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This chapter explores the challenges and the opportunities that lesbians experience in organizational America.

Lesbians: Identifying, Facing, and Navigating the Double Bind of Sexual Orientation and Gender in Organizational Settings

Julie Gedro

Lesbians who work in corporate America face multiple challenges, which include sexual identity development, occupational and organizational selection, and sexual identity disclosure. They have to learn how to negotiate the heterosexism, homophobia, and sexism of their organizational settings in order to achieve success in their careers. Because the fields of adult education and human resource development (HRD) have paid little attention to studying lesbians and organizational settings, this chapter explores the unique issues related to lesbians in organizations and concludes with some ideas and suggestions for addressing these issues.

Organizational Hetereosexism, Heterosexist Organizational Privilege, and Homophobia

Organizational heterosexism is a system of hegemonic dominance that privileges heterosexuality as the only acceptable form of sexual or relational expression (Griffin, 1998). Heterosexist privilege is the taken-for-granted "rights" of straight people that allows them to choose, for example, whether to discuss their personal and family lives at work. Heterosexist privilege is a pervasive and ubiquitous assumption that the norm is for a person to be straight. Lesbians, gays, and bisexuals are considered to be sexual minori-

ties who continue to face prejudice, oppression, and discrimination (Chung, 2001). Most organizations are dominated by a heterosexist, male power structure, which constructs lesbians and gay men as isolated exceptions whose sexualities are perceived to be "personal problems" (Burrell and Hearn, 1989, in Niesche, 2003, p. 44).

Homosexuality is the last acceptable prejudice. Considered sexual minorities, lesbians and gays continue to face discrimination, social oppression, and prejudice based on stereotypes, fear, and lack of education (Alderson, 2003; Chung, 2001; Levine and Leonard, 1984; Ragins, Cornwell, and Miller, 2003). In spite of diversity initiatives, intolerance of lesbian and gay people still exists in society and carries over into the workplace (Day and Schoenrade, 1997). Homophobia, an irrational fear and hatred of lesbians and gays, is a major aspect affecting lesbian and gay people because the lesbian and gay experience is seen as inferior, whereas heterosexuality is viewed as natural and normal (Fassinger, 1995). "Homophobia works effectively as a weapon of sexism because it is joined with a powerful arm, heterosexism" (Pharr, quoted in Heldke and O'Connor, 2004, p. 268). Prejudice against lesbians is grounded in sexism and misogyny (Miller, 1998), and the derision that is directed at lesbians is a result of the fact that lesbians have the "audacity to function without a man's support" (p. 25).

The Gap in Adult Education and HRD Around Issues Related to Lesbians

To be a lesbian is to be perceived as someone who has stepped out of line, who has moved out of sexual and economic dependence on a male, and who is woman identified (Pharr, quoted in Heldke and O'Conner, 2004). The career, business, management, and adult education fields have begun to pay attention to and research the experiences and learning of gays and lesbians in the world and in the workplace, in particular, in the corporate setting (Friskopp and Silverstein, 1995). There has been a lack of theory or research on the relationship between sexual orientation and other group memberships in the workplace (Ragins, Cornwell, and Miller, 2003). Lesbians who work in corporate America are paid little to no attention relative to their presence, experience, and learning. Multiple group membership, such as membership in a gender minority and sexual orientation minority, has been studied little (Ragins, Cornwell, and Miller, 2003). Rather than being considered a unique category of people with unique needs for learning, the lesbian experience is subsumed under either the literature and research on gay men or the literature and research on women. In addition, because there is a paucity of data and literature on them, lesbians must learn through trial and error how to negotiate their organizational settings.

Although work and careers are critical for lesbians, the field of psychology has traditionally paid little attention to the career counseling issues with them (Boatwright, Gilbert, Forrest, and Ketzenberger, 1996). HRD has paid

little attention to issues affecting lesbian careers as well. Bierema (2002) noted that as a discipline, HRD "has not vigorously studied diversity, equality, power, heterosexism, discrimination, sexism, racism, or other issues of oppression in organizations" (p. 245). Bierema also noted that asymmetrical power arrangements are ignored in HRD research. Perhaps contributing to the lack of visibility in adult education and HRD research is the fact that lesbians are literally invisible in the corporate setting. Whereas one in seven gay men are recognizable as such to the general public, only one in twenty lesbians are recognizable (Button, 2004). Lesbians are more disadvantaged than gay men in organizations because it is possible for gay men to hide in the shadow of the dominant masculinity (Niesche, 2003). "Lesbians experience a double (for women of color, triple) minority status in the workplace and thus are subject to increased discrimination based on their multiple identities" (Garnets and Kimmel, quoted in Fassinger, 1995, p. 154).

