Handbook of Research on Workforce Diversity in a Global Society: Technologies and Concepts

Chaunda L. Scott  
*Oakland University, USA*

Marilyn Y. Byrd  
*University Of Mary Hardin–Baylor, USA*
Chapter 24

Leveraging Sexual Orientation Workforce Diversity through Identity Deployment

Apoorva Ghosh
XLRI School of Business and Human Resources, India

ABSTRACT

Disclosure decisions for lesbian and gay employees have been researched in organizational contexts. While the dilemmas associated, factors affecting, and situations encouraging or discouraging disclosure have been studied, the relatively unexplored area is how homosexuality can be strategically deployed at workplace to contest the associated stigma and bring positive social and political changes in the organizational climate. While scholars believe that remaining closeted may be the best strategy in a heterosexist and homophobic environment, studies report psychological strain, lack of authenticity, behavioral dilemmas, etc. experienced by closeted individuals, which, at minimum, lead to conflicts in daily situations of identity management and, at the peak, suicidal attempts due to perceived burdensomeness and failed belongingness. To address this dilemma in leveraging sexual orientation diversity in workplaces, this chapter deals with the framework of identity deployment offered by Bernstein (1997) to explore how homosexuality can be deployed in the workplace.

INTRODUCTION

“Since the late 1980s, FinCo, one of the oldest corporations in the Twin Cities, has had what many insiders and outsiders alike described as a strong diversity initiative as part of its corporate strategy. Yet, there was no organized GLBT group until January 1993, when a series of unrelated events catalyzed two unacquainted employees to start the Gay, Lesbian, and Friends Network. For Dean, a gay man, it was an exercise in a team-training session, in which participants were asked to write the name of a celebrity dream date on a card; as a team-building exercise, they would make a game of matching cards to participants. Faced with the choice of coming out on the spot or hiding, he left the card blank and was later chastised for not being a team player (In later
Leveraging Sexual Orientation Workforce Diversity through Identity Deployment

educative encounters, he used this story to answer the frequent question, “What does sexual orientation have to do with work?”)" (Creed & Scully, 2000, p. 399).

With the demedicalizing of homosexuality by American Psychological Association and American Psychiatric Association in 1973 (Conger, 1975; Berkley & Watt, 2006) and the shift of conservative mindsets, making one’s homosexuality visible is being increasingly seen as normal and accepted. Contrary to the previous phase when homosexuality was considered psycho-pathological and social deviance and concealing was considered more appropriate (Cain, 1991) and discourses on homosexuality were limited to criminology and psychiatry (Gruszczynska, 2009), now it is finding place in the mainstream sociological, economic, and psychological discourses (Badgett, 2001). As a result, organizational scholars are also equally eager to study this diversity after realizing that much focus was on visible social identities such as age, race, and gender (Williams & O’Reilly, 1998).

Woods (1993) captures the pervasiveness of sexual orientation identity in organizations as he observes that peer group functions and gatherings demand the presence of a spouse or partner as social obligation, especially for people holding senior positions. Managing information about their sexual identity, hence, becomes important for lesbian and gay employees (Herek, 1996; Woods, 1993; Woods & Harbeck, 1991) in such situations. The interdependence of relationship and career (Browning, et al., 1991; O’Ryan & McFarland, 2010), referring to spouse or partner during regular chats and meetings in workplaces (Creed & Scully, 2000), and congruence of sexual identity between work and non-work settings (Ragins, 2004, 2008) bring sexual identity to the workplace which may be very normal, usual and obvious for heterosexual employees, but not for gay and lesbian employees (Creed & Scully, 2000). This brings sexual identity in the same league of other invisible identities like religion, occupation, national origin, club or social group memberships, illness (Clair, et al., 2005) etc., where disclosures may not be always easy.

The belief that lesbian and gay employees constitute microscopic minority at workplace holds no good. Up to 17% of population in workplaces of USA can consist of non heterosexual workers (Powers, 1996; Gonsiorek & Weinrich, 1991). This figure is reported to be 2 to 10 percent depending on small town or metropolitan environment in another study (Michael, et al., 1994). Nonetheless, these figures still cannot reflect the true picture in organizations where closeted gay identity is reality due to fears of social exclusion, or norm due to policies in organizations like military and defense services, conservative religious institutions, and organizations that serve children (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995; Herek, et al., 1996). Though the neglect of studying homosexuality in organizations is felt (Gonsiorek & Weinrich, 1991; Croteau, 1996; Ragins & Wiethoff, 2005), organizational scholars have still made sexual orientation an area ripe for research especially in the last two decades by dealing with issues like strategies of identity management in workplaces (Clair, et al., 2005; Creed & Scully, 2000; Button, 2004; Chrobot-Mason, et al., 2001, etc.), workplace benefits for lesbian and gay employees (Raeburn, 2004; Day & Greene, 2008), interdependence of work and same-sex relationship (O’Ryan & McFarland, 2010), LGB1 leadership and organizational citizenship behavior (Fasinger, et al., 2010; Brenner, et al., 2010), role of legal environment (Beatty & Kirby, 2006; Berkley & Watt, 2006; Herek, 1990), workplace disclosures (Ragins, et al., 2007; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Day & Schoenrade, 1997), etc.

However, at the same time, homosexuality does not escape from the stigma associated with invisible identities (Goffman, 1963) and disclosure decisions still remain risky, calculative and planned (Ragins, 2004). Thus, management of homosexuality has received considerable scholarly attention in recent times. A review of these
identity management strategies reveal that they run on a continuum from being closeted across work and life settings to openly explicit, depending on the work environment and peer attitudes (Woods & Harbeck, 1991; Griffin, 1992; Woods, 1993; Herek, 1996; Ragins, 2004, 2008; Button, 2004; Clair, et al., 2005). However, these identity management strategies do not account for the possibility of deploying identity to create inclusive mindsets towards homosexuality and making workplace equal for lesbian and gay employees. Hence, this chapter explores the framework for deploying homosexuality (Bernstein, 1997) by lesbian and gay employees to leverage sexual orientation diversity at workplaces.

