This book is dedicated to those who show up for work every day, who do their best, and who attempt to make a positive impact on their institutions and on society, in spite of the resistance they confront.
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1

The Many Faces of Diversity Resistance in the Workplace

Kecia M. Thomas and Victoria C. Plaut

As we commemorate EOEOC’s 50th anniversary this summer, it is sad to note the increase in recent years of the same type of behavior which compelled our nation to act 50 years ago.

Ida L. Castro, Chairwoman of U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Resistance to diversity is not a new or emerging issue. Every society and culture has confronted resistance to new immigrants, diverse ideologies, and simply different ways of being. The arguments against the abolition of slavery, voting and civil rights (Van Buren, 1996; Dix & Parker, 1999), and continuing debates about domestic partner and immigration legislation suggest that even in the twenty-first century, the United States still struggles with issues related to race, color, culture, language, and sexual identity. In fact, despite increasing explicit pronouncements of tolerance for diversity, actual accounts of workplace discrimination are on the rise (Wooten & James, 2004). In contrast to the past, instances of resistance are not as vocal nor as transparent, thus making them more difficult to identify and confront. Our discomforts, anxieties, fears, stereotypes, and anger persist and derail attempts at creating an inclusive society and culture, both inside as well as outside organizational life.

The topic of diversity is an enduring and likely permanent issue within organizational life. Common organizational efforts related to diversity within the workplace largely focus on recruitment and retention, and human resource development efforts related to diver-
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Resistance: An OD Perspective

Most of what we know about resistance in organizations is actually tied to organizational change. Resistance to change often is rooted in fears about an uncertain future, the relinquishment of the familiar, or a comfortable present, and perhaps frustration over the lack of control one may experience. When related to organizations, change is often a reflection of a perceived loss of status, power, and influence as well as uncertainty (French & Bell, 1999). Often resistance to change is expressed in worker reactions which may range from anger, fearfulness, and anxiety to resisting one’s perceived loss (French & Bell, 1999). Workers experiencing especially strong and negative emotions related to the impending change in their workplace may even attempts to derail or sabotage change efforts.

Organizational scholars have been very proactive in providing guidance to organizations that are undergoing change. These recommendations often center on communication and involvement. At the heart of these recommendations is the expectation that if employees feel involved in the change and if they frequently receive honest and straightforward communication about the change (rather than hear about it through rumor and innuendo), they will experience less anxiety and less resistance to it. Another strategy is to justify the impending change by communicating and demonstrating that the current system or way of doing things is unsatisfactory and even threatening to the organization and therefore to workers’ employment. Another means of moving through resistance is to hold workers accountable for learning and adapting to the change forthcoming and allowing persistent resistors to identify other sources of employment.

In many ways the growing attention and rate of demographic growth in the workplace is a form of organizational change. The 1984 Hudson Institute report, Workforce 2000 (Johnston & Tackett, 1987), was an attempt to communicate to both organizations and to the labor force that there was a major change on the horizon that would not only impact the recruitment and retention of workers, but also the career development and workplace relationships of the employees themselves (Thomson, 2005).

Yet the changes brought on by diversity are also unique; especially since these changes have prompted organizations and workers to
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Organizational scholars have talked about resistance to diversity and diversity initiatives largely in terms of White male backlash (Solomon, 1991). This backlash has largely focused on the emotional responses of White males who perceive growing interest in diversity as a threat to their career opportunities and development. Within the context of work, these negative emotions are largely driven by feelings that White men are being outnumbered and that other workers, presumably unqualified women and minorities, are taking away their opportunities and jobs (Jacques, 1997).

A more recent trend in the organizational literature is to discuss resistance as an organizational paradigm or perspective as it relates to diversity (Dass & Parker, 1999). A resistance perspective is one characterized by a dominant response to diversity that is reactive and which includes denial, avoidance, defiance, and/or manipulation (Dass & Parker, 1999). Two of the three diversity paradigms offered by Thomas and Ely (1996), namely the discrimination and fairness paradigm, and the access and legitimacy paradigm, reflect organizational perspectives about diversity in which underrepresented and marginalized workers are discriminated against—expected to assimilate (discrimination and fairness) or only accepted for their expected ability to offer organizations entry into their ethnic communities (access and legitimacy).

Both paradigms reflect an organizational inability to perceive and enact diversity as a critical opportunity for employee and organizational learning that could subsequently enhance institutional effectiveness, which is their third paradigm, learning and effectiveness (Thomas & Ely, 1996).

