

PREPARING FOR PARITY

The lack of visible

LGBT+ Women

in the workplace

EXECUTIVE INTRODUCTION

I am very proud that Accenture has been a long-time supporter of our growing LGBT+ community and our 100,000+ Allies. We have an unwavering commitment to diversity, working tirelessly to enable our 469,000+ employees to have a full sense of belonging within our organisation. Yet, only a small percentage of LGBT+ women are visible in our community — and most don't feel they can be.

It is my strong belief, not only as the global sponsor of Accenture's Pride network, but as a lesbian leader, that we need more visibility for LGBT+ women in our workplace; for that matter, for all of our women.

My partner—now wife—and I have been together for over 26 years. She joined Accenture in 1993 as an out, lesbian woman; in fact, she referred me to Accenture 12+ years ago. It has been important to us to be out at work, and act as role models for the next generation of leaders. We need more out and visible LGBT+ women to be courageous and do the same.

My colleague, Megan Cross, a newly promoted Consultant, raises the question of why there are not more visible LGBT+ women leaders in the workforce. Megan highlights some of the key reasons why as well as what the community and our allies can do to promote awareness. We have created an opportunity to increase our diversity. Let's continue to push that agenda — to be out and proud and to be recognised as the leader we have proven that we are.



Monica BollManaging Director and Global
Pride Network Executive Sponsor

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Megan Cross is a Management Consultant in Accenture's Products Talent & Organisation practice — supporting Accenture's clients with their change management activities. Prior to joining Accenture's Analyst Consulting Group in October 2016, Megan completed the Teach First Leadership Development Programme as an English teacher in a secondary school in London. During her time with Teach First, Megan designed and delivered training to Newly Qualified Teachers on tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying in the classroom.

As Co-Lead for the Pride at Accenture UK network for the last year, Megan represents over 200 LGBT+ colleagues and over 3000 Allies, who support each other through a diverse range of events, mentoring programmes, healthcare offerings and intersectional storytelling campaigns. Megan is passionate about increasing the diversity of our employee networks and encourages discourse around the disproportionately low representation of certain ethnic and gender groups, and how we can challenge this.

Megan and the UK Pride Leadership Team frequently work with Accenture's clients to help implement and successfully manage their own LGBT+ employee networks.

In 2018, Accenture was named as a Top Global Employer by Stonewall and received additional awards for its Global Allies Programme and Global Community Engagement.



Megan Cross

Management Consultant
and UK Pride Network Co-Lead

INTRODUCTION

I attend many LGBT+ events across a wide spectrum of organisations in the United Kingdom, and I continually find myself in the same situation: surrounded by men. Although I am incredibly proud to be part of a movement that has taken great strides forward over the years, this reoccurring imbalance troubles me.

I was unsurprised when I discovered that my anecdotal experiences fit the statistics and around 73 percent of LGBT+ women are not fully 'out' to colleagues in the United Kingdom;¹ there seems to be a painful irony that Inclusion & Diversity groups tend to become insular and, indeed, often seem rather exclusive and not particularly diverse.

This perception was further supported by the Financial Times' 2018 OUTstanding list, which celebrates "LGBT+ executives and allies who are not only successful in their careers but are also creating supportive workplaces for other LGBT+ people". The Financial Times highlighted that although the representation of lesbians in 2018's ranking table had risen by 2.3 percent in comparison to the previous year, the list was still "dominated by gay men" who "claim more than two-thirds of places."

I have no doubt that the balance between gender and LGBT+ identity is far more equal than it may appear. Accordingly, the following is not an exploration of the lack of LGBT+ women in the workplace, rather a lack of those who are visible.

The underlying premise of this paper acknowledges that being 'out' is not synonymous with being a visible role model in the workplace or participating in an organisation's LGBT+ network, although they are often interlinked. There are many women who are 'out' and comfortable with their

sexuality in both their professional and personal spheres, yet do not wish to be visible in the workplace or be part of their organisation's LGBT+ network for a multitude of legitimate reasons; it is vital that every LGBT+ person has autonomy in deciding how, when and where they choose to 'come out'— if they do indeed choose to.

