

OBSTACLES TO ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH AND EXCELLENCE: BELONGING AND OTHERING AND THE DELEGITIMIZATION OF THE OTHERED

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ABSTRACT

When societies legitimize privileges assumed by members of historically dominant groups, whether based on ethnicity, religion, culture, gender, or nationality, other groups can be inevitably delegitimized. In organizations where culture and environment sustain delegitimizing schemas and related biases, the withholding of opportunities and resources from historically marginalized groups often becomes normalized. Such exclusion fosters passivity toward injustice and inequity, particularly through special opportunities that elevate dominant-group members while creating barriers for those who are “othered.” Over time, these dynamics erode trust and diminish commitment to a shared organizational purpose.

This article examines the role of othering and the delegitimization of the rights of stakeholders who experience marginalization, and how these practices affect organizational cohesion, growth, and change management. Delegitimization is understood here as the systematic denial of credibility, authority, and rightful access to resources and participation within organizational systems. We explore how delegitimization is normalized through the assertion of undue privileges rooted in non-work-related attributes, often in the absence of justice and equity frameworks.

Attention is given to subtle organizational practices and communicative strategies that differentiate those who assert dominance-based privilege from those who are delegitimized, and how these processes damage organizational health. Because such practices tend to flourish under hierarchical or authoritarian modes of governance, at times hidden beneath well-intentioned written policies that aim for shared governance, we also examine organizational cultures that devalue justice to rationalize both direct and indirect exclusion.

Using five vignettes, this study illustrates how organizational cultures may become conducive to othering and the normalization of delegitimization, often producing environments of divisive control and subordination. Drawing from the literature and vignette analysis, we conclude with recommendations for organizational assessment and cultural transformation, emphasizing the need to consciously cultivate safe, just, and optimizing spaces for all stakeholders.

KEY WORDS

Delegitimization; Othering; Belonging; Cognitive Schemas; Dominance; Organizational Environment; Justice Frameworks; Organizational Culture; Empowerment Strategies; Organizational Excellence.

“We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people. Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability.”

-Martin Luther King, Jr., April 16, 1963

Introduction

Organizations often act as microcosms of macro-level society, reflecting processes of inclusion and exclusion as they relate to the social dynamics of belonging and othering. Belonging is an intrinsic human need, reflected in the desire to be accepted and included within primary and secondary groups that give meaning to human connection (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

At the organizational level, similar to the societal level, factors that influence the degree of belonging experienced by workers and members take various forms, including the accentuation of differences among those who are considered historically marginalized and disenfranchised. The process of othering often begins with the devaluation of attributes (Canales, 2000) associated with these individuals and manifests as exclusion from access to resources and opportunities for those belonging to ethnic, cultural, racial, religious, and gender-based underrepresented groups.

Levels of exclusion within organizations (Ray, 2019) include the exercise of power by those in privileged positions to control and often subordinate members of ethnic minority groups. When efforts to establish inclusion and norms of belonging are resisted, as seen in recent judicial developments such as the U.S. Supreme Court’s 2023 ruling on affirmative action in higher education admissions, as well as legislative actions between 2019 and 2022 aimed at reducing or eliminating DEI initiatives, organizations tend to regress toward exclusion and diminished experiences of belonging.

Inclusion efforts have been widely recognized as necessary for reducing disparities in organizational outcomes for historically marginalized and underrepresented communities. Nevertheless, the devaluation of programs and initiatives related to inclusion and belonging is often grounded in the assumption that such efforts are antithetical to the interests of dominant groups that have historically held power and access to resources. This assumption overlooks the broader historical trajectory in the United States, including the exploitation of “othered” populations over several centuries. As a result, muddled perceptions that inclusion efforts privilege minority groups contribute to a culture of delegitimization of the rights of individuals from these groups. This othering culture is reinforced in organizations where inclusion and belonging are treated as peripheral add-ons to policies and procedures, rather than as foundational elements embedded within organizational culture and aligned with principles of justice, belonging, and inclusion (White et al., 2021).

