BREAKING THE LAVENDER CEILING FOR LGBTQ+ CORPORATE DIRECTORS

gender and the economy

Rotman

Breaking the Lavender Ceiling for LGBTQ+ Corporate Directors

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LGBTQ+ Corporate Directors Canada

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Executive summary

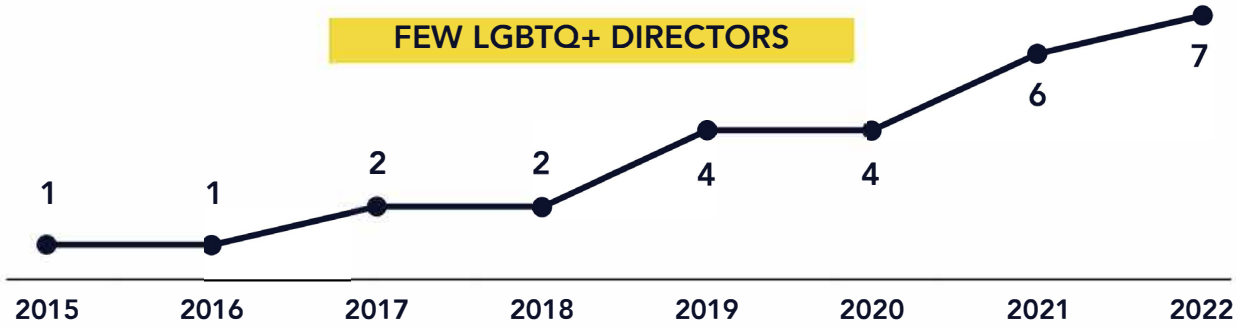
LGBTQ+ people are underrepresented on corporate boards of directors and throughout most organizations in Canada. This report summarizes findings from an analysis of representation on Toronto Stock Exchange-listed companies from 2015-2022 along with a review of the existing research on LGBTQ+ representation on boards and within organizations. Key insights include:

- Only 0.15% of TSX-listed company directors publicly identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community, yet greater board diversity is associated with greater connections and collaborations among board members, increased innovation and long-term strategic thinking, greater inclusiveness throughout the organization, and improved corporate resilience to crisis.
- Research and practice have overlooked LGBTQ+ board directors, but a review of research on LGBTQ+ inclusion in organizations more broadly give us clues into the sources of the "lavender ceiling" of barriers that prevent LGBTQ+ people from entering and rising up into top leadership.
- There is a plethora of evidence that LGBTQ+ people experience discrimination in applying for and interviewing for jobs, in their daily work experiences once they get jobs, and in their exclusion from networks that could lead to promotion opportunities. This leads to feelings of isolation, lack of engagement and higher turnover.
- LGBTQ+ employees experience a disclosure dilemma at work: they can achieve greater authenticity and connection by "coming out" but risk discrimination, or they can hide their identities to avoid discrimination but risk the disconnection that comes from not bringing their whole selves to work. Moreover, this choice is not a one-time thing but instead must occur with every new situation and when meeting each new person.
- LGBTQ+ employees have multiple intersecting identities—related to gender, race, disability, immigrant status, Indigeneity or other—which can result in different experiences at work, where different identities can either offset or amplify advantages or disadvantages.
- LGBTQ+ employees can be agents for change by both normalizing LGBTQ+ identities and disrupting existing norms in organizations. But the burden of change should not rest only or mainly on the shoulders of these employees.
- Peers, supervisors, organizational leaders, policy makers and other stakeholders can create more inclusive organizations by becoming strong allies, implementing effective training, setting strong cultures and developing inclusive policies and practices. These actions may not be fully effective on their own, but in combination can create a positive cycle of inclusion that is better for LGBTQ+ employees and for organizational health and resilience overall.