An organisation's LGBT+ network is therefore not the proxy or arbiter for the entirety of the organisation's 'out' LGBT+ people. However, having this awareness does not explain or justify why the damaging visible gender imbalance exists, nor does it encourage the opportunity to debate, challenge and ultimately change what seems to be accepted as 'the norm' for the representation of gender in LGBT+ spaces.

The dearth of visible LGBT+ women in the workplace is an issue. I am concerned that we have 'hidden' LGBT+ women who may well be less productive and have a strained sense of belonging with their professional home.

This is not a problem unique to Accenture. It is also not a problem inherent to business in general. Walk down the streets of London's Soho, attend the Pride marches, and you will see the same disproportionate representation. This is a much wider societal issue, which is replicated throughout many organisations, and I firmly believe that businesses can be at the forefront in tackling it.

http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/two-thirds-of-lesbian-and-bisexal-women-experience-discrimination-at-work-research-finds-a7144376.html

^{2.} https://www.ft.com/content/b6a08ba0-b40c-11e7-aa26-bb002965bce8; https://wwft.com/executive-diversity

WHY DO WE LACK VISIBLE LGBT+WOMEN?

"New into the workplace, the LGBT+ network was key in helping me confidently forge my career path in a way that I could be myself, sexuality and all. Through the network I made a lot of contacts both inside and outside the firm and the active role I played in the network has been pivotal in my success and personal development to date. However, as I have matured in my career journey and become comfortable with being myself and 'coming out', at least daily, I find I no longer need the support of the network but instead can help progress the LGBT+ agenda in the wider workplace, both in Accenture and at the client site, by openly being myself and talking about the importance of LGBT+ inclusivity."

ALICIA CAMPBELL-HILL

Senior Manager





WE STRUGGLE TO IDENTIFY WITH THE COMMUNITY

What does it mean to be LGBT+? How do we look? How do we sound? What are our interests? The LGBT+ community is surrounded by ingrained stereotypes regarding our appearance and behaviour, which can be incredibly damaging. Since I first 'came out', I have lost count of how many times I've been faced with: "... But you don't look like a lesbian?" and "so are you the man or the woman?" Prior to joining Accenture, I was a participant on the Teach First Leadership Development Programme, where one of my students pointed out to me "but Ms. Cross, you don't have a lesbian haircut". My experiences reflect the wider landscape. Society has failed to embrace the depth and diversity of our community on many levels, and the multiplicity of narratives around gender identity and expression is often not understood. I have witnessed many women have their sexuality questioned and doubted purely because they do not conform to the societal mould of an 'LGBT+ woman.' For these women, the reinforcement of self-doubt makes the 'coming out' process even more challenging.

Furthermore, for many people, their sexuality is on a spectrum and is fluid by nature. Others can be quick and keen to label one's sexual orientation in a static, simplified and myopic way. Again, the lack of nuance around these conversations makes it far harder for people to identify with the LGBT+ networks that aim to represent them and far less comfortable in their own skin. This is compounded by the prevalence of biphobia; women do not want to be labelled as "greedy" and "indecisive," or have their sexuality undermined as "just a phase."

This has created a self-perpetuating negative cycle for LGBT+ representation in both professional and non-professional environments. Many LGBT+ women cannot see themselves in the community and/or feel unwelcomed, therefore they do not partake in it, and the cycle continues.

I fear that this has become so firmly entrenched after decades of LGBT+ 'liberation' that it has now become a cultural acceptance. Women will not be in most LGBT+ bars, women will not be part of LGBT+ networks at work, and that's 'just the way it is.' But the way things are is not the way things have to be.





WOMEN & CONFIDENCE

Fundamentally, 'coming out' is not easy for anyone, and 'coming out' in the workplace can feel like a continuous repetition of a traumatic process. However, as a woman, this experience comes coupled with the systemic challenge of being female in the workplace — impostor syndrome, self-doubt and a lack of confidence. If women are far less likely to make their voices heard at the table and ask for a promotion, then why would they be more likely to 'come out' in the same space?

