



WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY

GENDER EQUITY IN THE WORKPLACE:

INTERSECTIONAL AND GENDER & SEXUALITY
DIVERSE APPROACHES

NICHOLAS, L., CHANDRA, S., HANCKEL, B., ULLMAN, J., & FERFOLJA, T.

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WESTERN STAFF CONSULTED FOR THIS PROJECT

Professor Susanne Gannon, Education.

Associate Professor Kate Huppatz, Sociology.

Dr Anne Jamison, Senior Lecturer, Literary Studies.

Dr Jorge Knijnik, Associate Professor, School of Education.

Dr Brahm Marjadi Associate Dean for Engagement and Senior Lecturer in Community Engaged Learning at the School of Medicine.

Dr Navindhra Naidoo, Academic Course Advisor/Senior Lecturer, Paramedicine, School of Health Sciences.

Emeritus Professor Caroline Smith, Professor of Graduate Research, Graduate Research School, Adjunct Professor, Translational Health Research Institute (THRI).

Dr Erika K. Smith, Sessional Unit Coordinator and tutor, casual research assistant, Centre for Educational Research.

Dr Cris Townley, casual research assistant, Sexualities and Genders Research.

Stephen Zissermann, Senior Project Officer, Equity and Diversity, Equity Safety and Wellbeing, The People Office.

Shakti Ram, PhD Researcher, Diversity Management.

Dr Sowbhagya Michael, Lecturer, School of Medicine.

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CONTACT AUTHOR

Associate Professor Lucy Nicholas l.nicholas@westernsydney.edu.au

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With respect for Aboriginal cultural protocol and out of recognition that our campuses occupy their traditional lands, WSU acknowledges the Darug, Eora, Dharawal and Wiradjuri peoples. We thank them for their support of our work in their lands.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Workplaces are increasingly looking to expand their equity and diversity work to understand how to address aspects of identity that intersect with gender or sexuality, and with genders and sexualities beyond binary (M/F) understandings. There are solid business and moral cases that can be made for this expansion. The Sexualities and Genders Research Stream at WSU approach this area from a social justice lens, reflecting WSU's key commitment to the principle of Equity. WSU is emerging as a national leader for research into intersectionality and the inclusion of trans* and gender diversity, in gender equity across the sector.

Our work is consistently practice and community oriented and has already been applied to a range of workplaces (medicine, paramedicine, corporate environments, schools, and universities). We also take a leading-edge majority / privilege focused approach, which means we are interested in those who currently set workplace cultures and have the power to change them, such as men, white / Anglo people, and cisgender* people.

Consultation with external stakeholders working in workplace equity and diversity and our research partners, identified three main issues as most impacting workplaces capacity to make change: framing of gender and queerness, culture of organisations and recognising recognising that employer diversity initiatives, and organisational cultures and attitudes, are at different stages.

WSU researchers and experts have an excellent grasp of these issues, demonstrated by the projects featured in this paper. It is our position that future work should aim to develop informed resources, guidelines and best-practice examples to foster cultural change in organisations and businesses. The expertise and experience of WSU researchers places the institution in a unique position to fulfil many of these articulated needs of workplaces, by providing evidence and data to support work in this area, guidelines for training, and clear resources that explain the complexities of gender identity and intersectionality to organisations and businesses located across sectors.



1. THE CHALLENGE:

GENDER EQUITY BEYOND HOMOGENOUS BINARIES

Gender equity has been defined in ‘gender mainstreaming’ approaches as the ‘process of being fair to men and women’¹. While this approach to gender equity research has been critical to advancing work on gender equity in the workplace, it also has serious limitations, as notions of gender equity have mostly been restricted to the inclusion of white, heterosexual, cisgender*, able-bodied women into institutions, with a particular focus on mothering, given that parenting impacts on women’s careers disproportionately².

Australian workplaces and organisations have done considerable work in this area, demonstrated by their growing adoption of gender equity initiatives. However, workplaces are increasingly looking to expand their equity and diversity work to understand how to address aspects of identity that intersect with gender or sexuality and with genders and sexualities beyond binary* understandings.

There are solid business and moral cases that can be made for this expansion. The instrumentalist case is that:

“ A failure to adopt trans-specific policies and practices can cost businesses dearly in the form of higher turnover, decreased engagement and productivity, and possible litigation. Discriminatory behaviour in general also hurts the company’s brand⁵ ”

However, the Sexualities and Genders Research Stream at WSU approach this area from a social justice lens, reflecting WSU’s key commitment to the principle of equity. The university articulates this pledge through its “longstanding commitment to enhancing the lives of our students, people and communities by promoting fairness, social justice and opportunities for success”⁶.