Our working definition of diversity resistance is outcome based and therefore it moves beyond focusing on emotions and seeks to understand both the individual and organizational behaviors and practices that impede diversity initiatives and the access and fair treatment of minority (broadly defined) workers in organizations. With that in mind, we define diversity resistance as a range of practices and behaviors within and by organizations that interfere, intentionally or unintentionally, with the use of diversity as an opportunity for learning and effectiveness.

At the interpersonal level, diversity resistance can therefore involve the rejection, exclusion, harassment and/or subordination of others based upon differences, as well as more obvious overt, hostile, and intentional actions and hate crimes. At the level of the orga-
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Opportunities and challenges for diversity-related initiatives in the workplace are complex and often contentious. Diversity resistance, both overt and covert, can manifest in various forms, reflecting the complexities of organizational dynamics and individual experiences. Understanding and addressing these resistance forms is crucial for creating inclusive and equitable work environments.

### Understanding Diversity Resistance

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<th>Levels of Diversity Resistance</th>
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<td>Covert</td>
<td>Unconscious bias or discrimination</td>
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<td>Subtle</td>
<td>Subtle manifestations of diversity resistance</td>
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### Overt Cases of Diversity Resistance

Cases of overt resistance to diversity are typically easy to identify, and there are frequently institutional or societal policies and regulations in place to address them. Contemporary resistance to diversity is more subtle, reflecting an individual level of analysis and frequently includes instances of discrimination and harassment. Websites such as the EEOC (http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/facts.html) provide resources on how to identify and address these forms of resistance. Overt forms of resistance often involve direct statements or actions that are easily identifiable and actionable.

### Covert Cases of Diversity Resistance

Cases of covert resistance to diversity are more challenging to identify and address. Covert resistance can manifest in numerous ways: exclusion, avoidance, distancing, and even silence. Organizations often engage in policies and practices that resist diversity in overt and covert ways, which can make it difficult to identify and address these forms of resistance. Understanding and addressing covert forms of resistance require a deeper level of awareness and intentional action to create inclusive and equitable work environments.

### Graphic Representation

Figure 1.1: A taxonomy of diversity resistance in organizations.
mate for diversity that was most visibly manifested in a dozen (some reports suggest more) noises that were allowed to hang in the organization's facilities until after the original suit was filed (McDonnell, 2003). Likewise Georgia Power, a Southern Company subsidiary, also knew about and tolerated hangmen's noises; however, the company did not acknowledge that noises found in workplaces where Blacks worked were intended to harass or intimidate those workers (Trigaux, 2000). The incidence of noises at Georgia Power actually continued (and some reports suggest escalated) after Black employees sought class action suit status for racial harassment and the offensive climate that was allowed to persist for Black workers. Illegal selection and promotion practices such as those alleged against Wal-mart also reflect diversity resistance.

At times, individual and organizational behaviors and practices that are "well intentioned" may actually resist diversity (Mio & Awakuni, 2000). These forms of diversity resistance are especially dangerous because the individuals and leadership teams involved are frequently unaware of the harm they inflict on marginalized workers, and it is difficult for them to accept their practices or policies as averse to diversity. Subsequently, subtle and frequently well-meaning and good intentioned forms of diversity resistance are rarely changed because those who perpetrate them are rarely motivated to eliminate them (Mio & Awakuni, 2000). Silence, as an individual action and as a cultural norm, is another important subtle manifestation of diversity resistance that rarely gets discussed.

Subtle Forms of Diversity Resistance

Individual Level. The passive acceptance of others' discrimination is one frequent form of diversity resistance. Silence in the face of others' discrimination, harassment, and mistreatment only serves to reinforce the resistance and does nothing to challenge it. Certainly bystanders who witness the placement of noises in offices, cubicles, and workplaces in many ways are accessories to those acts. Ted Gig-nilist, a 20-year White worker at Lockheed Martin had remained silent in the face of Black coworkers' racial harassment and hangmen's noises for several years until an injury revealed to him what mistreatment can feel like for Black workers (Trigaux, 2000). Once he began reporting racist occurrences and the noises to supervisors, he, too, became a target of harassment. The harassment became so bad that eventually he changed his home phone number in order to stop the threats he received (Trigaux, 2000).