IDENTITY DEPLOYMENT: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Bernstein’s (1997) framework of identity deployment is focused on contesting the stigma associated with a collective identity, with particular emphasis on homosexuality. Identity deployment receives intellectual inputs from the explanation of social movements by Resource Mobilization theory and Political Opportunity theory. Social movement refers to “collective challenges [to elites, authorities, other groups, or cultural codes] by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interactions with elites, opponents, and authorities” (Tarrow, 1994). Bernstein (1997) adds insights from the New Social Movement theory to arrive at her conceptual framework.

Resource Mobilization Theory explains the interaction of “the variety of resources that must be mobilized, the linkages of social movements to other groups, the dependence of movements upon external support for success and the tactics used by authorities to control or incorporate movements” (McCarthy & Zald, 1977, p. 133). It argues that the activists of social movement make rational strategic decisions to mobilize a constituency to achieve pre-determined goals of a movement. For this, they mobilize resources using the pre-existing organizational structures (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Zald & McCarthy, 1988). While deprivation and the resulting grievance are key reasons to mobilize, they are not sufficient in doing so when the movement lacks sufficient resources (Wilkening, 2005; Jenkins, 1983).

Though Resource Mobilization theory offers initial insight on the ways and means to mobilize, it largely ignores the political contexts in which the social movements operate (Mayer, 1991). McAdam et al. (1996) believe that social movements are “shaped by the broader set of political constraints and opportunities unique to the national context in which they are embedded” (p. 3). Political Opportunity theorists believe that the political structures and events have major bearing upon the course of social movement. Activists do not decide upon the strategies and goal without assessing the constraints and opportunities imposed by the political environment. In other words, politically achievable goals are adopted. Efforts for mobilizing are hurt when the activists are denied access or when the immediate demands of the social movement are met by the ruling elite. However, when the polity is fragmented and makes itself open to the movement demands, mobilization is strongest. This fragmentation leads to political opportunities and activists make rational and strategic decisions on the modus of collective mobilization to achieve the success of movement (reviews by Cortese, 2004; Gruszczynska, 2009). The “changing political opportunity, meaningful access to power and influential allies and significant splits in the ruling alignment or cleavages among the elite” boost the efforts of collective mobilization for a movement (Tarrow, 1994, p. 18).

Though these two frameworks explain the formulation of goals and strategy for political mobilization, they are criticized for ignoring the cultural mobilization in a social movement (Mayer, 1991; Bevington & Dixon, 2005). Bernstein (1997) observes that these theories overemphasize strategy as instrument for change in policy
structure and ‘access to the structure of political bargaining’ (p. 534) as the main goals of collective mobilization. This leaves the theorists unable to explain the movements that aim to challenge the mainstream culture, contest the dominant values, beliefs and norms about social identities, and at times ‘working at cross purposes to achieving policy change’ (p. 534). Pichardo (1997) emphasizes that the New Social Movement (NSM) theory fills this gap by explaining the aspects like culture, identity, and role of civic sphere in social movements. At macro level, NSM explains the role of culture in social movements, whereas at micro level, it is concerned with how identity and personal behavior shape up the movements. The NSM paradigm offers credence to the civic sphere as an equally important arena of social movements as the economic and political spheres. Buechler (1995) observes that unlike the social movements of industrial period which attracted the working class as major activists, the agendas of NSMs are carried by the middle class. The NSM paradigm accommodates in its theoretical framework new forms of collective action that arise from the shift of industrial to post-industrial society, are centered round culture, identity (women and minority groups), environment, peace and youth groups, and have, inter alia, apolitical goals (Boggs, 1986; Olofsson, 1988).

Social identity refers to ‘the portion of an individual’s self concept which derives from his/her knowledge of membership in a social group or groups’ (Tajfel, 1978; quoted by Schneider, 1993, p. 121). Viewing from NSM perspective, Bernstein (1997) observes that “identity movements seek to transform dominant cultural patterns, or gain recognition for new social identities, by employing expressive strategies” (p. 533) that create new organizational forms aiming towards participation and empowerment of stigmatized minority identities like gays and lesbians. Bernstein’s framework of identity deployment centers round the mobilization of collective identity as means of empowering a constituency to achieve the identity goals using strategic actions. Collective identity refers to “an individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution” (Polletta & Jasper, 2001, p. 285). Bernstein’s identity deployment framework is based on three analytic dimensions of identity: identity for empowerment, identity as goal, and identity as strategy (Table 1). These are explained in the next section.

The Three Analytic Dimensions of Identity

Identity for empowerment. Bernstein (1997) defines identity for empowerment “to mean the creation of collective identity and the feeling that political action is feasible” (p. 536). It is the first step towards initiating activism and paving way towards future action by creating and mobilizing a constituency. This dimension also empowers the activists to assume legitimate political standing in the movement by reinforcing their identity. Leitz (2011) explains how the oppositional identities of peace movement against the pro-Iraq war frames in USA legitimized their standing as the advocates of peace. The activists, being military veterans, ex-soldiers, and military families, asserted their insider position on the war that allowed them to be heard by people who may choose to otherwise ignore the stereotyped traditional peace activists.

Identity as goal. Bernstein explains that identity as goal seeks to attain the broad outcomes of the movement, such as to contest the stigmatization of an identity by challenging the dominant cultural norms and values. The aim is to bring the individuals holding this identity from the fringes of social milieu to the mainstream and achieve belongingness and respect for what they are. The goal could also be to deconstruct restrictive social categories of identities like “man,” “woman,” “gay,” “straight,” “black,” or “white.” that create barriers of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ and restrict access to social structures and resources. The goal could also be the recognition for emerging identities, such as
Leveraging Sexual Orientation Workforce Diversity through Identity Deployment

**Table 1. The three analytic dimensions of ‘identity’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity for empowerment</td>
<td>Activists must draw on an existing identity or construct a new collective identity in order to create and mobilize a constituency. The particular identity chosen will have implications for future activism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity as goal</td>
<td>Activists may challenge stigmatized identities, seek recognition for new identities, or deconstruct restrictive social categories as goals of collective action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity as strategy</td>
<td>Identities may be deployed strategically as a form of collective action. <em>Identity deployment</em> is defined as expressing identity such that the terrain of conflict becomes the individual person so that the values, categories, and practices of individuals become subject to debate. <em>Identity for critique</em> confronts the values, categories, and practice of the dominant culture. <em>Identity for education</em> challenges the dominant culture’s perception of the minority or is used strategically to gain legitimacy by playing on uncontroversial themes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Bernstein, 1997, p. 537)

mixed cultural forms like the New Left organizations of the 1960s (Bernstein, 1997), and new categories such as specialist versus generalist identities (Swaminathan, 2001).

