



# Advancing Sexual and Gender Minority Workplace Inclusion—A Call to Action

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The study by Hinkle and colleagues<sup>1</sup> leveraged the Diversity Engagement Survey (DES) to assess perceptions of institutional engagement and workplace inclusivity among self-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender employees at a single academic medical center. The findings are striking. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) respondents and transgender, queer, and nonbinary (TQNB) respondents reported significantly lower levels of institutional engagement and more negative perceptions of workplace inclusivity compared with their heterosexual and male counterparts, respectively. Specifically, LGB individuals scored lower on key workplace culture constructs, such as shared vision, camaraderie, and recognition of contributions, compared with heterosexual respondents. TQNB individuals had even greater disparities in comparison with men. Perhaps most concerning, both LGB and TQNB respondents were more likely to consider leaving their positions due to disruptive or unprofessional behavior from colleagues or supervisors.

The large academic medical center studied by Hinkle and colleagues<sup>1</sup> had implemented a multifaceted, multiyear initiative to improve the workplace culture for all employees, including sexual and gender minority individuals. Interpreted within the context of other research documenting that a broad array of workplace cultures can hinder sexual and gender minority employees from fully realizing their potential,<sup>2</sup> the study by Hinkle and colleagues,<sup>1</sup> conducted within an organization still facing disparities in inclusion, belonging, and engagement despite years of efforts to improve its climate, suggests that much remains to be understood about how to effectively transform organizational cultures.

In large, complex health care settings, creating a culture of equity that can successfully address multiple forms of oppression and discrimination is a relatively new endeavor, and there is still much to learn. Directly addressing power differentials between demographic groups is key, as is partnering with minoritized individuals in diagnosing the root causes of their lack of inclusion and engagement and in designing appropriate interventions. These aspects of culture change are often overlooked in many initiatives designed to advance equity and deserve additional attention and exploration.<sup>3,4</sup> The study by Hinkle and colleagues<sup>1</sup> is also an example of the need for ongoing measurement and assessment of how organization culture specifically impacts TQNB people because advancing equity takes time, requiring experimentation and an iterative process to discover what will work in a particular setting.

Hinkle and colleagues<sup>1</sup> finding that TQNB respondents were nearly 50% more likely than men to consider leaving their positions was both striking and deeply concerning, particularly as job change considerations were prompted by disruptive or harmful coworker behavior rather than external factors. This highlights the profound impact that interpersonal dynamics within the workplace can have on retention and employee well-being. When individuals from minoritized groups are contemplating departure due to workplace conflict or disruption, it calls into question the institution's public image and the true effectiveness of its inclusivity efforts. Even the most well-intentioned diversity initiatives may hold little value if the internal workplace environment fails to foster a sense of safety and belonging. While burnout is undoubtedly a factor in workplace dissatisfaction in a health care setting, the underlying issue here is workplace harassment and harmful behaviors, which was aptly identified by the authors.<sup>1</sup> The tendency to broadly attribute workplace dissatisfaction to burnout risks minimizing the serious and direct consequences of these harmful dynamics, which often lead to the very burnout that compounds the problem. By reframing the discussion to center on the impact of harassment and toxic workplace behaviors, institutions can

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more accurately address the root causes of job dissatisfaction and take meaningful steps to improve retention and support for minoritized employees.

The current political and social climate for sexual and gender minority individuals living in the US elevates the importance of this study. A recent National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) consensus study report identified multiple principles for demographic data collection documenting sexual orientation, gender identity, and intersex status.<sup>5</sup> By applying these principles, Hinkle and colleagues<sup>1</sup> provided an example of how measuring sexual orientation and gender identity can reveal opportunities for improving organizational culture so that all employees can thrive and fully participate in advancing the organization's mission and vision. Their work also advances understanding of the mechanisms through which various aspects of organizational culture impact the experiences and well-being of sexual and gender minority individuals, one of the many beneficial outcomes of such data collection as described in the NASEM report.

However, there is much more to learn. We need additional exploration and intervention to identify the tools to help workplaces create a culture that allows people with minoritized identities to have the same chances as others to succeed. Unfortunately, the Trump-Vance Administration, through its harmful executive orders, funding terminations, and regulatory restrictions, is actively dismantling these crucial efforts by not only blocking demographic data collection but also creating a hostile environment that seeks to silence any research that could benefit these vulnerable populations.<sup>6</sup>

It is this type of identity disrespect, negation, and erasure that often occurs in maladaptive workplace cultures, and its impact is profound. When individuals feel invisible, unsupported, or unwelcome due to their gender or sexual orientation, it not only harms their well-being but also damages the organization. Marginalized employees feeling disconnected are less likely to engage fully, resulting in lower morale, higher turnover, and a weakened sense of commitment to their institution. Organizations that neglect the value of all their employees ultimately undermine their own potential for growth and success. To thrive, particularly in today's climate, workplaces must demonstrate courage by actively confronting and dismantling these harmful practices<sup>7</sup> and foster a culture where all employees are respected, valued, and empowered to contribute to their fullest potential.

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## ARTICLE INFORMATION

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