Other more subtle forms of individual-level diversity resistance often reflect interpersonal discrimination, namely exclusion, avoidance, and social distancing (Lott & Malasp, 1995). For example, Thomas (2005) discusses how social distancing in the workplace denies opportunities for minority career development and mobility. Dominant group workers distance themselves from others who belong to more marginalized groups for many reasons. For example, potential male mentors may distance themselves from women because they fear the perception that the relationship is romantic or that the female protégé may develop romantic feelings. Women may also be distanced if stereotypes are embraced that suggest they are incompetent or have less of a "payback period" due to less work commitment (Cos., 1994) as compared to male protégés. These stereotypes and beliefs frequently create barriers to receiving the career-related benefits of mentoring, especially in industries or work environments that are male-dominated. Research by Dreher & Cox (1996) also suggests that there are some very real financial losses that result from not having a White male mentor, specifically. In their study of MBAs, those with a White male mentor had a $7000 salary advantage over those that had no mentor, or a mentor who was a person of color or a woman. That is, financially, having a female mentor or a mentor that was a person of color was equivalent to not having any mentor! Therefore, distancing of White men (especially) from women and members of ethnic minority groups may be particularly harmful both professionally and financially.

Organizational forms of diversity resistance can also be covert and passive, for example when organizations engage in secondary victimization (Murphy, 2001). When minority group members have no recourse for the discrimination they confront and when there are no viable alternatives for seeking a resolution to their harassment and discrimination out of fear this will be further victimized, secondary victimization occurs. This experience can eventually lead the victimized to accept (and in some cases rationalize) the prejudice directed toward them (Phare, 1988).

Another more subtle form of organizational resistance to diversity can be explained as ethnic drift (LeFkowitz, 1994). For example, unconscious institutionalized practices of assigning minority newcomers supervisors of their same ethnicity create limited oppor-
and diversity by implicitly excusing intolerance (Thomas, Mack, & Montagani, 2004). Diversity resistance is a relatively unexplored topic within human resources, yet it has costly implications for organizations that allow it to persist. Workers that experience this resistance incur costs to their ability to gain employment, to their opportunities for career development, and even to their health, in the form of work-related stress.

The Costly Outcomes of Diversity Resistance

One significant outcome of resistance to diversity is conflict. Certainly at the foundation of interpersonal discrimination and hate crimes in organizations is the internal conflict some employees experience between whom they believe should work in their workplace and whom should not. They seek to eliminate this conflict by intimidating minority workers or engaging in otherwise negative behaviors that would motivate minorities to leave. It is relatively easy to see discrimination and harassment as likely outcomes of resistance. It is more difficult to see other forms of conflict that come out of resistance to diversity.

Friedman and Davidson (2001) discuss conflict related to diversity as occurring as first-level conflict and second-level conflict. First-level conflict is the actual discrimination and harassment already discussed. Second-level conflict is related to the more covert and hidden forms of resistance that impede organizations’ abilities to effectively resolve first-order conflict. That is, second-level conflict may actually represent conflict about how to address workplace discrimination and harassment, how diversity is defined, and which diversity strategies to pursue. Affirmative action is clearly one of those diversity strategies about which employees may have vastly different opinions that are resistant to express due to fear of escalating conflict. Unaddressed sentiments can lead to autonomic hostility that details other diversity efforts (Friedman & Davidson, 2001).

Organizational Level Costs

Diversity resistance leads to financial, productivity, developmental, and emotional costs. Watson & Hoffman’s (1996) research suggests that managers spend up to 42% of their time related to the resolu-
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Explanations for Diversity Resistance

Explanations for Overt Forms of Resistance

The persistence of workplace discrimination and harassment, specifically, can be explained by multiple individual difference, cognitive, motivational, and cultural factors. In terms of individual differences, individual hostility (e.g., hostile sexism) and value orientations (e.g., authoritarianism) can drive discrimination. From a more cognitive perspective, stereotypes about certain groups are widely known and can lead to evaluating employees on the basis of category membership rather than individual merit—especially when the target is in the minority or there is a lack of perceived fit between their category and occupation (Zuck, Beroff, Boggida, Deaux, & Hallman, 1991). Furthermore, when a target disconfirms a stereotype (e.g., a nurturing woman leader) she is likely to be stigmatized (e.g., "career woman"), leaving the original stereotype intact. Numerous motivational factors also explain the persistence of discrimination. According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), people not only categorize individuals into in-groups and out-groups, but they also confer positive distinctiveness on their own groups because they are motivated to enhance self-esteem and, therefore, prejudice others when self-esteem is threatened. Sinclair and Kanada (2000) found that men disparaged a female manager when given negative feedback, but not positive feedback, by her; however, the same difference was not found when the manager was male. Other motivations include competition for resources (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1963), maintaining power over subordinate groups (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), and concern for the ingroup (Lowery, Unczuz, Knowles, & Goff, 2000).

