



MULTICULTURAL VETERINARY
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

Silenced by the Study: How NAVTA's DEIB White Paper Harms the Communities It Claims to Champion

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In 2025, the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA) published its first-ever [Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging \(DEIB\) Landscape Survey Report: Where We Stand](#).¹ The Multicultural Veterinary Medical Association (MCVMA) was excited to see NAVTA's effort to engage with the critically important issue of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in the veterinary technician profession. The visibility of DEIB in veterinary medicine is essential, especially for often overlooked veterinary technicians, and we commend NAVTA's willingness to explore it. However, after reading the report, MCVMA has serious concerns about the study and reached out to NAVTA about those concerns.

In this statement, we will first outline how NAVTA chose to meet MCVMA's concerns and offer of collaboration and restorative action in ways that caused repeated harm. We will then turn to the report itself by providing a summary of the concerns with the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Landscape Survey Report: Where We Stand, which will hereafter be referred to as "the report".¹ It is important to note that MCVMA was never able to directly communicate with those responsible for conducting the survey and writing the report, hereafter to be referred to as "the authors", despite concerted efforts to do so. Due to this, we acknowledge that we do not know why certain decisions were made in this report. We also acknowledge that we may be mistaken in some of our concerns with the report, as there was a significant lack of detail on the methodology of the study. However, without NAVTA and, presumably, the authors' willingness to engage in dialogue about our concerns and the potential harm of research such as this, we felt it necessary to speak publicly about the report and NAVTA's subsequent behavior toward us.

NAVTA's Response and the Harm It Caused

Before we begin detailing our interactions with NAVTA, we want to clarify a few points.

In our initial email to NAVTA, we acknowledged their well-intentioned effort to engage with DEIB while raising serious concerns about the report's methodology, analysis, and conclusions. We outlined specific harms the paper posed to marginalized communities and initially requested a formal retraction, transparent explanation, and recommissioned study. We also extended a good-faith offer to collaborate on a corrected version, one that could serve as a model of restorative justice, professional collaboration, and community-based research for the entire profession.

Unable to locate emails to reach the NAVTA board members directly, we contacted the organization using the general inquiry email on their website, which we later learned is managed by the Executive Director, Phil Russo. We note this only to acknowledge that we are unaware whether our initial communication was received by those we intended to reach—the NAVTA board, the NAVTA DEIB committee, and the authors. In response, we received an email from Mr. Russo agreeing to a meeting, and we spent significant time preparing, including consulting with social science researchers on possible solutions that might more accurately reflect the realities for marginalized veterinary technicians.² To our dismay, two days before our meeting, we were sent a response signed by three of the five authors: Christina Loftin, Brian Tesch, Michael Ramirez, and NAVTA's DEIB committee. This response dismissed our scholarship and both our lived and professional experiences, suggesting we simply needed education on the research, and specifically claiming that “some critiques may reflect differing epistemological expectations between natural science research and social science inquiry.”

Epistemology is the study of knowledge. Specifically, what it means to say that someone knows, or fails to know, something.³ Epistemic violence is the erasure or dismissal of marginalized communities' knowledge and lived experience by systems that deem their ways of knowing inferior, silencing not just their voices, but their very capacity to be recognized as knowers.⁴ We do not lack epistemological understanding, and we have lived the experience of epistemic violence. It was committed against us in their response as well as in the subsequent meeting with NAVTA, discussed below, and it was committed against the marginalized participants that this survey claimed to center.

Despite this response, we remained open to collaboration and attended the meeting we had been invited to by Mr. Russo. While the response we received before this meeting claimed an interest in constructive engagement, no authors were present at the meeting to address our specific concerns, leading us to believe they did not take our concerns seriously enough to meet with us or that they were unaware that the meeting was happening. Instead, we met with six NAVTA representatives who had limited knowledge of the study and who had not prepared for this meeting. When we brought our

disappointment in their lack of preparation to their attention, Mr. Russo called us “aggressive,” “angry,” “hostile,” and scolded us for “attacking” them and making his “heart race”—despite the courtesy of privately reaching out to the organization with our concerns, and during the meeting, calmly and professionally bringing to their attention the harm the study and the subsequent response had caused. The NAVTA Board’s silence while their Executive Director berated us compounded this harm, as did their lack of acknowledgement or apology after one of our team members interrupted his escalating behavior and identified, for the group, the racial and gendered microaggressions that had just occurred. Instead of offering repair, they offered resignation. To quote Mona Eltahawy:

If hate is the accelerator that dehumanizes both its subject and object, to allow the former to kill the latter, then indifference is worse; it confirms that you are not worthy even of concern. If hate is a precursor to killing, then indifference is the spectator who watches.⁵

This meeting ended without resolution or a clear path forward. Once again, the burden fell on us to follow up via email and initiate next steps. We were also left to further educate the NAVTA Board on why their conduct at this meeting had been harmful. That this labor fell to us, the community that had already been harmed, is itself a reflection of the inequity at the heart of this situation. This dynamic has been documented in the literature in other professions. Specifically, professionals of color are too often left to facilitate the anti-racism education of the white colleagues who harmed them.⁶ That we must look outside veterinary medicine to name this experience only underscores the depth of the problem within our field.

