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The Leadership Center *for inclusion*

Uncovering talent A new model of inclusion

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Rediscovering inclusion

It has now been many years since the diversity and inclusion revolution swept the corporate world. Today, most Fortune 500 companies have a diversity and inclusion officer who superintends an impressive array of programs focused on the needs of a diverse workforce.¹ Yet reports suggest that full inclusion remains elusive:

- “Only a little more than 1 percent of the nation’s Fortune 500 companies have Black chief executives... At the nation’s biggest companies, about 3.2 percent of the senior executive positions are held by African Americans.”²
- “A meager 21 of the Fortune 500 CEOs are women. Women hold about 14 percent of executive officer positions, 17 percent of board seats, and constitute 18 percent of our elected congressional officials.”³
- “There isn’t a single openly gay chief executive officer in the Fortune 1000.” As the Human Rights Campaign’s director of corporate programs noted, “Being gay in the corporate world is still far from being a ‘nonissue,’” given that “many subtle biases remain in the workplace.”⁴

Why have inclusion programs stalled on these fronts? One intuitive answer is that these initiatives have not lived up to the core ideal of inclusion. The ideal of inclusion has long been to allow individuals to bring their authentic selves to work. However, most inclusion efforts have not explicitly and rigorously addressed the pressure to conform that prevents individuals from realizing that ideal. This study hypothesizes that a model of inclusion analyzing that pressure might be beneficial to historically underrepresented groups. Indeed, given that everyone has an authentic self, a culture of greater authenticity might benefit all individuals, including the straight White men who have traditionally been left out of the inclusion paradigm. To test this theory, this research draws on the concept of “covering.”



The concept of covering

In 1963, sociologist Erving Goffman coined the term “covering” to describe how even individuals with known stigmatized identities made a “great effort to keep the stigma from looming large.”⁵ Goffman gave the example of how President Franklin Delano Roosevelt ensured he was always seated behind a table before his Cabinet entered. President Roosevelt was not hiding his disability — everyone knew he was in a wheelchair. However, he was covering, making sure his disability was in the background of the interaction.*

In 2006, Kenji Yoshino further developed the concept of “covering.”⁶ He elaborated the four axes along which individuals can cover: Appearance, Affiliation, Advocacy, and Association.



Appearance-based covering concerns how individuals alter their self-presentation — including grooming, attire, and mannerisms — to blend into the mainstream. For instance, a Black woman might straighten her hair to de-emphasize her race.



Affiliation-based covering concerns how individuals avoid behaviors widely associated with their identity, often to negate stereotypes about that identity. A woman might avoid talking about being a mother because she does not want her colleagues to think she is less committed to her work.



Advocacy-based covering concerns how much individuals “stick up for” their group. A veteran might refrain from challenging a joke about the military, lest she be seen as overly strident.



Association-based covering concerns how individuals avoid contact with other group members. A gay person might refrain from bringing his same-sex partner to a work function so as not to be seen as “too gay.”

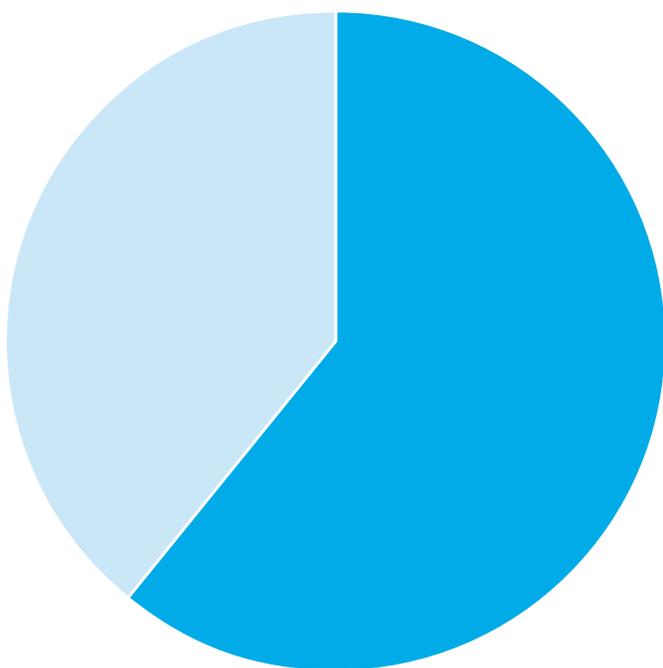
The pressure to cover is distinct from discrimination under governing legal standards. Organizations should be interested in covering not because they are “playing defense” against lawsuits, but because they are “playing offense” to create a more inclusive culture over and above legal compliance. Most Fortune 500 companies are seeking to create that culture. Yet the covering concept has not been applied to the corporate context. This research sets out to do so.

* “Covering” differs from the more familiar term “passing.” When an individual passes, she is ensuring that others around her do not know she possesses a particular identity. When an individual covers, she has disclosed that identity but seeks to mute its significance. Covering is a much more universal dynamic — while only some groups have the capacity to pass, all groups have the capacity to cover.

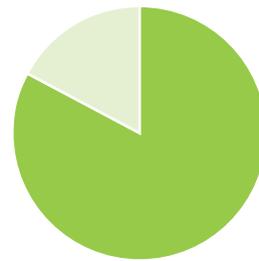
Covering at work

To measure the prevalence of covering, a survey was distributed to employees in organizations spanning ten different industries. The 3,129 respondents included a mix of ages, genders, races/ethnicities, and orientations. The respondents also came from different levels of seniority within their organizations.

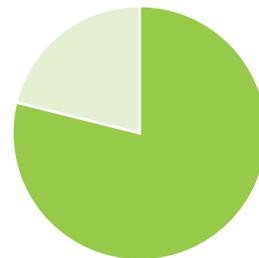
Sixty-one percent of respondents reported covering along at least one axis at work. Eighty-three percent of LGB individuals, 79 percent of Blacks, 67 percent of women of color, 66 percent of women, and 63 percent of Hispanics cover. Covering occurred with greater frequency within groups that have been historically underrepresented. At the same time, 45 percent of straight White men — who have not been the focus of most inclusion efforts — reported covering. This finding seems particularly promising, given that a model of “inclusion” should, almost by definition, be one in which all individuals can see themselves.