**Identity as strategy.** Bernstein (1997) believes that “cultural resources also have an external, strategic dimension” (Williams, 1995, p. 125). She defines identity deployment as “expressing identity such that the terrain of conflict becomes the individual person so that the values, categories, and practices of individuals become subject to debate” (Bernstein, 1997, pp. 537-538). By deploying identity, activists make their identity visible in a way that seeks to contest its attributed stigma for the purposes of institutional change (Taylor & Raeburn, 1995) or “transform mainstream culture, its categories and values (and perhaps by extension its policies and structures), by providing alternative organizational forms” (Bernstein, 1997, p. 538).

The strategic action adopted to realize the broad cultural goals of collective identity depends on how the activists wish to deploy their identity. Bernstein explains that the strategy for identity deployment could be to either celebrate or suppress the differences from mainstream culture. She expresses the possibility of deploying identity both collectively as well as individually along a continuum from critique to education by ‘identity for critique’ and ‘identity for education.’ *Identity for critique* ‘confronts the values, categories, and practices of the dominant culture’ (p. 538). The efforts concentrate on contesting the existing structural forms, norms, and values created by dominant culture by making visible the differences of the alternate culture from the dominant culture. *Identity for education* “challenges the dominant culture’s perception of the minority or is used strategically to gain legitimacy by playing on uncontroversial themes” (p. 538). In other words, without challenging the morality, values and beliefs of the dominant culture, ‘identity for education’ attempts to change the popular notions about the stigmatized identity by emphasizing oneness and similarity with the dominant culture.

**ORGANIZATIONAL VIEW OF IDENTITY DEPLOYMENT: NORMALIZING AND DIFFERENTIATING STRATEGIES**

Creed and Scully (2000) argue that identity deployment by lesbian and gay employees is a form of ‘micromobilization’ and is capable of bringing organizational change. Identity deployment in workplace is manifested through strategic actions aimed towards changing the organizational mindsets towards homosexuality. Equal Treatment for lesbian and gay employees in matters of hiring, compensation, benefits, career progression,
and termination could be one goal of deploying homosexuality. Equality is also sought in matters of corporate recognition of same-sex partnership and adopting gay-inclusive policies and practices, including non-discrimination policies like domestic partner and healthcare benefits (Raeburn, 2004, Köllen, 2007; HRC, 2008). At the same time, making workplaces inclusive for lesbian and gay employees by preventing any disparate treatment due to heterosexism and homophobic behaviors could be another goal (Ragins, 2004; Collela & Dipboye, 2005).

Identity deployment is understood as strategic action of suppressing or celebrating differences with the dominant culture to achieve broad cultural and political goals for stigmatized identity group. The identity deployment strategies-identity for education and identity for critique are explored in the workplace context of lesbian and gay employees. Clair et al. (2005) explain these two mechanisms through normalizing and differentiating tactics at workplace to make the identity visible. Using differentiating tactics, lesbian and gay employees emphasize differences from the heterosexual workforce in matters like gender of their partners, associated stigma with their sexual identity and adverse impact due to institutional discrimination, which heterosexual employees do not have to face. Thus, they “reveal differences in ways that challenge perceptions, values, practices, and perspectives of the dominant group or organizational culture vis-a-vis stigmatized others’ (Clair, et al., 2005, p. 84) and demand equitable benefits such as domestic partner benefits including their dependent partner’s health insurance and corporate recognition of same-sex partnership, which are denied so far because of these ‘differences.’

Normalizing is the attempt to establish, pretend, and maintain to be living as “normal” as others, and denying any fundamental difference from others due to the alternate identity. This could be done by assimilating into the local organizational culture and making homosexuality visible as normally as done by the heterosexual counterparts in day-to-day conversations and information sharing (Clair, et al., 2005). The employees contest the stigma associated with their homosexuality by emphasizing homonormativity, a term coined by Duggan (2003) to emphasize that heterosexual ideals and constructs could be assimilated in the gay identity as well. Normalizing tactics can thus help in making workplaces more inclusive.

Because these two forms of tactics practically mean strategic action by employees (Clair, et al., 2005), I use the terms normalizing and differentiating strategies henceforth. In the following section, I discuss four strategies that are seen as largely normalizing-claiming encounters, educational encounters, discretion strategy and teaming up, and three differentiating strategies-advocacy encounters, legal encounters, and immersion-emersion attitudes. Then, I discuss ‘mixed model of identity deployment’ (Bernstein, 1997; Bernstein & Olsen, 2009), wherein employees deploy normalizing and differentiating strategies alternately or simultaneously.

Claiming Encounters

Woods (1993) observes that in high profile and senior positions, the presence of spouse or partner is expected in the social gatherings and peer group functions. Similarly, a casual mention of one’s partner or spouse during routine conversations or displaying family pictures on computer desktop at workplace is common. Even in organizations that do not encourage bringing family obligations in casual encounters, employees may not really fear using a gendered name for their partners (Creed & Scully, 2000). These are some of the numerous occasions when employees accept their heterosexuality. Accepting heterosexuality may not be seen a very big event, given that the normalcy associated with it downplays the significance associated with it. However, for lesbian and gay employees, this could be an event, or more precisely an ‘encounter.’ Creed and Scully (2000, p.
When tacit or direct disclosures of their sexual identity is done by lesbian and gay employees without thought on daily basis, similar to their heterosexual counterparts, Creed and Scully (2000) term these as claiming encounters. These encounters are the ‘first step in staking a claim to the legitimate social standing’ (p. 397) because they associate normalcy with homosexuality and assert its social recognition equally important as the heterosexual ways of life.

