

Framing the Issue/Framing the Question: How are Sexual Minority Issues Included in Diversity Initiatives?

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This paper situates sexual minority issues within organizations by examining what it means to engage diversity through the perspectives of hostility, compliance, inquiry, inclusion, and advocacy. These perspectives are discussed in terms of human resource development missions of individual development, career development, and organization development. Implications for HRD professionals engaging sexual minority issues within organizations are also discussed.

Keywords: Sexual Minorities, Diversity, Organizational Culture

Whether explicitly recognized or implicitly felt, power and privilege influence the decision making of organizations and stakeholders. When organizations and their employees reflect on their power and privilege, this reflection informs their perspectives. The perspective an organization adopts depends on the views the decision makers of the organization take towards economic ideologies, personal involvements, and human rights. Changing discriminatory behavior of individuals and organizations becomes the work of educators and trainers. Human resource practitioners and organizations can take different perspectives towards people who are sexual minorities in terms of discrimination and diversity initiatives. The purpose of this article is to examine five perspectives towards diversity initiatives that include people who are sexual minorities: hostility, compliance, inquiry, inclusion, and advocacy.

In line with the precepts of critical human resource development (HRD), we share a purpose which “works towards reform aligned with purposes of justice, equity, and participation;” knowledge which “is understood to be contested;” inquiry which focuses “on power issues seeking to understand how socio-political processes” shape how we understand cognition, identity, and meaning; and, methods which “are practices that expose and challenge prevailing economic ideologies and power relations constituting organizational structures of inequity” (Fenwick, 2005, p. 228-229). HRD practitioners are in positions of power and privilege to influence organizational decision-making and approaches to diversity. However, “HRD professionals seldom analyze or even acknowledge the existence and consequences of power” (Schied, Carter & Howell, 2001, p. 42).

The perspectives presented in this article provide a framework for the decision makers to reflect on the way power and privilege are used explicitly and implicitly by HR practitioners and organizations. We suggest these perspectives provide a cogent way to reflect on where an organization stands in terms of sexual minority issues and exposing and challenging existing heterosexist structures. These perspectives are implicit in the discourse around diversity and we are making them explicit here.

Setting the Stage

Diversity encompasses visible and non-visible aspects of identities by which individuals categorize themselves and others (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Cultural diversity includes representation of people from different groups within a social system (Cox, 1994). This definition of diversity and many others like it focus on “the identities of nationality, racioethnicity, and gender” (Cox, 1994, p. 105-106). Gilley, Dean and Bierema (2001) expand diversity to include “age, disability, and learning styles...race, gender and social class” (p. 45). Neither definition includes people who are sexual minorities or the intersections of competing identities (Sheared, 1999).

Social systems are created by both structural and cultural elements that work together as a unit and share a common purpose (Johnson, 2000). Any organization may be considered a social system because of the presence of both structure and culture. Structure consists of both the functional and hierarchical arrangement of people within the system. In an organization, HRD is traditionally seen as the part of the organizational structure focused on improving performance to ultimately benefit and enhance the organization (Gilley & Egglund, 1989). Culture consists of the attitudes, ideas, norms, artifacts and values that define and shape relationships between people who participate in the organization (Bunch, 2007).

Diversity training is “a generic term used to describe any type of training designed to help people understand and value cultural differences in the workplace. [Diversity training is] usually provided for managers and

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supervisors in an attempt to increase productivity and reduce the potential for legal actions resulting from employees' or management's bigoted attitudes toward people who are different" (Tracey, 2004, p. 193). While there is no federal workplace antidiscrimination protection for sexual minorities, in *Romer v. Evans* (1996) the U.S. Supreme Court held that sexual minorities were entitled to equal rights, but not special rights such as affirmative action. In *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins* (1989) the Supreme Court stated that sex stereotyping based on traditional notions of gender specific behavior was illegal (Hornsby, 2006). Discrimination against any person is hard to prove. As Freeman (1995) points out, the perpetrators of discrimination are "atomistic individuals whose actions are outside of and apart from the social fabric and without historical continuity" (p. 30). Discrimination is viewed as an isolated event, perpetrated by an individual whose conduct is misguided. Antidiscrimination law focuses on isolating the aberrant behaviors and outlawing them while ignoring the social conditions and historical context that allow discriminatory actions to occur (Rocco & Gallagher, 2004).