61%
reported covering
along at least one axis



83%
of LGB individuals



79%
of Blacks



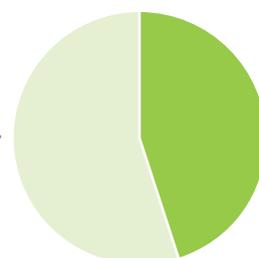
67%
of women of color



66%
of women



63%
of Hispanics



45%
of straight White
men cover



To understand how a group might cover along the four dimensions, consider these results from the cohort that reported the highest degree of covering.

This table, which is representative of the qualitative data reported by Black respondents, bears out the hypothesis that the amount or type of covering can help diagnose the remaining work to be done in the area of inclusion. All surveyed individuals worked for companies with inclusion efforts pertaining to race and ethnicity. Nevertheless, almost all Black respondents reported pressure to downplay their identities in a way that their mainstream counterparts did not. Many Black women observed that they felt they could not wear their natural hair at work. While this pressure may seem trivial, it symbolically singles out this subgroup. No other group expressed discomfort about wearing their natural hair. In addition, many Black respondents reported that they could not associate with each other too much in public, lest they be seen as a “clique.” No White respondent expressed that view.

The issue is not formal inclusion — none of these individuals complained of exclusion from a particular work situation. The question was not whether they were included, but *on what terms* they felt their inclusion rested. Often that perceived social contract involved managing aspects of their identity in a way that the dominant group would not have to do. These individuals felt they had to work their identities alongside their jobs.

In these ways, the Uncovering Talent model identifies challenges faced by specific cohorts. Group-based covering charts, such as the one to the right, could be useful to an organization concerned about its inclusion efforts with regard to a particular population. Asking the right questions about the pressure to conform can provide organizations with fresh insights about those populations.

Perhaps less intuitively, the Uncovering Talent model allows organizations to find common ground across all groups. Current diversity initiatives have often emphasized what political scientist Robert Putnam has called “bonding capital” over what he calls “bridging capital.”⁷ Bonding capital concerns solidarity within a group; bridging capital concerns solidarity across groups. Putnam argues that a healthy community requires both — while bonding capital is “sociological superglue” that strengthens ties within a group, bridging capital is “sociological WD-40” that strengthens ties across groups. Employee resource

Race/ethnicity-based covering (Black)

Appearance



“I went through a period two years ago where I had a bad reaction to the chemical straightener I used in my hair and had to stop. It was so uncomfortable wearing my natural hair to work that I resorted to wearing weaves, which were very costly and did more damage to my hair. However, I felt that the weave was more acceptable than wearing my natural hair. I also hated that when I wore my natural hair it always seems to be the subject of conversation as if that single feature defined who I am as a person.”

Affiliation



“[I] remov[e] myself from discussions involving mainstream news figures of the day (Susan Rice, Tiger Woods, Barack Obama).”

Advocacy



“I definitely avoid being too involved in events at work targeted to Blacks because too often when we speak up, we are seen as ‘having an attitude’ or having a chip on our shoulders. I even go to the point of making it very clear that I am from the Caribbean so that [I] am not associated with the negative stereotypes I hear about Blacks and sometimes to make the majority feel more comfortable around me.”

Association



“I make a concerted effort not to be seen around other African American professionals in order to avoid some of the labels I’ve seen placed on other individuals.”

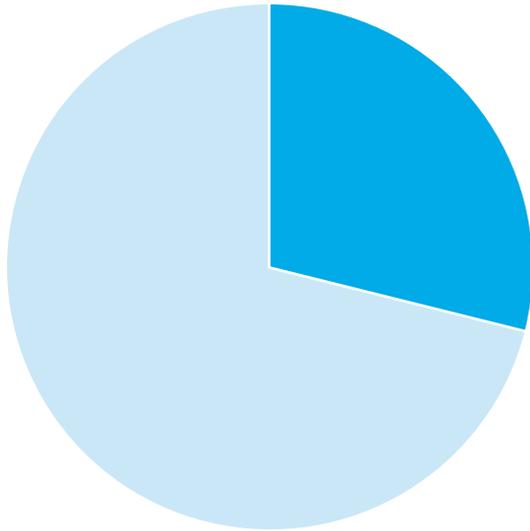
groups and business resource groups are potent sources of bonding capital. However, unless supplemented by bridging capital, these groups can encourage individuals to remain in silos that foster an us/them mentality.

The Uncovering Talent model breaks those silos by showing how all groups cover along the four axes. To demonstrate those commonalities, the following survey responses are organized by axis (appearance, affiliation, advocacy, and association). Each axis highlights the cohorts that engaged in the most covering (those based on race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation), as well as less traditional inclusion cohorts.

As these tables suggest, the Uncovering Talent model is designed to create “bridging capital” among groups in at least two ways. First, understanding how a group covers can lead to greater understanding across groups. Second, the model highlights that all groups experience analogous pressures. In doing so, different groups can begin to develop a common interest in a culture of authenticity. Covering is not just something “they” do — it is something “we” do.

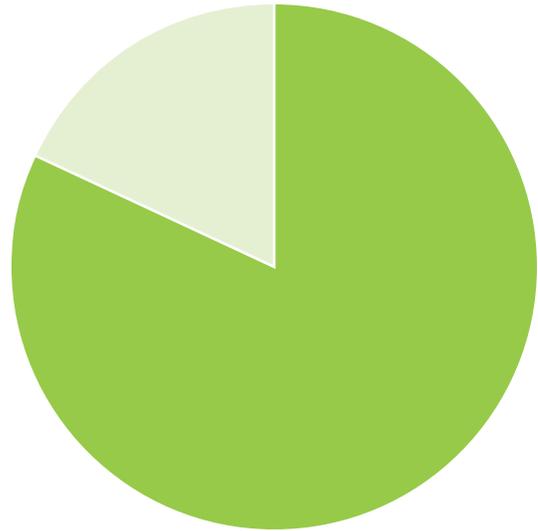


Appearance-based covering



29%

of respondents said they engaged in appearance-based covering.



