

Over the last decade and a half, hundreds of major businesses have adopted policies, benefits and practices aimed at furthering the inclusion of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) community in the workplace with concrete advances such as the widespread adoption of sexual orientation and gender identity non-discrimination protections; partner benefits; employee resource groups; supplier diversity; and, public policy efforts.<sup>1</sup> A full 609 businesses earned a 100 percent score in the Human Rights Campaign's 2018 [Corporate Equality Index](#).

However, **bisexual visibility and inclusion continues to be a challenge for many workplaces**. LGBTQ inclusive policies, benefits and practices are absolutely critical to creating more equality on the job, but alone they are not sufficient for true cultural change. The HRC Foundation's research on the daily realities of LGBTQ experiences, or the workplace climate, consistently shows significant numbers of Bi-identified workers across every region, industry and age group.

At the same time, the levels of concerted employer and employee resource group efforts to include Bi workers remain disproportionately low. This compounds the often reported struggles of Bi workers feeling that they cannot bring their full selves to work and be open about their identities, with a majority of Bi workers in national studies self-reporting being open "to no one" or "to only a few people" at work.

For example, HRC Foundation's climate study [Degrees of Equality](#), found that **bisexuals are less likely to self-report their sexual orientation in an anonymous, confidential human resource survey than their gay and lesbian peers** — 59 percent versus 79 percent of gay men and 77 percent of lesbians.

Daily interactions - "watercooler conversations" - are opportunities for rapport building between co-workers and generally a consistent part of the work day. However, these seemingly small moments of chitchat between colleagues can also be a source of behavior that chills the environment and prevents full LGBT inclusion, especially Bi inclusion. In a [recent survey by HRC](#), **a full 43% of LGBT workers report hearing jokes about bisexual people**. One of the most common ways for someone to brush off or recover from an offensive statement is to claim it was only a joke. Yet, jokes are fair indicators of culture and climate; about what acceptable behavior is, and what is fair game for mockery. For a Bi person gauging whether or not a workplace is a safe place to be out, one unchecked joke or negative remark can be enough to keep someone in the closet.

A driving force behind bi-invisibility is the preponderance of negative stereotypes and misconceptions about the bisexual community. Despite significant evidence to the contrary, some people continue to believe the myth that bisexuality doesn't exist or is "just a phase" on the way to being straight or gay. In fact, studies show that **there are as many or more bisexuals than there are gays AND lesbians combined**.<sup>2</sup>

The impact of bi-invisibility in the workplace is clear – **employees having to hide who they are comes at the cost of individual employee engagement and retention**, and reveals broader challenges of full inclusion in the workplace – not just with respect to bisexual people but along other lines of diversity such as gender, race and ability as well.

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<sup>1</sup> In the 2018 Corporate Equality Index, 99% of rated companies had non-discrimination policies that specifically included sexual orientation and 97% included gender identity. 82% of CEI-rated companies provide domestic partner benefits, 89% have an ERG or diversity council and over two-thirds (72%) engage in external efforts of public engagement with the LGBTQ community

<sup>2</sup> The Williams Institute study; Gates, Gary J., 2011 [How many people are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender?](#)

### As an Individual:

- **Challenge yourself.** What biases do you hold about bisexual people? We all have predispositions and beliefs based on our early life lessons that we bring to the workplace and our relationships with others. Be willing to acknowledge and address your own bias even if it is uncomfortable to do so.
- **Use inclusive language** – Don't assume to know an individual's sexual orientation. Someone in a same-sex relationship may not necessarily be gay or lesbian – and someone in a different-sex relationship may not necessarily be straight.
- **Remember – B is part of LGBTQ!** Bisexual colleagues in different-sex relationships are still members of the LGBT community and not the same as allies.
- **Speak up.** If you overhear a bi-phobic comment or inappropriate joke in your workplace, let others know that's not ok. A term like 'fence-sitting' or even just eye-rolling can create an unwelcoming environment for bisexuals.
- Take opportunities to **highlight positive stories** of people who are Bi – whether someone you know personally or public figures – this helps create a connection to the human experiences of Bi people.

### In your LGBT ERG:

- **Be bi-inclusive** in your employee resource group or network.
- Think about your conversations, group programming and events – and **be intentional in creating a bi-inclusive space**. For example, recognize a leader in Bi inclusion in annual leadership or engagement awards.
- **Include specific events** to create bi-awareness; for example, recognize Celebrate Bisexuality Day annually on September 23rd.
- Review collateral and communication materials with an eye towards **Bi representation** (e.g. in LGBTQ celebrities cited, examples of best practices, etc).
- Offer guidance to senior ERG champions and spokespeople to **seamlessly reference Bi inclusion** in talks rather than shorthand the community to “gay” or “gay and lesbian” when referencing sexual orientation.

### HR & Management

- Make sure you're aware of your **company's policies, practices and benefits** related to bisexual people.
- Be knowledgeable on your company benefits regarding same- and different-sex domestic partner benefits. When a company offers **Domestic Partner Benefits** for same-sex couples only, different-sex bisexual relationships can suffer, as will couples who choose not to marry for other reasons. Support same-sex and different-sex DPBs at your company.
- Increase awareness and understanding by **incorporating Bi inclusive examples** in your non-discrimination, anti-harassment and/or conscious/unconscious bias workplace trainings.

For more information, please visit: [www.hrc.org/bisexual](http://www.hrc.org/bisexual)

*Special thanks to **Heidi Bruins Green** for her input and guidance on this resource.*

We welcome feedback on this and other resources at [workplace@hrc.org](mailto:workplace@hrc.org)