Illustrative of the growing recognition of the need to address gender diversity and intersectionality* within gender equity in workplaces, is the university-based Athena SWAN Charter for Women in Science. This began in the UK in 2005 as a gender equity award scheme and was expanded to the Australian sector in 2014⁷. The Australian SAGE pilot (2014-2016), then squarely focused on the advancement of women in STEM fields, which initially included 30 universities, each required to demonstrate their commitment to the original ten principals of the Athena SWAN Charter. It is notable that these original principles failed to articulate gender diversity in non-cisgender binary terms, and referred to intersectionality in, arguably, thin terms (for example, principle #10 referred to “considering the intersection of gender and other factors”⁸).

However, in 2015, the Charter was expanded to include transgender staff and students¹⁰ and in the years that have followed (2015-2021), the Charter Principles have been revised multiple times in line with best practices with respect to inclusivity of trans/gender diverse* individuals and the recognition of gender identities beyond the binary. The current principles include addressing gender-based discrimination specific to “trans and non-binary people” while acknowledging that “individuals have the right to determine their own gender identity”¹¹. Likewise, the Charter Principles have shifted from merely “considering” intersections to “understanding and addressing intersectional inequalities”. These revisions align with a growing recognition of the necessity to consider intersectional approaches in workplace policy design to proactively attend to the ways that other aspects of identity intersect with gender. These intersectional approaches must be inclusive of gender diversity, in order to genuinely advance visibility and inclusivity.

Aligned with these commitments, WSU has provided significant internal funding and harnessed the collective expertise of staff to support intersectional approaches and visibility of trans/gender diversity. This is evidenced through internally resourced activities such as: research into university staff members' understandings of trans/gender diversity, research exploring how staff view intersectional dis/advantage, reviewing organisational policies for inclusivity with respect to gender diversity and reviewing the terms of reference for the Vice Chancellor's Gender Equity Committee to ensure representation of gender diversity. Efforts are currently underway to ensure that a representative from Rainbow Western, the university's network for LGBT+ staff, is embedded in every key stakeholder

group for the university's gender equity work. The university's Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2016) includes greater reference and commitment to gender diversity. Most recently, the university convened a Gender Equity Diversity Data Working Party to ensure responsible collection of related data and to establish related social justice principles with respect to staff and students' personal diversity data¹.

Unsurprisingly, given our commitment and investment in more expansive, nuanced and inclusive understandings of gender equity in academia, WSU is emerging as a national leader for research into intersectionality and inclusion of trans* and gender diversity in gender equity across the sector.

***CISGENDER**

When a person's gender identity and gender expression aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth³

***GENDER BINARY**

The spectrum-based classification of gender into the two categories of either man or woman based on biological sex⁴

***INTERSECTIONALITY**

Most commonly used to describe how various aspects of a person's identity intersect, to compound disadvantage⁹

***TRANSGENDER**

(Often abbreviated as trans) refers to people whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. Sistergirls are First Nations women assigned male at birth, and brotherboys are First Nations men assigned female at birth. In some regions, sistergirls (sometimes Yimpininni in the Tiwi Islands) and brotherboys have distinct cultural identities and roles¹²

ⁱ Material referencing Western Sydney University's current and future plans for Athena SWAN accreditation is informed by (1) contributions by Dr Keiryn McKay, WSU SAGE Project Officer, as well as (2) the following published resource: SAGE. (13 Dec., 2021). *Episode 18: Gender equity at Western Sydney University*, available here <https://www.sciencegenderequity.org.au/think-difference/episode-18-wsu-janice-aldrich-wright/>.

2. EXISTING APPROACHES: STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

2.1 FINDING THE 'T' IN LGBT+ WORKPLACE INCLUSION

As alluded to above, much of the literature on workplace experiences of gender inclusion have explored the realities of cisgender women. For example, Ng and Rumens¹³ highlight that a vast amount of the literature which focuses on workplace diversity has focused on women, in comparison to LGBT+* individuals. According to Ng and Rumens, a search for literature between “between 1956 to 2016, yields 331, 271 publications for ‘women’” and “only 1,997 for ‘LGBT+’ individuals”. Much of the literature on women does not further specify if these are cisgender women or not, and therefore one must assume that that the vast amount of literature identified as being about women refers to cis individuals. This literature raises concerns faced primarily by cisgender women, which includes mothering¹⁴, sexual harassment¹⁵, and other forms of sexism¹⁶.