Creed and Scully (2000) observe the dynamics associated with claiming encounters. Lesbian and gay employees may take cautious steps by claiming initially to their trusted peers to receive their feedback on the suitability of doing so with rest of the peers. Organizational climate and the perceived heterosexist and homophobic reactions play major moderating role in this process. Pfef- fer (1981) observes that in organizations where diversity is promoted, employees may feel safer to claim their identity to the senior diversity managers or officers since they are more sensitized to such issues. Such managers are likely to be more appreciative to such honesty and may take symbolic actions to include them with the mainstream on the issue of sexual orientation.

Though claiming encounters involve the process of ‘coming out’ of the closet, the two are not exactly the same. While ‘coming out’ is an individual process of revealing, claiming encounters makes the person “consciously or accidentally… political in order to initiate a challenge to the social status quo” (Creed & Scully, 2000, p. 399). This is the reason why claiming encounter is seen as identity deployment and not simply disclosure at workplace.

**Educative Encounters**

Lesbian and gay employees often encounter heterosexism in organizations that result from the comparison of a) their virtual stigmatized social identity existing as mental representation or cognitive schemata in the minds of heterosexual peers and b) the actual social identity for which equal treatment policies are fostered (Stone, et al., 1992, p. 391). Bernstein (1997) finds that activists try to change the mainstream perceptions about the stigmatized identity and educate the legislators and public to dispel the associated myths and stereotypes. To adopt a similar inclusive approach in organizations, Creed and Scully (2000) explain the deployment of homosexuality through education by educative encounters. Educative encounters are the face-to-face meetings for addressing the various contentions of the peers and employer. Educative encounters invite questions, which offer the lesbian and gay employees to explain realities about their lives, which are largely unknown to their heterosexual peers and employers.

In their qualitative study, Creed and Scully (2000) offer examples of how educative encounters are deployed in organizations. In their study of FinCo, they find that the first official act of the lesbian and gay employee group after its formation was placing a request for extending partner benefits to them. This was turned down by Tom, a heterosexual white man and the Senior Vice President, HR, at the very first instance. However, Maria, the lead representative of the group was successful in scheduling a luncheon meeting to have an initial discussion. During this meeting, Tom was replied to all his questions. After this encounter, explaining the transformation and the shift of mindset, Tom says:

“It was apparent that this is an issue that I needed to pay attention to. I didn’t understand it. . . . I think the breakthrough was, “How is it that I can see the needs of all these other groups?” On the gay and lesbian side of the equation, it was],
“This is a personal issue.” That was part of the learning. From there [Maria, a lesbian employee activist] was very instrumental and very helpful in walking me through that. I asked a lot of questions, and she was very blunt and candid in explaining things” (p. 399).

This example shows that when the senior management is ready to hear issues with an open mind, the heterosexist views can be contested. Educative encounter from outsiders can sometimes be more effective than efforts from the insider lesbian and gay employees. Addressing the issue with authentic accounts from one’s own life can transform the views of senior management. Creed and Scully (2000) recount another example of such an encounter. The case of Karen Thompson, who fought an eight-year legal battle with her in-laws to take care of her partner who was seriously injured in a car accident (Thompson & Andrzejewski, 1988), was invited by a newly formed lesbian and gay employee group to deliver a talk on her experiences. Though many senior executives declined to attend, the Executive Vice President, HR, Cathy accepted the invitation. After listening to the talk, explaining her transformation, Cathy said that she made an attempt to view herself in Karen’s place. The pain, anxiety, and frustration experienced in such situations are quite the same as in a heterosexual relationship. Hence, the issue is to recognize the equal rights of lesbian and gay individuals and not to evaluate the moral, religious, and cultural sanctity of same-sex relationships. Cathy, thus, championed the cause of domestic partner benefits for lesbian and gay employees, both inside and outside her organization, and actively advocated in the senior management meeting, since she felt so strongly about it.

Educative encounters can also be deployed collectively through tactical repertoires that contest the stigma associated with the identity by challenging the mainstream cultural values, beliefs and sanctions (Taylor, et al., 2009). Gay employee groups organize educative events that invite employees across the organization and sensitize them about the need to be inclusive towards diversity (Raeburn, 2004). Of course, these events are likely to succeed when a favorable environment is created to conduct them. The “GLUE” (Gay and Lesbian United Employees) association of a telecommunication company in Raeburn’s study developed such an initiative of establishing personal connection with heterosexual peers so that gay and lesbian issues were “brought home” rather than marginalizing or alienating them. To operationalize this philosophy, they compiled a “GLUE Family Album” that contained, in the words of the national co-president, “stories of our gay and lesbian lives.” It contained “a collection of short autobiographical sketches of members, primarily those in long-term committed relationships, to help overcome society’s stereotypes” (p. 194). The album was circulated to everyone, including the top executives of the organization. This initiative won their as well as coworkers’ support towards inclusion of lesbian and gay employees.

Discretion Strategy

Though keeping homosexuality in the closet may be harmful for such employees psychologically (Griffith & Hebl, 2002) as well for their workplace productivity (Brenner, et al., 2010; Day & Schoenrade, 1997), remaining so and opting for counterfeiting their identity or simply avoiding such matters may still be preferred by them given the possibilities of heterosexist and homophobic reactions (Chrobot-Mason, et al., 2001). However, even in such situations, homosexuality can be deployed through discretion strategy. Discretion here does not mean being selective in disclosing personal information (Herek, 1996), nor does it mean choosing conversations, activities, or contexts that selectively hide personal information (Clair, et al., 2005). Discretion strategy can be
understood as to postpone the decision of making the identity visible and remaining alert in choosing the right time to do so which impacts positively on the coworkers and makes the workplace inclusive for lesbian and gay employees. Discretion, thus, means to choose the right time to make the identity visible, and not choosing the information, conversation, activities, and contexts to disclose.