Cognitive schemas of minority groups are regularly used to justify the deprivation of resources experienced by historically underrepresented populations, even after 60 years of the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. For instance, the Executive Order 13950, issued (September 22, 2020), banned trainings on systematic othering attributes at the federal level, and 40 states patterned their efforts into the introduction of bills designed to eliminate inclusion efforts, beginning with the introduction of bills to either limit or eliminate trainings to strengthen inclusion. In 20 States, such limitations on inclusion training and initiatives were signed into law. These initiatives succeeded despite the demonstrated fact that the elimination of inclusion initiatives works against the interests of individuals and groups who have been historically marginalized and underrepresented (Gee, & Hicken, 2021).

In some instances, organizations express a strong commitment to belonging and equality while simultaneously eliminating programs designed to address disparities affecting minority groups. These actions often disregard the impact of such decisions on organizational health, including the cumulative effects of stereotype threat, vulnerability, discrimination, and barriers to self-actualization (Badenhorst et al., 2022).

It is therefore not surprising that, even as inclusion programs are reduced or removed in areas such as admissions, recruitment, and leadership development, efforts to transform organizational environments do not consistently begin with an examination of organizational structures themselves. Specifically, organizations are not always analyzed as systems that must actively cultivate belonging and inclusion for all stakeholders.

Likewise, leadership styles, institutional affirmations, and communicative strategies that reinforce the delegitimization of the rights of othered stakeholders are often not examined as areas requiring change (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Feagin, 2020).

Experiences of disparity and discrimination are often shaped by organizational power structures and the degree of transparency within communication systems. Vertical, clique-based, and status quo-oriented communication patterns are known to hinder organizational mission and effectiveness, as they diminish the voices and experiences of individual stakeholders across organizational contexts (Yona, 2018; White et al., 2021).

Organizational structure and the exclusion of the “othered”

Assertion of extraneous norms that fall outside the proclaimed goals of an organization’s stated purpose, particularly when directed at specific groups, delegitimizes the rights of those who are subjected to marginalization. Because “othering” reduces the conditions necessary for belonging, the intent to other is sustained through a range of justifications that are often presented as necessary for organizational survival. These practices are reinforced through evolving rationalizations that build upon initial stereotypes, biases, and misplaced beliefs. Organizational choices, behaviors, decisions, and stakeholder experiences are often shaped by these exclusionary norms. Corresponding strategies are then used to allocate work responsibilities and determine outcomes in differential ways. Such practices of delegitimization are frequently normalized through assumptions about differential capacities among employees, as well as through evaluation strategies that are biased and disempowering (Badenhorst et al., 2022).

While visible forms of marginalization, such as unequal rewards and punishments for diverse organizational stakeholders, can contribute to both intergroup and intragroup conflict, the manner in which exclusion criteria are applied, whether intentionally or unintentionally, consciously or unconsciously, can and often does result in harmful outcomes for individuals, as well as for organizational goal attainment and change management (Bamberg & Verkuyten, 2022).

Our purpose here is to elucidate the detrimental impact of the delegitimization of the rights of stakeholders who experience marginalization and exclusion within organizations, particularly when those in leadership positions maintain an organizational culture that disregards the importance of adhering to equitable and inclusive policies and procedures designed to reduce inequities in organizational functioning and outcomes.

Methods

We analyzed five vignettes involving professionals in leadership positions who rationalize and normalize exclusionary strategies while contributing to the creation of organizational cultures that sustain “othering.” A systematic literature review on organizational culture and mechanisms of exclusion accompanied our analysis. We begin with the premise that delegitimization of the rights of stakeholders who experience marginalization, along with exclusionary practices within organizations, continues uninterrupted when organizations perpetuate artificial inequities rooted in pre-existing hierarchies and when unearned privileges remain normalized (Atteberry-Ash et al., 2023; Bonilla-Silva, 2001).

We also focused on factors such as the replication of the “old boys’ informal networks” perpetuated in organizations that withhold the avenues for systemwide belonging, even after the original key actors who engendered exclusion cultures are no longer present. Despite the departure of architects of regressive organizational environments, structures reflecting the delegitimization of the rights of marginalized have often persisted in the absence of renewed policies and practices, allowing new individuals to continue these practices.

