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'My People': the potential of LGBT employee networks in reducing stigmatization and providing voice

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the separation and isolation from the mainstream workforce that lesbian, gay, and bisexual employees can experience due to their sexual orientation, and how this can affect their voice and silence in the workplace. In response to perceived threats and actual experience of stigma in the workplace, we highlight the need for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) voice in organizations, while unpacking the complexities and concerns for LGBT employees in publicly voicing their sexual orientation at work. We explore how LGBT employee networks help mitigate LGBT isolation at work, and can directly and indirectly provide them with voice in the organization. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with LGBT employees across organizations in Ireland. The findings confirm that LGBT employees can experience isolation at work, affecting their voice, and that workplace networks may moderate this loneliness and stigma. However, the findings question the value of LGBT employee networks in providing voice for all sexual minority employees. Our research considers the individual-level responses of LGBT employees to participation in, and the value of, employee networks, and the perceived role of these networks in giving them visibility and voice.

Introduction

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) employees, described as 'one of the largest, but least studied, minority groups in the workplace' (Ragins, 2004, p. 35) face a number of issues and challenges in the workplace that heterosexual people do not (McFadden, 2015). To support LGBT employees at work, voice structures in the form of LGBT employee networks/affinity groups have grown in popularity in recent years, particularly in large multinational organizations, such as Google, Accenture, Goldman Sachs, Microsoft, J.P. Morgan, and EY. LGBT employees networks can be formed either by the actions of unions or by companies

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themselves (Colgan & McKearney, 2012), and may vary in their structure, operation and goals (Githens & Aragon, 2009). Like other such networks, they provide a voice for minority employees, a chance to meet other similar workers, and offer the prospect of lobbying for positive change in the organization (Bell, Özbilgin, Beauregard, & Sürgevil, 2011; Githens & Aragon, 2009).

While there is a dearth of research on LGBT networks in academic literature, some authors (Colgan & McKearney, 2012; Githens & Aragon, 2009, Raeburn, 2004) have outlined some characteristics, goals, and purposes of LGBT employee networks. Colgan and McKearney (2012) discuss how LGBT networks act as an individual and collective voice mechanism, provide visibility and community for members, and promote change. By bringing together sexual minority employees to the one space, LGBT employee networks can provide social support in the organization (Githens & Aragon, 2009). Similarly, Willis (2010) finds that having sexual minority colleagues is a source of support and positive affirmation for LGBT employees; while Chung (2001), exploring coping strategies by LGBT employees facing discrimination, finds that social support is one way of managing.

The degree to which personal values are aligned with perceived organizational values affects employee decisions whether or not to exercise their voice in a work context (Avey, Wernsing, & Palanski, 2012). In this paper, we consider the role of employee networks/affinity groups (terms used here interchangeably) as a source of social support and remedy for LGBT workplace isolation, and as a means of providing and encouraging the voice of LGBT employees within organizations. Our paper conceptualizes LGBT employees as a collective form of 'The Stranger' (Simmel, 1908) in organizations that are heteronormatively centric, where *heteronormativity* is defined by Rumens (2010, p. 957) as a force that '[ascribes] heterosexuality a normative and privileged status by reinforcing a heterosexual/ homosexual binary'. We consider how networks can moderate the challenging identity management processes that LGBT people embark upon within the workplace. In keeping with the Special Issue (Wilkinson, Gollan, Kalfa, & Xu, 2015), we explore the possible absence of LGBT voice in the workplace, and consider the role of employee networks at the individual-level of analysis. We refer to a qualitative study where 29 LGB employees in a variety of organizations in Ireland were interviewed in depth, and show how the normative voice offered by employee networks needs to be unpacked and questioned as the solution to providing employee voice to LGBT employees.

This research is situated in and builds upon the extant literature on employee voice. 'Voice', for our purposes, is categorized as the second option Hirschman (1970) proposes for individuals unhappy in their organization: Exit, or Voice. It represents attempts to enforce change in organizations to make one's work life more palatable (Bell et al., 2011; Hirschman, 1970). As Mowbray, Wilkinson, and Tse (2015) show, the HRM/Employee Relations domain habitually characterizes voice as a formal process supported by various voice mechanisms, while the Organizational Behavior domain conceptualizes voice more as a behavior

undertaken informally and not necessarily with the support of a mechanism. Our research crosses both domains, considering both informal and formal voice, through the mechanism of an LGBT network, but also through an individual's autonomous behavior.

In this article we discuss the empirical research conducted, emphasizing how our focus was to question the normative assumptions that employee networks are positive voice mechanisms for all LGBT employees. The next section of this paper, however, outlines the theoretical lens we use in our analysis, LGBT employees as 'The Stranger' (Simmel, 1908).

LGBT employees as 'The Stranger'

The notion of the Stranger arises from a short essay published in 1908 by Georg Simmel. The basic concept seems at first paradoxical: there can exist a type of person in a group who is both close, yet far away. Simmel examines the duality of being both spatially close; that is, someone in the immediate proximity, yet relationally distant; one who, by the lack of in-group membership, is an outsider, or 'Stranger'. While Simmel used the example a of migrant, the concept has been extended to people of certain personality types (Levine, 1977), and McLemore (1970) argues that it is anyone on the margins, rather than just those new to a group (like the migrant), that best exemplifies the Stranger. This paper presents the LGBT employee as the Stranger in an organization: one who is present in the workplace (spatially close) yet is also, because of their sexuality, relationally distant from the (heteronormative) 'group'. This is not an entirely novel comparison, with McGhee (2001) applying the concept to gay male refugees. However, the positioning of the LGBT employee as a form of the Stranger in the workplace appears, to the authors' knowledge, to be new.

In unpacking the underlying features of the Stranger within Simmel's short essay, we identify a number of aspects that are particularly relevant for LGBT people. Firstly, LGBT employees are often separate, or made separate, for a number of reasons. It is this separation that forms the 'farness' within the Stranger's near/far duality. One such cause can be the coming out process that many LGBT people go through at work. Disclosure decisions are made in every new workplace and with every new person that the LGBT employee meets (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995; Paisley & Tayar, 2016). To formally exercise a hidden minority voice, LGBT employees would need to continually disclose their sexuality at work, either directly through membership of an LGBT employee network at work, or indirectly through availing of anonymized voice mechanisms such as employee surveys. The risks associated with coming out in the workplace, such as potential negative overt or covert career advancement repercussions, may therefore curb LGBT employees' take-up of exercising voice on LGBT-related workplace issues. The alternative is silence, which may allow a heteronormative culture to dominate.

