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Voice, silence, and diversity in 21st century organizations: strategies for inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender employees

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VOICE, SILENCE, AND DIVERSITY
IN 21st CENTURY ORGANIZATIONS:
STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSION OF
GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND
TRANSGENDER EMPLOYEES

**MYRTLE P. BELL, MUSTAFA F. ÖZBILGIN,
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Employee voice has been largely examined as a universal concept in unionized and non-unionized settings, with insufficient attention to diversity of workers (Rank, 2009). As invisible minorities, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) employees provide a valuable focal point from which to examine employee voice mechanisms. Positing that GLBT employees are often silenced by what is perceived as “normal” in work organizations, this paper identifies some of the negative consequences of this silencing and proposes ways in which the voices of GLBT employees and other invisible minorities can be heard. With its relevance to policies and practices in other organizations, the “Don’t ask; don’t tell” policy of the U.S. military is used as a lens through which to analyze voice, silence, and GLBT employees in other organizations. Heterosexist environments can foster organizational climates of silence, where the feeling that speaking up is futile or dangerous is widespread among employees. Specific recommendations are provided for HR managers to facilitate the expression of voice for GLBT employees in today’s increasingly diverse organizations.

Keywords: sexual orientation; GLBT; diversity; voice; silence; inclusion; gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender

In the May 2009 issue of *DiversityInc.*, a PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) advertisement on the prominent inside front cover focused on voice, silence, and diversity. Although sexual orientation was not explicitly mentioned, it was implied by the speaker's struggle with whether to answer a simple question commonly exchanged among colleagues. *"I wonder if people really want to know how I spent my weekend?" "When they ask me, I sometimes avoid the question." "When I focus too much on what people might think, I'm not being true to myself." "When I am true to myself, I worry that people will only see what I am rather than who I am."* (*"Who am I?"*, 2009 [Advertisement]). The ad directs interested readers to PWC's diversity website, which describes PWC as "A culture where every voice matters" (<http://www.pwc.com/us/en/about-us/diversity/pwc-diversity.jhtml>).

Hirschman (1970) defined voice as "any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs, whether through individual or collective petition to the management directly in charge, through appeal to a higher authority with the intention of forcing a change in management, or through various types of actions and protests, including those that are meant to mobilize public opinion" (p. 30). Most studies of employee voice to date have drawn on Hirschman's framing and have often treated voice as a universal concept that applies to all workers. As such, the voices of minorities in general and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) employees in particular have been neglected in much of the academic research on employee voice. Furthermore, partly due to their invisibility, overt discrimination, and lack of widespread protective legislation, GLBT employees are at high risk of silencing at work. In this context, they experience double jeopardy - diminished voice at work and limited research attention on their voice experiences. Creed (2003) argued that "it matters whose voices and silence we consider; the natures of both voice and silence may vary across identity groups that have different historical legacies of oppression and avenues of resistance" (p. 1507). This paper identifies the voices and silence of GLBT employees.

This paper proposes that it is particularly compelling to study voice (and silence) when the "objectionable state of affairs" at work is directly relevant to something that is invisible, but which is at the core of workers' identity, such as sexual orientation. We examine relationships between employee voice mechanisms and the increasing diversity of workforces, with a particular focus on GLBT employees, who are often silenced by what is perceived as "normal" in formal organizations. We consider some of the negative consequences of this silencing and propose ways in which the voices of GLBT employees and other invisible minorities can be heard. We begin by positing that sexual orientation is an invisible, but important, aspect of diversity. Next, we analyze voice, silence, and GLBT employees, focusing on the "Don't ask; don't tell" policy of the U.S. military. We demonstrate its relevance, however, to policies and practices that silence GLBT individuals in many other organizations and national contexts. Lastly, we provide specific recommendations for HR managers seeking to give voice to GLBT employees in increasingly diverse organizations.