82%

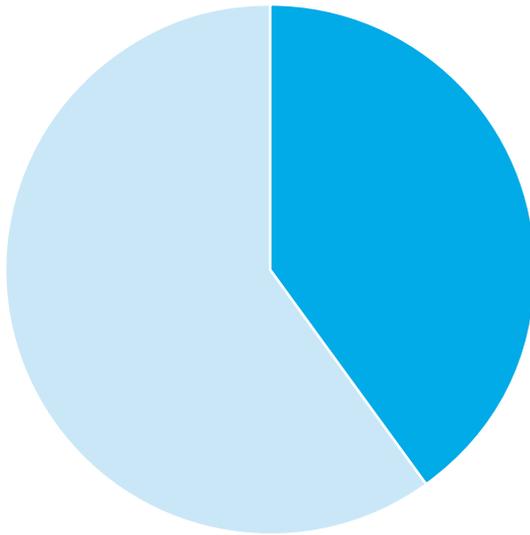
of those who covered believed appearance-based covering was "somewhat" to "extremely" important to their long-term professional advancement.



Race/ethnicity (Asian)	"To overcome for Asian stereotype[s], I do my best to speak up, speak clearly, and carry myself in a confident manner."
Gender (female)	"[I] wear clothes to appear more masculine, model male behavior to break down barriers to success, go to places that men like to go to be part of my group at work, [and] downplay my interest in feminine things."
Sexual orientation	"I have thought to myself — 'I can't wear that to work; it's too gay.'"
Disability	"I don't use my cane if I can avoid it."
Military status	"[I do] not openly display my military status unless asked about it."
Socioeconomic background	"I also grew up very poor and for whatever reason felt that people would know that by looking at me. For years, I would make sure my clothes were name brand (even if they were bought at a discount) just so that I could feel like I belonged."

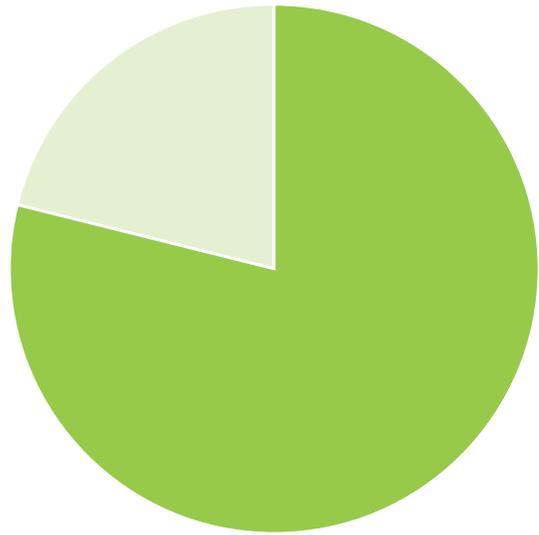


Affiliation-based covering



40%

of respondents said they engaged in affiliation-based covering.



79%

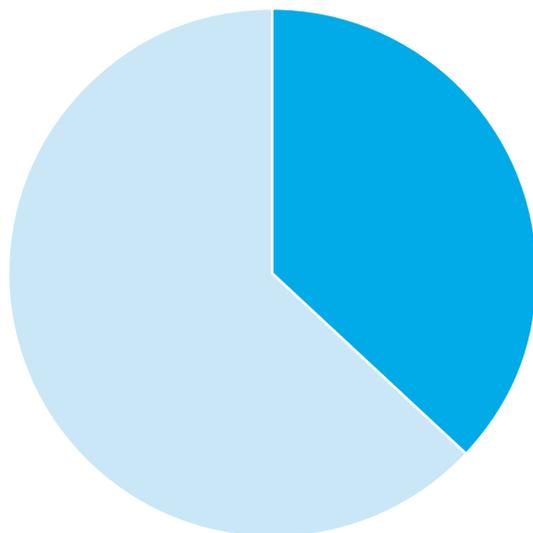
believed affiliation-based covering was "somewhat" to "extremely" important to their long-term professional advancement.



Race/ethnicity (Asian)	"I try to stay away from work that is stereotypical of Asian[s] (e.g., math)."
Gender (female)	"I was coached to not mention family commitments (including daycare pickup, for which I leave half an hour early, but check in remotely at night) in conversations with executive management, because the individual frowns on flexible work arrangements."
Sexual orientation	"[I have] no pictures of my partner in the office, [and leave] off personal pronouns in discussion."
Age (younger)	"I am hesitant about taking time off during the day to attend doctors' appointments or taking extended PTO. I feel that being a younger practitioner, I have not earned that type of flexibility."
Age (older)	"I am worried that my age will block me from promotion since I am older than many people in my position so I have been careful not to mention my age or anything that might date me."
Socioeconomic background	"I didn't always volunteer the information that I grew up very poor and that I was the first to go to college. It seemed like I wouldn't be accepted because I always assumed everyone I worked with grew up middle or upper class."

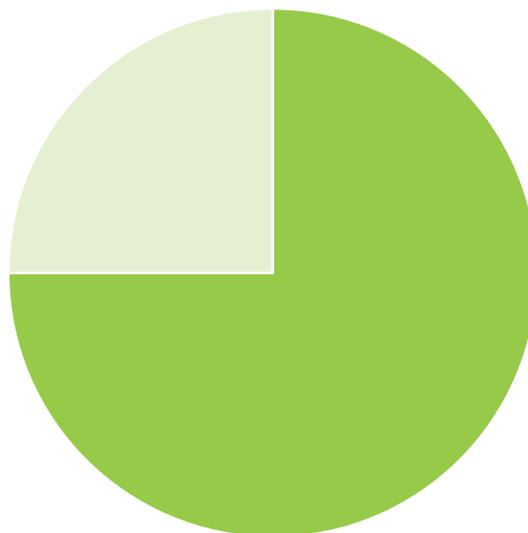


Advocacy-based covering



37%

of respondents said they engaged in advocacy-based covering.