As part of a social system, HRD practitioners and other organization leaders must make decisions about who to include and who to exclude when defining and discussing diversity issues within their organizations. Cheng (1997) argues that while race and "women in management research [have] become mainstream, other diversity issues are almost entirely ignored, particularly racism, patriarchy, class, heterosexism, sexuality, sexual identity, religion, postcolonial issues, physical ability and so on" (p. 553). Arguably, social dominance and social identity play a role in what is included, specifically the inability of dominant group members to see their privilege and power, therefore, making it difficult to critique and learn. A critique of diversity literature is that it is reductionistic, focusing on one identity characteristic and not the complexity of identity. A sexual minority, in the context of this paper, is used as an umbrella term for all non-heterosexual people. Sexual minorities are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and transgender people. By using the term minority, there is an implied statement regarding sociopolitical status. Minority status implies systemic oppression due to differences in power and that a dominant group with power sets the standards and parameters for behavior, ideas, and norms of the social system. In this case, heterosexual people are the dominant group.

Heterosexism (or heterosexual privilege) is "a system of oppression that reduces the experience of sexual minorities to medical or criminal causes while victimizing people who are seen as sexual minorities through violence or diminished opportunity" (Rocco & Gallagher, 2006b, p. 30). For example, "heterosexism sustains a legal system that denies equal protection and property rights (such as marriage) and holds in contempt the personal relationships of sexual minorities" (Rocco & Gallagher, 2006a, p. 11). In organizations, diminished opportunity as a result of heterosexism may come in forms such as the denial of benefits to domestic partners, social stigmatization and harassment, exclusion from promotion decisions, or termination from employment.

Heterosexism is different from other forms of oppression because it is based on socially constructed definitions of identity and behavior and not on physical characteristics. For example, gender, age, physical ability, and skin color have been used as markers to divide people on stigmas relating to such physical representations and to perpetuate dominance of one group over another (Goffman, 1963). Sexual minorities, however, are often invisible because they may not present an image corresponding to the heterosexist stereotypes used to identify and marginalize. In other words, sexual minorities may stay in the closet by choosing not to self identify.

The "closet" is the "defining structure for gay oppression" (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 71). The closet is an exclusive term used to define a "silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it" (Sedgwick, 1990, p.3). Being in the closet involves suppressing any speech or behavior that may lead to being identified as a sexual minority by others. When people who are sexual minorities perceive an external threat as a result of oppression, they may retreat into the closet in order to prevent the discriminatory consequences of the heterosexist system. Such may be the case in an organizational setting. People who are sexual minorities may withdraw into the closet if they perceive threats in the workplace, such as being passed over for advancement or terminated from employment.

The notion of the closet and the stereotypes perpetuated by a heterosexist system are problematic not only for sexual minorities, but also heterosexuals who may not conform to prescribed gender norms. Heterosexuals may be marginalized by heterosexism if they exhibit any behaviors that are stereotypically attributed to any sexual minority subgroup. Heterosexuals not conforming to heterosexual gender prescriptions for behavior are often labeled as gay or lesbian and assumed to be in the closet. As a result, heterosexuals may also experience diminished opportunity in the workplace as a result of the courtesy stigmas placed on them (Goffman, 1963).

Framing the issue/framing the question

We identify five perspectives towards diversity initiatives that represent different stands towards people who are sexual minorities. These perspectives are hostility, compliance, inquiry, inclusion and advocacy. Hostility is the

most negative and advocacy is the most positive. Inquiry, inclusion and advocacy, respectively, represent increasing levels of commitment to unmasking the systems of privilege embedded in organizations beyond current job expectations. HRD practitioners sometimes receive conflicting messages about the nature of diversity initiatives, about including people who are sexual minorities, and about the legal and economic impact on the organization of each of the perspectives.