The lack of attention to the lesbian experience in corporate America suggests that until now, the assumption has been that the experiences and needs of lesbians are subsumed under the study of the general female population (Morgan and Brown, 1991). Morgan and Brown state (p. 282):

> Lesbians are indeed a unique minority group. The minority status of lesbians is different from the minority status of heterosexual people of color and White non-lesbian women. First, discrimination against lesbians is both legal and socially sanctioned in this country. Such discrimination is no longer legal against people of color or White women, although social norms remain more resilient to change. Second, lesbianism, unlike skin color or gender, can often be hidden. Part of the heterosexism of our culture is that heterosexuality is assumed, and lesbianism and lesbians are generally invisible. Because a woman's lesbianism generally becomes known through her active disclosure of this information, lesbians usually have a choice about whether or not to be open at work.

In Friskopp and Silverstein's book, *Straight Jobs, Gay Lives* (1995), gay Harvard Business School alumni stated they felt they were about as successful as their straight classmates of the same race and sex, and minority and female gays reported much more discrimination based on their race, ethnicity, or sex than on their sexual orientation (Lewis, 1997). While the men often felt secure as they moved up, the women often felt less so—and retreated deeply into the closet (Swisher, 1996). As lesbians rise through the ranks of corporate America, some of them fear that the danger of disclosure rises with them (Swisher, 1996).

Lesbian Identity

Lesbians tend to demonstrate nontraditional sex roles. These nontraditional roles, combined with the expectation of being self-supporting through their

lives, provide the motivation for lesbians to pursue male-dominated careers, which will likely be higher paying than traditionally woman-dominated careers (Chung, 1995). Lesbians' double minority status contributes to the complexities that they confront in life and career planning (Hetherington and Orzek, 1989). Lesbians often realize early in life that they will not marry, so they tend to invest more heavily in preparing for careers than straight women do (Black, Makar, Sanders, and Taylor, 2003).

Lesbians represent about 3.6 percent of the population (Degges-White and Shoffner, 2002) and according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (quoted in Degges-White and Shoffner, 2002), hate crimes against lesbians increased between 1997 and 2002. Corporations, as microenvironments, must contend with this hatred. Therefore, lesbians in organizational America face a multiplicity of important considerations when managing their careers: occupational choice, lesbian identity development, and whether, to whom, where, and when to come out.

Vivienne Cass, an Australian psychotherapist, developed a model of homosexual identity development that may answer the question of why some gay people are content with themselves and others are quite unhappy (McNaught, 1993). A model of lesbian identity development is the Sophie model, which was developed in 1985 and tested through repeated structured interviews with fourteen women experiencing confusion about their sexual orientation (Fassinger, 1995). This model consists of four stages: (1) first awareness of homosexual feelings, (2) testing and exploration, (3) identity acceptance, and (4) identity integration. Understanding how these four stages work can assist in career development.

Advantages of Being a Lesbian in the Workplace

Lesbians have some advantages in the corporate world. For example, it has been noted that they tend to demonstrate more nontraditional, androgynous gender roles than heterosexual women do (Fassinger, 1996). Lesbian professionals who are openly gay are in the best position to reap the benefits of this stereotype. Friskopp and Silverstein (1995) tell the story of an openly gay woman who observed that people viewed her as a dedicated, appropriately aggressive professional who commanded the respect of men.

Lesbians, in comparison to heterosexual women, are less likely to make vocational and life choices based on accommodating men or conforming to traditional gender roles (Fassinger, 1996). Another aspect of lesbian identity that is likely to exert positive influence on career choice is that lesbians, in contrast to many of their heterosexual counterparts, do not expect to rely on men for financial support; they also tend to be more financially independent in their relationships, perhaps in part because legal restrictions largely prevent dependence in lesbian and gay relationships (Morgan and Brown, 1991). Thus, lesbians may be consciously or unconsciously planning at an

early age for the eventuality of a career; an employment rate of about 90 percent among lesbians supports this assumption (Morgan and Brown, 1991).

In research conducted with heterosexual, gay, and lesbian college students, lesbians showed the least amount of uncertainty about their career decision making (Hetherington and Orzek, 1989), and lesbians and heterosexual men were the most satisfied with their career choices. An awareness of the need to support themselves, as well as the frequent devaluation of traditionally female jobs in the lesbian community (Morgan and Brown, 1991), may further encourage lesbians to consider nontraditional, and usually more highly paid, careers (Fassinger, 1995). Lesbians are unusually successful in gaining employment in largely male-dominated and better-remunerated occupational categories (Blandford, 2003).