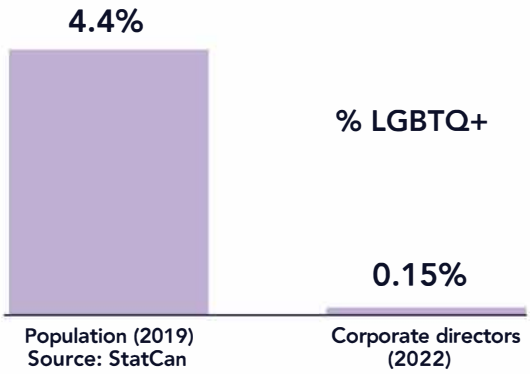
CANADA'S LAVENDER CEILING

LGBTQ+ Corporate Directors on TSX-listed Companies

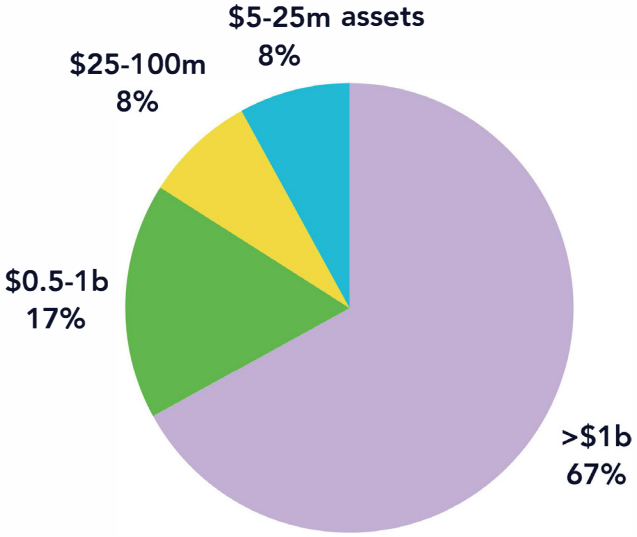
FEW LGBTQ+ DIRECTORS



UNDERREPRESENTED COMPARED TO THE POPULATION IN CANADA

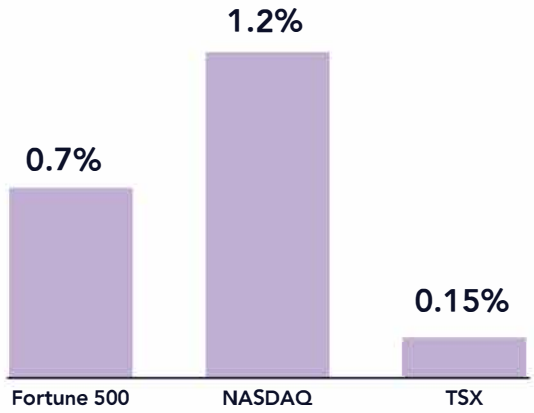


MAINLY IN LARGE COMPANIES



Sectors represented: mining, manufacturing, utilities, finance & insurance, information & cultural

CANADA UNDERPERFORMING COMPARED TO THE US (2022)



% LGBTQ+ Corporate Directors

OUR RESEARCH

- Conducted by Institute for Gender and the Economy (GATE) at the University of Toronto
- All TSX-listed companies (n=1,110) subject to Ontario Securities Commission disclosure regulations for women on boards 2015-2022
- Collected names of all directors 2015-2022 (n=9,396) and searched bios, LinkedIn, QueerBio, public sources for mention of LGBTQ+ identity
- Because we only had access to public data, this is likely an under count of LGBTQ+ directors, where some may have not been comfortable disclosing their identity publicly

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For more information: www.gendereconomy.org/lavenderceiling/

Introduction: The Lavender Ceiling

Diversity on corporate boards is an important bellwether of the climate for inclusion throughout the economy. Recently, attention has turned to LGBTQ+ representation on boards, where LGBTQ+ voices are underrepresented.[1] Our analysis of Toronto Stock Exchange-listed companies from 2015-2022 found only 9 out of 9396 board members (0.15%) openly identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community.[2] This number is notably low, given that 4.4%-9.0% of the Canadian population identify as LGBTQ+.[3,4] We also found that most of these directors are in large companies rather than small or medium-sized organizations.

Similarly, a 2023 report by the Association of LGBTQ+ Corporate Directors in the U.S. stated that although 7.2% of the population identifies as LGBTQ+, they only hold 0.8% of the board seats at Fortune 500 companies and 1.2% at NASDAQ-listed companies. Currently, there are no people who publicly identify as transgender on these boards. Only one non-binary individual holds a board seat outside of the Fortune 500.[5]

The underrepresentation of LGBTQ+ voices on corporate boards is problematic. This is because research shows that increasing board diversity—when coupled with an egalitarian board culture that embraces diverse, even conflicting voices and conversations about diversity[6]—can enhance connections and collaborations among board members, increase innovation and long-term strategic thinking, signal a greater inclusiveness throughout the organization, and improve corporate resilience to crisis.[7]

Yet, outdated approaches to board recruitment, boards' failure to recruit outside of their networks, LGBTQ+ candidates' exclusion or self-exclusion from these networks, and a lack of succession planning all contribute to a lack of representation on boards. This is exacerbated by widespread, inaccurate and harmful stereotypes sometimes held by other board members that depict LGBTQ+ board candidates as underqualified, potentially disruptive, or motivated by a specific agenda.[4]

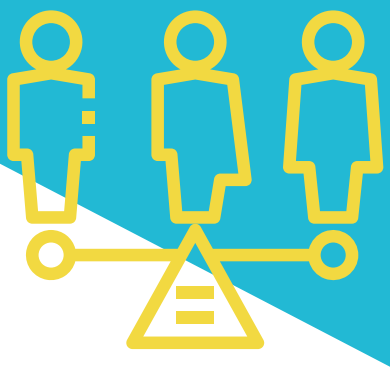
To understand the dynamics shaping the lavender ceiling that LGBTQ+ people encounter as they attempt to rise up in corporate leadership, we reviewed more than 90 academic studies in English from top management, psychology, economics and sociology journals along with industry reports that offered some clues into both the barriers and potential courses of action.