We also focused on the reasons why despite the provisions of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act that expressly forbid treating individuals differently based on the expectations of dominant groups, members of the minority groups often adjust themselves to behave in a certain way to conform with the stereotyped expectations of the dominant groups. We examined if differential treatment of marginalized groups is preceded by key statements that are constructed as part of the organization’s “formal” communication strategies. We also assessed if such key statements are structured to sound like objective norms when, in fact, they are subjective by nature and ideology specific.

Vignette One: How is “Organizational Fit” Used as an Excuse for Exclusion of Historically Underrepresented Populations from Employment for which They are Qualified?

A manufacturing company in an enterprise zone designated as qualified to receive federal funds for promoting local businesses was hiring for the position of Human Resources manager. The company advertises itself as an equal employment and opportunities employer. A White applicant and a Latino applicant applied for the job. They both met all the required qualifications. They both performed well in the interview and their final interview scores were the same. However, the company offered the job to the White candidate. The reason provided by the White manager for hiring the White candidate was "better organizational culture fit." The organization's employees identify as 62% White male; 20% White female; 10% Latino female, 6% Black male, 1% Asian and 1% Biracial. No efforts have been made to update the organization's inclusion policies in the past ten years; neither have the employees, including the manager, been trained in the concepts and implications of “belonging and othering”. The manager did not offer a reasonably prudent explanation regarding how he arrived at the decision that the White candidate had a better “organizational fit.” It was entirely his judgment call.

Here, the manager's subjectivity in assessing "organizational fit" was both permitted and accepted as an organizationally sound practice. Such subjectivities are generally unwritten rules in exclusionary and non-inclusive organizations because they allow the space for the assertion of the privileged status, by rationalizing it within the context of the organizational culture and environment. The organization has not assessed the components that contribute to a culture that prioritizes hiring members of dominant groups as employees in the name of a better fit for the organization. Such rationalizations prevent the organization from modifying its culture for growth and innovation.

In the absence of affirmative requirements for organizations to update their hiring and inclusion policies while emphasizing the need for organizational assessment to reduce the frequency and the impunity of the assertions of privileged status, outcomes as demonstrated in the above vignette, are logical consequences. A racial framework is a frequently used power base in exclusionary and non-inclusive organizations (Feagin., 2020; Gee, & Hicken, 2021).

Failures to update, review, and develop new policies that address changed circumstances and needs of the stakeholders, can create an environment of tolerance for the assertions of power, including the delegitimization of the rights of the historically underrepresented and disenfranchised populations (Kendall, 2012; Lindner, 2018; Lowery, Knowles & Unzueta, 2007). Organizational health assessment cannot be pushed to the background of the organizational priorities when exclusion of marginalized stakeholders results in disparate treatment. Unfortunately, the agents who create an organizational environment conducive to such marginalizations that result in disparate treatment generally lack the critical understanding of the need for equality and equitable organizational processes.

Because actions based on exclusion are frequently placed as neutral and objective, the need for leaders to train critically to understand the necessity for substantive and procedural belonging and inclusion efforts is not prioritized. This is the case in exclusionary and non-inclusive organizations that do not place a proactive, cohesive approach to developing a conscious, non-exclusionary and non-inclusive organizational culture that is inclusive and diverse and promotes horizontal communication. Exclusion driven actions by those in a leadership position are high in organizations that lack clear policies and procedures regarding the prevention of exclusionary practices and strengthening the practice of equitable organizational processes.

Vignette Two: How do Exclusionary and non-inclusive Organizations Establish a Motive for the Exclusion of Qualified Minority Employees from Key Organizational Tasks?