Framing the Issue: Defining the Perspectives

To frame the issue we will first define the perspectives. Hostility is “conflict, opposition, or resistance in thought or principle” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2003). Hostility may be seen as a commitment to reinforcing organizational opposition to positive diversity initiatives. Individuals who are hostile may act to undermine existing organizational policies or efforts to support people who are sexual minorities in organizations. Hostility as a policy would be intentional negative actions against sexual minorities. An example is the US military’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy, in which employment is terminated when the claim is made that an employee is gay. Hostility as an approach to diversity ranges from overt behaviors (i.e., termination, failure to hire or promote, unequal distribution of benefits or resources) to more subtle forms of behavior (i.e., use of non-inclusive language, social distancing sexual minorities, jokes) (Muñoz & Thomas, 2006).

Legal and policy compliance is seen as a neutral point of decision-making because it involves acting in accordance with rules or standards. HRD professionals are merely fulfilling expectations of their positions by complying with such rules, standards, or policies, even if organizational policies are already inclusive of sexual minorities. Compliance is upholding the law and internal organizational policy when it comes to diversity and sexual minority issues.

Inquiry would be when an organization explores issues related to diversity, diverse populations, and characteristics of diversity. The purpose is to learn and by learning about achieve a greater understanding of the issue, population, or characteristic. The first step towards inquiry is to recognize that sexual minorities exist. Inquiry is contemplative, not action oriented. Does the HRD practitioner who fosters diversity efforts expand the organization’s definition of diversity to include sexual minorities? This depends on how the HRD practitioner, and the organization, define and perceive diversity and its benefits to the workplace. The decision to act further is what separates inquiry from inclusion and hostility.

Inclusion is commonly known as the movement in special education to mainstream students with disabilities in the everyday activities of the school community (Heward, 1996). Inclusion is being used here as the complex act of including people who are sexual minorities in the natural community formed in workplaces. For instance, Grace and Hill (2004) discuss “inclusive queer praxis as a practical, expressive, and reflective encounter with sex, sexual, and gender differences historically considered taboo terrain and relegated to fugitive spaces” (p. 168). The taboo terrain that is bridged by inclusion is being able to discuss personal and recreational activities, and partner/family relationships making these activities and relationships visible through photographs and the presence of important others at appropriate work events.

Inclusion extends beyond offering fringe benefits to same sex couples or including a harassment policy that protects sexual minorities to providing a safe environment where workers are not afraid of being verbally or physically assaulted or shunned. Inclusion is about creating an open and affirming environment. It is about changing the culture of the organization so that sexual minorities feel they can belong openly and safely to the organization. Workers that feel they belong are more committed to the goals of the organization.

In order to foster inclusion of sexual minorities and all employees in an organization, “protection based on gender identity or gender expression should be included in nondiscrimination and anti-harassment policies and incorporated in the organization’s sustained diversity education programs” (Hill, 2006, p. 12). HRD professionals may promote inclusiveness through diversity education programs such as new employee orientations, discussions during staff meetings, employee groups, communications to employees, philanthropic events and professional development workshops. HRD professionals should also examine existing policies and procedures regarding grievances to provide a formal way for employees to address specific concerns in the workplace and provide a system for holding all employees accountable to be inclusive.

Advocacy is proactively hosting events, sponsoring events, contributing money, and other activities that indicate that the organization is advocating on the behalf of sexual minority people everywhere. For example, the Ford Motor Co. has recently taken such a stand by reaffirming its support for the gay community by donating to gay causes and advertising in gay media; the Miller Brewing Co. has demonstrated advocacy towards diversity initiatives by sponsoring gay pride festivities in many cities. Advocacy involves reaching beyond the boundaries of the organization and publicly promoting the organization’s definition of diversity and inclusion.

Advocacy by organizations in the United States also extends into the political arena with current efforts to promote the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) within the federal government. ENDA legislation

proposes to protect GLBT employees from discrimination in the workplace similar to protected classes (i.e., race, religion, color, natural origin, sex) under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Business Coalition for Workplace Fairness, comprised of over 25 organizations that include Coca-Cola, Nike Inc., and Microsoft Corp., publicly supports passage of ENDA. The Human Rights Campaign (2007) maintains a list of organizations supporting passage of ENDA and that are leading organizations of workplace fairness.