A first observation is that there are vanishingly few academic studies of LGBTQ+ corporate directors. One study focused on stock market response to the appointment of LGBTQ+ board directors and showed that shareholders may negatively evaluate these events in the short term, and when LGBTQ+ directors advocate for diversity and inclusion or serve on the nomination committee, this negative reaction intensifies.[8]

Yet, another study suggests that being appointed to a directorship can make some LGBTQ+ directors feel empowered to disclose their sexual orientation at work and advocate for LGBTQ+ rights within their companies.[9]

This report draws attention to the most important insights from our review of the broader literature on LGBTQ+ inclusion in organizations.

LGBTQ+ inclusion at work



Studies of LGBTQ+ inclusion at work highlight the discrimination members of the community experience, the dilemma they face about whether to reveal versus conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity at work, and the practices organizations can implement to promote a more LGBTQ+-friendly workplace. However, we found that most of this work centers around the lived experiences of gays or lesbians at work, with little about the other facets of the LGBTQ+ community, such as the experiences of non-binary, Two Spirit and transgender employees at work or intersectional perspectives that might take account of how disability, race, or socioeconomic class might shape these experiences.

LGBTQ+ employees experience discrimination at different stages of the employment process, from job application to the work environment to promotions to leadership.

LGBTQ+ job applicants experience discrimination when they seek employment.
LGBTQ+ job applicants can experience discrimination as they submit their job applications and as they participate in interviews.

To start, as LGBTQ+ employees apply for jobs, they get fewer interviews once recruiters learn about their sexual orientation. Specifically, openly gay men and lesbians become 40% and 13% respectively less likely to receive invitations to interviews than their heterosexual counterparts.[10,11]

Even when LGBTQ+ job applicants are invited to interviews, they continue to experience discrimination: Interviewers give them less time, say fewer words to them, and use more negative words during their interviews.[12]

At the same time, when interviewers meet with LGBTQ+ interviewees, they often already associate them with specific roles based on common stereotypes about the LGBTQ+ community, and they react negatively to those who apply for roles that don't fit these stereotypes.[13] For instance, when interviewers judge a male job applicant to be gay, they segregate the applicant into roles that are traditionally seen as communal or feminine. This can take place even when LGBTQ+ interviewees do not disclose of their sexual orientation. This is because interviewers may infer sexual orientation based on visible features, even though they may not be willing to admit it.[14] As an example, interviewers may react negatively to a gay interviewee applying for a job in the trades (e.g., construction worker) during the interview, although this interviewee does not disclose his sexual orientation.

LGBTQ+ employees experience discrimination at work.
After LGBTQ+ job applicants overcome these barriers and get hired, they continue to experience discrimination at work directly or indirectly.

First, other employees can directly mistreat LGBTQ+ co-workers by making uncivil remarks regarding their sexual orientation (e.g., name-calling), ostracizing them, or bullying them.[15] Second, LGBTQ+ employees may also be indirectly mistreated by others.[16] For example, they may witness a fellow LGBTQ+ coworker's mistreatment or involuntarily witness a homophobic discussion at work, even if the negative comments are not directed to them specifically. Third, supposedly neutral employment practices may unintentionally negatively influence LGBTQ+ employees' experiences at work. For instance, while a bring-your-family-to-work event helps connect employees with each other and their families, it may unintentionally force a closeted gay employee to come out at work or keep them from joining in a work event that might advance their careers.

Such discrimination becomes worse for transgender employees. According to the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey by the National Center for Transgender Equality, which included 27,715 transgender participants, 77% of transgender employees have felt pressure to take actions

to protect themselves from workplace discrimination, such as concealing their gender identity.[17] Indeed, a study involving 105 transgender employees found that nearly half of them experienced discriminatory behavior daily, including transphobic remarks and social isolation.[18] At the same time, 67% of them faced negative employment consequences, like job loss or not being hired, while 23% of them encountered other discriminatory actions, such as being pressured to conform to an incorrect gender at work. Moreover, research shows that trans women grouped, separated, and isolated in both formal and informal ways.[19] Trans women choose to work in the same industries and workplaces together (i.e., grouping), such as the call centers, as these places are more accepting of their gender identity. They, however, are kept apart from each other by their managers, and they are restricted from expressing their gender identity at work (i.e., separating and isolating). They are also more likely to be expected to spend more time and energy helping to maintain team unity in ways that go beyond their job duties, thus leaving them less time to focus on job performance.

