources and capabilities exist for employers to collect more information, many organizations are making decisions based on incomplete or inaccurate information about their workforce.

Legal limitations are often cited as a reason not to collect employee data. Yet, many people misunderstand the legalities of collecting data. Many organizations – not required to under Employment Equity legislation – conduct extensive demographic data collection about their workforce in full understanding of legal requirements and privacy protocols. As long as employees are informed about where the





information is being stored, how it will be used, and they have a choice whether or not to answer, it is perfectly legal to ask the questions.

Diversity and inclusion practices must be conducted legally, fairly, and with respect and care for all the individuals represented within the

organization, and that should include LGBT+ employees. That said, the value of measurement cannot be understated. A measure of success as it relates to how inclusive your workplace may be for LGBT+ people can come from demographic representation of these groups.

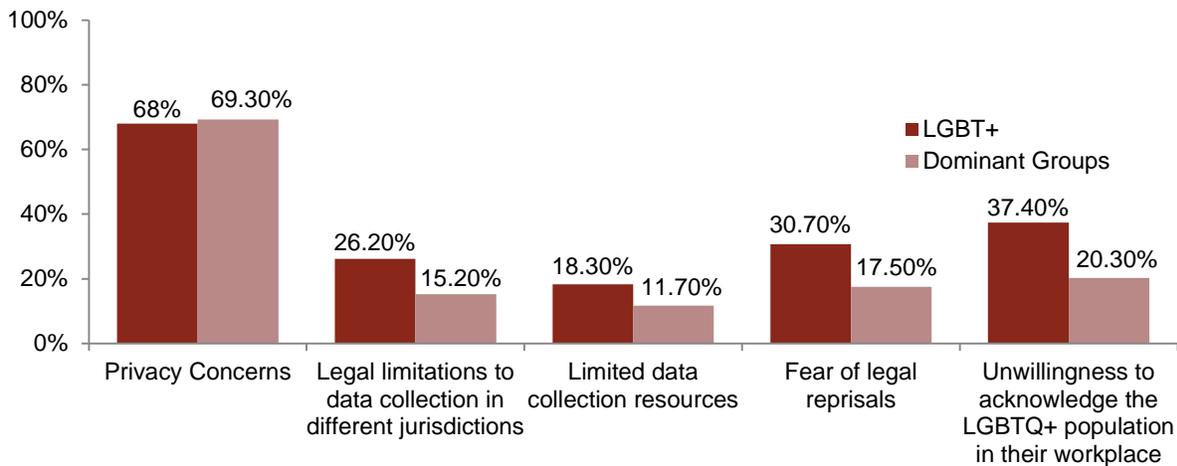


Figure 10: Perceived Barriers for Employers to Provide Opportunities for Disclosure





## Conclusions and Recommendations.

In addition to the issues facing LGBT+ employees in the workplace raised by respondents, the research surfaced multiple recommendations for how employers can improve inclusion for LGBT+ identified individuals.

### Autonomy in LGBT+ self-disclosure

#### Provide Opportunities.

The most common input from respondents was that sexual orientation and gender identity minority populations should receive the same privileges and opportunities within Canadian workplaces as heterosexual and cisgender employees. In fact, 75% of LGBT+ respondents and nearly 70% of heterosexual and cisgender respondents agreed with the statement that employers should provide employees the opportunity to self-identify at work. Only 6.3% of LGBT+ respondents and 10.5% of heterosexual and cisgender respondents reported that employers should not provide an opportunity for self-identification. However, in practice, less than 20% of LGBT+ respondents have been given the opportunity to self-identify

in their workplace. Figure 11 shows respondents answers to the question: *Should employers provide employees the opportunity to self-identify as LGBT+ at work?*