Contrary to earlier times when homosexuality was seen as socio-pathological deviance and a subject matter of psychiatry and criminology (Gruszczynska, 2009), disclosure or coming out of closet is now being increasingly seen as normal and accepted mainly because of the demedicalization of homosexuality by APA in 1973 (Conger, 1975). Thus after this period more number of people came out of closet (Cain, 1991). It can be argued that lesbian and gay individuals sensed it to be the right time to make their identity visible when medical science contested the stigmatized view of their sexual identity.

In her study of homosexuality in American Corporate, Raeburn (2004) finds that a closeted lesbian employee, who was also an assistant to the CEO of a firm established in scientific and photographic industry, joined the gay employee network after three years of its formation. The group was overwhelmed with the inclusion of this high profile member, but was more surprised when she came out of her closet (Cain, 1991). It can be argued that lesbian and gay individuals sensed it to be the right time to make their identity visible when medical science contested the stigmatized view of their sexual identity.

Making identity visible at the right time not only saves oneself from political repercussions, but can also impact profoundly on the lesbian and gay movement. In their study of Sociologist’s lesbian and gay caucus in American academia, Taylor and Raeburn (1995) came across a gay sociologist who kept his homosexuality at a very low profile until he was tenured. After getting the tenure, he went back to television events and gay meetings to participate in the lesbian and gay movement. While making identity visible at such times not only saves a person in terms of career prospects, the movement also benefits from high socio-educational status achieved by such individuals.

Teaming Up

The influence of partner could be significant in deploying identity at workplace. This area, though less researched, has significant implications. Partner’s influence in disclosure decisions is observed by Rostosky and Riggle (2002), who, in a study of 118 lesbian and gay couples, found that individuals were more likely to disclose at work when their partner worked at an organization that had gay-friendly environment. However, in wake of perceived low peer support, how dual career gay couples combat the initial hesitation and apprehension towards the identity deployment process? In such scenarios, O’Ryan and McFarland (2010), from their qualitative study of dual career gay couples, suggest the strategy of “shifting from marginalization to consolidation and integration.” I term this strategy, in short, as teaming up. Starting from marginalization and usually avoiding such situations that make the disclosure likely, the same-sex partners initially kept their relationship separate from work in the process of securing their roles in the workplace. The next phase of teaming up was a stage when they maintained their work identities while solidifying their relationship. This involved bringing personal and work world together, overcoming anxiety, frustration, and discomfort during microencounters and at the same time, being strong and protective towards each other. The last phase, “consolidation and integration” involved overcoming barriers in the workplace and presenting their relationship more
authentically and gaining social acceptability in official gatherings and informal encounters. Identity deployment could thus be a team activity in the workplace garnering social support through integration with the coworkers in a phased process.

**Advocacy Encounters**

Goffman (1961) argues that encounters a) are gatherings having single focus, b) involve “heightened awareness of the mutual relevance of each others’ acts,” and c) have a clear beginning and end, often marked by ritual or ceremonial expressions (quoted in Creed & Scully, 2000, p. 393; and Gamson, et al., 1982, p. 10). Gamson et al. (1982), offering input to the resource mobilization theory, observe that encounters are face-to-face interactions by which activists ‘micromobilize’ themselves and alter the course of long-term mobilization. In organizational contexts, Creed and Scully (2000) refer to the face-to-face encounter with policy makers as advocacy targets to claim equal treatment in the organization as advocacy encounter. They argue that an advocacy encounter is a process of micromobilization that contests organizational injustice to the employees based on their sexual orientation and claims remedy. It seeks to mitigate the discriminatory organizational policies and practices, like keeping the benefits enjoyed by the heterosexual coworkers inaccessible to the lesbian and gay employees, and social discrimination.

Advocacy encounters can emanate from the voice of gay employee groups which advocate for official corporate recognition of same sex partnerships, and making the policies and practices gay inclusive, such as extending domestic-partner benefits to lesbian and gay employees and equal treatment in hiring and career progression (Raeburn, 2004). Creed and Scully (2000) believe that successful advocacies are those in which employees take advantage of their insider status and don’t make the issue radical and contentious. Raeburn’s discussion on shareholder activism in her study (2004) offers an illustration to this. In AT&T, when a resolution to remove the protection to lesbian and gay employees from diversity policy was moved by the conservative group in May 2001, the lesbian and gay employee group made the board of director as their advocacy target. Employing their persuasive tactics, it convinced the board to urge the shareholders to vote against the resolution. This advocacy encounter was successful and the board influenced the majority shareholders to vote against the resolution.

However, all said, advocacy encounters require imaginative leadership and collective efficacy to succeed. The extent of openness of the organization and gay friendliness of the industry in which the firm is operating (Raeburn, 2004) plays crucial role in the success of advocacy encounters. Creed and Scully (2000) observe that advocacy encounters may also not succeed when the employee activists are not assertive enough to put their contentions or when the senior executives are not willing to take the responsibility of change. Also, advocacy encounters may not work where organizations clearly express their unwillingness to take steps beyond an extent, such as including sexual orientation in diversity policy, but unwilling to consider the demand of domestic partner benefits (Creed & Scully (2000).

**Legal Encounters**

The legal premises addressing sexual orientation discrimination are different across countries and states. A mixed instance occurs in USA where sexual orientation is not a federally protected identity in employment under Title VII of Civil Rights Act (CRA), 1963 (Berkley & Watt, 2006). However under state laws, it is protected in 21 states and district counties of USA2 (HRC, 2011).