The limited literature on LGBT+ individuals in the workplace on the other hand, has predominantly focused on the experiences of gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals. Köllen¹⁷ writes that “within the field of diversity management (or diversity and inclusion) at least, the specific issues gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees face in the workplace have entered mainstream diversity research”. Scholars have, for example, examined issues such as how sexual minorities may/may not feel included through everyday aspects of their work¹⁸. While gender diverse people are often thought to be included in this research on queer workplace inclusion, under the banner of ‘LGBT+’ research, this is often not the case. McFadden¹⁹ states “there is a relative lack of literature on the experiences, extent, scope, and magnitude of anti-transgender discrimination” for employees and job seekers. McFadden’s²⁰ systematic review of LGBT+ workplace experiences, for instance, found that of the 263 articles reviewed, only 18 of them focused on trans people specifically “while transgender issues were often not approached in articles that included ‘LGBT+’ in the title”. Additionally, of the literature that does exist about trans experiences in the workplace, it has often only focused on trans women and trans men. As Davidson²¹ highlights, “[t]here is a lack of data on non-binary transgender people in the workplace”.

2.2 TRANS AND GENDER DIVERSE EXPERIENCES IN THE WORKPLACE

The limited literature on trans people’s workplace experiences has found that these environments can be harmful and discriminatory spaces²². Trans individuals are often subject to instances of discrimination, stemming from cisgenderism* and cissexism*.

This can include: rejection²⁵, verbal abuse²⁶, harassment²⁷, bullying²⁸, microaggressions²⁹ and violence³⁰. At other times they are unable to access the correct bathroom³¹ or are subject to insensitive questions during transition*³². The literature also highlights that along with interpersonal marginalisation, trans workers face discrimination structurally within the workplace too. For example, Ozturk and Tatli³³ note that:

“ Organisational inability to understand, frame and accommodate transition leads to a heightened sense of panic and fear of the unknown. Resultantly, transition is seen by organisations as a process to be controlled and ‘managed’, lest it upsets sensitivities in the work environment or creates conflict between workers, which poses the unwelcome potential to disrupt actual business operations. ”

Pervasive transphobia* means that some people are reticent about disclosing their trans identity in the workplace³⁵.

Another body of research has examined the rates and trajectories of employment for trans individuals, finding they are more likely to be unemployed than the rest of the population³⁷; be dismissed from work due to changes in gender presentation³⁸; and face barriers to career enhancing opportunities³⁹. Although trans individuals face discrimination as a group, Leppel⁴⁰ found employment rates are not equally distributed throughout the trans population, with trans women more likely to be unemployed than trans men, and Ussher et al.⁴¹ found that trans women of colour experienced workplace harassment and discrimination, resulting in unemployment and diminished work satisfaction.

While much of the literature has focused on negative experiences for trans individuals in the workplace, positive experiences have also been noted by scholars. For example, Budge et al.⁴² write:

“ Despite the fact that within the transgender community it is considered a common event to experience discrimination and rejection at work, many of our participants described a climate of acceptance in their work environment. [...] Words of encouragement and use of correct gender pronouns* were seen as acceptance of transgender identity, as well as accommodating private spaces (locker rooms, bathrooms, etc.), and coworkers and supervisors acting as they would normally. ”

In a similar manner, Rundall and Vecchietti also found trans individuals felt included in their place of work when co-workers treated them according to the gender they identified with.

While it may be tempting to talk about the workplace as a singular category, research by Hines⁴⁴ found that trans individuals feel greater acceptance in certain sectors and industries, such as in the cultural sector. In an Australian study, for instance, Perales et al.⁴⁵ found that “better practices were observed in urban, not-for-profit, and higher-education employers compared to regional, rural, private-sector, and public-sector employers” when it came to the use of trans-inclusive language. The study also indicated that while women and other gender and sexual minorities may be more comfortable using trans-inclusive language, “cisgender non-heterosexual men were less comfortable using trans-affirming language than individuals from most other groups”⁴⁶. Findings such as these illustrate that trans workplace experiences vary across industry and the demographics of the individuals working in them. Moreover, the finding that cisgender non-heterosexual men may be less comfortable using trans-affirming pronouns serves as a cautionary reminder that “queer” minority status in workplaces should not preclude the possibility of lateral intra-community aggression towards trans individuals from others within the LGBT+ community⁴⁷.