Clearly, such fluidity of expectation allows lesbians to make freer and less constricted choices in their careers. Moreover, out lesbians are less threatening to men in the workplace because of the reduced sexual pressure or tension between the two parties. Lesbians are seen as being aggressive, nonemotional, tough, and reliable, which are qualities needed for management (Friskopp and Silverstein, 1995).

Fassinger (1995) has pointed out that despite a number of vocational barriers that lesbians may face, there are also important facilitative aspects of lesbian identity related to career planning and choice. Most salient among these is that lesbians tend to demonstrate more nontraditional, androgynous gender roles than do heterosexual women (Fassinger, 1996; Hetherington and Orzek, 1989; Morgan and Brown, 1991). Moreover, because lesbianism is difficult to physically distinguish, lesbians have the ability to hide their identities when their safety or security is threatened. Lesbian invisibility therefore is a two-edged sword. On one hand, this invisibility works to enable the homophobic, heterosexist, and sexist status quo of organizations. On the other hand, invisibility permits lesbians to make choices about their vulnerability. Lesbians must adroitly manage their identities with coworkers, supervisors, and clients when they choose to be open about their orientation, because of several factors that impinge on this decision. The effects of nonconformity often benefit lesbians, who not only gravitate toward male-dominated occupations but also succeed in managing the sexual politics and harassment that typify these types of work environments (Blandford, 2003).

Lesbians therefore experience a complex set of challenges as well as opportunities. The absence of research and practice that could provide training, development, and educational opportunities for lesbians does not mean that they have not learned how to succeed.

Lesbians and Learning

Lesbians in corporate America have learned the significance of their skill, ability, and willingness to prescreen, come out, and educate others on issues related

to being lesbian. In her study of lesbian executives, managers, and directors in primarily Fortune 500 corporations, Gedro (2000) examined what lesbians learned about success and how they learned it. Lesbians have learned that it is important, when meeting a new person or new group of people, or entering a new organization, to prescreen for clues that indicate the person or group's receptivity toward the subject of lesbianism. The prescreen includes paying attention to visual clues such as religious symbols that might indicate a predilection for negative views toward homosexuality as well as verbal clues such as a stated or implied dislike for concepts, viewpoints, or orientations that are somehow perceived as different from their own. Second, lesbians in corporate America have learned that it is important to come out, and they have learned through their experience that while coming out is sometimes a daunting process, it most often has a positive result. Finally, lesbians in corporate America have learned that it is important not only to come out as individuals but to educate others about issues related to being lesbian in order to raise the awareness of their straight subordinates, peers, and supervisors.

Lesbians do not learn about success as lesbians through taking classes, reading books, or attending seminars; such programs do not exist. Rather, they learn informally and incidentally. Informal learning is learning through means that are not structured and prearranged, that is, not institutionally sponsored (Watkins and Marsick, 1992). Informal learning includes trial-and-error learning, mentoring, and coaching. Incidental learning happens as a by-product of another activity (Watkins and Marsick, 1992). Informal learning is characterized by learner intent, whereas incidental learning happens generally spontaneously and occurs after the learner has reflected on and processed the meaning of an experience.

Creating Inclusive Environments for Lesbians

The invisibility of lesbians in organizational settings perpetuates the problems they face. The lack of research, theory, and practice into ways of disrupting the double discrimination arising from heterosexism, homophobia, and sexism guarantees that lesbians continue to be challenged in their careers. The dearth of scholarly and practical exploration into the double bind that lesbians face invites adult education and HRD scholars to address these issues in order to create some formal knowledge around lesbian issues and, more important, begin to arrange some institutional, group, and individual offerings for education, intervention and empowerment.

Organizational-Level Interventions. The informal and incidental learning that lesbians acquire suggests several formal and intentional institutional activities and arrangements that could disrupt the heterosexism and sexism that lesbians face. At the organizational level, the heterosexism and sexism of an organization oppresses all lesbians. However, it is beyond the scope of one chapter to explore precise organizational cultures in order to assemble specific proposals for creating lesbian-affirming environments. According to Grif-

fith and Hebl (2002), diversity training needs to specifically address issues of sexual orientation, and management "might consider greater attempts to educate workers specifically about gay/lesbian issues, foster a climate of acceptance, and articulate policies that clearly indicate that discrimination will not be tolerated, particularly because coworker reactions are so important to gay/lesbian employees' job satisfaction and job anxiety" (p. 1198).