These experiences of discrimination may make LGBTQ+ employees choose different occupations from heterosexuals to protect themselves. Research finds that gay men and lesbians are more likely to hold gender-atypical occupations (i.e., gay men choose occupations that are typically held by women (e.g., interior design) and lesbians are more likely to choose occupations that are typically held by men (e.g., trades).[20] They are also more likely to prefer to work in public and non-profit sectors[21,22] and find themselves in occupations, such as self-employment or entrepreneurship,[23] where they can perform their tasks independently without collaborations with others.[24]

LGBTQ+ employees have fewer advancement and promotion opportunities at work.
When LGBTQ+ employees become ostracized from social events, networking opportunities, and situations that enable them to build social relationships with others, they become less visible to management. This results in fewer people who can refer or recommend them. This may hinder them from getting a promotion or learning about opportunities within their organizations that help advance their careers.

Meanwhile, as LGBTQ+ employees face ongoing marginalization and discrimination, many of them may be reluctant to apply for leadership positions.[25] This is because these positions often entail greater visibility and therefore invite public scrutiny. Such reluctance excludes them from potential promotions or leadership appointments.

LGBTQ+ employees face a disclosure dilemma at work.
Such discrimination forces LGBTQ+ employees into a disclosure dilemma when they interact with their co-workers. As their sexual orientation or gender identity may not be directly visible to others, people may assume that they are heterosexual or cisgender when they first interact with them.[26] Thus, LGBTQ+ employees must balance the freedom and authenticity of coming out and being themselves at work with their concerns about experiencing discrimination from others. Different people may perceive the costs and benefits of this balance differently and therefore employ different strategies to hide or reveal their sexual orientation and gender identity.[27]

These strategies can be divided into passing (also known as covering) and revealing.[28,29] Passing includes fabrication (lying about oneself to others), concealment (actively preventing others from knowing oneself), and discretion (avoiding questions about one's sexual orientation or gender identity). Revealing includes signaling (navigating the delicate balance between concealing and disclosing by hinting subtly and offering cues), normalizing (presenting one's sexual orientation or gender identity as normal or typical) and differentiating (emphasizing the uniqueness of one's sexual orientation or gender identity and aiming to change the viewpoints and actions of heterosexuals). LGBTQ+ employees can use different strategies as they interact with different people and at different places and times.[30] For example, research finds that LGBTQ+ employees reveal their sexual orientation or gender identity when their co-workers are also members of the LGBTQ+ community or are heterosexual employees who send unambiguous cues of acceptance. At the same time, they may pass when they interact with clients or people who provide signals of rejection or intolerance.[31] Thus, choices about when and how to come out do not happen one time but are a constant tax on LGBTQ+ employees who have to repeat these decisions in every new situation or with every new person they meet.

How, and how much, a LGBTQ+ employee reveals their identity can lead to different outcomes. Passing can result in guilt and distress from a divided self, fear of and anxiety about others' discrimination, isolation from others, decreased effectiveness and wellbeing, and hindered

advancement at work.[26,32,33,34,35,36] Revealing may result in felt authenticity and increased organizational commitment and reduced work-life conflict. [37,38] Depending on how others react, revealing may either invite discrimination and isolation[34,39,40] or instead benefit one's effectiveness and wellbeing.[41] For example, after some LGBTQ+ faculty members at universities have come out at work, they experienced peers' awkwardness and discomfort surrounding their minority sexual orientation, pressure to tone down their "gayness," and increased scrutiny from others through higher evaluation standards for promotions and increased rumors from others.[42] This may become a double-edged sword because those who limit their interactions with their co-workers and managers and remain silent about their personal lives are then falsely regarded by others as having "no life."

Heterosexism and cisnormativity pervade workplace culture.

Heterosexism refers to the expectation or belief that heterosexuality is the norm or default. Cisnormativity is the assumption that gender exists only in a binary (male/female) and that everyone identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth. These frequently show up in workplace culture. For instance, while it may be perfectly acceptable for heterosexuals to talk about their families at work, it may be perceived as "weird" when LGBTQ+ employees bring up their partners or children. Likewise, many policies at work that help employees strike a work-life balance assume that employees have traditional, nuclear families.

Heterosexism and cisnormativity lead to negative behaviors and attitudes that aim to belittle, stigmatize, or limit the actions and norms of those who are not heterosexual or cisgender or to police and enforce heterosexual norms.[43,44] In this sense, while heterosexuals may accept that their co-workers or managers are members of the LGBTQ+ community, they may still be likely to react negatively to or even punish LGBTQ+ employees when they think that their own heterosexual identities are under threat or when they perceive LGBTQ+ employees' behaviors as ones that flaunt their sexual orientation or gender identity.