We explore further the complexity of LGBT identity management in our empirical study, later in the paper.

Coming out in the workplace has been shown to have much better consequences for the individual than staying 'in the closet': concealing can have a large psychological toll (Madera, 2010), and those who are open about their identity are found to have higher job satisfaction, lower role ambiguity, lower role conflict, and a better work-life balance (Day & Schoenrade, 1997). Being 'out' in the workplace is therefore a desirable state for many LGBT people and, because of anti-discrimination laws and an ostensibly more liberal social climate in recent years, a legitimate choice in many countries. However, '[h]omosexuality is punishable by death in seven countries and illegal in a further 85' (McNulty & Hutchings, 2016, p. 706; McPhail, McNulty, & Hutchings, 2016, p. 384), highlighting that additional contextual layers of legislation will influence LGBT voice and identity management decision-making by LGBT people in different countries (Paisley & Tayar, 2016).

In an Irish context, as within other accepting country contexts internationally, while coming out may not lead to such outright aggression or overt employment discrimination as in previous years, it may nonetheless position LGBT people as forms of the Stranger. Coming out can have implications for interpersonal relations in the workplace; with O'Ryan and McFarland (2010, p. 74) reporting lesbian and gay couples as cautious when forming relationships because of 'the decisions about what to say and what not to say, and when to disclose, when to push it and when not to push it', which may be likened to Schuetz's (1944) discussion of the Stranger's difficulty in approaching seemingly culturally established norms. Coming out positions oneself at the untraditional, unprivileged end of this heteronormative binary, increasing one's separation from the mainstream group.

Discrimination, and the fear of it, is a very salient issue in the workplace experiences of LGBT people (Gedro, 2010; McFadden, 2015). Discrimination against LGBT people in the workplace has been found in many forms: formal and informal, overt and subtle, and may further enhance the separation of LGBT employees from other employees, increasing the 'Stranger' experience of LGBT people in organizations. While it may be possible to identify overt discrimination, it is harder for someone to identify if more covert discrimination is taking place. For example, Ward and Winstanley (2003) found that most of their study participants did not face obvious, vocalized stigma when they made reference to their sexuality, but rather a 'reactive silence'; snubs that would be difficult to formally complain about but nonetheless were oppressive. Such discriminatory experiences, or the fear of them, may influence the propensity of LGBT employees to utilize formal voice mechanisms and affects their informal everyday work behaviors, where they may feel the need to repress their sexual orientation identity in the face of potential negative repercussions.

Researchers have used social identity theory to explain the similarity attraction paradigm or homophily effect in organizations (Almeida, Fernando, Hannif, & Dharmage, 2015), which renders those in organizational contexts that deviate from

the 'norm' to be disadvantaged. In Almeida et al. (2015), the focus is on migrants' underemployment, however this phenomenon also explains the perceived and actual discrimination which members of the LGBT workforce encounter at work, where they are perceived as outsiders to the heteronormative (Rumens, 2010) composition of the workforce. Because of formal, informal, overt or subtle discrimination, institutionalized and socialized heteronormativity, or anticipation of prejudice, LGBT employees may feel relationally distant to those around them in the organization and remain silent on LGBT-related concerns to not draw attention to their 'different' sexual orientation. We propound that the climate of heteronormativity within organizations which manifests in discrimination (overt and covert) against LGBT employees and presents the silence of minority employee groupings as a more acceptable norm, is in tension with the potential of LGBT employee networks in promoting inclusion and enabling LGBT voice within organizations (Bell et al., 2011).

Another feature from Simmel's Stranger concept that we draw upon are the shared commonalities that Simmel identifies between members of the group and the Stranger. Simmel (1908) points out that although there are some shared characteristics between the group members and the Stranger, these similarities are commonplace and general. Following Simmel's argument, the LGBT employee's heterosexual work colleague is close because of generic similarities (e.g. occupational features), but this closeness is shared by all members of the organization and so, in the workplace context, the relative importance of the shared characteristics are diminished. LGBT employees may therefore choose not to draw attention to their sexuality, and so may not opt to join LGBT employee networks or to openly voice LGBT-specific concerns at work, for fear of it magnifying their differences.

The third feature of Simmel's essay that is of pertinence to this discussion is de-individualization. The Stranger, as Simmel (1908, p. 3) points out, is 'an organic member of the group'. The Stranger has their place and position in the group and, perhaps because of this, is judged on their having that role rather than on their individual attributes. In this context, while the LGBT employee or colleague represents the Stranger, there are usually *other* LGBT people who also fill this role. While they are still in the minority (or would not be Strangers), there may be enough of them to possibly form another group, for example, as discussed in this paper, an LGBT employee network.

Stereotyping against lesbian and gay men in the workplace has been found in previous research (Embrick, Walther, & Wickens, 2007), and it arises perhaps from this view of the Stranger 'of a particular type'; where preconceived generalizations about this type of person affect one's perception of them. At the same time, the separation that demarcates the relationship between the group and the Stranger may limit chances to vanquish these stereotypes through repeated association and familiarity. This influences the individual LGBT employee's decision to be silent or to voice their sexuality and minority status at work, with some LGBT

employees possibly anxious to pronounce their difference and break down het-eronormative barriers.

The features outlined above work together to position the Stranger in that par-ticular position of being near yet far, in the group and still outside of it, a member and not a member. While LGBT people are now afforded more civil rights and protections than ever before, there still exists that minority status that may render them as a form of the Stranger in the workplace. This paper explores how the Stranger status may affect the propensity of LGBT employees to utilize commonly employed voice mechanisms – employee affinity groups, and unpacks why some LGBT employees opt for silence, becoming the missing voices in organizations (Wilkinson et al., 2015). The next section discusses employee voice specifically and how it relates to the LGBT employee as the Stranger.