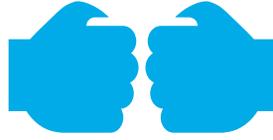


75%

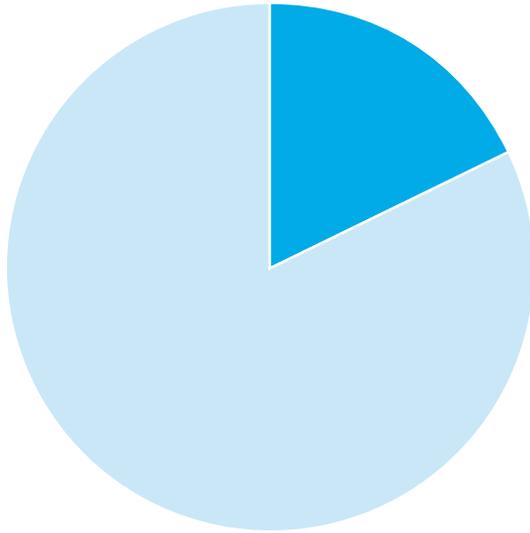
believed advocacy-based covering was "somewhat" to "extremely" important to their long-term professional advancement.



Race/ethnicity (Asian)	"Even though I am of Chinese descent, I would never correct people if they make jokes or comments about Asian stereotypes."
Gender	"I try not to make gender an issue at all. I never suggest it is an issue and do not bring up gender bias as a factor when considering applicants, etc., even if it might be present."
Sexual orientation	"I didn't feel I could protest when the person put in charge of diversity for our group was in fact an extremely vocal homophobe."
Citizenship	"Having a green card and not being a full citizen, I do not like to speak about anything political. The risk of hearing 'if you don't like it here, just leave' is always a fear."
Disability	"I would very much like to be an advocate for disability inclusion and improvements . . . but I have been reluctant to, because I'm afraid it will have [a] negative impact on my career."
Political affiliation	"It is difficult during an election year to not offend anyone who may be a Republican or a Democrat. And as such, you tend to downplay your own beliefs."

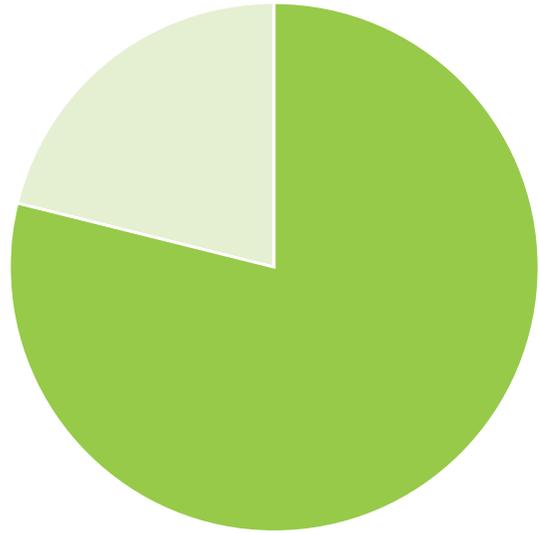


Association-based covering



18%

of respondents said they engaged in association-based covering.



79%

believed association-based covering was “somewhat” to “extremely” important to their long-term professional advancement.



Race/ethnicity (Asian)	“I don’t want people to define me as an Asian, so I’ve been hesitant to participate in activities geared toward the Asian community.”
Gender	“I am extremely sensitive to whether I am viewed as a sponsor of women versus a sponsor of people. I recognize that women need sponsors and that it is important for me to act as a sponsor to women, but I am also sensitive to whether my efforts in that regard will be perceived as ‘favoritism.’”
Sexual orientation	“I never bring a +1 to work events. I also try to avoid mentoring or sponsoring only people of color or LGBT.”
Mental health	“While I privately associate and support others with depression, I avoid doing so publicly. When asked why I am a member of the [disability-focused] BRG, I say it is because I believe in equality for all . . . and do not mention it is personal.”
Physical health	“I don’t associate with cancer groups, because I don’t want to draw attention to my medical status, disability, or flexible arrangements. People tend to look at me like I’m dying when they find out I have cancer, they avoid giving me longer term or higher-profile projects. Mostly I think they do this to be nice, because they assume I can’t handle it.”
Teetotalism	“Years ago, I was a social drinker but that’s not a part of my life any more. The lead manager in our group often invites all of us to join him in an after-work drink. I joined the group a couple of times and was ribbed loudly for not ordering an alcoholic beverage. Now when the invitation goes out to our team, I always give an excuse not to join them. I think some people have begun to think I’m standoffish.”

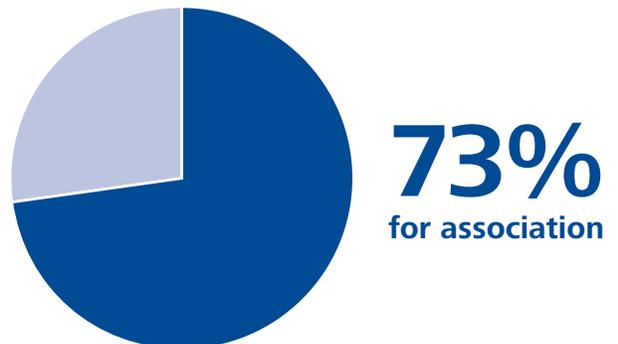
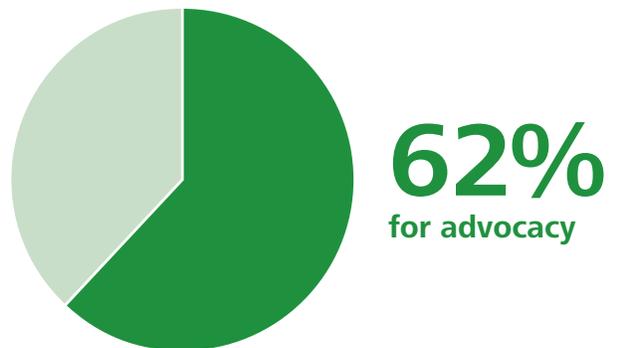
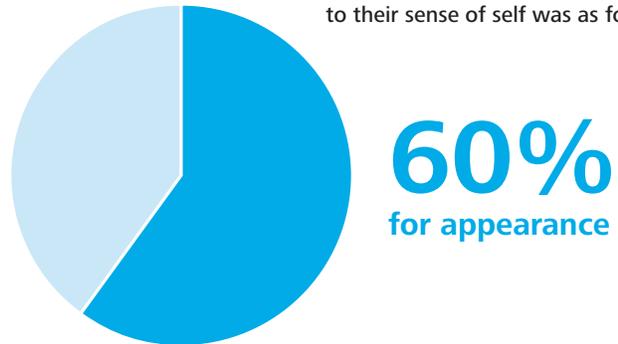
The impact of covering

