

Exploring equality and inclusion of lesbian and gay workforce through identity deployment

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ABSTRACT

Purpose. Receiving *equitable benefits and treatment* for lesbian and gay employees is challenging because of the *adverse impact* on them due to accepted employment practices driven by heterosexism (Ledvinka & Scarpello, 1991). Around 42 percent of the large corporations in USA that provide domestic partner benefits do not recognize extending it to the same- sex partners (HRC, 2008), partly because the state laws don't obligate them to do so and sexual orientation is not a federally protected identity. Since lesbian and gay employees are not protected by the federal laws in USA, in the absence of legal protection offered by the states, many employees face discrimination like denial of employment, and decreased access to promotional opportunities (Berkley and Watt, 2006) which may heighten to the extent of termination of employment because of the sexual orientation (Herrschaft & Mills, 2002). At the same time, *making workplace inclusive* for lesbian and gay employees is also challenging due to the associated homophobia- fear from homosexuality on moral, religious and symbolic grounds and heterosexism- an ethnocentric view towards *heteronormativity* that heterosexuality is the only superior, normal and accepted form of sexual orientation (Badgett, 1996; Bohan, 1996; Watson and Algert, 2007; Croteau, 1996; Winegarden, 1994; Sears, 1997; Herek, 1984, 1990).

This paper would examine identity deployment as an antecedent towards equality and inclusion of lesbian and gay employees at their workplace. Bernstein conceptualizes her identity deployment framework to address both the cultural and political goals of an identity movement. On one hand it contests the stigma associated with gay identity, on the other it aims to bring institutional and structural changes. Bernstein explains identity deployment as a strategic process of expressing identity and making it visible. It aims to bring positive political and cultural changes in institutions that are averse to the identity in question. By deploying identity, activists 'transform mainstream culture, its categories and values (and perhaps by

extension its policies and structures), by providing alternative organizational forms. Identity deployment can also transform participants or simply educate legislators or the public' (ibid, p. 538).

Design/ methodology/ approach. It is a conceptual research that draws from contemporary studies in the area lesbian and gay sexualities at workplace, identity deployment and EDI literature. The paper develops a conceptual framework based on the discourse and suggests implications for future research.

Findings. This paper proposes a model based on propositions derived from existing studies. These propositions interlink identity deployment strategies at workplace (Ghosh, forthcoming) and the diversity management goals- equality and inclusion (Özbilgin, 2009) with contextual factors as moderators in the context of lesbian and gay employees in the organization.

Originality/ Value. This paper bridges the identity movement premise in sociology and the EDI literature (Özbilgin, 2009) that proposes equality and inclusion as two simultaneous and indispensable goals of diversity management. It attempts to enhance our understanding on how these goals can be achieved at workplace.

Implications. The model is at proposal stage for empirical inquiry. It is open for the scrutiny of academic community and solicits suggestions. The future course of this study would be to evaluate and augment this model with empirical data collected through qualitative methods.

Keywords: diversity at workplace, sexual orientation, identity deployment, equality, inclusion

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