Explanations for Subtle Forms of Resistance

What currently makes discrimination and harassment more insidious is the fact that in the last few decades, racism and sexism seem to have gone undercover. Whereas explicit forms of prejudice and discrimination have decreased in many settings, implicit, subtle, or covert forms of prejudice persist. For example, modern racism
Silence as a Form of Resistance

But in this era of increased condemnation of discrimination, why do individuals remain silent in the face of others’ discrimination and harassment? Various social-psychological explanations can help us understand this lack of action, in particular, those associated with Latané and Darley’s (1970) five-step model of helping. First, individuals have to notice that discrimination is occurring. Given that discrimination can occur in subtle or institutionalized ways (not always perpetrated by individuals with explicit intent to harm), this can be hard to do. If individuals are distracted, or are preoccupied by self-concerns such as getting their jobs done, they may not be fully aware of these behaviors. Second, individuals have to code behaviors as discriminatory, which will fail if they perceive them as “none of their business” or as sufficiently ambiguous to determine whether a transgression took place. (Did he really harass her or was he just mildly flirting?) Even if individuals think an action is wrong, they might fail prey to pluralistic ignorance—misperceiving the social norm and believing that other people (who are also not explicitly expressing any concern) believe the action is more acceptable than they do. Third, individuals have to take personal responsibility. Unfortunately, being in a group can actually decrease the chances of offering help, through a process known as diffusion of responsibility (someone else is already done something about this or will do something). Fourth, individuals have to decide how to help and feel competent to act. An individual might not feel skilled in addressing a discriminatory behavior and might not realize that a little effort can go a long way (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Fifth, the individual has to act. If there are costs associated with voicing a complaint, silence will prevail.

There are tremendous potential costs to holding someone a racist or a harasser—costs that could involve not only embarrassment but also losing one’s job. Relatedly, people typically don’t like to be the whistle-blower, to rock the boat, or to appear deviant. The pressure of normative, majority influence can compel people to stay silent even when a behavior is unambiguously wrong (Asch, 1955). In addition, individuals engage in self-protective processes. The desire to believe one lives in a meritocracy can lead to making defensive personal attributions for others’ negative outcomes (e.g., blaming the victim).

To the extent that individuals target attacks against them and discriminatory behavior is justified and rationalized, change will not occur.

**Micro Solutions**

Are there then, solutions for these issues? Given the socially entrenched, and often implicit and covert nature of some of these processes, changing individual behavior poses a significant challenge. Solutions that have been offered for reducing prejudice and discrimination include intergroup contact (Allport, 1954), coop-
creative learning (Aronson, Stueh, Sikes, Blaney, & Snapp, 1978), perspective-taking (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000), and encouraging a common identity (Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio, Bachman, & Anastasio, 1993). Attempts at changing norms could also yield some success. When people are led to think that their perceptions of minority group members are more stereotypical than are others’ they endorse fewer stereotypes (Stangor, Sechrist, & Just, 2001). Encouraging individuals to be cognizant of their racial, gender, and ideological biases could also help. Efforts can also be made to decrease the tendency for observers of discriminatory action to remain silent. These include encouraging personal accountability so that individuals do not simply believe that someone else is going to intervene, fostering more open communication about people’s true feelings about discriminatory behaviors so that people don’t misperceive social norms, clarifying the simple steps that can be followed for intervening so that individuals can feel competent in reacting to such behavior, and minimizing the personal costs associated with reporting discrimination.

**Macro Explanations for Resistance**

Organizations by themselves do not choose to discriminate, harass, nor derive diversity; individuals engage in those behaviors. Therefore, all of the individual-level explanations offered for diversity resistance apply when attempting to understand organizational behavior, especially that of leaders. Leaders establish the values and in many ways drive the cultures of organizations. They establish the human resource policies and practices that can support or denigrate attempts to create inclusive workplace climates. Therefore, the values and practices of leaders, especially as organizational role models, deserve extra scrutiny in understanding why and how organizations resist diversity.