Sexual Orientation as an (Invisible) Aspect of Diversity

In the United States, although research on race and sex differences in management style, leadership, and opportunities has existed for many years, significant and focused attention to diversity issues began after Johnston and Packer's (1987) *Workforce 2000*. In groundbreaking work, they predicted that by the year 2000, 85% of the net new entrants to the U.S. workforce would be women and minorities, providing employers with a strong impetus to consider the effects of increasing race and sex diversity on their organizations (Bell, 2007). In the more than two decades since *Workforce 2000* stimulated researchers' and practitioners' attention to the topic, it is now apparent that 21st-century workforces have not just changed in terms of race and sex, but also of age, religion, work and family needs, and openness about sexual orientation. Indeed, researchers now include sexual orientation in definitions of diversity (e.g., Bell, 2007; Harvey & Allard, 2002). Sexual orientation diversity is a key part of today's workplaces. An estimated 8.8 million gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals live in the United States and an estimated 3.7 million live in the United Kingdom (Erens, McManus, Prescott, & Field, 2003; Gates, 2006). While it is difficult to ascertain how many of these individuals are in the labor force, U.S. Census data reveal that more than 86% of men and women in same-sex couples are employed, and that employment probabilities for gay men and lesbians lie below those of married heterosexual men, but above those of heterosexual women (Leppel, 2009). This suggests that increasing workforce diversity, reflecting trends toward an aging population, greater ethnic diversity, and more women taking up positions in paid work (Gallagher & O'Leary, 2007; Williams & Jones, 2005), is also likely to include more GLBT employees. These population and workforce changes are also associated with significant changes in the way work will be organized and manifested in the near future, including distributing and enacting voice in organizational settings.

Despite the now widely recognized importance of attending to diversity in research and practice, some aspects of diversity, in particular race and sex, receive considerably more attention than others. This is due in part to the historical resistance to discriminating against racial minorities and women and partly due to the ease of identifying race and sex. Visible attributes are more easily accessible to use in decision making, stereotyping, and categorizing at work than those that are invisible (Dworkin & Dworkin, 1999), such as sexual orientation. Thus, despite the clear relevance of GLBT employees' experiences to diversity in organizations regarding discrimination, harassment, stereotyping, and exclusion at work (Day & Schoenrade, 1997; Dietch, Butz, & Brief, 2004; Waldo, 1999), they are often overlooked in studies of diversity and of voice. In the same vein, GLBT equality is considered taboo or even unlawful across several societies and countries (Jonsen, Maznevski, & Schneider, in press). Bowen and Blackmon (2003) suggested that "managing 'invisible diversity' may be just as crucial as (managing) 'visible diversity'... but provides additional challenges since individuals may choose to conceal or evade, rather than speak up about their differences" (p. 1395). The option to conceal one's sexual orientation is sometimes used strategically (see Creed, 2003), but, as we will discuss, concealment comes with a host of negative

consequences for both individuals and the organizations that employ them (Beatty & Kirby, 2006; Day & Schoenrade, 1997; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; Rostosky & Riggle, 2002).

In addition to invisibility, the traditional heterosexual social structures, morals, social mores, fundamentalist religious (see Hunsberger, 1996) beliefs, homophobia, and inadequate legal protections in many places are related to discrimination against GLBT individuals (Lubensky, Holland, Wiethoff, & Crosby, 2004). Discrimination based on sexual orientation has been referred to as the last acceptable prejudice and creates tremendous problems for individuals and the organizations in which they work. Being forced to remain closeted, living with the fear of being terminated, and lack of partner benefits are just a few of the concerns unique to GLBT employees. Supportive human resource management practices that encourage openness and reject discriminatory practices, however, can make a difference. For example, researchers have found that GLBT employees who were “out” (had publicly disclosed their sexual orientation) at work had higher affective commitment and job satisfaction and viewed top management as being more supportive. Those who were out also had lower conflict between work and home, lower role ambiguity, and lower role conflict (Day & Schoenrade, 1997). Decisions about disclosure are related to perceptions of the climate for GLBT employees, including perceived managerial and peer attitudes and organizational policies (Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Huffman, Watrous-Rodriguez, & King, 2008; Ragins, 2008).

As diversity among employees and applicants has been increasing, changes have occurred in contemporary voice mechanisms, especially in the last decade (Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington, & Ackers, 2005; Wilkinson, Dundon, Marchington, & Ackers, 2004). Grievance systems, collective bargaining, suggestion boxes, open door policies, employee participation, participative performance appraisals, and computer-mediated communication are included in the formal mechanisms for employee voice (Bishop & Levine, 1999; Roberts, 2002). More recently, new voice mechanisms, such as affinity, networking, and employee resource groups, have emerged. These new mechanisms consist of employer-recognized, but employee-run, groups of workers who share a common identity, characteristic, or set of interests. They provide members with opportunities to network, support, exchange information and ideas with one another, and plan sponsored activities. For example, the LAMBDA employee affinity group at Oracle has participated in educating employees regarding GLBT perspectives, sponsors social events for GLBT members and friends, and provides links to GLBT communities and events around the world (Oracle, 2010).