Voice

Employee voice mechanisms – such as LGBT employee networks – enable (minor-ity) employees to participate in and influence organizational decision-making (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011). Research has found organizational benefits for firms that support and enable voice and employee participation (Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington, & Ackers, 2004). However, the reasons why some employees may opt out of participation and open voice have not been comprehensively unpacked from the perspective of the individual employee. This paper, similar to a recent publication in this journal by Felix, Mello, and von Borell (2016), gathers in-depth qualitative data from the population under investigation. While that paper focuses on the interaction level in order to develop the 'field of understanding of the process by which homosexuals contribute to a climate of voice or silence at work' (Felix et al., 2016, p. 17), this paper focuses on presenting the lived experiences of a sample of LGBT employees, which allows us to unpack their propensity to voice or silence in their workplaces. Ozeren, Ucar, and Duygulu (2016) explore why LGBT employees in Turkey opt for silence; our analysis focuses on the Irish context, where, in contrast to Turkey, national anti-discrimination measures are in place. Bell et al. (2011, p. 132) point out that LGBT employees 'partly due to their invisibility, overt discrimination, and lack of widespread protective legislation … are at high risk of silencing at work'. Here we explore if, in addition to the reasons these authors find, being a form of the Stranger in the workplace can also add to the silencing of LGBT employee voices.

A number of different forms of voice and its antonymic counterpart, silence, have been identified, as well as the purposes that these forms have. Van Dyne, Ang, and Botero (2003) synthesize and extend the work of Morrison and Milliken (2000) and Pinder and Harlos (2001) to categorize voice and silence; they can be *acquiescent* and based on resignation or low self-efficacy, *defensive* and based on fear and self-protection, or *prosocial* and based on cooperation and aiding the

organization. Later, Knoll and van Dick (2013) introduce the concept of *opportunistic* silence, which is based on self-interest.

A primary focus of this article is showing how being the Stranger in the workplace may affect one's voice. As a marginal member of the group, one could feel they have less self-efficacy than other members in creating change or offering good suggestions. As a Stranger one may feel resignation over their limited status and perceived power and may therefore primarily use *acquiescent* voice and silence (Van Dyne et al., 2003). If one's Stranger role is compounded by prejudice then *defensive* voice and silence, aimed at protecting one's self, might be utilized more often. Deniz, Noyan, and Ertosun (2013) find a significant negative relationship between the employment of defensive silence and organizational commitment. These options are far from the ideal *Prosocial* variety of voice and silence, aimed at cooperation and helping the organization. Like other employees, LGBT employees' voice must be heard in order to ensure they feel like a part of the organization, and stay engaged and committed. However, as outlined above, LGBT employees may find themselves isolated from the mainstream workforce, and unheard.

The rest of this paper looks at how being the Stranger manifests in the workplace for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people in Ireland. In particular, we explore how being the Stranger affects both identity and voice. We explore isolation and discrimination in the workplace, and how LGBT networks can assuage these occurrences and make the voices of LGBT employees heard. While social capital support for lesbian and gay employees is explored in McPhail et al. (2016) and includes organizational groups and non-organization specific groups, our focus here is on the social capital support from *official*, formal employee network associations established within organizations, which exist to provide legitimate voice to the LGBT minority employee grouping within the respective organization.

Research approach

Similar to Felix et al. (2016) and McPhail et al. (2016), this research used semi-structured interviews (May, 2001) with 29 lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) employees. For the purpose of this paper, the focus is on the content from those interviews pertinent to employee networks. A cross-sample of LGBT workers employed in Ireland, across age, gender, sexual orientation, organization-type, and profession was interviewed in order to explore broad trends. The majority (24) was educated to bachelor's degree level. Participants worked in a range of industries, including business services (5), academia and teaching (4), and the civil service (4), with the majority (19) working in the private sector. See Table 1 for a more complete breakdown of the interviewees.

The participants were interviewed by the first author between April 2014 and May 2015. Data were collected mostly using face-to-face interviews, with one interview conducted over the telephone. Participation was entirely voluntary and unpaid. Using non-probability sampling, participants were recruited using both

Table 1. Research participants.

Pseudonym	Age	Sexuality & gender ID	Industry/sector	Type of organization	Role
Adam	23	Gay Male	Academia	Small college	Lecturer
Aine	45	Bisexual Female	NGO	Small NGO	CEO
Alan	50	Gay Male	Local Authority	Large local authority	Senior civil servant
Amy	34	Lesbian Female	Telecommunications	Large multinational company	Mid-level marketer
Aoife	38	Lesbian Female	Local Authority	Large local authority	Junior civil servant
Brendan	39	Gay Male	IT Consulting	Large company	Mid-level consultant
Brian	41	Gay Male	Publishing	Large multinational company	Mid-level manager
Cam	31	Bisexual, Gender-queer	Academia	Large university	Lecturer
Cillian	27	Gay Male	Marketing	Large department store	Junior marketer
Claire	49	Lesbian Female	Local Authority	Large local authority	Senior civil servant
Conor	39	Gay Male	Management Consulting	Large multinational company	Mid-level consultant
Devon	31	Lesbian Female	Multiple: security, army reserves, retail	Multiple	Multiple
Donna	24	Lesbian Female	IT	Large multinational company	Junior HR manager
Emma	27	Lesbian Female	Professional Services	Large multinational company	Junior recruiter
Fintan	26	Gay Male	Education	Small secondary school	Contract Teacher
Geraldine	39	Lesbian Female	Professional Services	Large multinational company	Partner
Ian	30	Gay Male	Student, previously: hospitality	Previously: small hotel	Previously: accountant
John	33	Gay Male	Motor/Transport	Large multinational company	Mid-level manager
Jennifer	38	Lesbian Female	Cleaning Services	Self-employed	Cleaner
Kate	28	Lesbian Female	Health Service	Doctor's Surgery	Secretary
Kevin	59	Gay Male	Management Consulting	Large multinational company	Senior consultant
Laura	24	Lesbian Female	Retail Management	Large multinational company	Junior office worker
Liam	47	Gay Male	Criminal Justice	Irish civil service	Senior Civil Servant
Matthew	48	Gay Male	IT	Large international company	Contracted consultant
Michael	26	Gay Male	Digital Media	Small company	Junior accounts manager
Paul	67	Gay Male	Media	Large company	Retired
Shane	40	Gay Male	Public Relations	Small company	Senior
Stephen	32	Gay Male	Education	Large secondary school	Teacher
Yvonne	33	Lesbian Female	IT	Large multinational company	Senior manager

purposeful sampling (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) and snowball sampling techniques (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; May, 2001). Similar to McPhail et al. (2016), LGBT employee groups and social groups were also contacted using email and social media (LinkedIn, Facebook). Participants were then recruited using snowball sampling from these participants; as well as from the authors' own personal

networks, a form of convenience sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). This was a purposeful study that sought respondents that are part of the LGBT community, who had employment experiences and were based in Ireland. The majority (26) of the respondents were Irish citizens; the remaining (3) participants stemmed from Europe, Asia, and the USA, respectively. However, we do not focus on differences across nationalities here, but rather on the general themes that were evident across all respondents pertaining to employee networks in their organizations based in Ireland.