In response, MCVMA received an email from Mr. Russo that offered no genuine accountability, and instead centered his intent over his impact, shifting blame onto us for *feeling* offended. We responded directly and honestly: the message had not landed as an apology, and the absence of accountability from NAVTA leadership for failing to interrupt harm as it occurred remained unaddressed. Once again, despite the continued insult, we remained committed to collaboration under clear conditions: direct communication, critical engagement with our concerns with the report, and respectful, accountable dialogue that recognized MCVMA's knowledge and lived experience. We reiterated our willingness and interest to offer guidance and review of a statement acknowledging the report’s limitations, requested a response detailing NAVTA’s plan and timeline for doing so, and made clear that the matter could not remain unresolved.

At the time of writing this statement, we have not received a response. We have since learned that after our initial communication, some board members and DEIB committee

members stepped down from their roles at NAVTA due to similar concerns with current leadership. This pattern speaks to how NAVTA has handled dissent from those most committed to equity. We also want to acknowledge the previous NAVTA president, Beckie Mossor, who approved the report's release based on the limited information available to her at the time. When she learned of our concerns, she took full personal responsibility for its impact, demonstrating the kind of accountability and integrity that NAVTA as an institution and current leadership has yet to offer.

The Report: How NAVTA's White Paper Harms Marginalized Communities in Veterinary Technology

We want to reiterate that our concerns with the report are offered without the benefit of direct dialogue with its authors, and with the acknowledgment that significant gaps in the report's methodological transparency limited our ability to assess certain decisions comprehensively. We also want to make clear that this is not an exhaustive list of our concerns with this report, rather a broad outline of the most concerning aspects, so readers can understand how studies such as these can cause harm to marginalized communities. MCVMA remains open to further discussion on the detailed concerns of this report.

We will start by transparently discussing a reality in research. While it may seem that numbers cannot lie nor perpetuate biased ideas, how research is conducted, analyzed, and presented can be done in a manner that causes deep harm to marginalized communities. The truth of statistical analysis is that it was developed as part of the eugenics movement, giving scientific credibility to ongoing racial inequality.⁷ Thus, statistical analysis can be conducted in ways that not only perpetuate harm but also legitimize ongoing discrimination. To quote Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva, "social science is at its best when it is self-critical and relentlessly self-correcting."⁷ While NAVTA and the report's principal authors refuse to engage in this exercise to ensure they are not harming marginalized groups, MCVMA remains committed to this endeavour.

Methodology

While no positionality statement is provided, the majority of the authors appear to be of the majority racial/ethnic, gender identity, and ability status. The study utilized purposive sampling as it sought to include only credentialed veterinary technicians, despite NAVTA membership including non-credentialed veterinary assistants. This also introduced significant bias that is not addressed in this study, as the credentialing process for veterinary technicians has an unfavorable debt-to-income ratio post-graduation and thus generally represents a privileged and homogenous sampling frame. No justification as to why sampling was performed in this manner is given, and there doesn't appear to be

any participatory aspect to this methodology - no opportunity for marginalized veterinary technicians (credentialed and non-credentialed) to provide feedback to the survey, recruitment methods, study design, or the report. Additionally, a poor response rate of 7.1% should have been an indication to the authors that the sampling method was flawed. While the authors acknowledge in the report that they "do not know if or how this non-response bias affected findings," they still draw broad conclusions.

While the study's Spanish translation survey demonstrates an effort toward inclusivity, there are concerns over the clarity of the translations. It relies on constructions and vocabulary that, while grammatically correct, are less natural or accessible in the dialects and syntactic patterns commonly used across a diverse Latin American landscape and among Spanish speakers in the United States, where NAVTA is based. In addition, there are occasional errors, inconsistencies in register, overly literal phrasing, and a lack of conceptual equivalence in some questions that suggest localized, uneven, piecemeal, or rushed translation, which can create confusion for respondents and imply a lack of genuine effort or care to ensure they feel respected and linguistically included.