GLBT Employees in Diversity and Voice Literatures

To establish the foundation for our discussion, we now define key terms relevant to GLBT employees and voice (Table I). *Heterosexism* is “an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual behavior, relationship, identity, or community” (Herek, 1993, p. 90). Such a system normalizes and

privileges heterosexuality (Waldo, 1999, p. 218), results in institutional and interpersonal prejudice and social stigma for GLBT individuals, and is inherently silencing to them. Many GLBT employees express fears and experiences of harassment, discrimination, and termination at work (Day & Schoenrade, 1997; Dietch et al., 2004; Graham, 1986; Levine & Leonard, 1984; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001), prompting their efforts to remain “invisible” and fit in with the heterosexual mainstream. Early work by Levine and Leonard (1984) identified formal and informal discrimination against those who are GLBT. Formal discrimination consists of firing or not hiring someone on the basis of his or her sexual orientation (see Cracker Barrel in Bell, 2007, p. 435), being passed over for promotions and raises, and being excluded from benefits such as insurance and family leave. Informal discrimination against GLBT employees includes harassment and loss of credibility and lack of acceptance and respect by co-workers and supervisors (Croteau, 1996; Levine & Leonard, 1984). Ragins and Cornwell (2001) found that GLBT employees who perceived high levels of sexual orientation discrimination in their workplace had more negative job attitudes, felt lower satisfaction, and thought that they had fewer opportunities for promotion. Research indicates that everyone (regardless of sexual orientation) working in a heterosexist climate, in which behaviors such as anti-gay jokes are accepted as common practice, can experience reduced psychological well-being (Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik, & Magley, 2008).

In such hostile environments, the decision not to disclose sexual orientation would appear to be a reasonable decision. Not disclosing, however, is associated with negative consequences that may rival those of harassment, discrimination, and termination (Bell, 2007). Some GLBT employees construct heterosexual partners, bring opposite-sex friends as pretend partners to company events, and spend considerable energy trying to avoid speaking of their real, same-sex partners while at work (Özbilgin & Woodward, 2003). Such concealment detracts from constructive, productive behaviors (see Beatty & Kirby, 2006). Hewlin (2009) argued that minority employees sometimes create facades of conformity that can result in emotional exhaustion and intentions to quit. In his research on heterosexism as minority stress, Waldo (1999) found GLBT employees who were more out and those who were more closeted experienced minority stress and associated negative psychological, physical, and job-related outcomes. He surmised that those who are more out experience direct heterosexism and those who are more closeted experience stress from others’ assuming they are heterosexual. Waldo recommended that GLBT individuals consciously choose employers that do not tolerate heterosexism.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Inclusion refers to “a person’s ability to contribute fully and effectively to an organization” (Roberson, 2006, p. 215). The invisibility of sexual orientation and certain other diversity attributes warrants creating a *culture of inclusion* in which the “different voices of a diverse workforce are respected and heard” (Pless & Maak, 2004, pp. 130–131). In such cultures, those with invisible differences know they can be comfortable making known their differences (e.g., being out, belonging to a

minority religious group, or having another invisible difference). Thus, in addition to diversity as a concept, many researchers and practitioners now consider inclusion critical to unlocking the potential contribution of individual differences at work (Roberson, 2006; Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2008). For example, in 2008, SHRM hosted its first Global Leadership Summit on Diversity and Inclusion, bringing together 100 “global diversity thought leaders” from industry and academia to discuss pressing diversity and inclusion issues for the 21st century. In diverse *and* inclusive cultures, people are recognized as being different, yet they are also recognized and valued as equally free organizational citizens, with the same rights as everyone else and knowing “they can be their true selves, not only in private but also at the workplace” (Pless & Maak, 2004, p. 132). For GLBT employees, the ability to be “out” at work and to have the same rights, benefits, and privileges as everyone else is a key aspect of voice. When both diversity *and* inclusion exist, employees “feel a sense of belonging, and inclusive behaviors such as *eliciting* and *valuing* contributions from all employees are part of the daily life in the organization” (emphasis added; Lirio, Lee, Williams, Haugen, & Kossek, 2008, p. 448, citing Miller & Katz, 2002). Eliciting and valuing employees’ contributions are also key attributes of voice.

As discussed, voice includes attempts to change, rather than escape from, objectionable affairs at work (Hirschman, 1970) and has multiple manifestations. Perhaps most relevant to GLBT employees is the concept of *quiescent* or *defensive voice*, designed to protect oneself from abuse or mistreatment (Ellis & Van Dyne, 2009; Pinder & Harlos, 2001), as may occur in environments that are heterosexist or hostile to GLBT employees. In contrast, *acquiescent voice* refers to disengaged expressions based on resignation, which may manifest as GLBT staff’s withdrawing from social aspects of work. Last, Van Dyne, Ang, and Botero (2003) described *pro-social voice* as expressing ideas, information, and opinions in constructive ways to improve work and organizations based on cooperative motives. This resonates with the notion of GLBT workers as “tempered radicals” (Meyerson, 2001), workers who subscribe to often unstated radical plans for positive social change and whose radicalism is curbed only by organizational norms.