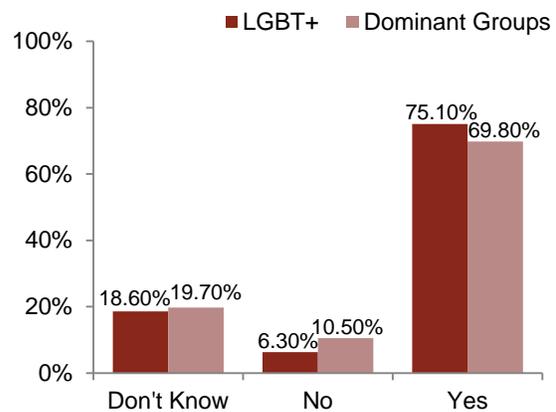


Figure 11: Perception of whether LGBT+ employees should be provided opportunity to self-identify.

“Employers “should” provide employees the opportunity self-identify as LGBT+, but they should not do it in a way that puts the individual in the spotlight amongst their peers, or in any way that is objectifying, othering, or tokenizing. This has to be done sensitively and in a way the employee is personally comfortable with.”

Location: Ontario  
Gender Identity: Male  
Sexual Orientation: Open to anyone  
Racial Identity: Racial Minority  
Age: 25 to 34  
Status: Canadian Citizen

LGBT+ individuals should have the opportunity to self-identify or disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity in the workplace without pressure or fear of persecution. However, recognizing that discrimination still occurs towards LGBT+ people, many respondents cautioned that if a workplace offers a formal opportunity to disclose, it must be done appropriately with attention to privacy and confidentiality protocols, and it must be voluntary. The individual must have the final choice regarding disclosure without any expectation or pressure.





### Build Trust Before Expecting Disclosure.

Other respondents cautioned that trust must be built between the employee and the employer before self-disclosure can be expected. An organization that does not have an inclusive culture, or where there have been incidents of homophobia or transphobia in the workplace, cannot reasonably expect disclosure from LGBT+ employees. Employers should strive to create an inclusive environment and be clear

about expectations around respectful behaviour in the workplace to begin to establish that trust. One survey respondent recommended that it would be appropriate for the employer to mention the diversity programs in place for all groups to illustrate the opportunities for inclusion instead of expecting self-disclosure before trust has been built.

### Communicate the Purpose and Privacy Protocols for Demographic Data Collection

It is also necessary for an organization to reflect on why they are providing individuals the opportunity to self-identify. The rationale must be communicated to their employees so they can determine if self-disclosure is appropriate for them. It is also vitally important to inform employees about where the data will be stored, who will have access to it, what they intend to do with it, and what confidentiality and privacy protections are involved in the data collection.

An organization that allows individuals to self-identify in a diversity census, but does nothing with that data to meet the needs of these employees, is going to risk losing the trust of their employees. In fact, this kind of action could create an adverse response from LGBT+ individuals who may feel cheated or tricked. Equally, employees may be reluctant to self-identify if they are unsure who has access to

their personal data. Recognizing the potential risk of disclosure in some situations, employees should be assured of safety and provided the choice to determine what is best for them in terms of disclosure, how they choose to disclose, and to whom they wish to disclose.

Ultimately, the opportunity created for self-disclosure should be intended to help ensure that LGBT+ employees are treated equally, are enabled to communicate their unique needs, and be included fully in the workplace. If the employer demonstrates a sincere commitment to improving inclusion, then the process of data collection may be perceived more favorably and may enable greater employee engagement.

More on data collection can be found at [www.diversitycensus.com](http://www.diversitycensus.com).





## Formal Resources and Support Services.

### Act on the Data.

As the quote from this respondent indicates, in creating a space for self-identification by LGBT+ individuals, the organization has more than a legal obligation; they are making a psychological contract with employees that they will use this information to create more inclusive workspaces.

Developing and providing resources and education for all employees are methods of fulfilling the implied contract to support LGBT+ employees.

“...Giving employees the opportunity to be out implies a responsibility for the company to provide strong protections from harassment and discrimination... (i.e., they would have to have strong policies in place AND act on them).”