Although organizations are driven by human behaviors and inequities, organizations are also microcosms of the larger society. Thomas, Mack, and Montaglani (2004) suggest that the resistance perpetuated by organizations is simply a reflection of the larger cultural ideologies that resist inclusion and diversity, such as the color-blind ideal, the society as a melting pot, and the meritocracy myth. Each of these ideologies may on their surface appear to support diversity, but at their foundation each really supports sameness, homogeneity, assimilation, and maintaining the status quo (Plaut, 2002). Wooten & James (2004) suggest that the dominant routines of organizational life prevent organizations from effectively identifying and addressing and rectifying workplace discrimination. Two "routine"-based explanations offered are that: (1) organizations rarely engage in reflective (double-loop) learning, and (2) organizations adopt defensive routines when events occur (like public claims of harassment and discrimination). Organizational leaders rarely look to their existing values and culture to better understand the occurrence of bias and discrimination. Instead, when these events occur, they deny claims, defend the organization (and at times justify the organization), and use the mere existence of EEO as a rationale for why discrimination could not possibly occur (Wooten & James, 2004).

In many ways, the mere existence of EEO policies may let organizations off the hook; after all, the principle of fairness is typically one in which there is ample agreement. However, when initiatives and practices to support EEO and fairness are actually put into effect, there may be widespread disagreement (Van Buren, 1996). Van Buren also argues that workers are not resistant to the idea of fairness and EEO, but they "... are resistant to programs that seek to implement the value of equal employment opportunity" (p. 12). That is, programs that seek to dismantle existing norms that may be disadvantageous to minority and marginalized groups, and those that challenge ways of working together, frequently face resistance. Furthermore, the more underrepresented groups become better represented (thus potentially shifting systems of power), the more resistance occurs, especially if dominant groups begin to feel under siege, threatened, and that the larger culture is under attack (Van Buren, 1996). Like Thomas, Mack, and Montaglani (2004), Van Buren (1996) suggests that managerial resistance to programs that support inclusion in organizations is largely driven by myths. These myths include the belief that discrimination is something of the past, that existing disparities among groups based upon demographic differences is due to differences in merit, that the organization lacks the resources for strong EEO programs, and that these programs do not support the business case for diversity. The prevalence of these myths are striking when you consider them in contrast to the national context.
in which multinational-dollar settlements occur almost weekly for workplace-found guilt of discrimination and harassment. Perhaps the most effective strategy for ridding organisations of diversity resistance is to address it at its multiple levels and in its many varieties. Certainly, organizational leaders must accept the charge of better understanding how their work environments may actually reinforce and promote interpersonal discrimination and harassment in its most subtle forms. Understanding how systems of privilege (Thomas, 1996) create opportunities for some workers and deny opportunities for others is an important lesson that can help leaders better critique existing policies and practices. Like individuals, organizations, namely their leaders, need the motivation to develop in their own diversity consciousness (Chrobot-Mason & Thomas, 2002). The frequency of settlement and court cases and the significant financial costs incurred (the business case for diversity) do not appear to be motivation enough (Litvin, 2006).

References

2

Understanding and Defusing Resistance to Diversity Training and Learning

Donna Chrobot-Mason,
Rosemary Hays-Thomas, and Heather Wishik

Resistance can be one of the most difficult aspects of educating about diversity and social justice. (Goodman, 2001, p. 43)

We agree. The best-planned educational experiences can be disrupted by participant behaviors that are unpredictable, distracting, argumentative, or even threatening. Take, for example, the following account from the third author: A diversity training workshop was held at a U.S. chemical company, and managers and leaders were strongly encouraged to attend. Topics included race, culture, gender, and sexual orientation. During the sexual orientation segment, while a consultant was debriefing the whole group, several participants surrounded a colleague sitting in the back row after he pulled out and opened a large folding knife and began vigorously tapping the blade on his thigh.

This chapter addresses resistance to diversity training in U.S. organizations. For purposes of this chapter, diversity training is referred to as a form of diversity learning accomplished through formal classes and workshops, which is the focus of most U.S. research. Diversity learning «is also take place outside such settings, including through teams and project-based work experiences, mentoring relationships, and other interactions. Diversity learning, at its best, involves awareness as well as behavior and skill building, and thus implies change. Unfortunately, diversity learning outside of formal