Silence is employees’ intentional, conscious decision to withhold their opinions and concerns about organizational problems or issues (Johannesen, 1974; Morrison & Milliken, 2000, p. 707). Like voice, silence is multifaceted and can be *quiescent* or *defensive*, *acquiescent* or *pro-social*.

Quiescent or *defensive silence* refers to the self-protective and more active behavior based on fear that the consequences of speaking up will be personally costly (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Pinder & Harlos, 2001), while *acquiescent silence* refers to disengaged behavior based on resignation (Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Van Dyne et al., 2003). Acquiescent silence is passive and entrenched, in which employees have given up hope for improvement and have accepted the problematic state (Van Dyne et al., 2003). Last, *pro-social silence* is withholding “ideas, information, or opinions with the goal of benefiting other people or the organization—based on altruism or cooperative motives” (Van Dyne et al., 2003, pp. 1366–1367). For GLBT employees

and allies, silence about discrimination, harassment, benefits, or other inequalities can thus be viewed through quiescent, acquiescent, defensive, and pro-social lenses. When fear of harassment, termination, or other negative consequences exists, acquiescent or defensive silence may result. When there is no hope of change, for example, silence may exist as a form of resignation. Pro-social silence of allies may occur when others fear for their GLBT friends and colleagues in an organization.

According to Bowen and Blackmon (2003), the interaction between an employee's personal characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation) and the context within which the employee operates determines voice and silence. Morrison and Milliken (2000) note that it may be "especially difficult" for some organizations "to respond appropriately to the diversity of values, beliefs, and characteristics that increasingly characterize the workforce" (p. 721). Bowen and Blackmon (2003) specifically focused on the sexual orientation dimension of diversity as an invisible difference, noting that if GLBT employees feel that expressing their personal identity is unacceptable at work, they will not share their experiences and speak up. Conklin (2004) presented a troubling story of a gay white man who tells of how his sexual orientation presents ongoing challenges at work. The man describes trying to appear more masculine, not volunteering information about himself that could make heterosexual white men uncomfortable, adopting heterosexual male behaviors such as dominating women, and remaining silent when GLBT employees are ridiculed or excluded in subtle ways or when assumptions are made that everyone is heterosexual (Conklin, 2004). Common across all forms of silence that GLBT employees may enact is that silence as an organizational act is often symptomatic of organizational processes, structures, and work cultures (see Morrison & Milliken, 2000) that are hostile to including GLBT employees. The "Don't ask; don't tell" policy of the U.S. military serves as an illustrative case of promoting silence as a policy for dealing with sexual orientation diversity at work.

"Don't Ask; Don't Tell" and Climates of Silence

In the 2010 State of the Union address, President Barack Obama vowed to repeal the official U.S. military policy on homosexuality: "Don't ask, don't tell, don't pursue, don't harass." More commonly known as simply "Don't ask; don't tell," this policy has been a clear and pointed expression of denying voice and a specific requirement to be silent. Under this policy, military service members have been prohibited from articulating their minority sexual orientation, and others have been prohibited from asking if personnel are gay (Lubensky et al., 2004). If their minority sexual orientation became known, U.S. military personnel have run the risk of being discharged (e.g., fired). Senator Carl Levin, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, opened a February 2010 congressional hearing into the repeal of the policy by stating that approximately 13,500 gay men and lesbians had been forced to leave the military since the policy was implemented (O'Keefe, 2010). During that period, some level of asking and telling had, in fact, been occurring. As evidence of further discrimination and power disparities, those discharged have disproportionately been enlisted personnel, rather than officers. For example, in one five-year period only 75 of the 6,300 discharged for being homosexual were officers

(Fouhy, 2004). Further, women have been significantly more likely to be discharged than men, making up 15% of the military, but 29% of those discharged under “Don’t ask; don’t tell” (Fouhy, 2004). Researchers have suggested that many women have been discharged under the policy after refusing men’s sexual advances (Human Rights Campaign, 2004), another act of suppressing voice.

While the specifics of the “Don’t ask; don’t tell” policy are unique to the U.S. military, prohibitions against homosexuality currently exist or once existed in other militaries in the past as well. Further, in many other organizations, unwritten rules similar to the “Don’t ask; don’t tell” policy exist, and these rules can silence employees, resulting in negative individual and organizational consequences. For example, as the quote at the opening of the article suggests, GLBT staff may fear answering innocuous questions regarding what they did over the weekend from co-workers engaging in normal workplace small talk. Even absent specific directives not to ask or tell, colleagues may learn not to ask (e.g., pro-social silence) via evasive responses from GLBT colleagues who know that not telling (e.g., quiescent silence) may be safer. Both military and nonmilitary organizations could learn from the destructive consequences of silencing (see Day & Greene, 2008) of personnel without legitimate reason. At the most obvious level, firing large numbers of qualified personnel negatively affects an organization’s effectiveness. For example, in 2003, nine linguists were discharged from the U.S. military, including speakers of Arabic; at the time, concerns were expressed that “Don’t ask; don’t tell” was endangering national security (Webley, 2010). Of course, it would be wise also to consider the negative consequences of silence among all personnel on the effectiveness of communication in the organization.