64 percent of LGBT+ women said that they had experienced a form of "negative treatment including sexual discrimination, inappropriate language, lack of opportunity or bullying at work". Although this more explicit form of treatment is entirely unacceptable, it is often easier to identify and discipline the perpetrators by using clear company policy and installing programs to support staff. However, when encouraging their staff to come forward and voice their negative experiences, businesses face reluctance due to a myriad of reasons.

Further complexity arises with the unconscious bias that hinders progress for gender identities and sexuality; this more tacit behaviour is insidious and erodes confidence. For LGBT+ women, it can feel as though being visible and fearless with their sexuality makes the glass ceiling twice as thick.

"We have a lot of work to do to overcome notions of who our Pride network represents ("maybe I'm not gay enough") and how people within our network see one another. This means overcoming assumptions that the men in the network are gay, the women are straight allies and that none of the network is bisexual. Storytelling initiatives have made the biggest impact to elevate 'out' female voices and get beyond stereotypes to show the diverse perspectives of LGBT+ women."

SONYA GOLDENBERG

Manager and Australia/New Zealand Pride Network Co-Lead



^{3.} http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/ two-thirds-of-lesbian-and-bisexual-women-experiencediscrimination-at-work-research-finds-a7144376.html



DO WE NEED TO BE PART OF AN LGBT+ NETWORK?

The weight of prejudice and bias has fallen far heavier on women in the workplace. However, history tells us that society has undoubtedly treated LGBT+ men more severely than LGBT+ women. The punishments of imprisonment and chemical castration, which attacked LGBT+ men up until the end of the 20th century, were not applied to women. Sexual intercourse between two women has never been illegal in the United Kingdom. In addition, the remnants of stigmatism from the HIV crisis of the 1980s continue to linger; the blood donation rules based on assumptions and preconceptions of HIV contamination were only relaxed for men who have sex with men in 2018.

Same-sex female relationships are often seen in a less threatening light in comparison to their male counterparts. Prior personal experience has shown me first-hand that female couples can receive discrimination via wolf whistles, unwelcome sexual advances or be undermined as just "close friends". However, same-sex male couples are more

likely to be viewed in disgust and, consequently, be on the receiving end of physical and verbal abuse; their identity is often persecuted against, rather than discriminated against. These societal reactions to both male and female same-sex relationships are all homophobic, but I know which reactions I would rather fall victim to.

The persecution of LGBT+ men has provided the fuel in driving men to join and lead many LGBT+ communities in a show of solidarity, such as OutRage, which was formed after the murders of five gay men in London. Although I feel the crux of homophobic behaviour directed at men is founded upon misogyny — by the perceived abandonment of, and therefore the threat to, the construct of 'masculinity' — many women may not have the identical motivation, or feel they have the matching level of need, to be part of the same LGBT+ groups, be it social or professional.





WE DON'T WANT TO BE TREATED DIFFERENTLY

There is a strong perception that we will be treated differently if we are open about our sexuality, and not everyone wants to stand out from the crowd. I have seen that LGBT+ people are often 'sexualised' as their sexual orientation unavoidably becomes part of their identity, to a greater or lesser extent. Peers can be very quick to mistakenly conflate the two in a way that does not happen with heterosexuality: the default assumption of sexual orientation.

Furthermore, there is a strange fascination with LGBT+ women; for decades, same-sex female interactions have been marketed in the male gaze and commoditised for male entertainment. The sexualisation of LGBT+ women can therefore make it feel inappropriate and unprofessional to 'come out' in the workplace. Sometimes, it is very tempting to reply with a simple "no" when asked if I have a "special man" in my life, rather than for my identity and character to be scrutinised or for someone to make a lewd and inappropriate comment. To have to lie about my sexuality to avoid deeply sexualised slurs is a stain on workplace discourse.