Having identified the incidence of covering across these populations, it is time to turn to describing the impact such covering has on individuals and organizations. The impact of certain kinds of covering behavior will be immediately evident, such as the physical pain suffered by the person who forgoes a cane to cover his disability, the juggling act conducted by the woman who must not only care for her children but also pretend she is not doing so, or the personal humiliation suffered by the gay person who feels he should not bring his spouse to an event where significant others are invited. Nonetheless, a skeptic might argue that outside of a narrow set of instances, the effects of covering might be trivial. To assess this point, the survey specifically asked respondents about the perceived impact of covering. For each axis, the percentage of respondents who stated that the practice of covering was “somewhat” to “extremely” detrimental to their sense of self was high: 60 percent for appearance; 68 percent for affiliation; 62 percent for advocacy; and 73 percent for association. For many respondents, then, the effects of covering were far from trivial.

It might seem obvious that individuals could not experience such negative impacts without having that affect their organizations. Yet rather than assuming that connection, the survey asked individuals how perceived expectations to cover affected their sense of opportunity within the organization and their commitment to their organizations. To get a better sense of what individuals perceived the source of these expectations to be, the survey distinguished the role of leaders from that of organizational culture.*

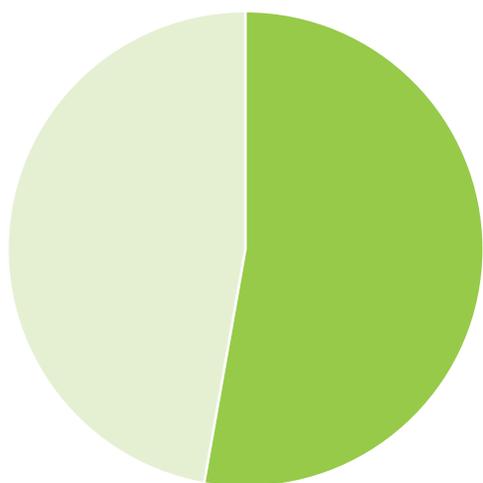
* The survey inquired about leadership and organizational culture to isolate the sources of covering that an entity could actually influence. Many covering expectations, of course, are beyond the control of organizations for any number of reasons (e.g., because they flow from society at large.)

The percentage of respondents who said that covering along an axis was “somewhat” to “extremely” detrimental to their sense of self was as follows:



53%

of respondents stated that their leaders expect employees to cover.

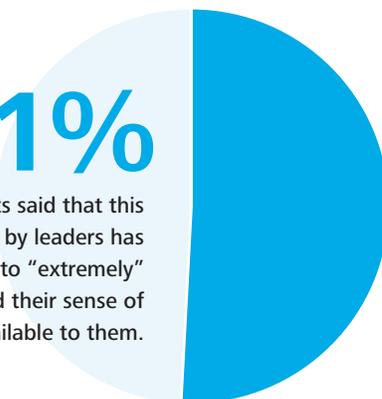


Leaders signal to others in the organization how they should think, act, and feel. The survey asked whether respondents believed their leaders “consciously or unconsciously have an expectation that their employees will cover along any of the four dimensions.” It then asked to what degree this affected their sense of opportunity within the organization and their commitment to it.

Lack of opportunities is likely to lead to decreased commitment

51%

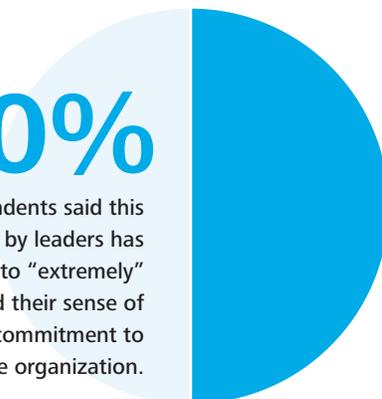
of respondents said that this expectation by leaders has “somewhat” to “extremely” affected their sense of opportunities available to them.



“When you look at the leaders of our organization, most are of the same gender, age, and background, and seem to share common values. In order to be successful in this organization, I feel I need to fit in with the existing norms.”

50%

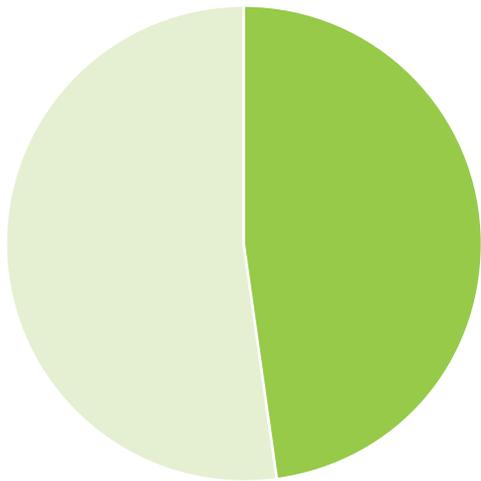
of respondents said this expectation by leaders has “somewhat” to “extremely” affected their sense of commitment to the organization.



“I understand that my opportunities to advance at my current company are restricted by the fact that I do not fit the ‘mold’ of their executive leadership. If I had the opportunity to do the kind of work I do at another firm with similar compensation, but could be more authentic without limiting my job security or chances for advancement, I’d switch in a heartbeat.”

48%

of respondents stated that their organization had a cultural expectation that employees should cover.



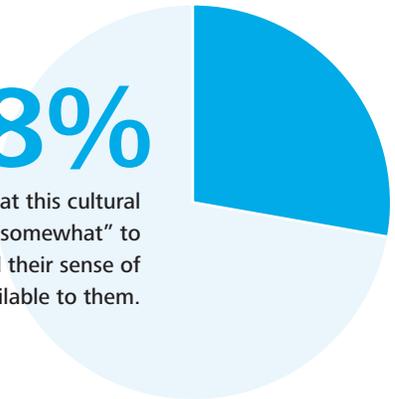
An organization's culture is related to, but distinct from, its individual leaders. Culture is a more diffuse set of expectations that cannot be attributed to a particular person or group. As one Black woman put it, "I do not think my leadership would explicitly 'ask' me to cover parts of my identity, but I do think there is an expectation that employees will fit in with the culture, which is very mainstream. To do that, sometimes, I feel like I have to do things to 'fit in' and look 'presentable' for work, like straighten my hair, etc."