According to Morrison and Milliken (2000, p. 721), *climates of silence* exist when powerful systemic forces create organizational silence—widely shared perceptions that speaking up is not worth the effort or is downright dangerous. In his article titled “Don’t ask, don’t tell: Secrets—their use and abuse in organizations,” Keane (2008, p. 107) explained that secrets can hinder communication and assert cognitive and social controls. Although Keane’s article was not about secrecy relating to sexual orientation or the U.S. military, the impact of secrecy about sexual orientation on communication and cognitive and social controls and the broad organizational relevance is clear. Being forced to remain closeted to avoid termination is one way in which GLBT employees are silenced (Colgan, Wright, Creegan, & McKearney, 2009). Fears of termination may be extreme. Yet even without such extremes, the many heterosexist factors that exist in organizations are silencing. For example, with most benefits programs requiring marriage for partners to qualify for medical, dental, and retirement benefits, in many organizations partnered GLBT employees are automatically silenced. In the absence of legislation that allows same-sex partners to marry, proactive organizational leaders must implement their own equitable benefits programs (Hannah, 2009). They may or may not do so, depending on the commitment to equality, inclusion, and voice for *all* employees and upon the influential power of GLBT employees and allies (see Day & Greene, 2008) in supporting equal benefits.

Voice Mechanisms for GLBT Employees

Various mechanisms provide employees with the opportunity to express their voice (Benson & Brown, 2010). Among these are legal regulations, trade unions, and specific GLBT and human rights organizations, which will be explored in this section. Legislation can be helpful in reducing the silence of racial and ethnic minorities, but the legal case for sexual orientation equality is relatively new and weaker compared to other forms of antidiscriminatory legislation (Colgan, Creegan, McKearney, & Wright, 2007). In the United Kingdom, the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations were implemented in December 2003 to offer protection against sexual orientation discrimination at work (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development [CIPD], 2009). In the United States, there is no widespread federal legislation that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Some states, including Wisconsin, Connecticut, California, Hawaii, Minnesota, and New Jersey, do prohibit such discrimination, yet in the absence of such prohibitions or local laws, one can be fired for being (or being perceived as) gay.

In 32 states, where no legislation exists to protect individuals against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, trade union membership can be a legal protection for GLBT employees. Indeed, employee voice has been seen as a traditional function of trade unions; however, in recent decades, union membership has been declining, rendering this voice mechanism less powerful than it once was (Urwin, Murphy, & Michielsens, 2007). Even where employee voice is legally protected by trade unions, however, GLBT employees can still remain silent. As Benson and Brown (2010) noted, unions differ in their capacity to represent their members. Research by Morehead, Steele, Alexander, Stephen, and Duffin (1997) demonstrated that only 24% of unionized workplaces in Australia were characterized as active, with senior delegates present, membership meetings held, and negotiations taking place between management and labor. More than three-quarters of Australian unionized workplaces did not have a union structure that could provide for employee voice.

Active unions can present their own problems for GLBT employees' expressing voice. Research in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom has established that minority groups encounter several structural and cultural barriers to participating in trade unions (Hunt & Rayside, 2000). If GLBT employees can participate in union processes, their representation by unions might prove useful (Greene & Kirton, 2006). White, heterosexual men, however, have dominated the governing bodies and decision-making structures of most unions and have therefore been able to influence policies and practices to reflect their own interests (Kirton & Greene, 2002). The unrepresentative nature of union leadership restricts the ability of unions to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion in employment effectively (Kirton & Greene, 2002; Trebilcock, 1991). While many unions are making strides in adopting structural and organizational changes to improve member equality, equal priority is not given to all groups; indeed, sex and racial equality has been pursued more energetically than equality for GLBT employees (Kirton & Greene, 2005). Recent and notable exceptions are evident to this rule; for example, the president of the Retail,

Wholesale and Department Store Union, which represents 100,000 workers in both the United States and Canada, recently outed himself and stated a commitment to same-sex spousal benefits (Weinthal, 2009). Nevertheless, the secretary-treasurer of the Office and Professional Employees International Union has stated that “very few national labor leaders are on board with this fight” (Weinthal, 2009).