For example, one study showed that when some single heterosexual police officers feared that others might perceive them as members of LGBTQ+ groups, they engaged in higher frequencies of discrimination and stereotyping towards LGBTQ+ police officers than their married counterparts.[45] Likewise, a study on people working in the trades showed that when the presence of women challenged tradesmen's masculinity, they labeled them as lesbians to mitigate their experienced threat.[46] Meanwhile, tradesmen also used homophobic remarks as a means to police behavior and to establish their superiority over tradesmen from other work teams. At other times, heterosexual men signal their masculinity and discriminate against homosexual men to connect with their other heterosexual men and ostracize gay men.[47] Similarly, policies and legislation such as the "Don't Say Gay" bill in the U.S. reflect heterosexuals' lack of acceptance of non-heterosexual behaviors and norms.[48]

Some studies suggest that certain religious beliefs that view homosexuality as wrong might contribute to continued bias against LGBTQ+ people.[49] Research also shows that some heterosexual individuals might feel uncomfortable around LGBTQ+ coworkers for religious or other reasons.[50,51] This discomfort could result in them avoiding interactions with LGBTQ+ colleagues or to suggesting that they keep their identity less visible at work.

Sometimes, heterosexism can have a reverse effect. For example, research documents how, in jobs that are stereotypically associated with gay men (e.g., dance, interior design) and lesbians, men are assumed to be "gay until proven straight" and women are presumed to be lesbians.[52,53] Thus, heterosexual men and women would then face the disclosure dilemma (i.e., they face the dilemma of whether to come out to their clients, co-workers, and managers as "straight"). These contexts challenge the heteronormativity of most workplaces and reverse the power dynamic between heterosexual and LGBTQ+ employees.[54]

The impact of intersecting identities

LGBTQ+ employees can have multiple intersecting identities—related to gender, race, disability, immigrant status, Indigeneity or other—which can result in different experiences at work.

Multiple (marginalized) identities may make social interactions difficult.
It may be difficult for LGBTQ+ employees with multiple marginalized identities to interpret others' behaviors towards them. For instance, when a Black lesbian employee experiences mistreatment from others at work, she may not know if this mistreatment is targeted at her gender, race, or sexual orientation (or some combination). In this sense, LGBTQ+-based discrimination against employees with multiple marginalized identities may be hard to observe and address, given that it may be intertwined with potential discrimination based on other of their marginalized identities.[55,56,57]

Heteronormativity may harm LGBTQ+ employees with other marginalized identities.
Advocacy within organizations and in society more broadly may unintentionally adopt a heteronormative perspective that aligns with values of the White middle class or reinforces the traditional view that sex, gender, and sexuality are binary.[58] Because heteronormativity is the presumption in most societies, it also can pervade the LGBTQ+ community whose feelings of exclusion may make them want to fit within society's norms. While such strategies may be perceived as expedient for advancing LGBTQ+ rights, they may neglect the interests of other groups of the LGBTQ+ community (e.g., bisexuals, transgender, and intersex people).[59,60,61]

Moreover, heteronormativity may prescribe how LGBTQ+ employees should express their sexual orientation or gender identity (e.g., a gay man should stay physically fit). Thus, those LGBTQ+ employees who deviate from such prescriptions may suffer from additional discrimination from others. This additional discrimination can even include members of their own community. For example, one scholar documented Asian gay men's experiences of racism within the gay community where White gay men ostracized Asian gay men because they presumed they were feminine.[62] Likewise, scholars have found that transgender people can encounter discriminatory behaviors from other members of the LGBTQ+ community.[63] Similarly, sometimes closeted gay men make homophobic jokes when they interact with their heterosexual friends.[64]

In some cases, being gay or lesbian may benefit LGBTQ employees.
Being LGBTQ+ does not have to lead to discrimination if other intersecting identities create advantages in the work context. For example, when gay men join a labor market that is mostly women, they may enjoy the "male privilege" or "patriarchal dividend" of advantages that are afforded to men. In the fashion industry, researchers have documented that gay men gain advantages over women.[65] This is due to society's gendered portrayal of them as the ideal cultural creators, characterized by masculine attributes such as independence, artistic expression, dedication, and genuineness. Similarly, an ethnographic study at a social movement organization documented how support for gay Latino men took priority over support for Latina lesbians and how men (some of whom were gay men) marginalized women (some of whom were lesbians).[66]

In some contexts, the problematic stereotypes associated with being gay (such as being effeminate and weak), can counteract those associated with being Black (such as being threatening or criminal), resulting in more benefits for Black gay job applicants than their White gay counterparts.[67]