This results in a translation that reads as academically rigid rather than reflecting a thoughtfully designed survey that conveys the appropriate cultural relevance for the target community. It is unclear how the survey was translated, who translated it, or whether the individual(s) responsible for the translation had the requisite understanding of and skill in linguistics and survey design necessary to reduce measurement bias. It is also unclear whether the translated survey was subject to validation methods such as back-translation, pretesting, or panel review with a diverse group of Spanish speakers to ensure accurate interpretation of questions and broad cultural inclusion and relevancy.

Further, no description of how statistical analysis was performed on the survey is offered. Instead, the authors provide a vague general description stating that descriptive statistics and linear regression analyses were conducted. It is unclear what steps were taken to establish rigor, validity, or reliability. The report also does not explain how the open-ended questions were developed or analyzed, and they are not mentioned in the results, except for one open-ended question about self-identifying as an underrepresented group.

Results

Presumably due to the sampling technique, the majority of respondents identified as a cisgender woman (69.9%), heterosexual (60.6%), married (48.3%), non-disabled (66.4%), and White or Caucasian (61.4%) - representing a selection validity threat. Any

participant who indicated two racial groups as biracial, and those with Hispanic and/or Latinx backgrounds, were amalgamated into a single category, despite these categories representing a broad range of identities. The authors also chose to similarly combine speaking multiple languages to either bilingual or trilingual, which homogenized the data even further.

While the stated purpose of this study, “sought to improve understanding of the representation of the veterinary technician profession,” the study methodologies reflect the homogenization of diverse participants. While these practices are common in social science research especially at the intersection of animal welfare, they are still problematic, especially when the aim of the study is DEIB.⁸ At a minimum, this should have been discussed more thoroughly in the limitations section of the report.

Further outlining the bias of the sample population, the majority of participants reported not residing in a multigenerational setting, not having dependents, having two household income contributors, having high workplace acceptance, and a high level of social and cultural comfort in the workplace. These findings are then not surprising if one considers that people tend to feel most comfortable when surrounded by those of similar demographics.

The survey also included an open-ended question to allow respondents to self-identify specific underrepresented groups to which they belonged. Of the 259 respondents, 75 (29%) identified themselves as part of an underrepresented group. When looking at Figure 3, which displays the different self-reported underrepresented groups, it is noted that 6 respondents identified themselves as “credentialed technician.” This reveals a poor understanding among credentialed technicians of what the term “underrepresented group” implies in the context of a DEIB study and, more importantly, the authors’ failure to communicate the intent of the question clearly enough for respondents to understand how to interpret it in this context. Despite this, these 6 respondents were still included in the reporting of perceived workplace inclusion, perceived workplace belonging, and perceived veterinary community belonging among underrepresented groups. The discussion fails to mention the issues with this question, these results, and the impact on the findings. As a result, we are left wondering if these 6 responses indicate a larger problem within veterinary technology—a conflation of the marginalization experienced by those who are in the racial, ethnic, gender, sexual identity, etc. minority within the profession with one’s professional role as a credentialed technician.

These results culminated in a regression analysis, with the authors reporting a Multivariate Ordinary Least Squares Regression analysis performed in three areas: perceived DEIB importance, workplace acceptance, and social/cultural comfort using

the demographic variables of age, race, gender, gender identity, and sexual identity. The lack of detail on how this was performed, as well as the table provided, raises serious methodological concerns that severely limit the credibility and interpretability of the regression analysis. It is not clear how these regressions were run, and additional regressions mentioned in the report were not presented in full; the authors simply reported 'no significance' without showing the results, an omission that could mask major issues with the study.

Take, for example, the multivariate OLS regression on gender identity. Of the self-reporting by respondents, 181 identified as a cisgender woman, 10 identified as a cisgender man, 0 identified as a transgender woman, 1 identified as a transgender man, 15 preferred not to respond, and 52 did not report their gender identity at all. Thus, in Table 13 outlining the results of the multivariate OLS regressions, the authors ran regressions of 191 cisgender respondents against 1 transgender respondent and then stated the result as non-significant - a statistically meaningless conclusion given how few transgender respondents were in the sample.

It is also unclear whether all demographic variables — age, race, gender, gender identity, and sexual identity — were analyzed together in a single model. This matters because in real life, these characteristics are connected to one another. For example, someone who is a racial minority is also more likely to belong to other marginalized groups. When you analyze connected characteristics together without accounting for those connections, they can effectively drown each other out, making it look like none of them matter when they actually might. This is a known statistical pitfall that raises serious questions about whether the authors' conclusions reflect a genuine finding or simply a flaw in how the analysis was conducted. In other words, the way this analysis was set up may have made it statistically impossible to detect the very disparities the study was supposed to be measuring.