An innovative project funded by the Federal Government has been obtained by Company A. The CEO scheduled a meeting of high-level employees - all of whom are White and tasked them with the implementation of the project. One of the team's key members, a senior Black employee who was equally involved in the completion of the proposal for the project, was not invited to attend the meeting. He heard about the project meeting and requested a meeting with the CEO to ask if he could do anything else to get on the team tasked with implementing the project. The CEO's secretary scheduled a meeting that was a month and a half away – by which time the project would have already been in its initial

stages of completion. The secretary was adamant that the CEO did not have any slots on his calendar until the time that he allocated for the meeting, which excluded the employee from the opportunity to become a team member on the project he was instrumental in creating.

The senior Black employee went to the Human Resources (HR) office in his company to see if he had been excluded from the project because of discriminatory practices on account of race. The HR did a preliminary investigation and informed him that there was no identifiable motive based on the protected categories that fall under Title VII, including race, that could be attributed to the CEO's decision not to include him in the project implementation, although he contributed significantly to the completion of the project proposal.

Here, the emphasis was on finding a motive for the exclusion of the Black employee from the project and not on establishing the reasons for affirmatively including him, given his contribution to the proposal writing stage of the project. The process of establishing a motive for exclusion based on race, that HR uses in such instances, works against the acknowledgment of the contributions of racial minorities because the basis for exclusion exists on a continuum that has varying levels of appreciation and understanding (Norton, & Sommers, 2011). Because the exclusionary processes can be covert and persistent, unless it is extreme in order to establish discrimination, exercising power by the leaders of the organization over colleagues is exclusively a matter of degree on a continuum.

Judicially, there is an emphasis on constitutional color blindness in deciding the Title VII case merits. Generally, Title VII's purpose is seen as reducing/alleviating the impact of extreme oppressive ideologies such as White supremacy, and therefore, the objective is to forbid discriminatory practices based on race in the workplace, and not to empower and enrich the lives of racial minorities. Therefore, as here, the employee who is excluded from the project that he contributed to and expected to be included in the implementation stage needs to establish othering attributes in operation as the motivation of the CEO who excluded him from the team entrusted with the implementation of the project.

Employees and clients who are impacted by both overt and covert assertions of privileged ethnic status by those in leadership positions do not always hold the power to support organizational efforts to update, review, and develop mechanisms for corrective and preventive action. A key reason for this lack of power among impacted employees lies in the purposeful creation of exclusionary and non-inclusive organizational environments that sustain the status quo while discouraging processes that foster belonging (Lowery, Knowles & Unzueta, 2007).

Vignette Three: Institutional Protection and Perpetuation of Delegitimization

Elena, a woman of mixed heritage (African and Indigenous), has been a faculty member at a community college for the past 15 years. Elena has observed how most of her White colleagues often seem more comfortable speaking about their gender and sexual orientation experiences than the minority colleagues whose expressions of anti-racist approaches are brushed aside in her work environment. Her White colleagues rarely acknowledge that they have benefitted from dominant norms and communication styles that favor their racial-ethnic experiences within educational institutions.

To cope with the ways that White dominance has often been manifested in program or institutional decision-making and opportunities, Elena has often distanced herself from colleagues whom she has perceived as color-blind and unaware of their Delegitimization. She found herself often using discernment in her interactions. Nevertheless, when a colleague openly undermined her contribution to a program that she participated in creating, and when administrative decisions were made that discontinued her ongoing participation, her strategy of isolation proved ineffective.

When Elena chose to confront the injustice, she had experienced, she discovered the extent to which Delegitimization is often protected and perpetuated within institutional systems. She encountered various tactics that maintained the status quo, such as the formation of exclusive alliances among those in power, tokenistic gestures that masked inaction, and unclear policies that obstructed transparency regarding complaint investigations. Additionally, Elena faced challenges like individual and institutional silence that ignored the realities of privilege, the marginalization of her contributions, and

power imbalances that concentrated decision-making authority in the hands of a select few, primarily from privileged racial and ethnic groups. While she was not surprised by the obstacles that she faced during her process to advocate for justice, the experience was emotionally draining and cognitively demanding.