The length of the semi-structured interviews ranged from 20 to 90 min. The average interview lasted approximately 35 min and each interview covered a range of topics. A topic guide was used, with broad headings to be explored during the course of the interview, and so each interview, while different, followed the same general structure. The topics included their career history, workplace experiences, identity management in the workplace, and support structures at work. Respondents were encouraged to speak in general about their career and workplace experiences, and to bring up topics of relevance to them in the discussion (see also McPhail et al., 2016 for a similar approach). Anonymity of the respondents was assured during the data collection stage and pseudonyms are used in this paper to mask their identities.

Twelve of the participants interviewed (40%) were in a workplace where an LGBT network was present and had first-hand experience here. The remainder expressed their opinion regarding LGBT networks, their social identity role, and their role as a mechanism for giving voice to LGBT employees in organizations and reducing feelings of marginalization.

All of the interviews were transcribed in full, and coded openly using MAXQDA qualitative coding software (version 11). The MAXQDA software allows computer-assisted analysis of data, including qualitative coding, and is widely used in qualitative research (e.g. Given, 2008; Saldaña, 2012).

As part of the broader study, a systematic literature review was conducted on the careers and workplace experiences of LGBT employees, prior to the data collection. At the coding stage, firstly, the topics that were identified in the literature review were used as the preliminary themes under which the codes would be placed. This is similar to what Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 58) refer to as a 'start list'. While this 'start list' provided some initial structure, it was recognized that the list of codes was a living document that changed over time. Coding is a cyclical and repetitive process (Saldaña, 2012), and each iteration of coding highlighted different topics and added new concepts; for example, LGBT networks, which are not discussed much in the Business/Management literatures. The coding is therefore abductive to a degree, using a pre-selected structure upon which to build more open coding. To avoid biases in the analysis of the interviews, both researchers analyzed the coded transcripts and discussed the core themes that emerged in order to allow a more balanced representation of the findings.

The national background in which this research takes place is unique, and highlights the differing socio-political and historical contexts regarding LGBT rights across the world. Ireland has recently taken great strides in affording civil rights to LGBT citizens, by extending marriage to same-sex couples and legalizing gender self-declaration. This research, therefore, was conducted during a period of great change and liberalization in Ireland, and, because of this, represents a very specific international case.

Findings: identity, social identity and employee networks

As discussed above, the Stranger, according to Simmel, is the person who is proximally close yet relationally distant. Participants in this study reported feelings of isolation, stigmatization, and discrimination in the workplace, in a manner that made them relationally different. However, as members of the organization, they are also proximally close to their colleagues. In this section, we explore examples of discriminatory incidents and feelings of isolation that positioned the participants as Strangers in the organization; how voice and silence are utilized by LGBT employees; and the role of networks in providing voice and reducing the Stranger status of these employees.

Participants reported how they could feel isolated in their organizations because of their sexual identity:

> It just wasn't me. I felt a little bit off the beaten track compared to the rest of them. They were all lovely people, but I just didn't feel … there was anyone else … similar to you … All my friends were sound, but in terms of the gay thing, I just didn't feel comfortable. – Amy

> You can very much feel like 'the only gay in the village' if you haven't got a gay or lesbian colleague around you. – Claire

> I probably would feel more comfortable if there were another couple of gay guys in my office, just so I wouldn't be the only one. In my building, I'm the only one … I suppose it would be nice if there were another one or two there, to give it a little bit more visibility. – Brendan

These experiences show how one's minority sexual identity can make one feel isolated at work. Without the presence of similar colleagues, voice could suffer; for example if one encounters a problem or challenge specific to their being lesbian, gay, or bisexual in their particular workplace, they may not feel motivated to voice their concerns, fearing that it is their individual problem and not a common or systemic one. Rather, they may opt for silence, restraining their personal thoughts in the workplace.

Incidents of harassment and discrimination, both blatant and subtle, were reported by participants. Geraldine (39), who works in the professional services industry, relates an incident of overt discrimination she had in a former workplace after coming out as lesbian, and how that made her feel about that organization:

> I had a particularly negative, nasty experience with one of the senior people in the firm. He sort of indicated that he would fix me, and sort me out: 'Don't be bothering with that kind of nonsense' kind of thing, 'You're far too pretty' kind of stuff. And I thought 'This has just soured what I feel and what I think about the career … not so much the industry, but this particular place, and now do I want to be as committed to something which is not as committed to me and my personal life.' – Geraldine

Geraldine's experience shows how incidents of harassment and discrimination can highlight the peripheral position an LGBT person can find themselves in an organization, and how that can affect their experiences of work and decisions concerning coming out at work or remaining silent.

Unlike Geraldine, most other participants did not face any overt discriminatory incidents, but subtle discrimination was encountered or suspected in many cases. One such incident involved Claire (49), an HR manager. In her organization, small office celebrations take place when an employee gets married, but did this not occur when Claire married her female partner:

> [T]here's no obligation to have them so you can't sort of say 'I've been discriminated against'. It's really subtle, but you feel it … A month later, a colleague was getting married, and there was a big thing about him, and tea and cake in the office and mine was blatantly ignored … That hurts. Because it was … a deliberate thing to do. – Claire

This quote demonstrates the subtle nature of many forms of discrimination. As Claire points out, she felt she couldn't make a formal complaint, as she could with an overt example of discrimination, because it was a discretionary, culturally bound ritual (Johnson & Scholes, 1988). However, the sentiment behind the incident and the feelings Claire experienced as a result were felt just as strongly as an overt case of discrimination. This incident also shows the conflicting positions that the Stranger experiences; as a proximally close member of the organization, they are subject to its cultural and social aspects. However, as relationally distant, some of the rituals and routines and interactions may be closed to them. While her organization is legally obliged to treat LGBT employees equitably, social relations are harder to police, and so many instances of stigmatization can go unreported, with LGBT employees unsure of how to voice their concerns. Although voice mechanisms may be in place, one might not feel that they are able to use them if they think they can't adequately convey the situation. This shows the institutionalized structures that may inhibit the voice of minorities in organizations, where organizational policies (possibly inadvertently) discriminate against minority employees in promoting heteronormative values.