In summary, when coupled with the lack of physical markers to differentiate GLBT individuals from heterosexuals, the absence of legal protections in many locations, the relative lack of union support, and the widespread negative attitudes toward homosexuality may result in more silence for GLBT employees than for other minorities. Researchers have suggested that defensive silence, due to fear, or acquiescent silence, due to giving up hope for change, can lead to further disengagement and withdrawal and ultimately include turnover (Brinsfield, Edwards, & Greenberg, 2009; Pinder & Harlos, 2001). As a result, both those who are silenced and their employers suffer.

We contend that managing diversity and inclusion effectively would include mechanisms of voice through which individual differences are recognized and organizational measures taken to accommodate those differences in the processes of decision making and career development (e.g., inclusive environments). Because the United States and many other countries do not have adequate prohibitions against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and due to widespread resistance against equality for GLBT in some areas, leaders concerned with voice for all workers must take specific steps to let GLBT employees know their voices will be valued rather than silenced. Breaking the cycle of invisibility and silence by allowing GLBT employees space to make positive contributions to work, unhindered by fear of violence, prejudice, discrimination, and harassment, can shift the status quo. To reach this aim, organizations need to develop voice mechanisms that include GLBT employees’ specific needs in the workforce (Conklin, 2004).

Recommendations for Human Resources Managers

As indicated, voice is a mechanism through which workers can effect organizational change, but transformation of workforces and dominant practices render traditional mechanisms of voice ineffective in capturing the demands of workers from diverse backgrounds. In this context, there is a need to introduce new and transformed mechanisms of voice that use systems and structures relevant to both new forms of work and increasingly diverse profiles of current and potential workers. Given the contentious and politicized nature of equality for GLBT employees, proactive leaders must implement policies and practices that support equality and indicate voice, even in the absence of legislation. Such policies may be more meaningful to employees and effective if implemented without the coercion of legislation, as doing so speaks volumes to employees and constituent groups of the organization’s level of commitment to equality. An obvious expression of commitment to sexual orientation equality is a widely communicated non-discrimination policy.

In taking a proactive stance for inclusion, leaders can draw a rich repertoire of specific voice techniques from the literature. Dundon et al. (2005) subdivided voice in large organizations into four principal strands of thought: first, voice as an *articulation of individual dissatisfaction* (such as complaints to line managers, grievance procedures, speak-up programs); second, voice as the *expression of collective organization* (such as union recognition, collective bargaining, industrial action); third, voice as a form of *contribution to management decision making* (such as upward problemsolving groups, quality circles, suggestion programs, attitude surveys, self-managed teams); fourth, voice as a form of *mutuality* (such as partnership agreements, joint consultative committees, and works councils, which are common in Western Europe; see Lewin & Mitchell, 1992). What matters in applying these mechanisms to promote voice is introducing methods that allow workers whose voices have previously not been heard to participate. See Table II for applications of these voice mechanisms as they apply to GLBT employees and other invisible minorities.¹

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

For GLBT employees, these four subdivisions of voice should have specific characteristics to facilitate voice. For the *articulation of individual dissatisfaction*, multiple mechanisms should exist for both GLBT employees and allies to bring forth complaints about discrimination, harassment, and exclusion. These mechanisms may be real or virtual, anonymous or open. Allowing for anonymous complaints respects the choice of some employees to remain closeted at work. While traditional mechanisms are generally real (in person) and open, voice mechanisms for GLBT employees may need to be virtual or anonymous, especially if the context of work could be particularly hostile to sexual orientation diversity. Although the ultimate aim is to offer real and open systems to disclose dissatisfaction, the current context of the workplace should be considered in designing voice mechanisms for GLBT workers if they are to be used. Providing workers with opportunities to express their dissatisfaction to line managers and making available grievance procedures and speak-up programs would help not only GLBT employees, but all of an organization's workers. More unique to GLBT employees would be to provide experts to deal with the dissatisfaction engendered by harassment, silence, or GLBT-specific issues. Important, too, is the availability of complaint channels that are free of further risk of harassment and bullying. Some organizations outsource their employee complaint services to specialized external agencies to ensure employees are adequately protected from harassment and bullying at work.

For the *expression of collective organization*, organizations can legitimate the voice of GLBT employee networks in trade unions, works councils, and other collective institutions. Creating networks of diversity and equality at work to include sexual orientation issues is a good starting point. Initially, options to network off-site may

¹ Efforts to include other invisible minority groups (e.g., religious minorities who do not wear distinctive religious attire or people with stigmatized, invisible disabilities) could benefit from similar applications of these recommendations.

be necessary. Once such networks are established, effective mechanisms to leverage diversity and eliminate inequality, discrimination, and harassment should be introduced. An intra-organizational GLBT network might also facilitate discussion among GLBT workers to help identify, and potentially resolve, issues related to workplace dissatisfaction. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development in the United Kingdom recommends that to “mainstream” GLBT employees in the workplace, organizations should work with trade union representatives and GLBT employee networks to foster engagement with the diversity agenda (CIPD, 2009). This could include inviting sexual orientation network members to become diversity council representatives.