Here, Elena's challenges have included isolation, cultural misunderstanding, and pressure to conform. While attempts have been made to raise consciousness, educational institutions have continued to struggle with deep-rooted racial-ethnic inequalities. Multiple factors have contributed to this condition, including White faculty members, both men and women, asserting the legitimization of their rights through alliances among White faculty members that have continued to advance "hegemonic whiteness" patterns and practices that normalize a White dominant culture.

Through her experience, Elena gained a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding institutional privileges assumed by members of the dominant groups and the importance of advocating for systemic change to create a more equitable environment for all faculty members and students. Being aware that assertion of Delegitimization, performed by men or women, does not only reflect interpersonal dynamics of power possibly held by one individual over another, but also that institutional dominance created historically through the promotion of privileged orientations, values, and norms can, and often does, create alliances that further delegitimize the rights of members of the minority groups. While it is understood that these dynamics of interactions are not always consciously driven, it is also recognized that such experiences continue to exist, affecting the lives of racially–ethnically minority individuals and groups. While it is understood that awareness alone does not create change, it is an important ingredient for continuing to promote transformation through conscious actions.

As noted by Mathew et al., (2023), some organizational stakeholders may present themselves as allies against discriminative actions faced by minority stakeholders. Yet the lack of genuine commitment to dismantling exclusive systems that reduces belonging and foster exclusion of marginalized stakeholders Sporadic pattern of slow action can, and often does, reinforce educational oppressive structures, producing further agony and distress to stakeholders who have already experienced racial marginalization.

Several writers (Mathew et al., 2023; Murray & Brooks-Immel, 2019) have examined the significant challenges often faced by racially and ethnically minoritized faculty members within the context of institutional exclusion. This is evident in Elena's case, where a number of colleagues protected those in power through silence. In doing so, they not only perpetuated the assertion of privilege but also contributed to the delegitimization of the rights of stakeholders who experience marginalization.

Vignette Four: Exclusionary and Non-inclusive Justifications for the Devaluation of Contributions Made by the Marginalized Employees

A tech organization at the cusp of making a major breakthrough is focused on increasing productivity and performance. A middle-level manager with a minority racial background was keen on extending the capacity of the organization to serve the schools in the region as he considered it the organization's social responsibility to serve the region's historically underrepresented communities to join the technology revolution, particularly, teaching with Artificial Intelligence tools.

The top leadership, composed of three leaders with Caucasian backgrounds, was focused on increasing the organization's profits. They argued that there would be time for giving back to the community. In fact, one of the top leaders argued that it is not the organization's responsibility to remedy past social inequalities.

The middle-level manager, who identifies as Black, was of the view that the organizational culture needs to undergo a major shift toward creating a diverse working environment, and that serving the region's underrepresented communities would further that objective in innumerable ways. The top leader disagreed with the middle-level manager. Consequently, the option of extending the organization's outreach to the region's unrepresented communities and schools was ignored.

Here, an excellent opportunity to build the organization's innovation around service and to strengthen its social responsibility was sidestepped, despite the middle-level manager's requests. While those operating within a dominant racial framework may prioritize outcomes that differ from those grounded in social responsibility, the undervaluation of the perspectives of leaders who see it as their responsibility to give back to underrepresented communities often results in their roles being treated as dispensable and secondary (Badenhorst et al., 2022; Bonilla-Silva, 2001).

This real or perceived undervaluation, in combination with the compartmentalization of different domains within the organization, is prevalent in exclusionary and non-inclusive environments, often serving to prevent the integration of individuals from diverse backgrounds and, in turn, hindering the development of an equitable organizational culture. The middle-level employee's efforts to expand the stakeholder base through inclusive practices, by taking into account the needs of the community in which the organization is situated, represent an organizational growth venture.

However, when leadership perspectives within an organization differ, and top leadership dictates are adopted as the basis for organizational growth without genuine consideration of alternative viewpoints, it can become difficult for members of minority backgrounds to adapt to the organizational culture. This challenge is further accentuated when top leadership focuses predominantly on economic growth at the expense of the empowerment of all organizational stakeholders (Baum et al., 1996; Berrey, 2015).