Because organizations have operated under a melting pot ideal for so long, the first instinct might be to dismiss the impact of covering. Yet as the demographics of the nation change, it becomes ever more crucial to understand the implications of covering. The survey found that covering negatively impacts individuals' sense of self and diminishes their commitment to their organizations.

Lack of opportunities is likely to lead to decreased commitment

28%

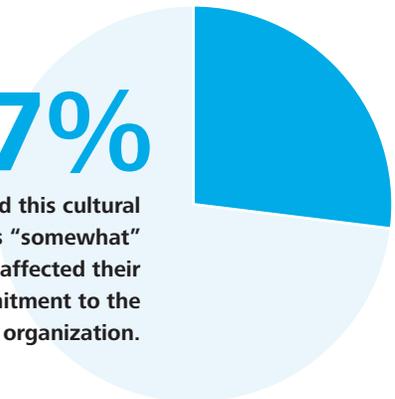
of respondents said that this cultural expectation has "somewhat" to "extremely" affected their sense of opportunities available to them.



I'm not sure I can cover adequately enough to be considered for high enough advancement here. I'm not sure I'd be considered 'executive' enough by [company name] standards without compromising my sense of self further than I feel comfortable."

27%

of respondents said this cultural expectation has "somewhat" to "extremely" affected their sense of commitment to the organization.



"I often wonder how far I can go — personally subsuming my personality in pursuit of success. It really rubs me the wrong way. As a creative, innovative person, I feel like I am being asked to choose between being a three-dimensional authentic person and a two-dimensional cardboard cutout that walks and talks like a corporate executive in exchange for the keys to the kingdom."

Uncovering our values

The survey data shows that the pressure to cover is a widespread phenomenon that negatively affects organizations, as well as individuals. Many readers, however, may still have reservations because some covering demands seem so crucial to the smooth functioning of an organization. Are there not appropriate forms of assimilation? If so, how might an organization distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate covering demands?

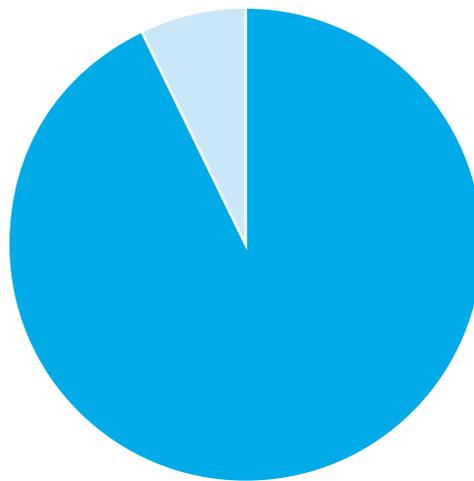
Some forms of covering are absolutely justifiable. To join a group is to surrender some degree of individual expression in the name of common expression. As one respondent observed, "I feel an increased sense of commitment to my organization by engaging in appearance[-based] covering."

The question then becomes how to distinguish proper covering demands from improper ones. The answer lies in an organization's values. When thinking about the dimensions along which it seeks to help its employees "uncover," the organization should consider its values as the touchstone.

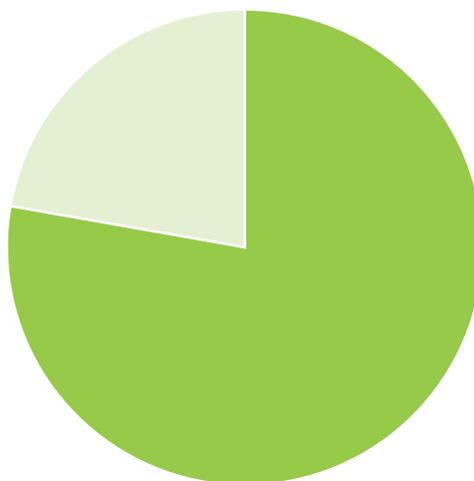
For instance, all individuals surveyed worked for organizations that articulate inclusion on the basis of race or ethnicity as one of their stated values. Nonetheless, a significant number of surveyed racial minorities said they felt they could not associate with each other without penalty. These organizations would better live up to their stated value of inclusion if their leadership more specifically and explicitly disavowed the need for such association-based covering.

In other instances, a covering demand will be justified by an institutional value. For instance, some respondents reported feeling the need to cover their political affiliations. Leaders confronted with a request to allow for more "uncovered" political expression might well conclude that allowing for greater political expression at work was not one of the organization's values. The important point for these purposes is not the nature of the organization's values, but its accountability to those values. One benefit of a conversation around covering is that it might help an organization clarify its own values.