Voice

While voice mechanisms may be in place in organizations, the effectiveness and outcomes of using them may vary. For example, although mechanisms such as LGBT networks may exist, the organizational processes (such as complaint procedures that may be in place for cases of discrimination) may not take subtle

discrimination into consideration, because of its nuanced nature, which could also marginalize those affected. As discussed above, LGBT employees who don't have LGBT colleagues may feel that problems they face are specific to them individually and not voice their concern, whereas if they had LGBT colleagues they might find it a common problem and be more inclined to use a voice mechanism.

Similarly, one may not trust that their voices will be heard or responded to, because of historical mistreatment. Yvonne's story below captures the dilemma some LGBT people may face when wanting to make a complaint. During the Marriage Equality referendum campaign in Ireland in 2015, Yvonne's LGBT network was planning an event to support the campaign and LGBT charities. However, senior staff canceled the event to prevent the organization's involvement in a political issue. When Yvonne organized an open meeting to allow staff members to express their anger about the event cancellation, it did not go to plan:

> I wanted a lot of our LGBT community to come and let our management know how pissed off they were about it, and how it made them feel. And when we got the meeting, everyone was really silent. People didn't really voice any of their concerns about how fucked off it made them and how it made them feel marginalized. And when that meeting was over, all of my counterparts went and escalated back to other people and they were making a lot of voice that they weren't happy. Then the general manager came to me and said 'Hey … I thought everyone was happy?' So I had a really good conversation with her [about] why gay people have a hard time being honest sometimes … As gay people, we've always seen the world as a place that may or may not like us, depending on where we're at, and we kinda tip-toe[ing] into equality … We want to make sure that each step forward that we're not putting ourselves in harm's way, that we're not going to be discriminated against or whatnot, because we don't trust the structures that are there. – Yvonne

This story shows how formal voice mechanisms may not work if there is distrust. Knoll and Redman (2016) question whether the presence of voice implies the absence of silence. Our findings affirm that silence can exist in spite of formal voice mechanisms. While Yvonne's colleagues felt they could complain to her or their colleagues about their anger, they weren't prepared to do so in an official setting to more senior management. Historical mistreatment from the establishment may have severed any trust that complaints would be listened to or dealt with, or invoke fear that complaints would be detrimental to the complainant's career or relations with more senior managers in the organization. This corroborates Bell et al.'s (2011) finding that LGBT employees choose silence at work, either to protect themselves from negative repercussions, or due to lack of trust in the voice system. The refusal of the employees here to engage in discussion is indicative of acquiescent silence (Van Dyne et al., 2003), where one deliberately withholds opinions due to resignation or the belief that it won't make a difference. Despite Yvonne's efforts to formalize her coworkers' voices, it seemed that the informal workplace grapevine represented a safer space to voice anger.

Incidents of discrimination may also go unreported if the person does not want to use voice out of fear of the consequences on their reputation. Yvonne discusses another reason why her colleagues did not complain about the event cancellation:

> When you have … people that are really pissed off but they've got this chance to talk to the general manager who indirectly has an influence on the continuity of their job, these people … don't want to brand themselves or label themselves as 'those gay noise-makers!' – Yvonne

The fear of being seen as a 'noisemaker' or agitator, and the effect that that might have on their careers, can result in the official voice mechanism going unused. Similarly, Liam explains his silence when he was treated differently at work:

> Heterosexual people in my organization, when they get married, they get a week off work, plus I believe, they get a cheque … I didn't get any extra leave, I didn't get any extra funds … [I didn't bring it up] … I didn't want to diminish myself, I didn't want to be that person. – Liam

These quotes accentuate the consensus not to be seen as a noisemaker, or to disrupt the status quo. Similarly, Upchurch, Danford, Richardson and Tailby (2006) contend that employees who use their voice may risk appearing to employers as disloyal or disruptive. Milliken, Morrison, and Hewlin (2003) find that many of their respondents chose silence instead of voice because they are afraid they'll be viewed negatively and therefore damage relationships. However, had the LGBT employees represented above voiced their concerns openly and pro-socially, they could have provided their organizations with invaluable information to improve their respective workplace's diversity knowledge. Rather, they chose defensive silence, and withdrew from expressing opinions or annoyance in an effort to protect themselves and their careers. This questions the effectiveness of mechanisms such as complaint procedures or open meetings in providing LGBT employees with voice. Spencer (1986) finds that employees are more likely to remain at an organization if they are given more opportunities to voice their dissatisfaction with the aim to change it. However, as shown above, if employees feel that they cannot use these voice mechanisms without fear of recrimination, the efficacy of the mechanisms falls, and employee dissatisfaction remains.

One possible resolution for not using voice because of the damage it may do to one's reputation is to use a group voice; in this way the individuals and their reputations are protected and somewhat anonymized. Next, we discuss the potential of LGBT networks as a voice mechanism, and additionally how it assuages the negatives aspects of being the Stranger in the workplace.

The potential of LGBT networks

Our analysis looks at the micro-level individual's interaction with the network, rather than the organizational-level approach taken by Githens and Aragon (2009). Firstly, we explore the potential of LGBT employee networks in combating the isolation and discrimination that characterizes being the Stranger.

Networks as a moderator of the Stranger status

For those in LGBT employee networks, the groups represented a form of respite from the isolation and stigmatization experienced in other parts of the organization, and in doing so, aided their tendency to use voice at work. Some people felt isolated when they were discriminated against, while others felt isolated simply as a result of the small numbers of LGBT colleagues. The quote below from Aoife (38), where she discusses joining her workplace's employee network, demonstrates how she felt a desire to be around other LGBT people:

> … I'm gay, and it's important to me … It was a bit of looking for something new to be involved in, but also … kinda like, 'my people', you know … – Aoife

For Aoife, the network fulfilled a wish to be around people who had had similar experiences of being gay in Ireland, and in her workplace. The network allowed her the chance to meet other LGBT employees in her workplace, whom she might not have met in other circumstances. Like Aoife, Donna (24) discusses how the network in her organization helped her feel part of a group, but also showcases how it highlighted that being LGBT in this particular workplace wouldn't hinder her career:

> … there's … kind of a sense of support, …a sense that I'm not alone in this .… Like there are other LGBT employees in here, who are obviously doing fine, and are great and … get along … – Donna

In this way, the employee network made visible the LGBT colleagues who had been successful in the same context. The network and its members signal to existing, new and prospective employees the type of workplace it is with regard to LGBT diversity. Similarly, Brendan discusses the role he thinks networks have for LGBT employees in highlighting acceptance:

> I imagine the functions of the network are just to make sure that people do feel comfortable with the sexuality, with the organization, and to reaffirm that … if you're a bit camp … it's ok, it doesn't matter. You can be yourself in the corporate world, and the corporate world is not judging you. – Brendan

Donna concurs:

> A lot of people … have this discomfort to a certain extent when they go into a workplace …For LGBT employees … you're disclosing a huge part of you … Employers like [my workplace] … do think about that … and I think having a network there enables the … employee to know that there's that kind of level of comfort. – Donna

The quotes above show how LGBT networks can help reduce the feelings of isolation that LGBT employees can feel because of their minority status in the workplace, make visible other LGBT colleagues who are successful despite their marginalized sexual orientation, and signal the organization's promotion of inclusion. In this way, a network can mitigate the Stranger role that LGBT people may feel in the workplace, encouraging them to have a voice, formally and informally, through their membership of and behaviors in the organization.

Networks as a voice mechanism

In other workplaces, the LGBT employee network served as a voice mechanism for its members. Claire (49) set up the LGBT network in her organization as a direct result of the discrimination she felt during her time in the organization and the incident of subtle discrimination described earlier in this paper:

> I was being constantly sniggered at in a previous department … And in around the civil partnership thing, I just … decided, 'You know what? I'm sick of this shit … Why don't we just do something?' – Claire

For Claire, the LGBT network acted as a collective voice mechanism to lobby for the abolition of stigmatization in her organization. Similarly, John (33) describes how the LGBT network in his company was brought in as a voice mechanism as a result of discrimination and the need for social support:

> Our employees at the LGBT forum told us they didn't know where to go, and they all had different stories [of discrimination] … and they just had no-one to talk to or didn't realize that there was someone to talk to … The idea of having a semi-formal network is that you have someone to talk to or … where to go to if you want to talk. – John

The networks also represented a voice mechanism for those LGBT employees who wanted to enact change in their organization:

> [The network has] been in touch with HR, making submissions to them about a leaflet we've drawn up that we feel every member of staff should get. We also want to bring up stuff about, when new staff come in they get a day's instruction, and that they're made aware that [the network] exists, and that the [workplace] has a policy in relation to the [network], and people who are in that category. That doesn't happen at the moment so we're trying to push for that. – Alan

> [The network] also then [does] this aspect of working with leadership and working with HR, to make sure that the firm is on track. So we've just done a big piece of work with our HR … around policy, to make sure … our policies [are] equal for LGBT employees, as well as everybody else, so have we got the same status, have we got the same rights. – Geraldine

The networks themselves differed in size, scope, and goals, similar to Githens and Aragon's (2009) analysis of these groups; some, like Claire's, which were formed in an attempt to change a hostile climate, were more political, critical, and subversive in scope, almost similar in tone to a workers' union or Githen's and Aragon's 'Queer/Radical Approach'. Others, like Geraldine's and Yvonne's, which had organizational support, were closer to Githens and Aragon's 'Conventional Approach' in their scope, and worked hand-in-hand with the organization to meet their goals. While the latter type of network certainly enjoys more resources, support, and visibility, their close relationship to the organization may prove calamitous in incidents like Yvonne's story, where senior staff canceled an event the network wanted to hold in support of the Irish Marriage Equality referendum. The price of having such organizational support might therefore be the total autonomy of the network, and their capacity to act outside of organizational goals. Conversely, the more radical networks, acting as a form of union, could suffer less from the

organization's umbrage, but find it harder to enact change without the use of conventional channels. These networks may also risk isolating their members further from the general workforce, exacerbating the Stranger versus Group dichotomy that Simmel (1908) highlights; whereas members of the more conventional networks, which are entrenched in their organization, may not suffer from that marginalization.

The stories above demonstrate how LGBT networks can serve, for some employees, as an antidote to discrimination and loneliness in the organization, as well as a mechanism for voice. From being treated as outsiders and the Stranger, through stigmatization and marginalization, the employees have formed or joined a network to gain social support, organize a collective voice for change, and to share their stories with similar others.

Heterogeneous LGBT identities

It was apparent from our analysis of the qualitative interviews that the LGBT community at work is not a homogeneous cohort, satisfied that networks represent their best interests. We found that not everyone wished to join a network, or to integrate their LGBT identity into their workplace identity. Seven of the research participants highlighted their LGBT identity, and joined LGBT networks and got involved with diversity initiatives. Fourteen preferred to normalize their sexuality and not draw unneeded attention to it, and eight of our research participants (over one in four) chose to keep these identities completely separate. Our study suggests that those in this latter cohort would be less comfortable in joining an LGBT employee network, either because they did not want their sexual orientation to be assumed or questioned, or because they would rather not make an issue of their sexual identity, and the role of networks is less significant. For instance, Fintan (26), a teacher, was annoyed when he was outed by a colleague:

> A teacher that knew me really well, told students of mine that I was gay … totally out of the blue with no reason … It … really pissed me off. – Fintan

For people in this cohort (and perhaps for some of those who try to normalize their LGBT identity), networks may cause further pressure, rather than support, as they do not want the voice of an LGBT group representing their work interests; rather they wish to deny, hide, or keep separate their sexual identity at work. Claire (49), who instigated and runs an LGBT employee network in her organization, underlines this, noting that many LGBT employees refuse to join the employee network for different reasons:

> People are … either not out at home or they're just not out at work. We found …, when we were setting up the LGBT network in there, that we were aware of no end of gay and lesbian staff, but they're not out and they won't join the network either … They just won't talk about it. – Claire

It is these sub-groups within organizations that have been under-researched, with HRM activities in organizations having prioritized giving visibility to LGBT

networks as support and voice bodies for all LGBT employees, ignoring those who do not wish to have their sexual orientation as a central concern in the organization. In other words, those LGBT employees who opt to remain silent about their non-normative sexual orientation in the workplace have not been given attention. Brendan's story reflects his wish to approach identity management differently to another gay employee in his organization:

> There's very few openly out gay men working in my organization. There's only one that I'm aware of. And he was at the party and he'd seen me around, but he worked in the other building. He never talked to me, and he came running up to me, screaming 'Oh my god, oh my god, you're the other gay, so nice to meet you! … Hey everyone, this is another gay! Finally I'm not the only gay in the office!' Now I grabbed him … and I said '… I am not the other gay; I am Brendan, the consultant … who happens to be gay'. – Brendan

Brendan's story captures well how different people approach identity management in the workplace; for his colleague, being gay appears to be a primary facet of his workplace identity (and also highlights the Stranger status that his colleague experienced), whereas Brendan's choice was to downplay his gay identity in favor of his work-related capabilities. For Brendan, the right to not overtly voice difference is underlined, and we contend (also argued by Paisley & Tayar, 2016), needs to be respected.