As discussed earlier in this article, not all employees impacted by overt and covert assertions of exclusion and delegitimization experience the power of decision-making and/or helping the organizations to update, review, and develop organizational mechanisms for corrective and preventive actions (Lowery, Knowles, & Unzueta, 2007). The organizational environment of exclusionary and non-inclusive organizations is often controlled by those who use their privilege for control. In such instances, unequal treatment can and often prevents the cohesive correspondence between the organizational goals, mission, and the priorities of the organizational objectives. Incongruence between the organizational environment and its goals create communicative strategies that act as norms that help to legitimize the assertion of Delegitimization to the detriment of organizational growth and integration.

Vignette Five: Using Intersectional Identities to Justify Exclusionary and Non-inclusive Frameworks and Delegitimization.

An Engineering department in a public university was undergoing a tumultuous time in the prioritization of the competing organizational goals. The department's current leadership and the preceding supervisor, both of whom are White, were making unilateral changes and appointments that were counterproductive to the university's mission of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion practices.

The current leader, countered objections to her appointment of those with neither experience nor capacity to assume the responsibility of managing the different units of the organization, with the assertion that she was giving more opportunities to women and that was addressing the needed diversity, equity, and inclusion principles. The leader was focused on strengthening her power base by creating cliques with intra group solidarity and intergroup conflicts based on work allocation.

Although faculty with minority backgrounds left the department in relatively high numbers because of the way the organization was deviating from its foundational goals, the leader of the department justified it by saying that diversity is not merely about the quantitative representation of faculty and staff with minority backgrounds. Rather it is about eliminating discrimination for the majority of the female faculty and staff. A few faculty of minority backgrounds had been accused of holding ideological viewpoints that were different from the department leader. As a result, they had also been ostracized and treated punitively.

Here, the leader's assertion of racial privilege, in conjunction with the protected gender category of "sex," illustrates how distinct categories of human classification and their associated frameworks can be combined to produce disparate impact. A department can be numerically diverse, with an increased representation of female faculty. Yet a consistently shrinking presence of faculty and staff from minority ethnic

and racial backgrounds may perpetuate exclusionary and non-inclusive privileges for members of historically privileged groups (Mannheimer et al., 2020).

Results: Discussion

- a) Overtly equality-based organizational environments may hold within their organizational culture, reductionistic exclusionary and non-inclusive framework, and communicative patterns that are normalized as organizational standards.

The historical origins of the preferences of some groups and the privileges associated with them are covertly promoted in organizational practices even when organizations support the remedies of past discrimination through diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. There seems to be a growing notion that equality exists in the United States and that there are sufficient measures in place to address instances of discrimination based on race and other minority statuses associated with race. Therefore, biased treatment of minorities, although acknowledged as detrimental to productivity and as preventing a cohesive approach to developing comprehensive solutions, innovation, and organizational growth, are continued until they rise to the level of extreme discrimination with a motive that can be attributed to race and racial constructs (Norton & Sommers, 2011; Patton & Jordan, 2017; Nkomo & Ariss, 2014).