Organizations advocating sexual minority issues may face scrutiny and opposition as a result of their public stance. For example, when the Ford Motor Co. first started advertising in gay media, organizations such as the American Family Association (2005) initiated campaigns to boycott the company. After initially rescinding its advertising campaigns due to threats of boycotts, the Ford Motor Co. reaffirmed its stance on diversity and its commitment to support the GLBT community. But even such commitment may be subject to criticism by stakeholders. Organizations that have adopted inclusive diversity practices are better positioned to defend accusations that advocacy efforts are strictly tactics for economic gain. The bottom line is that organizations need to “walk the talk”.

Framing the Question: Applying the Perspectives

Building on the five perspectives towards diversity initiatives we ask the question: How are the perspectives related to the mission of HRD? To respond to this question we will discuss HRD’s mission. Then we will present a table that illustrates the relationship between the HRD mission and the five perspectives. Gilley and Egglund’s (1989) definition of the mission of HRD is most widely accepted by practitioners. The mission of HRD is (1) to provide *individual development* focused on performance improvement related to a current job; (2) to provide *career development* focused on performance improvement related to future job assignments; and (3) to provide *organizational development* which results in both optimal utilization of human potential and improved human performance (Gilley & Egglund, 1989). This definition of the mission of HRD serves as the framework for Table 1. Using this definition, actions that HRD practitioners and organizations may take under each perspective are listed.

Action is accomplishing something possibly over time or in stages (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2003). Action at the individual employee, team, and department levels may come in the form of participation, which includes sharing the daily work and social activities that all workers engage in during a work day. Alternatively, action may consist of commitment that has been defined as the degree of pledging or binding of the individual to a set of behaviors and which motivates one to act (Kiesler, 1971). Action at the organizational level takes the form of corporate social responsibility which includes concern for the economic well being of the business, adhering to the law, and a concern for societal needs (Hatcher, 2002).

The cells in the table describe the different strategies taken by organizations across individual development, career development, and organizational development. Space is inadequate to discuss each cell.

Table 1: *HRD Missions with Organizational Perspectives*

	<i>Hostility</i>	<i>Compliance</i>	<i>Inquiry</i>	<i>Inclusion</i>	<i>Advocacy</i>
Individual Development					
<i>New employee orientation</i>	Use of language that excludes sexual minorities; actions that exclude sexual minorities	No mention; or mere reference to policies without meaningful discussion when required by local or state laws	No mention	Use of inclusive language; benefits in terms of specific needs of sexual minorities	Use of inclusive language; benefits created for specific needs of sexual minorities
<i>Diversity/sexual harassment training</i>	Use of language that excludes sexual minorities; negative reference to sexual minorities if mentioned	No mention of sexual minorities except in locations where legal protection exists	Starting to question adequacy of training in terms of sexual minorities	Use of inclusive language; protection under harassment policies; procedures updated to provide equity sexual minorities	Discussion of issues relevant to sexual minorities
Career development/progression	Termination upon disclosure or discovery; unstated, or	Disclosure not advisable; don’t ask don’t tell	Disclosure possible in select circumstances;	Disclosure an individual choice; formal	Disclosure an individual choice; proactive

	implicit, discriminatory hiring & employee policies; job insecurity and intimidation	policy; promotion might be in jeopardy if discovered	informal acceptance in hiring & employee policies; sexual minorities in positions of power	acceptance in hiring & employee policies; sexual minorities at all organizational levels	recruitment; employee policies written to include sexual minorities; sexual minorities at all organizational levels
Organizational development/culture	<i>Strategic planning</i> Develop policies which prevent infiltration	Develop policies that comply with the law	Establishment of task force; commitment of resources (time/money) to benchmarking, cost-benefit analysis, climate assessments, legal research & focus groups	Update mission/value statements to provide equity for sexual minorities; benefits; protection under harassment policies	All policy & procedure documents inclusive and proactive; identification as ally; sponsor and market to sexual minorities through philanthropy, lobbying, & advertising; decline to engage in activities that would undermine the goal of equal rights for GLBT people; encourage other organizations to be proactive
	<i>Work/life balance</i> Employee must stay closeted at social events	Partner unwelcome at social events due to climate, regardless of official organizational policies	Partner welcome in select circumstances; introduction of support groups	Open social interactions; support of GLBT employee resource groups; designation of special facilities (i.e. family or gender neutral restrooms)	Open social interactions; support of GLBT employee resource groups; designation of special facilities (i.e. family or gender neutral restrooms)