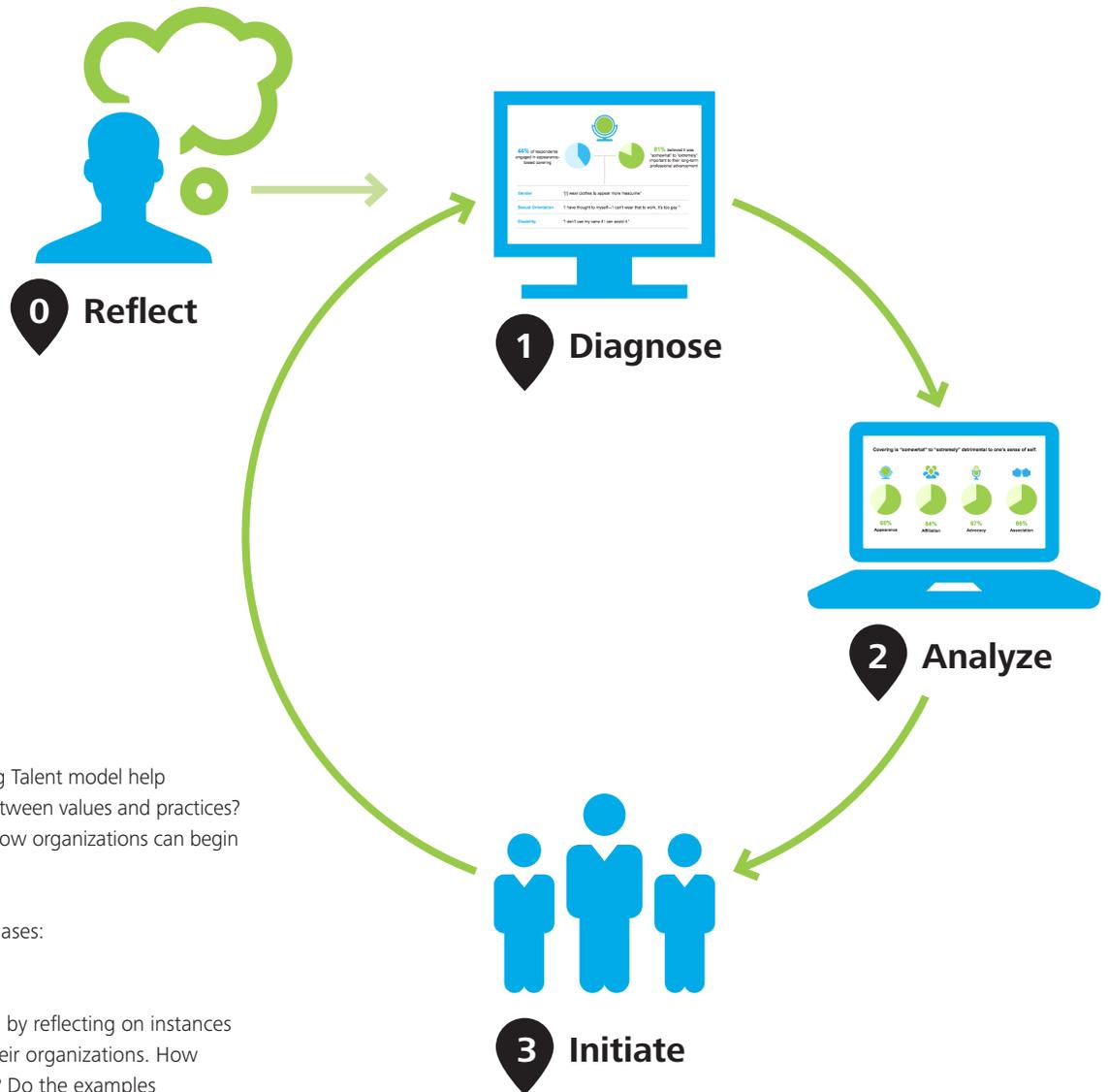
While some values may remain in play for productive debate, many values will be so clearly established that they are beyond discussion. Inclusion is now an almost universally held value in corporate America. In the survey, 93 percent of respondents stated that their organizations articulated inclusion as a value. However, only 78 percent of respondents felt their organizations lived up to those values. Approximately one-quarter of respondents felt their organizations were not walking the talk.



93%
of respondents stated that their organization articulated inclusion as one of its values.



78%
of respondents felt their organization lived up to those values.



How, then, can the Uncovering Talent model help organizations close the gap between values and practices? The process below illustrates how organizations can begin to “uncover talent”.

This model consists of four phases:

0 Reflect
Leaders should begin by reflecting on instances of covering within their organizations. How diverse is the leadership suite? Do the examples shared throughout this paper sound familiar? Could employees within the organization feel similar pressure to adhere to implicit standards and expectations? This form of organizational self-reflection can often lead to preliminary hypotheses regarding the types and extent of covering taking place.

1 Diagnose
Testing the hypotheses generated by reflection requires both quantitative and qualitative data. Deloitte’s ‘Uncovering Talent’ survey tool provides one mechanism to diagnose the incidence, nature, impact, and drivers of covering across an organization. Because it transcends the distinction between “inclusion” and “talent,” the model can both “zoom in” on particular cohorts, or “zoom out” to consider the entire talent pool. In addition, Deloitte has the ability to conduct comparative analytics, assessing organizations relative to others within an industry and relative to themselves over time.

2 Analyze
Equipped with quantitative and qualitative findings, organizations can analyze covering behaviors relative to stated corporate values. For example, if a company values inclusion on the basis of gender, it should question whether it is living up to those values if women feel the need to cover their gender to advance professionally. Understanding the incidence of covering pressures that conflict with corporate values allows organizations to establish priorities and determine the covering demands that should be addressed. The data may also lead an organization to reconsider its own values, as it considers whether an unexpected “hot spot” in its workforce demands its attention.