Voice as a form of *contribution to management decision making* is particularly important in that management decision making plays a key role in behaviors at work. When management clearly articulates that GLBT employees are valued contributors to organizational success, and that heterosexism is not tolerated (Waldo, 1999), GLBT employees are more comfortable being out. What is not properly funded in terms of staffing and financial resources often falls outside the focus of decision-making mechanisms at work. Adequate resourcing of GLBT initiatives, therefore, is important. Similarly, for GLBT issues to be mainstreamed in decision processes at work, organizations should introduce GLBT monitoring in their human resource reporting systems. The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) includes such monitoring as part of their award measurement criteria. Barron (2009) noted the importance of legislation prohibiting sexual orientation discrimination in reducing hiring discrimination and prejudice. Although introduced multiple times, federal legislation prohibiting sexual orientation discrimination has continually failed to pass in the United States. Further, even when such protective laws are enacted or policies such as “Don’t ask; don’t tell” are repealed, it may take years (and overt actions from leaders) before the hostile and heteronormative climate in organizations is changed such that GLBT employees are comfortable being out (Harding & Peel, 2007; Poulin, Gouliquer, & Moore, 2009) and treated fairly. As mentioned, it is important for organizations to attend deliberately to fairness toward GLBT employees in HR processes with or without specific legislation.

Diversity training and education should also include diversity in sexual orientation as it can help prevent discrimination by raising awareness, creating open dialogue, and reducing misperceptions, stereotypes, and fears (Bell, Connerley, & Cocchiara, 2009). Day and Greene (2008) suggested that organizations should include teaching by example, by diversity training, and through openly gay and lesbian employees as teachers. All workers should be educated on the organization’s stance regarding diversity and inclusion—and that it includes sexual orientation—regardless of whether or not there is protective legislation in a particular locale. Huffman et al. (2008) recommended that diversity training include support-based training, emphasizing how to be a fair and supportive colleague or supervisor to GLBT employees.

Finally, voice as a form of *mutuality* could mean bringing in representatives of GLBT internal and external networks to build effective ties with the organization. GLBT

rights campaign groups and human rights associations such as Stonewall in the United Kingdom, the HRC, and Pride at Work in the United States help provide avenues for employee voice outside the employing organization. Developing ties with such groups can facilitate transferring progressive practices elsewhere to the organization, bringing the organization in line with contemporary voice mechanisms. Identifying high-profile sexual orientation champions at work can also enhance the profile of GLBT issues and help integrate these issues into the strategic decision making at work. Doing so can also signal that being GLBT is accepted both in theory and in practice, as GLBT employees are represented in high-level positions, without penalty. Further, GLBT-friendly workplaces can apply for “equality badges” offered by external organizations such as Stonewall and to be designated a “gay-friendly employer.” Organizations can apply for such recognition to validate the merits of their policies externally and promote their organization as being welcoming to GLBT customers and workers.

For example, the HRC’s Corporate Equality Index is a report card on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender equality in corporate America. Since 2002, HRC has published company ratings on such things as fully inclusive nondiscrimination policies, equal benefits, and GLBT resource groups. Employers that receive a 100% rating are recognized as “Best Places to Work for LBGT Equality” and are invited to use the award recognition in their recruiting and advertising efforts. Applications for this recognition are increasing, as are the number of employers receiving a perfect score. In 2002, the first year of such recognition, only 13 employers earned a perfect score. By 2009, 260 employers, representing 9.3 million employees, did so. By 2010, 305 employers received a perfect rating, including 58 that received it for the first time (Human Rights Campaign, 2010). Even in the absence of widespread legislation, clearly, organizations are seeing value in such recognition and validation of their efforts toward equality for GLBT employees.