Despite these significant methodological concerns, the authors drew the following broad conclusions from their regression analysis:

- The demographic variables of race, gender, and gender identity ***DID NOT*** have statistically significant associations with perceived DEIB importance
- The demographic variables of age, race, gender, gender identity, and sexual identity (thus, all demographic variables in the regression models) ***DID NOT*** significantly influence workplace acceptance or social comfort

These conclusions are not only methodologically suspect, they are contradicted by a substantial body of existing research. It is well established that characteristics like age, race, gender, gender identity, and sexual identity meaningfully shape how people

experience their workplaces, including their sense of acceptance, comfort, and belonging.^{2,9-11} To conclude that none of these factors significantly influenced workplace acceptance or social comfort in a veterinary setting strains credibility, particularly given the well-documented lack of diversity, the lived experiences of marginalized professionals in this field, and the limited research available specific to veterinary workplaces.^{2,11} These non-significant results are far more likely explained by the methodological problems outlined above, such as insufficient statistical power, poor sampling strategies, and the amalgamation of diverse identities into overly broad categories, than by the conclusion that identity simply does not matter in the veterinary workplace.

Ironically, the regression analyses that produced these misleading conclusions may not have been necessary at all. A more equitable and informative approach would have been to invest instead in a more thorough and transparent presentation of the descriptive data they already had — breaking down responses by each marginalized identity rather than collapsing them into broad categories or running analyses that obscured individual experiences. While some basic summary statistics were provided, these were not meaningfully disaggregated by marginalized identity, ***leaving the experiences of the few marginalized respondents effectively invisible in the final report.*** This would not have required recommissioning the study or increasing the response rate, but a more careful and intentional approach to presenting the data that existed, provided that care was taken to ensure that potentially vulnerable participants, such as the sole transgender respondent, could not be individually identified.

Conclusion

Considering the concerns outlined above, generalizable conclusions cannot be made from the data presented, only that of their specific sample — predominantly cisgender, heterosexual, married, non-disabled white women. Yet, the authors claim generally positive attitudes around DEIB initiatives, high workplace acceptance, and a high level of social and cultural comfort in the workplace for technicians. Again, these findings are not surprising if one considers that the majority of the participants' demographics match the demographics of the veterinary profession as a whole and not only those of veterinary technology.

While the authors note some areas for improvement in the discussion and mention a few limitations, the report lacks a robust, transparent discussion of all the limitations and what conclusions can be drawn from them. Again, without the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the authors, it is difficult to know why decisions were made. We see simple avenues that could have improved the response rate and diversity of respondents. Further, the survey results could have been analyzed and presented

differently to fully capture the voices and perspectives of the marginalized responses the authors received.

This report has the potential to further perpetuate deeply harmful and dangerous ideas that the field is a safer place for marginalized individuals than it truly is. Especially considering the little research available on marginalized veterinary technicians shows that racism has deep negative impacts on their sense of identity both interpersonally and individually.² We respect and care deeply for our technician peers and believe that they deserve research that is representative of their experiences. We also know this report does not reflect the scholarship that technicians are capable of.

Beyond This Statement: A Call for Dialogue, Accountability, and Change

This statement is not the end of a conversation; it is an invitation to begin one. Veterinary medicine cannot claim to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging while continuing to produce research about marginalized communities without meaningful participation from those communities and a diversity of voices and experiences. The harm documented here is not unique to this report or this exchange; it reflects systemic gaps in how our profession approaches research, accountability, and the lived experiences of marginalized veterinary professionals. We know that these issues extend beyond DVMs, impacting our technicians, receptionists, kennel technicians, and support staff — and also the communities veterinary medicine serves. MCVMA calls on veterinary medicine broadly, its organizations, researchers, and leaders, to engage in honest dialogue about these gaps, to develop frameworks for community-centered and culturally responsible research, and to ensure that the communities being studied are not merely subjects but active, valued partners.

We return to Mona Eltahawy, who reminds us that indifference is not neutrality; it is a choice, and it causes harm.⁵ MCVMA chose differently. This statement, like every email sent, every meeting attended, and every offer of collaboration extended, was an act of love and of liberation. MCVMA exists because we love our profession and we love our community fiercely, unapologetically, and despite every instance of indifference and harm we have endured. As Eltahawy writes:

Love is not the opposite of hate. It is the opposite of indifference. We who demand a better world act out of love, not hate.⁵

MCVMA remains open to dialogue on any aspect of this statement, the report, or the path forward. We believe a better profession is possible, but only if we are willing to build it together, honestly and accountably.

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