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'Long way to go:' LGBT+ employees are few in corporate America

By Matthew Lavietes



NEW YORK (Thomson Reuters Foundation) - LGBT+ Americans are largely absent from the highest ranks of corporate America, where they often feel insulted and isolated, a study showed on Tuesday, putting into question the efficacy of efforts at inclusion and diversity.

The findings come despite business support for events such as pride parades and corporations speaking out against anti-LGBT+ measures such as those seeking to bar same-sex couple adoption, said authors of the study by McKinsey & Co., a top U.S. management consulting firm.

In corporate America, LGBT+ workers are significantly underrepresented and are more often subject to demeaning jokes and comments than are their straight colleagues, the study said.

“Support is at an all-time high for the LGBT+ community in corporate America, but we’re not where we want to be,” said Ana Mendy, a co-author of the study.

“We have a long way to go to translate good intention into actual results,” she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Among the efforts at corporate inclusion, hundreds of major consumer brands have become regular sponsors of annual LGBT+ pride events and donated millions of dollars to LGBT+ causes.

Corporations also have been transforming recruitment practices and marketing tactics to attract an LGBT+ workforce and LGBT+ consumers.

The U.S. Supreme Court last week delivered a landmark victory for LGBT+ rights by ruling that federal law barring workplace discrimination includes protection for gay and transgender employees.

More than 200 corporations became involved in the case by signing court documents in support of the expanded protection.

An estimated 4.5% of Americans identify as LGBT+, according to the Williams Institute, a research center at the University of California. Of those, 58% are women and 42% are men.

But in corporate America, LGBT+ men make up 3.1% of entry-level employees and 2.9% of top executives, the report found.

LGBT+ women make up 2.3% of entry-level employees, 1.6% of managers and just 0.6% of top corporate executives.

The researchers surveyed about 65,000 employees from about 300 corporations in 2018 and 2019.

Among those companies, only four chief executives were openly LGBT+ and none were transgender, it said.

In the study, LGBT+ respondents reported that they repeatedly had to explain their gender identity to colleagues, something nearly half said they had to do at least once a week.

LGBT+ women were twice as likely as women overall to experience “onlyness,” being the only one with their gender identity or sexual orientation, and seven times more likely to feel that way than straight white men, the report found.

Among LGBT+ women of color, two-thirds said they experienced “onlyness.”

Underrepresentation and isolation combined have led to a greater likelihood of LGBT+ people being vulnerable to sexist jokes, demeaning remarks and sexual harassment, the report said.

More than half of the LGBT+ women said they had experienced sexual harassment at work, 1.4 times more than straight women and 1.9 times more than LGBT+ men, it said.

Reporting by Matthew Laviates, Editing by Ellen Wulforst; Please credit the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the charitable arm of Thomson Reuters, that covers the lives of people around the world who struggle to live freely or fairly. Visit news.trust.org

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