In other contexts, members of other parts of the LGBTQ+ community also enjoy benefits from their intersecting identities. For example, amongst law

enforcement officers, lesbians may be more accepted than heterosexual women and gay men by straight male police officers. Indeed, research finds that women who are openly lesbian experience a greater sense of belonging than heterosexual women in many male-dominated occupations.[43,68,69] Further, while gay men earn less than their heterosexual male counterparts,[70] lesbians earn more than heterosexual women.[71] Also, women from racially dominant groups in the tech industry (i.e., Caucasian or Asian) who identify as LGBTQ+ or gender-fluid, can experience inclusion and acceptance into the masculine culture of male-dominated teams, while Black women (who come from a racial minority group in tech) do not enjoy such benefits.[72] Finally, many transgender men gain more authority and respect from others, recognition for hard work, economic opportunities, and status following their transitions, even when they still hold the same jobs. [73,74]

Building an LGBTQ+ friendly workplace

Research has shown that an LGBTQ+-friendly workplace helps organizations attract LGBTQ+ employees and reduces their turnover. This is because 60% to 75% of LGBTQ+ employees regard the ability to freely express their sexual orientation and gender identity at work as important to their wellbeing and productivity.[75] Yet, few organizations take meaningful actions to build a LGBTQ+-friendly workplace. According to the Deloitte Global 2023 LGBTQ+ inclusion at work survey, only 35% of LGBTQ+ employees reported that their employers showed commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion, and 33% of LGBTQ+ employees want to switch to an organization that is more LGBTQ+ inclusive. Likewise, according to a 2023 Out LGBTQ Board Diversity report, only 112 of the Fortune 500 companies use LGBTQ+ as a metric in their board diversity policies.[76] Moreover, research finds that very small firms (under 25 employees) are 33 times less likely and small firms (25 to 100 employees) are 6.5 times less likely to have any type of non-discrimination policy for LGBTQ+ employees than large firms (over 500 employees).[77] Smaller firms are less likely to have the resources, knowledge, skills or human resource staff that could support greater inclusion.

LGBTQ+ employees can be drivers of change.
The minority sexual orientation and gender identity of LGBTQ+ employees often contradict conventional norms, beliefs, and values in organizations. In this sense, LGBTQ+ employees often end up having to be agents of change. As one example, researchers have documented how ministers who were members of the LGBTQ+ community drove change from the bottom-up to resolve the conflict between traditional Christian values and their sexual orientation.[78] Likewise, another study found that transgender employees can engage in behaviors that disrupt the binary concept of gender at work.[79]

Marginalized employees (such as LGBTQ+ employees) are able to make others accept and include them through two pathways. First, they can talk about their sexual orientation or gender identity in ways that align with conventional norms. For instance, when a gay man shares about his sexual orientation, he could simultaneously express his desire for marriage and children. As these align with heterosexual relationship norms, he can make his minority sexual orientation appear "normal" and "acceptable" for his heterosexual co-workers.[80,81]

Alternatively, they can also challenge conventional norms. For instance, by asking, "What makes you say that?" an LGBTQ+ employee can encourage a conversation partner to reflect on what they just said and what they take for granted. In doing so, they can use this as an opportunity to educate people. Actions like this can shift away from heteronormativity to a norm that includes the LGBTQ+ community. For example, gay fraternities at universities challenge the conventional heteronormative and masculine fraternity models by adopting both traditional masculine fraternity practices while promoting inclusion for queerness and femininity.[82] These kinds of actions

can also celebrate the unique strengths of LGBTQ+ employees who can bring new perspectives to organizing and innovating. For example, in job applications, a gay man might highlight how his experiences of marginalization make him stand out from the applicant pool during a job interview.

Organizational policies and practices can promote an LGBTQ+-friendly workplace.
Change should not be delegated to the LGBTQ+ community members alone. Indeed, this can risk putting an extra tax on their energy and time which could take away from their ability to perform in their jobs, inadvertently tokenize them and put them in the spotlight when they are reticent to be there.

Therefore, proactive organizational policies and practices are essential for building a LGBTQ+-friendly workplace. These policies include ones that prevent discrimination against LGBTQ+ employees, increase inclusion and belonging, and extend benefits to same-sex partners.[83] Meanwhile, recognizing marginalized sexual orientation and gender identity as categories of diversity at work also helps. Such recognition can come from general nondiscrimination policies that acknowledge and discipline discrimination against LGBTQ+ employees, any diversity-related language (e.g., diversity statement in companies' hiring, diversity-related communications from managers) at work that includes sexual orientation and gender identity, and diversity training that includes challenges faced based on both sexual orientation and gender identity.

However, these practices may not always work. LGBTQ+ support groups and diversity training programs with content on LGBTQ+ inclusion may not make the workplace more inclusive.[79] For instance, LGBTQ+ support groups primarily include LGBTQ+ employees and their allies. However, these groups may not effectively reduce the discrimination LGBTQ+ employees experience at work, given that such discrimination often comes from heterosexual peers who do not participate in these groups. As such, one study found that while these groups help LGBTQ+ employees feel connected and facilitate their decisions to come out at work, the employees still perceive the same level of discrimination as before these groups were formed.