2.3 INTERSECTIONALITY IN GENDER EQUITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Like much of the literature on gender equity in the workplace, which focuses on cisgender women’s experiences, research pertaining to intersectional understandings of gender also focuses on the experiences of cisgender women, with ‘cisgender’ being the primary identifier with which other characteristics ‘intersect’⁴⁸.

The limited literature on intersectionality in trans workplace experiences is unsurprising given our sparse understanding of trans experiences at work in the first place. Chech and Rothwell⁴⁹ argue, “prior research has typically treated workplace heteronormativity and homophobia as uniformly consequential for LGBT+ workers across race and gender categories and organizational contexts”. Their research on LGBT+ federal employees found that “[r]acial/ethnic minority LGBT+ employees have more negative workplace experiences than do white LGBT+ employees on nearly all measures”⁵⁰. Further research on trans individuals, alongside greater consideration of other identifiers, will provide a deeper understanding of how gender diverse inclusion can be improved in the workplace.

*LGBT

Stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. We use this as the collective term and it is the most common term used in the literature, sometimes more expansively ending with LGBTIQA+ (intersex, queer, asexual and others). When referring to other people’s work we will use the terms they use.

*CISGENDERISM

Refers to the cultural and systemic ideology that denies, denigrates, or pathologises self-identified gender identities that do not align with assigned gender at birth as well as resulting behavior, expression, and community.

*CISSEXISM

Refers to both the discrimination against individuals who identify with and/or present as a different sex and gender than assigned at birth and the privilege conveyed on individuals who identify with and/or present as the same sex and gender as assigned at birth.

*TRANSITION/GENDER AFFIRMATION

The personal process or processes a trans or gender diverse person determines is right for them in order to live as their defined gender and so that society recognises this. Transition may involve social, medical/surgical and/or legal steps that affirm a person’s gender.

*TRANSPHOBIA

Refers to a range of negative stereotypes, feelings or behaviours towards anyone who is transgender or gender diverse, which often leads to prejudice or discriminatory actions or abuse.

*GENDER PRONOUNS

These refer to how a person chooses to publicly express their gender identity through the use of a pronoun, whether it is a gender-specific or a gender-neutral pronoun. This can include the more traditional he or she, as well as gender-neutral pronouns such as they, their, ze, hir and others.

3. OUR APPROACH

To better understand how research can support these concerns and gaps into the future, the authors held a multi-stage consultation. One with WSU academic researchers consisting of a survey and roundtable, followed by a second roundtable consultation with representatives of organisations or businesses with a stake in intersectional and gender and sexuality diverse approaches to workplace gender equity. This second roundtable included some of our existing research partners. The aim was to identify research and expertise, and then gauge organisation and business participants' levels of knowledge, sources of knowledge and support, current limits in practice, and what workplaces need to address this issue better. The data from this consultation informs our recommendations for research on this area in the future.

At WSU, our research ensures that, as well as looking at binary (M/F) gender and sexuality diverse experiences at workplaces, we focus on transgender, and gender and sexuality diverse experiences in workplaces⁵¹. Our work is consistently practice / community oriented⁵² and has already been applied to a range of workplaces (medicine, paramedicine, corporate environments, schools, and universities). We also take a leading-edge majority / privilege focused approach, which means we are interested in those who currently set workplace cultures and have the power to change them, such as men, white / Anglo people, and cisgender people⁵³.

WSU is home to a critical mass of researchers and practitioners with sector-leading expertise in sexualities and genders research. This includes expertise and critical work on

intersectional inequalities, and transgender and gender diversity research, especially as it pertains to experiences in workplaces and gender equity workplace initiatives. WSU houses the Sexualities and Genders Research Stream, consisting of 54 researchers with a focus on gender and sexuality across the university. This group includes a vast number of applied researchers producing critical work across fields. This includes social scientists examining attitudes towards transgender and gender diversity in the university workplace, medical and health scholars leading diversity and inclusion research, as well as training for general practitioners (e.g. Shepherd and Hanckel⁵⁴) using an intersectional lens, and paramedicine researchers focusing on gendered and intersectional challenges in paramedic work-life. This also includes academics working in the field of business,

researching how organisations are evaluating lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) experiences as they relate to approaches to diversity management, as well as education researchers examining gender and sexuality diversity in schools and tertiary institutions, in terms of curriculum, policy and workplace experience⁵⁵. Social researchers, embedded throughout WSU are leading critical work into gender and work⁵⁶, human geographers are researching the intersections of sexuality, Indigeneity, and higher education⁵⁷, with leadership scholars more broadly committed to attainment and executive success for Indigenous Australians⁵⁸. This is complimented by research on making spaces more inclusive for sexuality and gender diverse people, in, for instance, the fields of sport⁵⁹ and in digital spaces, particularly for young people⁶⁰.