Individual development. A narrow view of HRD's role as trainer for individual development is "identifying, assessing, and arranging planned learning efforts that help in the development of the essential competencies that enable individuals to perform current jobs" (Gilley, Dean, & Bierema, 2002, p. 9). Training must comply with "legal and regulatory standards with direct and indirect implications" (Clardy, 2003, p. 27). For this discussion, the vast array of programs, designed by specific organizations to improve organizational specific competencies, are not considered. Instead, two standard training programs, orientation for new employees and sexual harassment/diversity training, provide examples of the differing treatment by perspective of sexual minorities. The organizational culture is portrayed through trainers' use of language; organizational values are portrayed through a discussion of benefits. Sexual harassment and diversity trainings are offered to decrease an organization's legal liability. How this training is implemented under each perspective is influenced by the organizational culture, local climate and legislation.

Career development. We expand the definition of career development of performance improvement for jobs within an organization (Gilley & Eggland, 1989) to include an individual's career planning and management which sets a course with promotions, increased responsibility (McDonald & Hite, 2005), and further education. Career planning includes an individual's adaptive patterns regarding work and the construction of a vocational self-concept. Self-concept is "a picture of the self in some role, situation, or position, performing some set of functions, or in

some web of relationships” (Super, 1963, p. 18). A career plan includes locating a position at a company where an individual can develop and grow by taking on more responsibility through promotion. The career progression of an individual within one firm is heavily influenced by the perspective of the firm. Hostile organizations will not hire or will fire sexual minorities when discovered. Worrying about inadvertent disclosures reduces productivity (Rocco & Gallagher, 2006) which influences superiors when deciding on promotions. Being discovered can be a risk even in organizations which adopt compliance or inquiry as the perspective.

Organizational development. The OD Network, a professional organization, provides this definition of OD:

Organization Development is a body of knowledge and practice that enhances organizational performance and individual development, viewing the organization as a complex system of systems that exist within a larger system, each of which has its own attributes and degrees of alignment. OD interventions in these systems are inclusive methodologies and approaches to strategic planning, organization design, leadership development, change management, performance management, coaching, diversity, and work/life balance. (M. Minaham as cited in Organization Development Network, 2007)

This definition includes strategic planning and work/life balance, which we chose to illustrate the perspectives. Strategic planning under the hostile perspective would work to prevent infiltration into the organization by people who are sexual minorities, whereas compliance policies developed are in terms of the law. Under the inquiry perspective a task force might be created to explore the issues and determine what other organizations are doing. Strategic initiatives in an inclusive organization would update mission and value statements to provide equity for sexual minorities. Under advocacy, strategic initiatives would reach beyond the organization to making a difference in society.

Work/life balance would not really exist under the hostile perspective since the employee would have to stay deeply closeted at work and all social events connected to work. Under the compliance perspective, the employee would not feel comfortable bringing a partner or same sex friend to social events, while under inquiry employees could consider disclosure and coming out of the closet in select circumstances. In both the inclusive and advocacy perspectives, employees are welcomed and open social interactions exist.

Implications

A critical approach to HRD “fundamentally opposes the subjugation of human knowledge, skills, relationships, and education to organizational gain and goals that are primarily economic or instrumental” (Fenwick, 2004, p. 198). With that said organizations exist to achieve their financial goals and should exhibit corporate social responsibility at the same time. Sexuality, as an invisible social identity in the workplace, has implications for both research and practice (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005; Ward & Winstanley, 2005). HRD practitioners should understand that organizations are not “neutral or apolitical” and that “structures and systems have developed over time in specific historical and social situations” (Schied, Carter & Howell, 2001, p. 52).

Future research should examine the impact of each of the five perspectives on stakeholders, on organizational productivity, and on other areas of concern to organizations. Additionally, since the intersection of organizational culture and HRD has been under explored (Bunch, 2007), further research should also examine the impact of organizational culture and subcultures on the five perspectives presented in this paper. Organizations that have multiple and distinctive subcultures may identify with more than one of the perspectives concurrently. Our hope is that these perspectives provide a cogent reference for HRD practitioners, so that when organizations examine their diversity policy and practices, they can identify their present perspective, and consider policy and practices that advocate for people who are sexual minorities.

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