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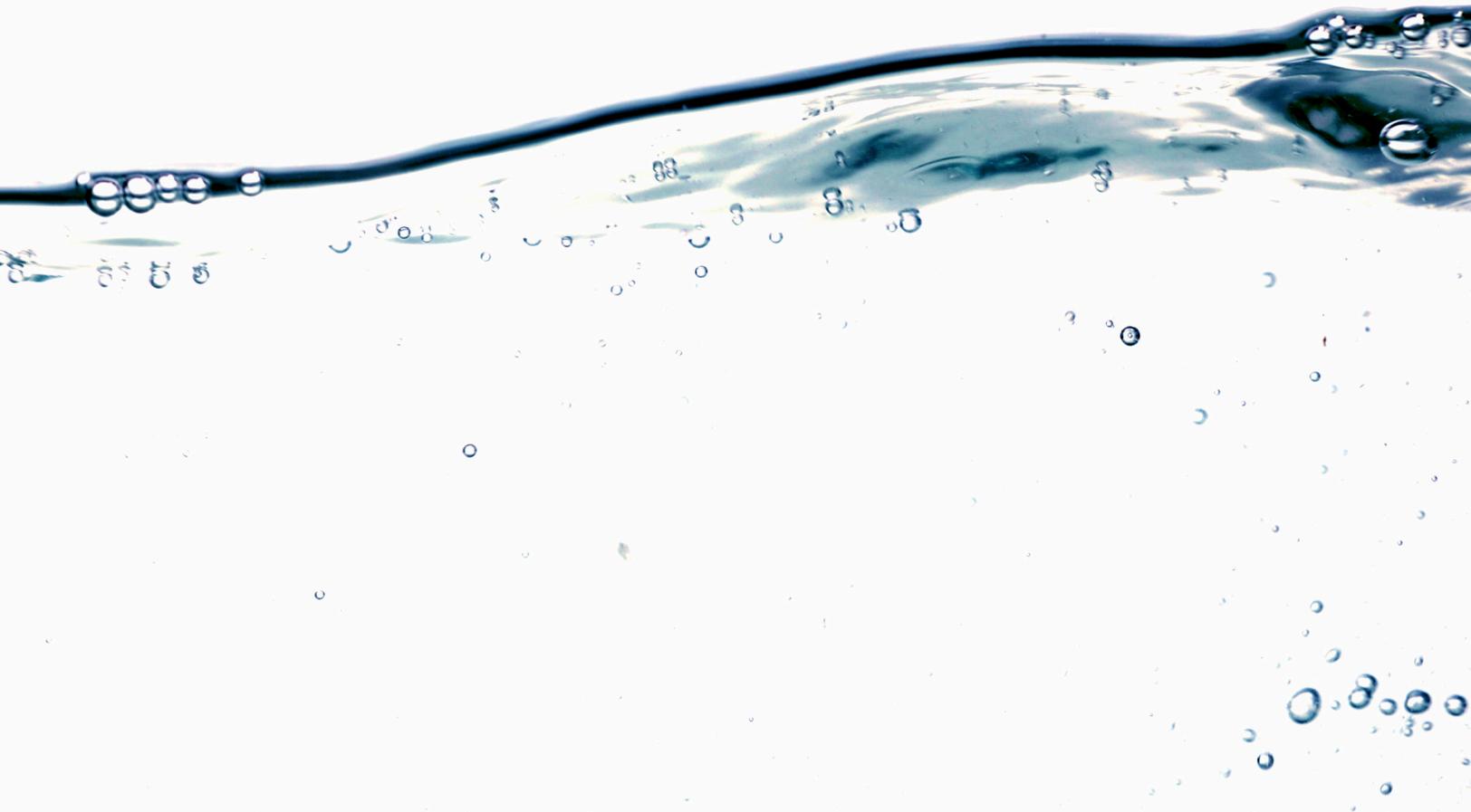
Initiate

Organizations can use the survey findings and values assessment to identify both leadership and cultural solutions. One powerful — yet simple — approach is to encourage leaders to uncover themselves. As one survey respondent said, “Leaders have to uncover first. If they don’t, we won’t.” Many respondents echoed this point. Deloitte recently launched a Share Your Story campaign, in which leaders filmed short videos sharing personal stories. These videos have been broadcast through a number of channels with the goal of encouraging an open dialogue and finding common ground. Ultimately, solutions should be tailored to each organization and should include specific, tangible practices.

Real success is possible. Seventeen percent of respondents stated that they have “uncovered in a way that has led to success” both for them and for their organization. A key finding from the survey was that the goals of respondents and their organizations were aligned. One respondent observed that covering “takes energy that I would rather give to my job.” Another elaborated, “The energy I put into trying to behave different[ly] than who I am drained my energy. Once I decided to bring my whole self to work, it was liberating and I became a lot more productive and successful.” Yet another stated, “If you can’t be your ‘whole self’ at work, you’re not at your best. A company that allows people to be themselves and judges them only (on) the quality of work they do will be far ahead in the long run.”

Uncovering the future of inclusion

The Uncovering Talent model presents a new alternative to existing inclusion efforts. It puts the spotlight on the pressure to conform that may be causing many inclusion efforts to stall. As the workforce becomes more diverse, this pressure to conform — real or perceived — will be felt ever more keenly. The Uncovering Talent model addresses that pressure directly. In doing so, this rigorous, practical approach fulfills the promise of authenticity. It ensures that individuals can win at work without surrendering themselves. And it helps organizations find the talent within their ranks that only waits to be uncovered.



Meet the authors



Kenji Yoshino is the Chief Justice Earl Warren Professor of Constitutional Law at NYU School of Law. A graduate of Harvard (A.B.), Oxford (M.Sc. as a Rhodes Scholar), and Yale (J.D.), Kenji taught at Yale Law School from 1998 to 2008, where he served as Deputy Dean and the inaugural

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Christie Smith, PhD is the West Managing Director of Consulting and the national Managing Principal for the Deloitte University Leadership Center for Inclusion. Christie has a track record of breaking boundaries — including her past career as a professional golfer, her leadership in

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Additional information

About the Deloitte University Leadership Center for Inclusion

The Deloitte University (DU) Leadership Center for Inclusion is a manifestation of Deloitte's commitment to advance the conversation, continue to challenge the status quo, and lead from the front in inclusion. The new center provides a place (both at DU and virtually) and a platform for coming together to engage with our people, our clients, and thought leaders on issues that will help us better understand and contribute to what inclusion will look like in the future.

Survey methodology

The online, anonymous survey consists of 51 questions answered by respondents from seven different industries: (1) Consumer & Industrial Products; (2) Energy & Resources; (3) Financial Services; (4) Life Sciences & Health Care; (5) Professional Services; (6) Public Sector; and (7) Technology, Media, & Telecommunications.

The survey was updated on December 6, 2013 to incorporate all respondents to date. The 3,129 survey respondents included individuals from a variety of backgrounds, with representation across gender (male, female), race/ethnicities ('Asian,' 'Black or African American,' 'Hispanic or Latino,' 'Multiracial,' and 'White'), generations (those born between 1946 and 1964, those born between 1965 and 1980, and those born after 1980), sexual orientation (heterosexual, LGB and other), foreign national status, veteran status, disabilities (physical, mental, or emotional), level within an organization (executive, management, staff, and other), and tenure with an organization.

Throughout the survey, 'people of color' refer to the nonwhite population.

The survey asks how often respondents cover, how important specific covering behaviors are to their advancement, and how detrimental such behaviors are to their sense of self. It also asks how the leadership, culture, and values of their organization require them to cover, and what concrete actions could be taken to create a climate in which less covering is necessary.

Unless another source is indicated, all of the quotations in this paper are from the survey respondents.

Sources

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