4. OUR INSIGHTS

At WSU, our research to date in this area has provided some key lessons and principles that underpin our work on the topics. In survey responses and roundtable discussions, during internal consultations for this white paper, our researchers offered the following insights. These demonstrate the perspectives, positions, and knowledge of WSU staff in relation to intersectionality, and gender and sexuality diversity in workplaces. These quotations demonstrate the unique perspective and understandings underpinning our research:

“

So many gender inequities are entrenched in workplace cultures, and race in particular, is a significant intersection with these issues.

Benchmark man* and their sibling the Unencumbered Bachelor are endemic.” (Cris Townley, see Smith, Townley, Huppatz, and Bansel (2022)⁶¹ for more on the unencumbered bachelor).

We must not ‘pick and choose’ just the easy paths while avoiding the hard fights for inclusion and equity. Also, we must not ‘pick and choose’ which parts of the ‘alphabet soup’* we wish to support.

Intersectional analyses are necessary as multiple forms of marginality compound disadvantage.

*BENCHMARK MAN

This normative masculinist standard favours those who are Anglo-Australian, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle class, not elderly, espouse a right-of-centre politics and a nominal mainstream religion, if any. When women and Others are measured against Benchmark Men they are invariably found wanting.⁶²

*ALPHABET SOUP

A colloquial term that refers to the acronym(s) used to identify gender and sexuality diverse communities. From LGB (Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual), the acronym has expanded to be more inclusive of a range of sexual and gender identities, such as LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual). We recommend not using the term ‘alphabet soup’ from outside the community, as it could be perceived as trivialising.”

Organisations are vicariously liable for perpetuating masculine hegemony by condoning unacceptable practices or promoting them.

Binary understandings of gender are persistent.

'Nothing about us, without us' must be the front and centre guiding principle.

Understandings of excellence are built upon masculinist norms.

Segregation practices and processes are persistent.

Academics of colour (as compared to White academics) and women (as compared to men) tend to report less work-life balance.

There is pervasive impact of silencing/marginalisation on gender and sexuality diverse employees' sense of workplace connection; safety; self-efficacy beliefs and morale.

Pushing things into a level of complexity that an intersectional lens requires can push audiences away - so we are always looking for good ways to overcome this, e.g., case studies and reflection opportunities.



5. FEATURED PROJECTS

PROJECT 1

An exploration of WSU staff's understandings of trans and gender diversity.

Researchers: Associate Professor Lucy Nicholas; Professor Kerry H. Robinson; Dr Cris Townley

Partners and funders: Gender Equity Fund

Brief background and aim: This research explored WSU cisgender staff understandings of trans and gender diversity (TGD), support for TGD students and staff, and University policy on TGD. A key aim was to identify the needs of staff in regard to working more effectively with TGD students and staff, in order to develop more inclusive policies and practices and to contribute to reducing inequalities based on gender diversity.

Findings and impact / key lessons and principles:

- Staff were mostly supportive of explicit support and guidelines for working with TGD staff and students, but many felt they lacked understanding around terminology, policy and procedures.
- Most staff were keen for more explicit guidance and training on the issue, and strong, vocal leadership on the issue.
- There is always resistance to issues such as this. Training and awareness raising needs humanising content to emphasise the real impacts on TGD people of not taking account of their needs.

PROJECT 2

Gender and sexuality diversity in schools: Parental experiences and schooling responses

Researchers: Associate Professor Tania Ferfolja; Associate Professor Jacqueline Ullman

Partners and funders: Australian Research Council, in partnership with Professor Tara Goldstein (OISE; Canada)

Brief background and aim: This project analysed parents' perspectives regarding the inclusion/exclusion of gender and sexuality diversity in K-12 state-school curriculum across Australia. It simultaneously investigated how parents of gender and sexuality diverse children navigated their child's experiences of schooling. Using the combined data, a verbatim performance piece was developed and filmed for use as a professional development resource by teachers and as a means to disseminate findings to lay populations. See <https://westernsydney.edu.au/glds/home>

Findings and impact / key lessons and principles:

- 94 per cent of parents want relationships and sexuality education delivered in government schools.
- 82 per cent of parents support the curriculum inclusion of gender and sexuality diversity topics for all school students, from kindergarten to Year 12.
- Most parents want to see gender and sexuality diversity introduced in the curriculum in primary school and the early years of high school.
- The majority of parents support parents, schools and teachers all being involved in relationships and sexuality education.
- Parents of gender and sexuality diverse children had variable experiences navigating the school system for their child, but in the main, reported that schools lacked knowledge about, and expertise in, gender and sexuality diversity.