Likewise, while diversity training programs may educate employees about their biases, they may be met with resistance and could backfire if these programs send signals that undermine their supposed goals.[84] First, when these programs send the signal that LGBTQ+ employees need help to succeed at work, this signal can increase other employees' perceptions that LGBTQ+ employees lack competence. In this way, it can invoke employees' stereotypes, increase discrimination against LGBTQ+ employees, lead to LGBTQ+ employees' decreased job performance, and ultimately result in reduced representation of LGBTQ+ employees. Second, when these programs send the signal that LGBTQ+ employees can succeed at work, this signal can make majority members (e.g., heterosexual peers) experience threat and regard organizational practices as unfair. This is because people often view intergroup relations as a zero-sum game: When majority group members perceive that minority group members are more likely to succeed, they worry that they will be less likely to succeed and more likely to be discriminated against.[85,86] Thus, training programs need to be designed to avoid sending these signals by showing that the playing field is not level and moving beyond the zero-sum game mentality.

Further, research by the Institute for Gender and the Economy and Pride at Work Canada showed that while a number of Canada's most prominent employers do pursue these practices, most use one umbrella for their LGBTQ+ policies, training and practices which means that the focus ends up being primarily on the experiences of lesbian and gay employees with little attention to the potentially different needs of transgender employees.[87] The most effective efforts will recognize the diversity within the diversity of the LGBTQ+ community and tailor programs accordingly.

Supervisors and peers can support LGBTQ+ employees.
Supervisor support refers to support from managers towards LGBTQ+ employees, while interpersonal or peer support refers to the support (e.g., allyship) co-workers provide for each other. Research finds that supervisor support increases LGBTQ+ employees' job satisfaction and peer support increases their life satisfaction.[88] Both types of support make LGBTQ+ employees feel included and perceive less discrimination.[31,38,78]

Supervisor support can involve regular check-ins with LGBTQ+ employees to make them feel heard and included. Such support can also involve active detection and prevention of discrimination against them or development of beneficial resources. For instance, offering mentorship opportunities for LGBTQ+ employees increases their job satisfaction

and job engagement.[89] When looking at mentorship relationships, it is important to recognize the advantages of having both LGBTQ+ mentors and ones who are outside of the community. An LGBTQ+ mentor improves the mentees' wellbeing more and gives more relevant and specific advice than a heterosexual mentor, but a heterosexual mentor helps their LGBTQ+ mentees get more promotions than a LGBTQ+ one. However, research finds that LGBTQ+ employees often lack access to mentoring and management training opportunities, resulting in their higher turnover than their heterosexual, cisgender peers.[90]

Interpersonal support refers to allyship for LGBTQ+ co-workers. Being an ally means that coworkers use the privileges they enjoy as heterosexuals to support their LGBTQ+ peers.[91] For instance, co-workers can take the initiative to learn about the origins and prevalence of discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community. In this way, they can become aware of their privileges and potential biases and work to mitigate them when they interact with their LGBTQ+ peers. Likewise, co-workers can advocate for LGBTQ+ rights at work, defend LGBTQ+ employees who are wronged, or educate others about the LGBTQ+ community. In doing so, these acts can increase LGBTQ employees' job satisfaction and perceived value of work. Importantly, doing this work transfers the burden of change away from the LGBTQ+ employees themselves and thus helps reduce their emotional exhaustion.[15] Sometimes, simply including LGBTQ+ employees and their partners can also make them feel a sense of belonging.[77]

Being an ally for LGBTQ+ employees at work can take courage. This is because other employees may shun those who affiliate with stigmatized people (e.g., LGBTQ+ employees), believing that they "absorb" the stigma by association (i.e., they also might be seen as members of the LGBTQ+ community).[23]

Allyship can benefit the people who do it. First, it gives the allies opportunities to connect with LGBTQ+ employees at work which builds their own network of support.[92] As they help LGBTQ+ employees feel more included and advocate for their rights, LGBTQ+ employees are likely to return their favor. They can reciprocate by trusting them more or becoming friends with them. Second, it fosters personal growth and the development of leadership skills.[93] Being an ally encourages the ally to become more aware of others' diverse experiences and unique challenges. This helps the ally learn about and mitigate their biases towards others. Third, when someone identifies with someone who is being ally (i.e., observers think that they are like the actors or want to be like the actors), they are more likely to emulate the allyship behaviors and become allies themselves.[94] As such, being an ally has a positive spiral effect, thus contributing to a more inclusive culture where LGBTQ+ employees belong.

Policies and activism can promote LGBTQ+-friendly workplaces.