Location: *Ontario*  
Gender Identity: *Male*  
Sexual Orientation: *Bisexual*  
Racial Identity: *Caucasian*  
Age: *45 to 54*  
Status: *Canadian Citizen*

### Establish Employee Resource Groups.

Employee Resource Groups (“ERGs”) – also known as affinity groups, employee networks, and many other names – have played an important role in creating safe space in organizations for individuals with a diverse range of identities, including LGBT+ employees. These ERGs have advocated for changes to organizational policies to make them more inclusive for LGBT+ employees, and have created opportunities to develop identity-based communities within workplaces.

53% of the total respondents worked in a Canadian organization that had an ERG-type group dedicated to LGBT+ individuals and allies to participate in. LGBT+ respondents were more likely to be part of the resource group if one was available, but most LGBT+ respondents reported being part of an organization that did not have an ERG.

Figure 12 illustrates the prevalence of LGBT+ ERG’s and respondents’ involvement in them.

Results of this survey revealed that a majority of sexual minority employees were not aware of an LGBT+ employee group within their organization (55.8%). Although heterosexual-identified individuals are generally able to join and contribute to LGBT+ employee groups as allies, they were much less likely to belong to such a group (23.3%) even if they reported having access to one (46.8%).

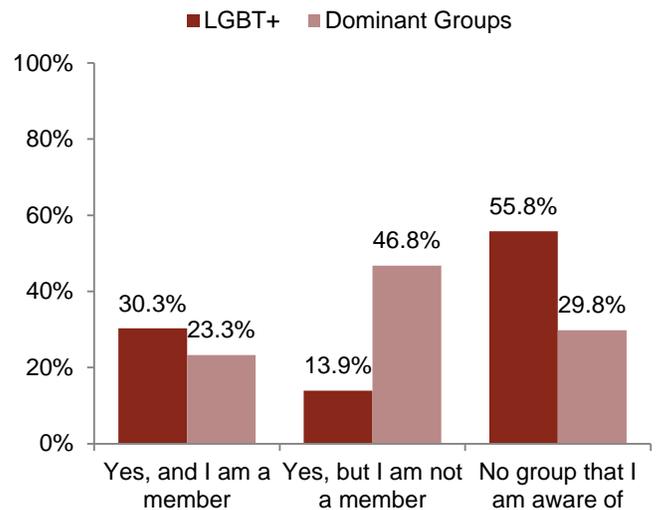


Figure 12: LGBT+ Employee Resource Groups





### Provide Additional Resources and Services to Promote Inclusion.

Respondents were eager for more resources and services to be provided for employees who identified as LGBT+ or allies in order to create safe spaces for learning, support, and community building. Examples that an organization could implement include:

- » Bringing in guest speakers to talk about diversity and inclusion as part of employees' professional development,
- » Supporting employees who want to initiate an LGBT+ and ally ERG,
- » Encouraging employees to participate in, or engage with local LGBT+ organizations and events,

- » Creating a diversity and inclusion strategy to address inclusion issues within the workplace, ensuring that LGBT+ issues are taken into consideration, and
- » Establishing diversity councils or committees to ensure there is accountability and cross-functional support to operationalize the strategy.

A significant number of respondents also expressed a keen interest in developing capacity for allies in workplaces. This will be discussed in a subsequent recommendation.





## Implementing Institutional Policies

### Ensure Policies Encourage Inclusion.

An organization may believe itself to be inclusive of sexual and gender diversity, but it is necessary to review all policies and procedures with a critical lens to assess what policies exist and what are missing, as well as any language in policies that may not be inclusive or create barriers or exclusions for LGBT+ individuals. It is also important to examine how policies are enacted and under what circumstances leaders, managers, and other employees are enabled to go “off policy”. For example, many employers have policies related to respectful behaviour in the workplace, but sometimes there are no consequences for violating the policy (assuming employees are even aware the policy exists).