- b) Organizations frequently use cultural and social cognitive schemas to establish a culture of social undermining and legitimize the assertion of power bases, including "Delegitimization." The deeply ingrained notion of "the ethnic other," often fostered by White supremacy (e.g., an ideology and systemic structure reinforcing racial inequality and the idea of white dominance), has sustained conscious and unconscious practices of invisibility, dismissal, distrust, and ultimate mistreatment of those categorized as "the other." This has been done in a number of ways, one being the covert construct of social hierarchies and power structures that deny the ripple effects and current manifested realities of historical oppressive forces such as overt and covert othering attribute (Thomas, 2004; Triana et al., 2015; White et al., 2021; Yona, 2018).
- c) The culture of control and subordination are commonly couched in the form of "organizational fit" and "productivity" to mask the social undermining of those who are targeted by leaders who operate under the assumption of normalizing "Delegitimization." The gradual elimination of inclusion and belonging efforts that are currently being unleashed in our nation based on the false premise that inclusiveness efforts are inequitable legitimizes the emerging trends in organizations that devalue belonging and inclusion processes. While now we have a reasonable legal framework to remedy discrimination that is actionable, assertions of privileges and resulting exclusions are often unchecked and allowed to persist until those assertions rise to the level of actionable discrimination under the applicable law.
- d) Generally, the logical outcome of the exclusion and delegitimization is the devaluation of inclusive practices and the legitimization of exclusionary practices. It is often not until a law has been broken that the unearned advantages promoted through assertions of delegitimization are recognized and, perhaps, addressed. Within the context of educational and/or service organizations, delegitimization is manifested in multiple ways, including privileged professionals profiting from institutional norms, standards, communication styles, and practices that align with their cultural backgrounds. Frequently, this has not been the case for racial-ethnic minorities who have often experienced organizational norms, standards, communication styles, and practices as less supportive and accommodating, at times impacting their access to opportunities and career growth.
- e) The exclusionary practices impact organizational health by reducing organizational cohesiveness and the trust of the stakeholders. Questions of assertion based on backgrounds unrelated to work need to be examined on the basis of who is included and who is excluded. How the pressing issues of status quo and punitive organizational culture, particularly the interactions of members of the faculty with each other and the individual level attitudes and behaviors towards members of the minority groups, need to be addressed in the context of the organizational mission (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Patton & Jordan, 2017).

While structurally, the organization may be perceived as an inclusionary organization, cognitively, it is an organization that categorizes minority faculty from a secondary and marginalized viewpoint, knowing and

being fully aware of the imbalance such categorization brings about. In such instances, the organizational schema may contradict the cognitive schema followed and communicated. It is in this context that the importance of organizational schema, with its attendant conceptualization, needs to be examined (Dover, 2022; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Feagin, 2020; Juris, 2008; Kendall, 2012).

The conceptualizations in exclusionary and non-inclusive organizations appear to be using cognitive discrimination to marginalize the faculty of minority backgrounds, and in the criticisms of those who associate with the movements of oppressed individuals, groups, and communities. Because the organizational schema allows rationalizations for arbitrary work assignments that are justified as having been allocated in the interests of the organization, as a matter of custom, those who agree with the organizational schema are often rewarded. For instance, the concept of equality and equity built around female colleagues' needs may be prioritized as a stimulus for the new organizational procedures established in contravention to the prior policies and procedures (Gee & Hicken, 2021; Hammonds, 2000; Mathew et al., 2023; Thomas, 2004; Triana et al., 2015; White et al., 2021; Wooten & Coulotte, 2017).

Because of the vertical, top-down approach followed in exclusionary and non-inclusive organizations, those who desperately need work often adjust their behavior to this schema and its attendant expectations. Because value is added to complying with the leader's preferential treatment, the department members expect certain behaviors, even egregious ones, as expected and normal and adjust to the hierarchical assumptions because adjustment to the perceived differences are viewed through the lens of power (Juris, 2008; Kendall, 2012; Lindner, 2018). Because of this adjustment, the scrutiny of exclusion and delegitimization-based leadership patterns can be minimized with an attitude of least resistance. Hammonds (2000) discussed this in exploring the role of differences in power. The assertion of privileges based on racial identity in well-established workplaces is less direct in our contemporary societies because of the legal frameworks that mainly forbid extreme direct discriminatory practices. However, the form such assertion has taken in contemporary societies has more to do with overt and covert attitudes often promoting a notion of those who assert such privileges in conjunction with behaviors and practices that stereotype those who are outside their group identification (Nkomo & Ariss, 2014). The ongoing devaluation of inclusion training and inclusive practices continues to create divisive and, to some extent, unhealthy organizational environments that are counterproductive to their mission and goal achievement.

Conclusion

We conclude that organizational environments can be conducive to exclusion and the delegitimization of the rights of marginalized groups when those in leadership positions act on their presumed privileges through conscious and unconscious exertion of power stemming from such assumed privileges, thus creating or maintaining exclusionary and non-inclusive organizational structure. When there are expectations that others subscribe to the worldview of the person asserting such privilege, such expectations create an unequal bargaining power in the organizational environment, and different strengths of the diverse members are ignored in preference for the status quo.