The research questions the assumption that LGBT networks are positive voice mechanisms for all LGBT employees; rather the findings highlight that further research and deeper exploration is required. The respondents in this study were not unanimous in their support and involvement in LGBT networks, and thus may not benefit from these groups. While these may opt for silence within the organization, it is not only in response to institutionalized control (as manifested in older policies and practices celebrating heterosexual events such as marriages), but is more layered and diverse from a personal, individual level.

Discussion and implications of the study

This paper contributes to the existing limited research on LGBT employees and their voice, as recognized by Bell et al. (2011). Our findings show that LGBT employees differ in their workplace/sexual identities integration, as well as their views on the efficacy of, and need for, an employee network. This suggests that the voice role that LGBT networks play is more nuanced than expected. Similar to findings from Bell et al. (2011) and Ozeren et al. (2016), we find that some LGBT employees do not use their voice in organizations, because they believe it could lead to mistreatment or simply have no effect. In addition, we find that some LGBT employees will not use their voice because they feel they will be labeled as noisemakers or agitators.

This paper contributes to the theme of the Special Issue in exploring how the voices of LGBT employees may be unheard, and the ability of employee networks to give voice to all LGBT employees, by sharing research that suggests that such

networks do not represent the solution for all such employees in the organization. Similar to the studies by Felix et al. (2016), and Beauregard, Arevshatian, Booth, and Whittle (2016), our findings indicate that some LGBT voices are going unheard, with opportunity to express voice limited to organizational LGBT networks (with which some LGBT employees do not wish to associate) or traditional complaint procedures (which may not be appropriate for certain complaints). This echoes Syed's (2014) assertion that traditional voice mechanisms such as trade unions may not offer suitable representation for diverse groups. In addition, as Bell et al. (2011) argue, the fact that union leadership is dominated by white heterosexual men (Green & Kirton, 2006) means that diversity and inclusion efforts may be hampered. While a union is a traditional mechanism for employee voice in the organization, it may therefore not be as effective or even viable for LGBT employees.

This research contributes to and has implications for research on voice in organizations, in that it focused on voice that is connected primarily to a shared identity, rather than to a shared role, function, or level. Marchington, Wilkinson, Ackers, and Goodman (1993) depict employer interest in employee involvement (EI) through a wave metaphor, which captures the complexity, changeability and waxing/waning of various EI movements. As they point out, there are likely to be new waves of interest, influenced by a number of different factors, in the future. Identity-based voice may therefore represent a next 'wave' of interest in employee voice and various mechanisms, with the introduction in many organizations of LGBT, women's, and ethnic minority affinity groups. For many groups, particularly LGBT employees, this was simply not possible in previous decades, due to discrimination or the criminalization of these identities, as well as a lack of similar groups upon which to base themselves on. As Bowen and Blackmon (2003) note, one's tendency to use one's voice is strongly affected by the presumed attitudes of others in the organization towards an issue. Following that argument, one may therefore presume that the voice tendencies of a marginalized group in one jurisdiction or culture could differ from the same group in another.

Wilkinson and Fay (2011) compare and contrast the different theoretical paradigms that concern voice – HRM, Industrial Relations, Industrial Democracy and Organizational Behavior – showing how they differ according to the voice schemes (e.g. suggestion schemes, workers on boards, groups, collective bargaining), the form of vehicle (i.e. group or individual), the underpinning philosophies (i.e. efficiency, power, rights, or autonomy) and the focus of the voice effort (i.e. performance, power, decision-making, or job redesign). More formal voice mechanisms like LGBT networks can be implemented but may not be utilized by all LGBT employees, who may use an individual voice. Voice based on LGBT identity and pertinent issues can be therefore formal and informal, system-based and behavior-based. Voice attempts concerned with discrimination, heteronormativity, or marginalization may be a very private and individual concern, despite the focus in many organizations on LGBT diversity, and the established business

case for it (Gedro, 2010). In reflecting the different conceptualizations of voice, the identity-based voice that we see at play in this study both corresponds with and furthers our current understanding of voice.

Because we examine groups of LGBT employees that both do and do not use their voice in the workplace, our research contributes not only to the voice literature, but also to the literature on employee silence, of which there is comparatively less (Morrison & Milliken, 2003). As shown, we find that LGBT employees represent a form of the Stranger (Simmel, 1908) in the organization; may balk at the thought of using their voice at work due to historic discrimination from those in power; may not wish to use voice in case their sexuality is revealed, or highlighted to an undesirable degree; and may not wish to be seen as a 'noisemaker'. Silence is therefore a strategy for many LGBT employees. As Morrison and Milliken (2000) note, this can be detrimental to the organization; if differing points of views are not expressed, the organization will not be able to benefit from the diversity of values inherent in every workplace. LGBT employees who feel they cannot use their voice may not be able to contribute to fundamental discussions surrounding diversity in the workplace, or challenge prevailing viewpoints and beliefs.

As noted above, Van Dyne et al. (2003) refer to *acquiescent* and *defensive* silence. Our analysis shows that, as the particular type of voice we look at was heavily influenced by identity, participants used both of these types of silence, because they felt it wouldn't make any difference, and to prevent themselves from suffering career-related consequences. From analyzing these reasons, we can observe that LGBT employee silence may result both from a top-down culture (similar to Morrison & Milliken, 2000), as well as from bottom-up, employee-led motives (similar to Knoll & van Dick, 2013).

Formal, overt, deliberate voice behaviors and mechanisms, we argue, will deepen the silence of those LGBT employees who wish to separate their work identity and sexuality. In contrast, some LGBT employees may concentrate on their minority status in order to bring LGBT issues to light within the organization. Those in the middle – not wishing to spotlight their sexuality, but also not wishing to hide it – want to fit in and create an organizational norm that is open and beyond heteronormativity. These employees may engage in more informal, bottom-up behaviors, to socialize their sexual orientation and attempt to normalize their differences. Formal voice mechanisms such as social media, representing the voice of the regular LGBT employee, may enable the informal normalizing voice of this sub-group of LBGT employees to proliferate.