Unfortunately, many women are still experiencing misogyny and objectification in the workplace due to their gender; while already suffering conscious and unconscious gender discrimination, it is unsurprising that few opt to add sexuality discrimination to their workplace experience – especially when one's sexuality is an invisible attribute that is usually far easier to conceal than one's gender. McKinsey's 2018 study of 'Women in the Workplace' also recognises this additional layer of prejudice endured by LGBT+ women and flagged that "71 percent" of lesbians "have dealt with microaggressions" as "lesbian women are far more likely than other women to hear demeaning remarks in the workplace about themselves or others like them".4

To confront both sexism and homophobia, most large businesses have active and established employee networks, such as Accenture's 'Accent on Gender' and 'Pride' networks. Gender and LGBT+ liberation groups tend to operate in silos and participation is in addition to an already demanding day job. Although organisations such as Accenture are increasingly committed to cross-network activities and communications, there is room for further signposting and collaboration between these groups. As it currently stands, many LGBT+ women feel they must make a choice of commitment: gender rights or LGBT+ equality. The former usually takes priority. I would challenge this premise and ask: why can't businesses rethink how their Inclusion & Diversity groups operate so their staff can simultaneously fight for parity across the board?

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The introduction of Accenture's Leadership DNA sets clear expectations on what it takes to 'Lead in the New'. There are several attributes from the Leadership DNA which resonate with me:

- · Embracing diversity as a source of creativity
- Harnessing people's strengths to create high-performing teams
- · Challenging the status quo
- Being 'Truly Human' to inspire others around you

The fabric of leaders in any sector needs to be relentlessly and unapologetically authentic. This transparency is a) how we establish trust between ourselves, our clients and our customers b) how to retain and recruit the best talent.

Furthermore, as businesses push the envelope on gender parity (Accenture is on the path for a 50/50 workforce by 2025) then, statistically, we will surely have more LGBT+ women in the workplace. It makes both business and moral sense to ensure this potential talent is unlocked and LGBT+ colleagues are not channelling energy into censoring their language to prevent being 'outed' rather than focusing on producing the highest quality of work.

Businesses cannot be truly representative until they are more diverse, and the experiences of different genders and sexual orientations can be extremely varied. We need new perceptions, stories and experiences at the table. The more diverse our visible LGBT+ communities are, the more interesting our conversations will become, and the more impact we will have as networks that stand for all forms of gender identity and sexual orientation.

"As a gay man I have a responsibility to help create an inclusive and safe environment where woman can thrive authentically in a community which has always welcomed and supported me. I am troubled by the lack of female representation within a male-dominated community. I also believe women have a responsibility to show up, participate and be visible. Only by working together as a community will we tackle this issue and increase our diversity."



OLIVER HOLMESHuman Capital & Diversity Specialist



WHAT CAN WE DO?

The starting point for enabling LGBT+ women, and indeed everyone, to thrive at work is by addressing the workplace culture. Accenture research published in 2018 revealed that all workers thrive in more inclusive cultures — those characterised by bold leadership and fair policies, and where employees feel empowered, trusted and can "be themselves". In these environments, LGBT+ employees are three times more likely to love their job, be happy with their progress, and advance to more senior levels.⁵

The following proposes several practical and tangible measures to develop such workplace cultures.

5. https://www.accenture.com/es-es/_acnmedia/ PDF-73/Accenture-When-She-Rises-We-

All-Rise.pdf

"I grew up in a country that was painfully intolerant towards the LGBT+ community and was constantly reminded that success meant staying within heteronormative boundaries. I didn't know how people would react if they discovered that I was gay, or if being 'out' at work was even a possibility. Today, the visibility of LGBT+ women in professional environments has been vital to not only prove that we can thrive as 'out and proud' women, but to also give me the confidence to 'come out' to my colleagues without a fear of rejection or retaliation. Seeing them do it has made me realise that I can too." **NITYASHA PILLAI** Consulting Analyst

IDENTIFY AND SUPPORT FEMALE LGBT+ ROLE MODELS

We tend to assume that 'role models' and 'leaders' start at the top. Their greater clout, reputation and visibility has been forged from years of experience, and their expertise should not be underestimated or unappreciated; leadership buy-in and visible LGBT+ leadership presence is of integral importance for confronting unconscious and conscious bias. However, I think it is crucial that we create an environment that understands leadership and role models exist everywhere and at every level – particularly when considering that the lack of visible LGBT+ women in the most senior positions mirrors the broader gender divide at the top.