As the example above illustrates, certain practices may not initially appear to create barriers for LGBT+ individuals, but upon greater reflection, it becomes apparent that these practices affect each individual differently. Even if an organization is not aware of employees that are LGBT+ identified, it should strive to create accessible and inclusive policies nonetheless. Just because they are not “out” in the workplace, does not mean they are not there. In fact, if an

### Multiple Benefits: Policies Educate Everyone.

When an organization creates sexual orientation and gender identity inclusive policies and practices that respect the broad spectrum of identities, not only do they support LGBT+ employees, but this also serves to educate other employees by creating dialogues and learning opportunities. If an organization has clear guidelines communicated for dealing with

“... I believe that systems should be set up so that people do not HAVE TO disclose [their sexual orientation gender identity] in order to be treated fairly. Systems should assume that people might be trans or might be gay, or might be bisexual (and so on). For example, always include a "preferred name" on forms and always have "partner, spouse" (or other non heterosexual/gender assumption) options. It should be the norm and not the exception.”

Location: *Nova Scotia*  
Gender Identity: *Trans Male*  
Sexual Orientation: *Queer*  
Racial Identity: *Caucasian*  
Age: *25 to 34*  
Status: *Canadian Citizen*

employer has a significant number of employees and no one is “out”, they should focus on why LGBT+ identified employees do not feel comfortable or safe to come out, rather than assuming they simply have no LGBT+ identified employees.

sexual orientation and gender identity-based harassment, and managers fulfill their responsibility to enforce these guidelines, employees will recognize the organizational value of inclusivity as genuine. These policies and practices must be reinforced at all levels, with leadership teams, supervisors, employees, and clients.





**Include Everyone.**

It is important for organizations to also realize that policies and practices for gender identity and sexual orientation should not just be for LGBT+ individuals; cisgender and heterosexuals should have the policies equally accessible to their gender identities and sexual orientations. Policies, practices and communications must recognize that all people have a gender identity and a sexual orientation, whether it is a minority identity or an identity that is part of the majority. Therefore, policies should be consistent for all individuals. As one respondent shared:

“I would feel offended for being asked because I feel like heterosexual people are not being asked to declare their identity. I personally just want to feel comfortable filling our HR medical forms and for my employer and coworkers to not assume that I am straight.”

Location: *Ontario*  
Gender Identity: *Female*  
Sexual Orientation: *Gay*  
Racial Identity: *Caucasian*  
Age: *35 to 44*  
Status: *Canadian Citizen*





## Organizational Culture Change.

### Create an Inclusive Organizational Culture.

“I believe that providing the opportunity to self-identify is important, but more importantly, organizations need to provide working environments where being your whole self is not intimidating. Creating environments where language is inclusive, diverse workplaces where you can see yourself in others, and internally/externally marketing an organization’s commitment to various diversity initiatives will provide meaning and significance to self-identification.”

Location: *Alberta*  
Gender Identity: *Female*  
Sexual Orientation: *Lesbian*  
Racial Identity: *Caucasian*  
Age: *25 to 34*  
Status: *Canadian Citizen*

“I feel that my queer identity is “invisible” – and there is no opportunity to disclose. It’s not even a lack of opportunity, it’s like the information is unwelcome and for some reason it makes people uncomfortable. People make assumptions about me daily and I have no choice but to just live with it. I feel my workplace is toxic.”

Location: *Ontario*  
Gender Identity: *Female*  
Sexual Orientation: *Bisexual*  
Racial Identity: *Racial Minority*  
Age: *25 to 34*  
Status: *Canadian Citizen*

In reinforcing the importance of creating and enforcing inclusive policies and practices, it is necessary for organizations to foster cultures of acceptance that are inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity minorities, along with other dimensions of diversity. If organizations want to be recognized as authentically promoting inclusion, efforts need to be taken to increase the quality, breadth, and impact of diversity and inclusion work.