Adult and Higher Education. Both managers and human resource managers would benefit from education about the oppressive effects of homophobia, heterosexism, and sexism on lesbians so that they can more confidently and more effectively work to support their lesbian employees, but also so that they can identify and disrupt covert and overt discriminatory practices. Many human resource managers ignore the issues that gays and lesbians face because they lack education about such issues (Lucas and Kaplan, 1994). The lack of education among managers serves to reinforce existing feelings and systems of oppression, as lesbian employees "expend significant energy managing their sexual orientation on the job, attempting to control whether, when, and to whom their orientation is disclosed" (Schneider, 1982; Woods, quoted in Blandford, 2003, p. 625).

Although the adult education, HRD, and business curriculum are poised to educate existing and future organizational leaders to "reject the hierarchies of abjection" (Warner, quoted in Carlin and DiGrazia, 2004, p. 773) of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) employees, they generally remain silent on these issues. McQuarrie (1998) offered three reasons that sexual orientation is missing in management curriculums: there is a lack of visible or physical distinction of LGBT people, issues of LGBT people go unidentified and unaddressed because of the invisibility of LGBTs, and the discussion of sexual orientation may pose a threat to instructors. Instructors who are gay or lesbian may fear that teaching about sexual orientation may require them to disclose their own sexual orientation, even if they are uncomfortable in doing so or worried that such disclosure may affect their jobs or careers (McQuarrie, 1998).

Instead of serving to disrupt pervasive societal heterosexism, the silence and invisibility of LGBT issues in adult education and in the business curriculum reinforce its stigmatization. Adult educators and faculty in higher education, and particularly those in business, can advance the cause of the fight for LGBT equality by locating sources that provide insights about LGBT employees and including discussions about LGBT issues in the business classroom and adult education settings. Allies of the advancement of the equal rights of LGBT people should strive to include LGBT issues in their courses. In addition, faculty and adult educators who are LGBT have the opportunity to serve as activists inside the classroom by coming out. By claiming space, voice, and presence, LGBT adult educators, HRD practitioners, business faculty, and allies are uniquely positioned to foster learning environments in which learners can be exposed to issues unique to lesbians that might otherwise be ignored.

Role Models. Exposure to role models has been noted as an important factor in career choice (Hetherington and Orzek, 1989). The lack of career role models for lesbians is the result of the double bind that lesbians face, yet the presence of role models could be a critical factor in untangling lesbians from this bind. Girls and women in the early stages of lesbian identity have limited exposure to role models who would assist in the career development process (Hetherington and Orzek, 1989). The literature on career development consistently reflects the lack of role models as negatively affecting career development, particularly of lesbians (Fassinger, 1995). Because lesbians generally remain closeted at work, they cannot serve as role models for other lesbians (Fassinger, 1995), which reinforces the trial-and-error learning identified and discussed by Gedro, Cervero, and Johnson-Bailey (2004). The elimination of organizational homophobia, heterosexism, and sexism could create encouragement for lesbians in positions of power and influence to come out of the closet so that they could serve as role models for younger lesbians. Occupational stereotyping serves as a barrier to lesbians' career planning and choice, and lesbians often avoid certain occupations that are associated with lesbianism (Hetherington and Orzek, 1989).

Implications for Research and Development. Instead of lesbians having to serve individually as change agents of heterosexuals' sensitivity and awareness of issues related to being lesbian, adult educators and HRD researchers and practitioners have an opportunity to close the gap. Several research opportunities would extend understanding about lesbians in organization settings, including examining lesbians who have not succeeded in the corporate environment, lesbians who remain closeted as a singular strategy of negotiating the heterosexism of the corporate setting, mentoring choices and mentoring relationships for lesbians, and development training and development opportunities that address the unique learning needs of lesbians.

Conclusion

Lesbians have to concurrently negotiate heterosexism, sexism, homophobia, and their own sexual identity development while establishing and cultivating their careers. Adult education and HRD are disciplines that are positioned to collect and institutionalize some wisdom and some strategies for interrupting oppressive power structures as well as to empower lesbians. The interruptions can happen in a variety of locations: at the organizational level, in the business curriculum, in management, and for lesbians themselves.

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JULIE GEDRO is an assistant professor of business, management, and economics at SUNY Empire State College in Syracuse, New York.