PROJECT 3

Diversity and safety on campus @ Western

Researchers: Associate Professor Tania Ferfolja; Associate Professor Nicole Asquith; Dr Brooke Brady; Dr Benjamin Hankel

Partners and funders: Western Sydney University

Brief background and aim: This project explored students' and staffs' perspectives about safety on WSU's campuses and also provided a particular focus on the experiences of gender and sexuality diverse students and staff. The research was mixed method incorporating a quantitative survey, qualitative interviews and document analysis.

Findings and impact / key lessons and principles:

- Institutional and interpersonal heterosexist and cissexist discrimination was apparent at the time of the fieldwork.
- Although many students and staff were content studying and working at WSU, heterosexist and cissexist exclusion was experienced by both students and staff.
- Addressing these forms of discrimination across WSU's campuses was recommended to create a more inclusive and open environment.
- This research contributed to subsequent changes in policies, practices and general levels of awareness across the university.

PROJECT 4

Welcoming social wellness: Exploring the impact of LGBT+-affirming health and community care on older gender and sexuality-diverse women's wellbeing and sense of belonging

Researchers: Associate Professor Tinashe Dune; Associate Professor Jacqueline Ullman; Associate Professor Tania Ferfolja; Dr Benjamin Hankel; Shirali Garga

Partners and funders: Department of Family and Community Services

Brief background and aim: This research aimed to examine and understand older gender and sexuality diverse (GSD) women's experiences and needs related to health, aged-care and social support services. In particular, this project sought to explore how access and engagement with services was related to women's sense of community belonging, health and wellbeing.

Findings and impact / key lessons and principles:

- Given the increasing ageing population and greater recognition of LGBT+ people and their relationships, better supports are required for older gender and sexuality diverse women as they transition into, and through, retirement, age related health care, aged care and palliative care services.
- Health, social and aged care providers can change gender and sexuality diverse women's expectations of homophobia, the dilemma of disclosure, and feelings of connection and belonging by engaging in training and making themselves visible allies to LGBT+-friendly policies.
- There is a need to revise health, social and aged care policies and programs to ensure that they overtly acknowledge and include LGBT+ identities.

PROJECT 5

LGBT+ teachers' experiences of workplace discrimination and disadvantage

Researcher: Associate Professor Jacqueline Ullman

Partners and funders: Western Sydney University, in partnership with the New South Wales Teachers Federation (Ms Mel Smith)

Brief background and aim: This project examined the prevalence of LGBT+ bias-based workplace discrimination in New South Wales government schools, as experienced by LGBT+ educators across the sector. Using a mixed-method sequential design of an online survey followed by in-depth interviews with select participants, this research investigated teachers' negative workplace experiences which were viewed by them as directly linked to their known or suspected gender or sexuality diversity. A key aim was to investigate which members of the school community engaged in discriminatory behaviours and to better understand the nature and impact of those incidences on teachers' wellbeing and other central workplace outcomes.

Findings and impact / key lessons and principles:

- Experiences of homophobic/transphobic workplace discrimination were widespread, with over 40% of participating teachers reporting experiencing them. These included verbal and psychological harassment as well as being overlooked for career opportunities and advancement. Negative experiences were linked to mental ill health and lowered sense of workplace belonging and efficacy.
- Recommendations offered by LGBT+ teachers included staff wellbeing policies that specifically articulated LGBT+ identities, inclusive of a clear set of actions for reporting discrimination and obtaining support from both the Department of Education and the Teachers Federation.
- Research highlighted the need for relevant training for school leadership personnel to facilitate understanding and support of their LGBT+ staff members. There is a pressing need for trans/gender diverse-specific training for school leaders.

PROJECT 6

Understanding and addressing everyday sexism in Australian universities

Researcher: Associate Professor Jacqueline Ullman

Partners and Funders: Australian Research Council, in partnership with Edith Cowan University (Lead CI: Professor Mindy Blaise) and RMIT (Dr Emily Gray)

Brief background and aim: This project commenced in 2021 and is ongoing at the time of writing. Project aims are to improve the ways in which workplace gender-based discrimination is understood and addressed in Australian universities by employing a situated, intersectional and creative approach to researching 'everyday sexism'. An important focus of this work is exploring how gender-based discrimination in university workplaces impacts trans/gender-diverse academics and how this might manifest differently in different locations and disciplines. Data collection includes an audit of university websites; interviews with key stakeholders across university Equity and Diversity portfolios; a national survey of academics; and creative focus groups with selected participants.