The less inclusive a workplace is for individuals to work in, the more likely individuals will have experiences like one respondent (quote, top right). When employees feel that they are being excluded or ostracized based on their identification, they are less likely to be engaged in the work they do and more likely to leave the organization to seek employment in a more inclusive environment. This does not just affect the individual; an environment that is toxic to

one group is likely toxic to others as well. Furthermore, the toxic environment can spread throughout the entire organization and influence the reputation of the organization.

Creating an inclusive culture allows people to bring their whole selves to work and to not feel like they have to hide an important part of their identity. This contributes to feeling included and engaged, which leads to them being able to perform at their best.

It makes my job easier being able to bring my true self to work, not having to worry about who I am or hide who I am. Give me the power to do my job to the fullest being my full self.”

Location: *Manitoba*  
Gender Identity: *Male*  
Sexual Orientation: *Bisexual / Gay*  
Racial Identity: *Caucasian*  
Age: *18 to 24*  
Status: *Canadian Citizen*





### Review Training and Communications.

Not all current diversity-related learning and development, and communications are inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity, and if these topics are included, they are often dealt with superficially and lack priority in comparison to other topics. Organizations should review their learning and development and communications practices with an expert in the field to determine how adequate the current offerings are at representing the many forms of diversity.

Furthermore, diversity training should not be a one-time offering when someone starts with the organization or after a workplace discrimination complaint is filed. Employers should commit to developing a curriculum of diversity and inclusion training and embedding diversity and inclusion in other learning and communications programs across the organization. Better still, employers should consider linking the learning to performance outcomes to ensure the material is applied.

### Do Not Tokenize LGBT+ Employees.

The burden cannot be placed solely on LGBT+ individuals to motivate the organizational change for inclusivity or be the “go-to” people to speak on all matters pertaining to sexual orientation and gender identity. Individuals should not be tokenized for their identity to

represent an entire community. Organizational leaders, human resources professionals, and all employees have the responsibility to become educated on how to make an inclusive environment for LGBT+ employees and create a culture of acceptance.





## Encourage Non-LGBT+ Employees to be Allies.

### Develop and Encourage Allies.

Allies are important to LGBT+ communities. Access to supportive coworkers and supervisors who may not identify as LGBT+, but nonetheless support social and economic equality, are immensely important to create environments conducive to the inclusion and success of LGBT+ individuals.

When developing the online survey used to conduct this research, we strove to be as inclusive as possible of sexual and gender identities, English and French language translations, as well as heterosexual and cisgender allies. Yet, in our actions to be inclusive we made the mistake of, at times, including allies when we should not have. This emerged as an important learning for our work, but one that may also transcend into businesses and workplaces. As one participant noted:

“The A in LGBTQIA+ stands for Asexual/aromantic and or Agender. Straight/cis people, people who are not marginalized by their sexuality or gender identity, are not part of the acronym because they are not part of the group. Full stop. The point of an ally is that they stand outside queer spaces and keep marginalized people safe.”

Location: *Nova Scotia*  
Gender Identity: *Female*  
Sexual Orientation: *Bisexual*  
Racial Identity: *Caucasian*  
Age: *18 to 24*  
Status: *Canadian Citizen*

“I have a sister who has a trans-identified partner. I have found that there are a large number of my colleagues who also have LGBT+ siblings, so it’s an important point to share with those who may not have anyone LGBT+ in their lives, that you don’t have to be gay or lesbian or transgendered, in order to feel impacted by the implicit and explicit bias and discrimination around these identities that can crop up at work. For this reason, among others, I’m sure self-identification opportunities are important to non-LGBT+ identities as well.”

Location: *Ontario*  
Gender Identity: *Female*  
Sexual Orientation: *Straight*  
Racial Identity: *Caucasian*  
Age: *25 to 34*  
Status: *Canadian Citizen*

While the support of allies is critically important, in the process of developing or recognizing allies, it can never be at the expense of limiting the voices of those who are marginalized or discriminated against. It is a difficult dynamic to moderate, but an important piece for employers, and individuals who identify as allies, to understand. If we create a space that privileges ally voices over LGBT+ voices we are merely replacing one source of harm with another.