Assertions of privileges are detrimental to the communities that the organizations serve, and exclusionary and non-inclusive organizations create negative devaluation of some stakeholders' functions as members of the organization. The vignettes analyzed in this article demonstrate the disempowerment that occurs when an organization fails to include and bring together the diverse members of the organization to appreciate and integrate the different approaches and contributions and honor the organizational presence in the communities in which they are located.

Contrary to unconscious bias, those who intentionally practice exclusion are frequently conscious of their behaviors and the impact of their behaviors on those whom they try to assert their privileges over. Exclusionary and non-inclusive organizational structures facilitate the othering function. The opposite end of the continuum would be where members with different ethnic, cultural, religious, national, and gender backgrounds are brought together with critical reflection on the unique contributions that each of them can make to building the organization cohesively as an entity of growth, innovation, and excellence.

Recommendations:

Simply providing performative inclusion training and giving more information will not prevent and alleviate the assertion of privileges based on the dominant framework. Changing organizational environments with processes for modifying organizational culture begins with a historical understanding of the equity principles and their current devaluation precursors.

The organizational environment needs to be geared to the idea of safe identity spaces that comply with federal laws promoting belonging and an inclusive work culture that encompasses the entire organization. To some extent, the examination and, if necessary, the dismantling of power structures that preserve and further the assertion of privileges based on dominant frameworks is required. Fundamentally, because it is the exclusionary and non-inclusive and unexamined structure of the organizations that allows the assertion of privileges along dominant frameworks and creates spaces of delegitimization of the rights of marginalized stakeholders, change management directed to organizational restructuring with an emphasis on belonging and inclusion is required.

The training and education for preventing the consequences of the assertion of privileges based on dominant frameworks need to include anti-oppressive and anti-racist frameworks. According to Groyberg (Zinaty, 2021), “diversity is about counting the numbers. Inclusiveness is about making the numbers count.” The curriculum for the training needs to include mechanisms for the disruption in the established schema that involves the critical examination of stereotypes and the organizational loopholes that make it conducive for those who assert privileges based on dominant frameworks.

Organizational assessment to examine internal procedures for their alignment with the mission of the organization is a significant step in the right direction. When guided by consultants and change agents, the disruptive method of organizational change management, which can assess the organization's health, can bring about foundational changes in organizational environments. Organizations need to engage all the stakeholders through psychological, intellectual, spiritual, and social empowerment to create positive outcomes in how members interact with each other, particularly how the management interacts with the employees.

Section 703(m) of Title VII states that, “an unlawful employment practice is established when the complaining party demonstrates that race, color, religion, sex, or national origin was a motivating factor for any employment practice”. The process of demonstrating the assertion of privileges based on racial frameworks that have a negative impact on individual and organizational space at work is a complicated and time-consuming process that often fails. Therefore, setting up organizational structures that do not contribute to the assertion of exclusionary and non-inclusive delegitimization of the rights of marginalized populations is one of the key requirements for ensuring growth-oriented organizations where all stakeholders can contribute to positive outcomes.

Evaluation methods that assess organizational and individual outcomes need to integrate the Western privileged “objective” methods of evaluating outcomes with integrative cultural and organizational frameworks that appreciate the individual stakeholders’ experiences as integral parts of the organization. In such an organizational environment, the assumed superiority based on artificial categories unrelated to work is highly unlikely to act as stumbling blocks to innovation and growth. Institutions of higher education and training need to reframe the change in attitudes and interactions to integrate impeccably empathetic and wholistic organizational environments.

Covertly supporting the exclusion practices through the seemingly equitable organizational arrangements that maintain a divisive organizational culture needs to be actively seen as a threat to organizational productivity, cohesion, and growth. The metrics for organizational growth and cohesiveness need to be centered around integrating belonging initiatives into the organizational mission, vision, policies, and procedures.

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The authors report no conflict of interest. This study was conducted independently, utilizing the authors' own time and resources.