Today's graduates and new recruits are tomorrow's leaders, and the nurturing and facilitation of those leadership skills begins during their first years in the workplace. If future LGBT+ female leaders are not engaged and developed authentically during their formative years, how can we expect them to be a strong and visible LGBT+ presence when they are executives leading organisations? As Morgana Bailey states in her TED talk 'The danger of hiding who you are', "once you start hiding, it becomes harder and harder to step forward and speak out".6

We need people to step up to the plate, not look on from the side-lines. Complacency is costly. A few staple leaders, as important as they are, are not enough. We need new faces and diverse voices at the table, and this also entails actively recruiting visible female LGBT+ leaders at all levels. There are different paths into organisations, and all paths should actively encourage inclusive, diverse and confident leadership.

If businesses are struggling to source female LGBT+ role models internally, they must branch out beyond the confines of their organisation and find role models externally. Accenture has demonstrated this successfully in the past by inviting the presence of notable LGBT+ women

to our key events, such as International Women's Day. These women bring depth and diversity to our internal discussions around the role of women in business and more broadly in society, whilst also bolstering the representation of LGBT+ women. Partnering with external and confident LGBT+ women begins to compensate for the lack of internal presence.

It is far more likely that LGBT+ colleagues will suppress their identity if they cannot locate - and identify with - a role model. The professional status of the role model (including their employer and job level) is of secondary importance.

However, no LGBT+ person should ever be forced or pressured to 'come out' as a visible role model. We do not know of the personal trials endured and traditions battled due to their sexuality. Besides, uncomfortable role models would be counter-intuitive for progress. I am conscious that the generation that precedes me in the workplace encountered far more discrimination and cultural stigma than I have, and therefore I speak from a platform of relative privilege. Equally, our invisible LGBT+ community, particularly women, should be made aware of the potential impact and influence they could have when there are so few of us, especially at the top. Their stories are extremely valuable.

Since I professionally 'came out' during my time as a secondary school teacher, I have been truly overwhelmed by the number of students and colleagues (particularly female) who have 'come out' to me. The confidence and ownership that I have of my own gender and sexuality has gone some way to help others come to terms with theirs. I strongly encourage LGBT+ women to stand up and join professional LGBT+ networks, but it is also the responsibility of the networks to ensure those women feel welcomed, empowered and supported.

LGBT+ NETWORKS MUST BE INTERSECTIONAL, INCLUSIVE AND PROGRESSIVE

The dialogue of any LGBT+ network needs to be nuanced and multi-faceted. The discourse must a) challenge societal perceptions of what it means to be an LGBT+ woman b) drive progress for both gender and sexuality simultaneously, so it does not feel like a choice between the two. At Accenture, our move away from the 'LGBT' network label to 'Pride' is a positive step in embracing the fluid and layered nature of both gender and sexuality, but we need to ensure our events and communications also align with this.

A clear ask of this article is that organisations need to encourage female participation in their LGBT+ networks. However, we also need to ask ourselves: is an increase in female attendance enough? In short, it is not. We need active participation, not a passive presence. The objectives of any LGBT+ network should therefore be accessible, relevant and exciting. This encapsulates the difference between 'inclusion' and 'diversity': were you just invited to the party or did you get up and dance?

It is important that when driving this movement to diversify that we make the change a sustainable one. We need to foster an inclusive environment that encourages female attendance without it feeling like a tokenistic gesture. I believe that the majority in any LGBT+ network (usually gay men) have a responsibility to use their confidence of place in the community to champion the minority — not for tokenism, but for diversity of thought and perspective.

At the same time, LGBT+ networks need to actively cast their nets wider to become more diverse whilst still creating a sense of belonging and inclusivity for all members. We need to embrace and grow the minority in our community whilst still providing for the current majority. The last thing that I want is for gay men to now feel unwelcome in a space that is founded upon equality. Instead, I would challenge any network to explore and promote the differences and unique identities amongst gay men. No two people in the LGBT+ community are the same.

"While I love being surrounded by our community, I continually ask "where are the women?" Whether it's at LGBT+ professional conferences or network events, LGBT+ fundraisers for various causes (homeless youth, AIDS, elders, etc.) or Human Rights Campaign events in New York, Atlanta and Washington, DC, there is always an imbalance of women. Women need to 'come out' to support, inspire and be more visible in the community."