Employees have deployed their homosexuality by making legal claims against injustice meted in their workplaces. Fitzpatrik (2007) offers a review
of cases in UK where sexual orientation identity is protected in employment relations since 2003 (Aransheibani, et al., 2007). In *Mr David John Hubble v Mr Brian Brooks* (Case No 1600381/05 (4902/90) July 2005) case, the tribunal upheld that the gay couple could not be refused employment only on the grounds of their sexual orientation. In another case (*Mr P Lewis v HSBC Bank Plc* (EAT/0364/06/RN) (Clark J) 19 December 2006), the tribunal sensitized the employer that the staff must receive diversity training to avoid any kind of homophobic or heterosexist treatment in disciplinary proceedings. Further, any discriminatory treatment based on sexual orientation should not be tolerated. In *Mr E Ho v University of Manchester* (Case No. 2401255/05 (4901/103) July 2005) case, the court upheld that sexual orientation regulations also cover students at institutes of higher education. And finally, sexual orientation protection is not only confined to the plaintiff’s own sexual orientation, but also includes his/her professional endeavors related to homosexuality, such as research on gays and lesbian sexualities (*Brian Lacey v The University of Ulster and Paul Davidson* (Case Ref: 970/05, February 2007).

deploying identity through legal encounters could be an uphill task where explicit legal protection is absent. In the states and district counties of USA where sexual identity is not protected, plaintiffs have claimed justice by seeking remedy towards discrimination against their gender identity and not sexual orientation, taking benefit from ‘sex’ as a protected identity under Title VII of CRA. (*e.g. MGM Grand Hotel v. Rene*, No. 02-970 (March, 2003), cited in Berkley & Watt, 2006). In these cases, courts have upheld decisions in favor of lesbian and gay employees considering that discrimination was due to not behaving according to the socially accepted gender norms, and thus the cases were within the ambit of Title VII. However, such cases may create bad precedents for deployment of homosexuality in two ways: one, the stereotyping approach adopted by the courts is inconsistent with identity deployment strategies like advocacy and educative encounters. Second, plaintiffs who rely on such claims create bad precedents for lesbian and gay employees who face discrimination only because of their sexual orientation and not for disobeying gender stereotypes (Bible, 2001, 2002). Hence, the continual efforts are ongoing since over three and a half decades to include sexual orientation in Title VII protection, and the amendment has faced numerous legislative and political hurdles so far (Sung, 2011), but given the return of Democrats, who are perceived to be more liberal than Republicans in matters of lesbian and gay issues (Cortese, 2004), the chances of success are now brighter.

**Immersion-Emersion Attitudes**

Cross’s (1971, 1978) model of nigrescence is widely used and referred model of racial identity development in people of African origin. Because non-white race and homosexuality both attract societal stigmas (*e.g. Ragins, 2004*), Walters and Simoni (1991) borrowed this model in study of sexual identity development in lesbian and gay individuals and found empirically that its four stages pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion attitudes and internalization represent homosexuality development process as well.

In case of lesbian and gay individuals, immersion-emersion attitudes make them fascinated and involved towards the gay culture and they celebrate their differences from the larger heterosexual majority. At the same time, these are also found to help in integrating the lesbian and gay employees with their heterosexual counterparts (Walters & Simoni, 1991; Button, 2001). Immersion-emersion attitudes are manifested by participation in gay pride march, celebrating gay pride month at workplace and involvement in “National Coming-out day” during the month of October every year. Such participations are likely to impact on the organizational mindsets towards gay issues. It is reported that organizations where gay employee groups actively participate in the
celebration of their identity in these events, there is far more equitable working environment in terms of domestic partner benefits and corporate recognition of same-sex partnerships compared to those where such participations are minimal (Raeburn, 2004).

MIXED MODEL OF IDENTITY DEPLOYMENT

Bernstein (1997; Olsen, 2009) argues that activists may follow a mixed model of identity deployment or mixed identity presentation (Dugan, 2008) wherein they emphasize both sameness and differences. Activists may deploy identity for critique and identity for education simultaneously or alternately to achieve the identity goals. This means that activists may shift their course of strategy over a period of time or they can use both strategies at the same time.

Alternate Mixed Model of Identity Deployment

In cases where activists shift their strategies with course of time, Bernstein and Olsen (2009) argue that such moves depend on the level of political access of the activists and changing political environment. When activists’ political access is delegitimized, identity for critique is the strategy mostly resorted to, and when otherwise, identity for education is used to suppress the glorification of contentious differences with the broader culture. Bernstein (2011) observes that with the coming of Republican President Ronald Reagan in 1980 with support from Religious Rights Wing, and the reduced access to federal agencies compared to that at the time of Democratic President Jimmy Carter, the lesbian and gay movement’s strategies and goals saw drastic shift. With the proliferation of attempts to repeal the sexual orientation clauses from antidiscrimination ordinances, the mobilization now shifted its focus from identity for education to gaining political legitimacy by identity for critique. Drawing parallel to the workplace situations, it can be expected that normalizing strategies are most likely to be resorted by gay employee groups when they have access to the senior management positions or have ally relationships with people manning such positions. On the other hand, when political equations change resulting in hostile workplaces, differentiating strategies are most likely to be used.

Bernstein and Olsen (2009) argue that the shift in identity deployment strategy may also result from internal efforts by the organizational members. Gilmore and Kaminsky’s (2007) study of National Organization for Women (NOW) explains the hostility of its members towards lesbian feminists in the organization. When the demand for their inclusivity gained momentum, moving from differentiating approach, NOW focused on mitigating the differences between the two groups (lesbian and non-lesbian feminists). It built a new organizational identity that stressed more on the oneness of these groups by merging these two identities to join these erstwhile separate groups.

Bernstein’s discussion of mixed model of identity deployment explains the shift of strategy with course of time. Cortese (2004), based on his field research in USA, argues that shift of strategy may vary, instead with time, depending on the “distinct political environments contingent upon its geographical location” (p. 30). He finds that SAGA (Straight and Gay Alliance), a gay organization founded on ally relationships with heterosexuals, deployed identity for education in geographical areas that have gay friendly legislations, conducive political environment to foster gay inclusive policies (mostly where democrats are ruling or have occupied political offices) and have liberal mindsets towards same-sex unions. He observes that in these areas, SAGA’s main focus is towards broadening the fundraising base from the heterosexual allies. However, in conservative areas, SAGA has to expend most of its energy for the visibility of heterosexual allies to gain political
Leveraging Sexual Orientation Workforce Diversity through Identity Deployment

legitimacy for gay inclusive policies and legislation. Thus, in such areas, identity for critique is the widely used strategy.