### Provide Advice for Allies:

Workplaces are perfect locations for providing safe spaces for people to be allies. As described

by the *It Gets Better* project, heterosexual and cisgender individuals can:





- » Create space for LGBT+ individuals to feel loved, accepted, and included without reservation.
- » Encourage the organization and employees to challenge commonly held assumptions of heterosexism and cis-centrism.
- » Act in support of others by asking the right questions about workplace practices and prompting organizational change as necessary.
- » Understand what they know and what they still need to learn about sexual orientation and gender identity.

- » Think critically about how to support LGBT+ individuals. Seek clarification about what kind of support LGBT+ individuals are looking for at work.
- » Stand up for LGBT+ rights in the workplace.
- » Teach others about how to be an ally and what being an ally truly means.

More information on the *It Gets Better* project can be found at [www.itgetsbetter.org](http://www.itgetsbetter.org).

### Allies Need Inclusion Too.

“I like being included in the acronym as an ally. I believe it encourages ‘heteros’ to step up and be true allies AND advocates for LGBT+ rights and responsibilities.”

Location: *Ontario*  
 Gender Identity: *Female*  
 Sexual Orientation: *Straight*  
 Racial Identity: *Racial Minority*  
 Age: *55 to 64*  
 Status: *Canadian Citizen*

It is important to realize that allies may need support from our workplaces too. Some allies have partners, children, parents, siblings, or friends who identify as LGBT+ and experience their own fear of discrimination by disclosing this information at work. These allies may be unsure how others will react to this news, just as LGBT+ individuals may not be aware of how others will react to their coming out.

Inclusive practices for LGBT+ individuals and education about sexual orientation and gender identity in the workplace inherently also creates an environment that supports allies. For example, many Employee Resource Groups have been inclusive of allies at their events, and

have used their platform to educate others to become allies. The support can have an immensely positive impact for allies and on workplace culture. As one respondent mentioned, it was extremely meaningful to her that her coworkers started to refer to her trans-identified son by his preferred name and gender pronouns following his transition.

“My son recently came out trans, I have had positive support and people have been quick to start calling him by his preferred name.”

Location: *Ontario*  
 Gender Identity: *Female*  
 Sexual Orientation: *Bisexual*  
 Racial Identity: *Not Specified*  
 Age: *35 to 44*  
 Status: *Canadian Citizen*

Allies have an important role to play in creating workplace inclusion for LGBT+ individuals. Although they may not be directly part of the LGBT+ acronym as someone with a minority sexual orientation or gender identity, they can be change agents to help create more holistically accepting and inclusive work environments.





## Limitations

As with any research there are limitations based on what information was prioritized for study, how the data was collected, and how the data was analyzed for interpretation. We address these limitations here, not to negate the content of the report, but to ensure it is read with a critical eye and awareness of its constraints.

The demographics within this report do not perfectly map onto the Canadian population. Older workers are not well represented, nor are individuals in the fields of health, manufacturing, agriculture, or the arts. Part-time workers, entrepreneurs, and students were also underrepresented. Additionally, response rates were lower in the Maritime Provinces, the Territories, and the Prairies where there may be some characteristically different contextual factors influencing employment experiences for sexual and gender diverse populations.

There are many practical, socio-economic, and historical reasons for the demographics of this

report. For example, recruitment and participation in this research utilized methods that required individuals to have access to the Internet, the study was offered in English and French only, and it necessitated individuals to trust disclosing personal information via an online platform. Each of these components (in addition to other factors) may have been a barrier to participation for some potential respondents.

Greater focus must be placed on understanding the lived experiences of individuals who experience multiple forms of discrimination, such as LGBT+ individuals who are also racial or ethnic minorities, aboriginal, living with a disability, or do not have Canadian citizenship. The issues and recommendations listed in this report are a step in the right direction to shed light on the discrimination faced by LGBT+ communities in Canadian workplaces, but there is more work that must continue to be accomplished.





Employer Inclusivity Index

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