Anticipated findings and impact:

- This project will use an innovative approach to gather and examine evidence on how everyday sexism contribute to gender-based discrimination across the individual, discipline and university levels.
- Findings will be used to devise practical strategies for recognising, addressing and challenging everyday sexism in the workplace.
- Expected outcomes include new gender equity practices that will assist universities to refine current programs, strategies and policies capable of eliminating gender-based discrimination in the higher education workplace.

PROJECT 7

Addressing intersectionality in gender 'equity' at WSU: Experiences, policies, and everyday practices

Researchers: Professor Kerry Robinson, Dr Emily Wolfinger, Associate Professor Lucy Nicholas, Associate Professor Corrinne Sullivan

Partners and funders: Gender Equity Fund

Brief background and aim: This research explored WSU staff understandings, perceptions and experiences of intersectionality and intersectional disadvantage. A key aim was to contribute to the development of relevant WSU policies and practices, especially related to the WSU Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan goals. This multi-method research included an online survey of academic and professional staff at WSU, which included multiple choice and open-ended questions; two focus groups, and nine interviews.

Findings and impact / key lessons and principles:

- There was a clear need to increase understanding and awareness of intersectionality as a structural phenomenon that underpins dis/advantage through awareness training.
- A significant number of WSU staff consider that they experience intersectional disadvantage or have experienced or witnessed a colleague experiencing this, but a majority of respondents believe staff of all identity backgrounds are treated equally in their work area.
- Gender needs to be considered beyond the binary and race-blind notions.
- There is a need for more workplace opportunities for those with intersectional disadvantage, a continuation of current affirmative hiring, and the development of peer communities of support.



6. STAKEHOLDER NEEDS

We held roundtable consultations with external stakeholders who would benefit from intersectional diversity and inclusion research. These included representatives from government (council level), university diversity and inclusion, LGBT+ health services, public housing services, TAFE, counsellors, violence against women organisations, men's violence prevention services, LGBT+ organisations, and schools.

We asked them to reflect on best practices, sources of information and guidance, research and resources they require, as well as identify the challenges and sticking points that emerged in their work in relation to including intersectional and gender diverse approaches to gender equity in workplaces.

These discussions allowed us to tailor our research and ensure their priorities are considered in future research, and as well as ensuring that our research has real-world utility.

Three main issues were identified as most impacting workplaces' capacity to make change: framing of gender and queerness; culture of organisations; and recognising people at different stages. We discuss each in turn below.

6.1 FRAMING OF GENDER AND QUEERNESS

- There is an overall lack of understanding about the LGBT+ 'community', which is often seen and imagined as a homogeneous group.
- 'Women' is often conceptualised as being cisgender women, and gender inclusion is about them.
- Trans men are often excluded in conversations about gender equity.
- It was noted in our consultations that different initiatives are required for different forms of queerness.
- Initiatives must also account for and critically engage with broader social systems that are built around a gender binary, which makes it difficult to address gender diversity.

6.2 CULTURE OF ORGANISATIONS

Our consultation revealed that there are ongoing challenges to diversity management associated with working in bureaucratic and conservative environments. For example, structural changes within organisations mean that diversity issues are often at the end of the list of priorities.

There was reported resistance and a lack of organisational support for such diversity issues and often no clear structured way to come together about these issues within workplaces. Where there was budget for diversity, stakeholders emphasised the budget limitations and the need to justify spending money on these initiatives. It is often the case that one single person is expected to be versed in all aspects of diversity in an organisation, which includes knowledge about all LGBT+ people and their experiences.

There were also reported fears from within organisations, where staff often desired to be inclusive but feared saying the wrong thing. There can also be fear about vocalising issues to do with diversity and the potential backlash that may result. Stakeholders indicated that a commitment to LGBT+ issues is required from leadership to allay such fears and support such initiatives.

6.3 PEOPLE AT DIFFERENT STAGES

Our consultation also revealed how some organisations are reticent about engaging with gender diversity, including those in positions of power. People working in social justice roles or organisations are sometimes assumed to be on top of all matters to do with diversity because they work in the area. These assumptions are problematic and point to the need for ongoing reflection and training in these roles. Furthermore, this also extends to people in the LGBT+ community. There is a need to not assume that people who are part of the queer community know about different forms of 'queerness' and recognise that even people working in this space require ongoing education.