**Simultaneous Mixed Model of Identity Deployment**

Though normalizing and differentiating strategies may be significantly different means to make identity visible, their contributions may be complimentary. Dugan (2008) observes that mixed identity presentation strategies based on simultaneous deployment of sameness and differences may work depending on the audience and venue of deployment. She explains how Christian Rights Movement achieved its identity goals against the gay rights movement in Cincinnati during 1992-93 by mixed identity deployment. When the mayor of Cincinnati included homosexuality as protected identity in the Human Rights ordinance in 1992, the right wing Christian Rights group initiated a protest campaign “Issue 3” in which they brought visibility to the gay identity in two ways. First, they emphasized their difference from the larger heterosexual population. They argued that the amendment was a reality because the gay wing is far more influential and politically well resourced and connected than the rest. Second, emphasizing their similarity with the rest, they advocated that the lesbian and gay individuals are really not a minority group that needs protection. By seeking to be a protected group, they are being treated ‘specially’ and not ‘equally.’ This active campaign of both celebrating and suppressing the differences reached to a large population, including the African Americans who expressed their oneness with Issue 3. On the other end, the gay rights wing, responding to this campaign, resorted to the more traditional way of reacting by condemning the proponents of Issue 3 as villains advocating discrimination in legislation. This static approach was cited the main reason for not being able to stop the anti-gay ballot initiative of 1993.

Just the way Christian rights group deployed mixed identity to achieve its goals, an active campaign by lesbian and gay employees at the workplace which ascends above the rhetoric of discrimination against their sexual identity by celebrating and suppressing differences simultaneously can achieve diversity management goals like equality and inclusion at the same time. Lesbian and gay employees have partners, family, and way of living similar to their heterosexual peers. They too like to enjoy holidays and being invited to the corporate social gatherings and peer group functions with their partners. The need for belongingness with their partnered status is same as for any heterosexual couple. Most of them are visibly indistinguishable from their heterosexual peers and the gender stereotypes about lesbians and gays really do not fit many of them (Creed & Scully, 2000). Hence, they are very much like others and deserve inclusion in the social network of peers. At the same time, they are different because their partners are of the same sex. Hence, local and state laws which do not approve same-sex relationships hurdle the normal way of living as compared to their heterosexual counterparts. When the workplace also does not recognize the same, they cannot take care of their partners when they are ill or injured since there is no ground to seek a leave of absence. Similarly, they also do not have access to health insurance for their dependent partners, nor can they enjoy tax benefits that married or partnered heterosexual employees are entitled to. Thus, because of these differences, lesbian and gay employees often advocate for the corporate recognition of their same-sex union (Köllen, 2007) which the heterosexual employees do not have to. Hence, by making these differences visible, gay employee networks often advocate for equal treatment policies. Owing to these differences, they also argue for non-discrimination in hiring, career progression, compensation, termination of employment, and redressal of such grievances. Otherwise, gay employees may face prejudiced
treatment from superiors who have heterosexist and homophobic mindsets (cf. Ragins, 2004).

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER SCOPE

This chapter extends the identity deployment framework to organizations from the realm of sociological discourses on identity movement. I do this by acknowledging previous writings, which have wholly or partially done so (e.g. Taylor & Raeburn, 1995; Creed & Scully, 2000; Raeburn, 2004; Clair, et al., 2005; Bernstein & Olsen, 2009)

This chapter explains the importance of acknowledging homosexuality at workplace and its importance in leveraging the workforce diversity. Focusing on the lesbian and gay employees, identity deployment process for contesting the stigmatized view of identity and fostering inclusive mindsets at workplace is dealt at length. This narration begins with the conceptual inputs from resource mobilization theory, political opportunity theory and new social movement theory that shape the framework of identity deployment. Then, explaining the three analytic dimensions of identity and the identity deployment strategies—identity for critique and identity for education, this chapter takes a micro view into the workplace contexts and explores the normalizing and differentiating strategies adopted by employees at workplace to deploy their homosexuality. Hence, augmenting Bernstein’s framework of three analytic dimensions of identity further, this chapter adds another level of normalizing and differentiating strategies at workplace, which clarifies further how identity for critique and identity for education are operationalized in organizational contexts to achieve the identity goals.

Figure 1 illustrates the three levels of identity deployment framework. The first level at the top consists of the three analytic dimensions of identity from Bernstein’s framework. I view ‘identity as goal’ and ‘identity for empowerment’ as foundational concepts for identity deployment since they express the purpose and prerequisite for the process. The goal of de-stigmatizing the identity and deconstructing restrictive social categories (Bernstein, 1997) explains the purpose. Identity for empowerment, i.e., realizing the collective identity and mobilizing a constituency (here, the lesbian and gay employees) to gain a legitimate political standing to take strategic actions, explains the prerequisite. To achieve the goal, Bernstein suggests the third dimension—identity as strategy. She argues that the strategy could be to suppress or celebrate the differences with the dominant culture (here, the heterosexual workforce) through identity for education and identity for critique. This is the second level in the model. The third level explains the normalizing and differentiating strategies at workplace. I discuss these strategies at length and how these can help the lesbian and gay employees achieve their identity goals. Considerable attention is given to the mixed model of identity deployment as well, wherein the differentiating and normalizing strategies are used alternately or simultaneously.

An important focus of identity deployment could be whether the strategies are deployed individually, collectively or both. A few strategies, by their definition, nature and the way of deployment, are most likely to be seen as individual strategies. For example, claiming encounter is about making an explicit or tacit disclosure by the employee in a way that creates inclusive mindsets in their coworkers. Discretion strategy is about remaining alert for the right time to make the identity visible in an appropriate way. Similarly, a legal encounter depicts the litigation filed by a lesbian or gay employee to redress the discrimination and injustice meted at the workplace, with an aim towards claiming equal treatment from the employer. Hence, these three strategies can be seen as individual strategies. On the other hand, there are some strategies, which utilize the strength provided by collective force of employees. In my discussion, advocacy encounters and
immersion-emersion attitudes are the strategies that are mostly deployed by gay employee groups through their collective voices. The ‘teaming up’ strategy explains a unique case of collective strategy, wherein identity deployment is by two people—the employee and their partner, and not a group.