The findings from our analysis have implications for organizations and HR managers. We suggest that both an individual-specific as well as a group (employee network) approach is required to give voice to employees, accepting that some LGBT employees will not voice their LGBT specific concerns, but rather maintain a level of separation between their sexuality and workplace identity. As Colgan (2016) highlights, networks must take into account the various 'identities, beliefs and priorities' of their members. Workplaces must consider different types of

voice mechanisms for those LGBT employees who choose not to affiliate with an LGBT employee network in their organization, as these employees may currently be unheard (by not wanting to be out, wanting to keep their sexuality private). A balanced and comprehensive approach is therefore advisable, giving opportunities for employee networks, but also recognizing that not all LGBT employees may feel comfortable joining them. Purcell and Georgiades (2007) find that voice mechanisms that allow a combination of direct employee voice with indirect employee voice (e.g. an individual complaints procedure and a union) can lead to higher organizational commitment. Similarly, Knoll and Redman (2016) highlight that the presence of voice may not necessarily imply the absence of silence, finding that employees may use employee-sponsored mechanisms for work-related participatory voice, while at the same time remaining silent about other issues to avoid interpersonal friction (*cooperative silence*). Our findings concur, and imply that a range of voice mechanisms should be implemented to appeal to all LGBT employees, who differ in how they approach their identity management.

Anonymous opportunities to voice discontent, for example, through a suggestion scheme (Dundon et al., 2004), could be the mechanism for those employees who do not want to publicly voice their anger because of mistrust or fear. Similarly, the LGBT network could be used as an outlet for those who felt mistrust with authority or did not want to 'muddy their brand'. The network could collate the voices of its members and voice it officially to the relevant authorities; keeping the individual members anonymous. To maximize the effectiveness of this solution however, it is necessary that the network advertises this function to not just their members but also those LGBT employees who aren't involved; as described above, many LGBT employees may not join the network in their workplace for a variety of reasons.

Limitations and further research opportunities

This research project took place in a specific time, space, and socio-political background. Because of this, and the small sample size, generalizability of the findings is not possible. However, this was not the intent of the research, which was rather to focus on workplace topics of relevance to LGBT employees at the individual-level, and, for this paper, to unpack the role of LGBT employee networks in providing voice to their members. We encourage further research in this area, to comprehensively address the potential of employee networks in providing voice to LGBT employees and other minority employee groupings within organizations.

Cross-national comparative research would further extend knowledge in this area, particularly focusing on macro-level socio-cultural and legislative differences that influence employee voice at the national and international level. Our study focused on the individual (micro-) level perceptions of voice mechanisms for LGBT employees from a sample of LGBT employees in Ireland. Comparative studies of LGBT employees in other countries would enhance this research.

McPhail and McNulty (2015) discuss the danger associated with being LGBT for expatriates in certain geographies, where social norms or legalization vilifies non-heterosexuality; the LGBT person as an 'extreme' version of the Stranger in these countries could add an extra analytic lens in future research on expatriates (see also McNulty, 2015; McPhail, McNulty & Hutchings, 2014, Paisley & Tayar, 2016 for further research on LGBT expatriates). Additionally, research on LGBT employees from underrepresented countries is required. Despite recent research by a number of authors in different countries (e.g. Felix et al., 2016; Özturk & Özbilgin, 2015; Willis, 2010; the literature on LGBT workplace experiences is dominated by Western experiences (McFadden, 2015). Compounded with the lack of research on LGBT networks, this means that a gap in the literature exists on the role of LGBT networks in non-Western countries and companies, for example, in Russia, and Africa. As Gedro, Mizzi, Rocco, and van Loo (2013) discuss, LGBT people face unique challenges when they relocate for professional reasons, and belonging could be a particular theme for LGBT expatriates. An LGBT network could provide an important function for expatriates in offering affiliation and belonging, providing local knowledge on cultural and organizational attitudes to sexual minorities, particularly where personal safety is a concern (Gedro, 2010), and in reducing psychological 'eco-shocks' associated with moving to a new place (Fontaine, 1993; Gedro et al., 2013). Future research should consider each diverse geographical context and how it relates to the potential for these networks and their role for their members.

Additionally, surveys of larger populations of LGBT employees would aid to quantify our proposed organizational requirement to tailor their LGBT support strategies to be more inclusive of LGBT people who choose not to disclose their sexual orientation in the workplace, but nonetheless may feel uncomfortable in the workplace due to their difference from the heteronormative culture. Longitudinal studies would help address the limitation surrounding the very specific temporal context this research took place in, and could help track identity management strategies of LGBT employees over time, while ethnographic studies would be very beneficial in sharing the complexities of everyday life experienced by LGBT employees.

Like a lot of research on this topic, this paper suffers from the lack of transgender perspectives. While LGB people are socially and politically linked with transgender people under the LGBT umbrella, the latter's smaller numbers make finding a representative sample difficult (McFadden, 2015). Beauregard et al. (2016) find that transgender voice may be unheard because their issues are subsumed within the broader LGBT grouping; however, they face very unique challenges in the organization, and their experiences differ in many respects from their LGBT counterparts (Collins, McFadden, Rocco & Mathis, 2015; McFadden & Crowley-Henry, 2016). Further research is needed to explore the voice of transgender workers, to ascertain if current voice mechanisms, such as LGBT networks, are adequate to represent transgender workers, or if groups specific to these employees should exist.

Conclusions

This study addresses a gap in the literature regarding LGBT employee voice, by considering the role of LGBT employee networks in moderating voice/silence, and conceptualizes LGBT employees as 'the Stranger' within organizations. The role of networks in moderating the stigmatization of LGBT employees in organizations is unpacked. We find that networks can aid some LGBT employees in the workplace through creating a forum of affinity with other LGBT employees, but that this is not unanimous. Not all LGBT employees will feel they can join a network, while those that do join may not want to use it as a mechanism for voice. In conclusion, there are still many LGBT voices being unheard in organizations today, and there are different reasons for this. Institutional structures that perpetuate a specific agenda (Donaghey, Cullinane, Dundon, & Wilkonson, 2011) – in this context a heteronormative one – stigmatization, discrimination; and the fear of negative career-related consequences can silence sexual minority employees, and LGBT employee networks represent only a singular, limited approach to providing them with voice. A more nuanced consideration of LGBT support in organizations is required; with further recommendations that our findings are tested in other countries, in order to truly bring this global concern into the international arena.

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