Conclusion

In this article, we have argued that increasing workforce diversity necessitates new and different voice mechanisms. We have provided a typology of recognized voice mechanisms, appropriately applied to GLBT employees, which can be used to give voice to GLBT individuals at work and thus create a culture of inclusion. Voice and its relationships with diversity and inclusion are critical to the success of cultural change management efforts. Only by managing diversity effectively across a growing set of strands and myriad intersections of these strands will organizations capture the voices of all workers in their ongoing processes of organizational change. This requires organizational leaders, as change agents, to understand the dynamics of their organizational and national context (Tatli & Özbilgin, 2009) and recognize a wider repertoire of voice mechanisms that can cater to different constituent groups in workplaces. In his work on diversity, inclusion, and voice, Rank (2009) explained that organizational leaders should move away from command-and control-based managerial approaches toward encouraging participation and developing trust to promote use of voice by non-traditional workers. For GLBT employees, managing

diversity should consider aspects of inclusion that specifically consider their particular, unique concerns (see Roberson, 2006). If these concerns are addressed, organizations can expect higher levels of satisfaction, organizational commitment, and positive work attitudes from GLBT employees (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). The estimated 8.8 million GLBT individuals in the United States and nearly four million in the United Kingdom are valuable current or potential employees, customers with significant purchasing power, and stakeholders with interest and influence. As Cox and Blake (1991) illustrated, employers that value diversity will have advantages in terms of attracting and retaining workers. Similarly, as mentioned, Waldo (1999) recommended GLBT employees make conscious efforts to seek organizations that are intolerant of heterosexism. The efforts of organizations such as the HRC to identify and publicize companies that support equality for GLBT employees underscore the increasing importance of specific efforts to include GLBT employees in diversity and inclusion efforts. In addition, some heterosexuals seek to work in and are more engaged with inclusive companies (Hannah, 2009, p. 110).

Aside from obvious business benefits, moral and social cases can be made for providing voice to GLBT workers. Providing such voice will require committed leadership. Howard Becker (1963) introduced the concept of “moral entrepreneurs” (p. 147) to denote individuals whose ideas stick and who can promote certain norms in organizational settings. There is a need to identify and foster moral entrepreneurs who can champion and promote the significance of democratic and fair use of voice at work and who can alter the normative topography of organizations by doing so. Through the example that moral entrepreneurs will set, the message of democratic and fair mechanisms of voice can be legitimized and routinized in practices, processes, and systems of work. Human resource managers can play a significant role in identifying and fostering moral entrepreneurship to promote voice for GLBT employees and other invisible minority groups.

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TABLE 1: DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition	Source
Heterosexism	“An ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual behavior, relationship, identity, or community”; the normalizing and privileging of heterosexuality	Herek (1993) Waldo (1999)
Inclusion	The ability to contribute fully and effectively to an organization; a sense of belonging, respect, and being valued	Herek (1993) Waldo (1999)
Voice	Any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs; intentionally expressing work-related ideas, information, and opinions	Hirschman (1970) Ellis & Van Dyne (2009)
Quiescent/defensive voice	Expression of ideas, information, and opinions with the goal of protecting oneself from abuse or mistreatment	Ellis & Van Dyne (2009)
Acquiescent voice	Disengaged expression of ideas, information, and opinions, based on resignation	Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero (2003)
Pro-social voice	Other-oriented expression of ideas, information, and opinions for constructive ways to improve work and organizations, based on cooperative motives	Van Dyne et al. (2003)
Silence	The intentional, conscious decision of employees to withhold their opinions and concerns about organizational circumstances	Morrison & Milliken (2000); Pinder & Harlos (2001)
Quiescent/defensive silence	Active withholding of relevant ideas, information, or opinions as a form of self-protection, based on fear	Pinder & Harlos (2001) Van Dyne et al. (2003)
Acquiescent silence	Passive withholding of relevant ideas, information, or opinions, based on resignation	Pinder & Harlos (2001) Van Dyne et al. (2003)
Pro-social silence	Withholding work-related ideas, information, or opinions with the goal of benefiting other people or the organization, based on altruism or cooperative motives	Van Dyne et al. (2003)
Climate of silence	Widely shared perceptions among employees that speaking up is not worth the effort or is downright dangerous	Morrison & Milliken (2000)

TABLE 2: IMPLEMENTING VOICE MECHANISMS FOR GLBT EMPLOYEES

Types of Voice	Mechanisms of Voice at Work for GLBT Employees (and Other Invisible Minorities)
Articulation of individual dissatisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing anonymous complaint mechanisms • Allowing feedback free from harassment • Scrutinizing all policies and practices for sexual orientation bias • Providing a safe place for GLBT networking (which may sometimes need to be off-site) and allowing staff time for participation
Expression of collective organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating inclusive diversity councils • Establishing intra-organizational GLBT networks (virtual or real) • Union representation that includes GLBT employees
Contribution to management decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making an explicit commitment for issues unique to GLBT employees to be considered in decision-making processes • Allocating adequate staff and financial resources to sexual orientation equality efforts • Integrating GLBT employees' voice in training and development programs • Including sexual orientation questions in human resource monitoring systems
Mutuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building representatives of internal and external GLBT networks • Joining GLBT equality initiatives to bring external scrutiny to the organization • Identifying and promoting champions of sexual orientation equality