Finally, there are strategies, which could be deployed both individually and collectively. As we saw, for an educative encounter, the source could be either an individual or an employee group. Similarly, besides demonstrating collectively, immersion-emersion attitudes can also be deployed individually. In a first of its kind precedent, Ralph J Hexter, the President of Hampshire College, celebrated his gay identity by letting himself out as an openly gay executive in the print media through an article, “Being an out president.” Following this, subsequent reports swelled this number up to eleven, demonstrating, probably, the contagious effect of immersion-emersion attitude (Fassinger, et al., 2010). Mixed model of identity can also be deployed individually, besides collectively. Claiming encounters, though largely seen as normalizing, may be deployed as special case of mixed identity deployment. Creed and Scully (2000) observe that during claiming encounters, individuals may claim both the oneness as well as the differences of their homosexuality from the heterosexual identity.

The categorization of identity deployment strategies into individual and collective can be contrasted with their normalizing versus differentiating nature. This model can be presented in a 2 X 2 matrix, as shown in Figure 2. Mixed identity presentation takes center-stage in this matrix as it can occupy all the four quadrants.
The framework of identity deployment to leverage workforce diversity offers at least three compelling reasons to research further in this area. 

First, organizational scholars may be interested in exploring what could be the identity goals of this deployment process. Equality and inclusion could be two prominent goals in the workplace context (Bell, 2009; Özbilgin, 2009). By creating inclusive mindsets in the heterosexual coworkers, employees contest the stigma associated with homosexuality. Simultaneously, they deconstruct restrictive social categories by claiming equal treatment through organizational policies. Scholars may be interested in exploring other identity goals as well. Next, having categorized the normalizing and differentiating strategies into individual and collective, one may like to explore the identity deployment process in these two streams. Thus, the second area of research could be to explore what individual and organizational characteristics (Chrobot-Mason, et al., 2001) affect identity deployment, when done individually. And the third stream could be to explore the role of collective efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1982) in deploying identity collectively. “Though forceful collective action is prompted by detrimental conditions, it is initiated by those “not... who have lost hope, but (by) the more able members whose efforts at social and economic betterment have met with at least some success” (p. 143). Hence, this course could explore the relationship of collective efficacy beliefs of the employee groups with their identity deployment strategies and how contextual factors affect these relationships.

As seen in the chapter, many sociologists of contemporary times have expressed interest in taking identity deployment framework further (e.g. Dugan, 2008; Taylor, et al., 2008, Bernstein, et al., 2008). Organizational scholars (e.g. Creed & Scully, 2000; Swaminathan, 2001; Raeburn, 2004; Clair, et al., 2005) have also offered significant inputs in this area. However, the field is still very ripe with a lot of possibility of conceptual and empirical contributions, which can enhance our knowledge in the area of workforce diversity.
REFERENCES


Leveraging Sexual Orientation Workforce Diversity through Identity Deployment


Leveraging Sexual Orientation Workforce Diversity through Identity Deployment


**KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

**Advocacy Encounter**: Face-to-face encounter with policy makers as advocacy targets to claim equal treatment in the organization.

**Claiming Encounter**: Tacit or direct disclosure of sexual identity done by lesbian and gay employees without thought on daily basis, similar to their heterosexual counterparts.

**Collective Identity**: An individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution.
Differentiating Strategy: A term used for ‘identity for critique’ at workplace.

Discretion Strategy: To postpone the decision of making the identity visible and remaining alert in choosing the right time to do so, which impacts positively on the coworkers and makes the workplace inclusive for lesbian and gay employees.

Educative Encounter: Face-to-face meetings for addressing the various contentions of the peers and employer. Educative encounters invite questions, which offer the lesbian and gay employees to explain realities about their lives, which are largely unknown to their heterosexual peers and employer.

Identity as Goal: The goal of mobilizing collective identity to contest the associated stigma, deconstruct restrictive social categories that limit access to resources or seek recognition for an emerging identity.

Identity as Strategy: The strategic actions taken to deploy collective identity.

Identity Deployment: A way of expressive collective identity that brings positive cultural and political shifts in the organizational mindsets.

Identity for Critique: The strategy to confront the values, categories, and practices of the dominant culture. The emphasis here is on highlighting differences from the dominant culture.

Identity for Education: The strategy to challenge the dominant culture’s perception of the minority to gain legitimacy by playing on uncontroversial themes. The emphasis here is on highlighting sameness with the dominant culture.

Identity for Empowerment: To mean the creation of collective identity and the feeling that political action is feasible.

Immersion-Emersion Attitudes: Fascination and involvement towards the gay culture and celebrating their differences from the larger heterosexual majority.

Legal Encounter: Litigation filed by lesbian or gay employee to fight discrimination based on sexual orientation at workplace.

Lesbian and Gay: Women and men who are attracted to the members of same sex. The commonly used term for this, homosexual, was coined by psychiatrists around 1890 to connote homosexuality as an illness. Hence, it is more appropriate to use lesbian and gay, instead of homosexuals (Zuckerman & Simons, 1996). In many contexts, however, ‘gay’ incorporates both lesbian and gay, which too is fine.

Mixed Identity Presentation/ Mixed Model of Identity Deployment (Alternate): Shift from normalizing to differentiating strategies or vice versa in the course of identity deployment.

Mixed Identity Presentation/ Mixed Model of Identity Deployment (Simultaneous): Deployment of normalizing and differentiating strategies simultaneously with the same target.

Normalizing Strategy: A term used for ‘identity for education’ at workplace.

Teaming Up: Collective efforts of a dual career lesbian or gay couple to deploy their homosexuality at workplace.

ENDNOTES

1 LGB stands for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual. The literature on sexual minorities deals with broad class of identities, like lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, trans-sexual, and intersexual. Hence, acronyms like LGB, LGBT, and LGBTI are used in various writings. Though the author realizes the importance and responsibility of being inclusive, academic scholarship demands focus on specific social identities to make the framework and conceptualization more generalizable than if an all-inclusive approach were adopted (Osigweh, 1989). Hence, the social identity considered in this chapter is ‘homosexuality,’ and thus the group under the discussion ambit is lesbian and gay employees.

2 As of March 08, 2011.