

Women and the lgbt community are natural allies

[Sociology](#), [Community](#)



“ Maybe it’s because you’re confident,” said the drag queen slamming a whipped-cream pie into my face. It was my reward for raising the most money for AppNexus’ Pride Week Fundraiser.

This past year I’ve spent increased time advocating on LGBT issues. It’s not because I’m gay. It’s because we need allies between communities of marginalized groups. Basic math tells us that the sum is greater than its parts.

On Women’s Equality Day, we acknowledge that women continue to face significant gender inequalities: the wage gap, barriers to education and underrepresentation in leadership roles within the public and private sector, just to name a few.

But women can only achieve true equality when there is equality for all. And today, both women and members of the LGBT community face many of the same glass ceilings in the workplace.

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Studies have shown that the lack of female role models in certain male-dominated educational programs and in higher-level positions has a negative impact on women entering and remaining in the workplace. According to a recent Catalyst , women are significantly less represented the higher up they go in an organization. For the LGBT community, the climb is at least as steep -- in it is not illegal to discriminate based on sexual orientation.

When you look up and see someone who looks like you, it inspires and affirms that you can get there as well. Until these numbers increase, both

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women and LGBT individuals face an uphill battle. We are statistically less likely to have a sponsor. We are less likely to have a peer to turn to for support. We are less likely to make it to the C-Suite.

Why should women care about the impact on the LGBT community? When doors and seats at tables are blocked for our LGBT neighbors, they are much more likely to also be blocked for women, and vice versa.

Gender-based stereotyping curtails women's advancement and opportunity to effectively lead. For , women are frequently perceived as poor problem solvers, a trait associated with being inadequate CEO material. Gay men are as effeminate and promiscuous; lesbians, as man-haters. These stereotypes make it difficult, if not near impossible, for both women and LGBT individuals to break into the (straight) boys' club at the top of the corporate pyramid.

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For members of marginalized groups, this reality imposes a double imperative. Women and LGBT employees have to be "good enough" to make it to the top, in the face of stereotypes along the way. They must also work to bring equality to their workplace. A former colleague of mine told me she worried about being perceived as "high maintenance" or "too focused on women's issues." I can point to many other anecdotes testifying to the challenge of balancing one's day-to-day business with the "extracurricular" work of organizing efforts. Allyship can help us share the burden.

The work that women have done to advance equality can be applied to the LGBT movement as well.

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Organize an affinity group.

Our AppNexus Women's Network is a company-funded, employee led group focused on recruiting and promoting AppNexus women. We have other similar groups like OutNexus, our LGBT affinity group, the AppNexus Black Alliance, Latino Alliance and Oy Nexus. These groups provide support networks and lead initiatives relevant to their group. Our affinity groups also come together in open forums to discuss issues ranging from blood equality to racial tension.

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Form allyships within your company's internal and external community.

We have a company wide focused on increasing diversity and creating an inclusive AppNexus. The committee is cross-functional and diverse across race, ethnicity, gender and age. It is company-funded with support from our CEO and executive team, and co-chaired by our Chief People Officer (a white straight male ally) and me. We have partnerships with external community leaders like , , and .

Say " yes" to the seat at the table.

Then crush it at your job. For those who worry that they got hired just to fill a quota, as said, " Get over it.... Get hired because you are a woman or person of color and then do a bloody brilliant job in that role."

Sponsor others who follow you.

Pay it forward and use your power to bring others along. Once there are more women, LGBT individuals and underrepresented groups in the room,
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the space becomes safer and better performing. At a company level, we have training programs focused on skills like speaking, personal branding and executive presence.

The dynamics of the women's rights movement are evolving. Our group's issues are no longer relevant only to those assigned the female sex at birth. Our issues can no longer be overcome on our own. As women, we must evolve our issues and our base. We must be allies.