MONICA BOLL

Managing Director and
Global Pride Network Executive Sponsor

"I grew up in New York City where I was comfortable with being LGBT+ amongst my non—LGBT+ peers. As such, I never felt the need to be an active member of the LGBT+ community. I also saw LGBT+ groups as exclusive and didn't want to label myself. Through meeting 'non—out' women I realised that while I am comfortable with being 'out', a lot of women are not. This is partially because many of them feel they don't fit the 'lesbian stereotype'. Hence, it is critical for 'out' women to take part in the LGBT+ network to show that there is no 'lesbian stereotype' — LGBT+ women are a diverse group. Visibility is the key to breaking stereotypes and promoting true inclusion and diversity."



BEATRICE HARDYConsulting Analyst

ENGAGE AND EMBRACE OUR LGBT+ ALLIES

I strongly believe that our LGBT+ Allies are an equally valuable part of our LGBT+ networks; the power and influence of an LGBT+ Ally should not be underestimated in engaging the majority. The majority could and should play a pivotal role in what can sometimes be perceived as a minority debate. Although this piece is a calling to LGBT+ women to become more visible, it is also a calling on every person to support and enable LGBT+ women to do so.

Lord John Browne, a gay man and former chief executive of BP, outlines in 'The Glass Closet: Why Coming Out Is Good Business' that the discourse surrounding the LGBT+ movement is far stronger when supported by all corners of the business, regardless of gender and sexual orientation.⁸ The messaging behind "LGBT+ discrimination affects me and we need to challenge it" is powerful, but when it is supported by "I can see how LGBT+ discrimination affects my colleagues and we need to challenge it", the dialogue resonates and engages with a much wider audience. In turn, this can only make our strides to equality increasingly powerful.

LGBT+ networks need to not only make it clearer that the door to our events and campaigns is open to all, we need to invite our LGBT+ Allies in. The path to parity affects all of us, and everyone has a responsibility to forge the road.

"One of the main reasons I struggled with identifying as anything other than straight in the past is that I don't fit the conventional norms or neat stereotypes surrounding what it 'looks like' to be LGBT+. When speaking about my sexuality, people questioned its legitimacy, dismissing it with phrases like 'but you've never properly dated a woman, how can you be bi?', leading to a sense of 'I'm not gay enough.' I have since embraced my bisexuality, largely due to becoming surrounded by a network who are real advocates for people to express their true selves, no matter where they fall on the spectrum."



ALYSSIA GORDON Manager

"After many years of being involved in the LGBT+ community — both within and outside of Accenture — I have witnessed an extraordinary amount of positive change. It is important for us to understand and respect every person's decision on how they choose to present their sexuality. However, we also have an obligation to challenge the status quo — not just for the benefit of our LGBT+ women but for all."



PATRICK ROWEDeputy General Counsel and UK Pride Network Executive Sponsor

THE ROAD AHEAD

Many employees across organisations are fearful that it is too risky or too controversial to confront certain issues in the workplace, particularly around intersectional experiences. To this, I would advise my peers to be bold and brave; the ground is shifting in our favour, we are just slightly ahead of the curve.

Rupi Kaur writes the following: "I stand on the sacrifices of a million women before me thinking what can I do to make this mountain taller so the women after me can see farther". It is by this sentiment that I steer my life and I encourage all LGBT+ women to do the same. We still have a long road ahead of us while we work in an environment with only one visible LGBT+ female FTSE 100 chief executive, Inga Beale, who announced her departure from Lloyd's of London in June 2018.9 If we want Accenture to be the most inclusive and diverse organisation in the world by 2020 and if any organisation aims to be truly representative, then those of us who have a voice need to be far louder to support those who are still trying to find theirs.10

9. https://www.ft.com/content/aed56a08-9896-11e7-8c5c-c8d8fa6961bb

10. https://www.brightnetwork.co.uk/employer-advice/accenture/accenture-2/



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Find out more about Pride at Accenture: www.accenture.com/lgbt

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