Community organisations additionally highlighted the complexities of catering to mixed groups of people (e.g. clients/constituents), where some have extensive knowledge about diversity and others are beginners with limited understandings. Such diverse environments can and do create tensions in discussing and undertaking diversity initiatives.

7. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

AND OPPORTUNITIES

This consultation revealed critical areas and directions for the future. This included the need for data as evidence - empirical studies - to support the implementation of evidence-based diversity initiatives. Future work should aim to develop informed resources, guidelines and best-practice examples to foster cultural change in organisations and businesses. WSU researchers' expertise and experience places the institution in a unique position to fulfil many of these articulated needs of workplaces, by providing evidence and data to support work in this area, guidelines for training, and clear resources that explain the complexities of gender identity and intersectionality to organisations and businesses located across sectors.

7.1 WHAT IS REQUIRED BY ORGANISATIONS

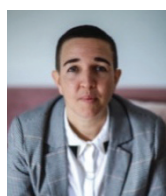
- Data which accounts for more diverse gender identifications, as currently data is often collected based on a binary understanding of gender. This can make it easier for practitioners to talk about what is going on.
- Research that identifies and supports best practices for the ethical collection and use of individuals' personal identity data reflecting their gender and sexuality diversity.
- Resources to help educate people on gender diversity in workplaces, such as guides on using gendered language. This will be particularly beneficial to those people who are educating others.
- More data about how different intersecting identifiers affect inclusion and exclusion across varied sectors.
- Facilitating work that enables more robust conversations in workplaces about gender diversity.
- Developing practical and innovative guides and ideas about how to include gender diversity into broader strategies focusing on gender equity.
- Research that identifies and supports best practices for creating cultural change in organisations.

8. AN INVITATION TO WORK WITH WESTERN

We welcome opportunities to work with organisations where our content, theory, and methodological expertise can be brought to bear on nuanced problems around gender and sexuality diversity and intersectionality. We can lead or assist with research design, literature reviews, best-practice, data collection, data analysis, recommendations, guidelines for inclusivity practice, training and training materials.

8.1 WHO ARE WE?

Please contact the relevant member of the team below to discuss possible partnerships:



Associate Professor Lucy Nicholas (they/them) is director of Genders and Sexualities Research at WSU. They are dedicated to diversity and inclusion outcomes and have

significant content and conceptual expertise in gender and sexual diversity, whiteness, and masculinity. Their research skills include research design; research ethics; quantitative and qualitative methods; data analysis; best-practice; diversity and inclusion training and public speaking on gender diversity beyond equity.

Email: l.nicholas@westernsydney.edu.au



Dr Shiva Chandra (he/him) is a researcher at the Young and Resilient Research Centre, Institute for Culture and Society, WSU. He uses creative and innovative methods to explore

subjectivity, and how individuals relate to their social worlds. Shiva is interested in exploring how scholarship can sit at the intersection of academia and community development. His interests include the sociology of personal life, sexuality, gender, race, and decolonisation.

Email: Shiva.Chandra@westernsydney.edu.au



Dr Benjamin Hanckel (he/him) is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Culture and Society and the Young and Resilient Research Centre at WSU. Benjamin's

research examines health and wellbeing, social inequalities in health, and social change. His research has a particular focus on the experiences and practices of gender and sexuality diverse youth and young adults and their wellbeing as they transition into adulthood and employment. He has worked across mixed methods studies and has expertise in evaluative research.

Email: b.hanckel@westernsydney.edu.au



Associate Professor Tania Ferfolja (she/her) researches in social and cultural diversity in the School of Education/Centre for Educational Research.

Her research focuses, in the main, on gender and sexuality diversity in education at all levels, particularly (but not only) in relation to employment practices, policy, curriculum and pedagogy. Her research skills centre on qualitative methods and she is interested in alternative creative ways to disseminate research findings for maximal impact to lay populations.

Email: t.ferfolja@westernsydney.edu.au



Associate Professor Jacqueline Ullman (she/her) is located in the School of Education and the Centre for Educational Research. She is a mixed-method researcher with strong

quantitative expertise who researches gender-based violence and discrimination across schools and workplaces. Associate Professor Ullman has worked across a number of funded projects with industry partners consulting and conducting research in the areas of workplace wellbeing; inclusivity and diversity training; gender and sexuality diversity; gender equity; and gender-based violence. Her skills include survey design and analysis; policy analysis; in-depth qualitative explorations; and workshop design and training.

Email: j.ullman@westernsydney.edu.au



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