Beyond relationships and actions within an organizations, stakeholders—such as lawmakers, social activists, and shareholders—can help build LGBTQ+-friendly workplaces.

First, legislation and government policies can create a supportive umbrella for corporate efforts at inclusion. In Canada, securities administrators have created a disclosure requirement for women on boards and are currently considering including information on other groups such as members of the LGBTQ+ community. These regulations can shed a light on an issue and help organizations work towards greater inclusion. For example, prior to the achievement of marriage equality in the U.S., research found that state policies dissuaded employer adoption of LGBTQ+-inclusive policies when laws prohibited same-sex marriage and, on the other hand, facilitated adoption of inclusive corporate policies when states had LGBTQ+ non-discrimination laws.[95] Given that the challenge of LGBTQ+ inclusion is even greater in small and medium-sized firms, policy makers can focus on creating resources and support for these organizations as they learn how to create more inclusive environments.

Second, shareholders of public companies can help build a LGBTQ+-friendly workplace by presenting resolutions that demand adoption of or changes to LGBTQ+-inclusive policies and practices.[95] The more these resolutions are supported by shareholders, the more likely organizations are to comply with their demands. Recently, according to the ruling of the US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), shareholders have the right to ask questions about the health benefits being offered to LGBTQ+ employees at companies.[96] This represents the first legal attempt at legitimizing and protecting such resolutions. Third, activists and advocacy groups, such as experts and lobbyists can advocate for organizations to adopt LGBTQ+-inclusive policies and practices as well. For example, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC)

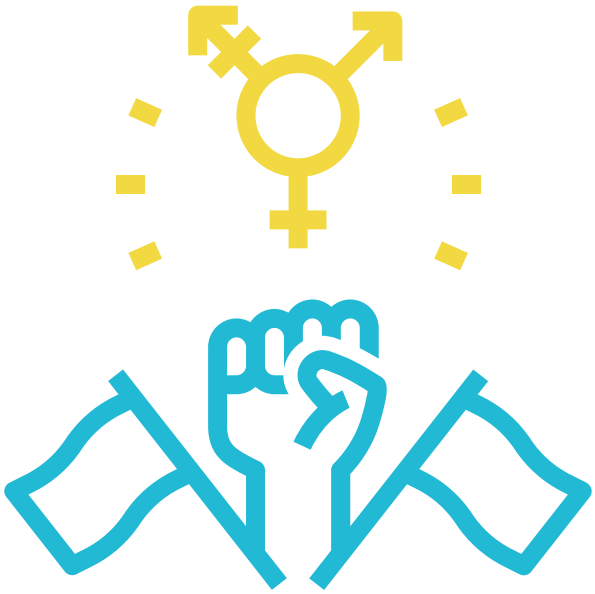
publishes reports that show which employers adopt or reject LGBTQ+-inclusive policies, thus shining a light on company actions and potentially creating social pressure to conform.[97]

At the same time, these approaches only can work if employers themselves follow through by creating inclusive environments. For example, one study found that protective legislation does not influence lesbian teachers' disclosure decisions at work because many either still fear for others' (e.g., parents, children, members of the general public, co-workers) negative reactions or they internalize the stigma, stereotypes, and discrimination from others.[98,99] Such fear and internalization make them anticipate job insecurity upon coming out and thus still remain closeted.

Researchers can shed a light on LGBTQ+ inclusion on boards.
As we have noted above, little research has been devoted to LGBTQ+ representation on boards, so this report is a call to action for more data and thoughtful analysis. Government and regulatory researchers could support more effective legislative, regulatory and corporate policy making by tracking statistics and publishing reports on representation. Industry associations would benefit from resources to support their work to advance representation, including by surveying members. Academic scholars would usefully turn their attention to this neglected aspect of board diversity, studying more closely the barriers to representation as well as the impact of increased diversity on board and corporate performance.

Conclusion: Breaking the Lavender Ceiling

Our analysis shows that LGBTQ+ people are underrepresented in corporate directorships but little scholarly research has addressed topic. Research on LGBTQ+ inclusion in organizations more broadly shows that LGBTQ+ employees face many challenges at work due to overt or inadvertent stereotyping and discrimination. As a result, LGBTQ+ people face a disclosure dilemma, trading off true authenticity with the risks of coming up against barriers to achievement. Taken together, these factors often prevent LGBTQ+ people from rising to the top of organizations such that they could eventually be considered for board positions. Yet, there are many benefits for employees and organizations to having LGBTQ+ people in top leadership and board roles. Organizations are missing out on the tremendous insights and strengths that LGBTQ+ people can bring to the party. To remedy the situation, research suggests that peers, supervisors, organizations and external stakeholders can take actions to build more LGBTQ+-friendly workplaces. No one action on its own will improve LGBTQ+ inclusion, but each action can feed on the others, creating a virtuous cycle.



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