

## Improving Organizational Responses to Sexual Harassment Using the Giving Voice to Values Approach

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*Despite significant expenditures on organizational responses to sexual harassment, it remains a persistent challenge. We argue that the legal environment has unduly and negatively influenced the ways in which organizations address the problem of sexual harassment and offer an alternative. Giving Voice to Values (GVV) is an action-oriented approach to business ethics education that can be used to improve the ways in which organizations address the phenomenon of sexual harassment (SH). Because of its focus on action and expressing personal values, GVV can be used to prepare targets, observers, and managers to intervene in instances where they may encounter this behavior at work. The original contribution of this article is a detailed application of GVV to the unique organizational issue of SH training. Ways of developing dialogue in response to sexual behavior at work are presented and implications of the GVV approach are discussed. Organization Management Journal, 12: 236–248, 2015. doi: 10.1080/15416518.2015.1096760*

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Given the substantial financial (Enjoli, 2012; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], 2013) and human (see Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007) costs arising from sexual harassment (SH), it is not surprising that organizations spend billions of dollars on programs to prevent, manage, and correct SH and other employment law problems (Silverstein, 1998). Despite these substantial expenditures aimed at prevention, a recent survey indicates that 75% of working adults believe SH in the workplace is widespread and warrants increased attention (Angus Reid, 2014). Thus, it is clear that SH continues to be a real and present ethical challenge in the workplace that deserves increased attention by both scholars and practitioners (Bowes-Sperry & O’Leary-Kelly, 2005;

Hollyoak & Mayo, 2014; Pierce & Aguinis, 2005; Pierce, Broberg, McClure, & Aguinis, 2004). In this article we explore how an action-oriented approach to business ethics education, Giving Voice to Values (GVV) (Gentile, 2010a), can be applied to the topic of SH. Much of the research on GVV has focused on describing the pedagogy, explaining the contribution it can make to undergraduate and graduate management education, and sharing the innovations of early adopters. The original contribution of this article is a detailed application of GVV to the unique organizational issue of SH training. The article begins with discussion of the legalization of SH training in organizations and outlines key problems with this approach. Next we discuss the effectiveness of traditional SH training drawing on both scholarly and practitioner literature. Finally, we apply the Giving Voice to Values curriculum to SH to demonstrate how approaching SH training through a lens of performative ethics (Edwards, Webb, Chappell, Kirkham, & Gentile, 2015) can empower targets and observers of SH and positively shift personal experiences and the organizational cultures in which they operate.

### THE LEGALIZATION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT TRAINING

Organizational responses to SH have gone through a process of “legalization” whereby decision making is overly influenced by the legal environment, resulting in legal concerns trumping managerial concerns (Meyer, 1983; Sitkin & Bies, 1993). Organizations mitigate their legal liability for incidents of SH occurring within their purview by developing and communicating SH policies, providing SH training, and having an SH grievance procedure that SH targets are required to invoke to gain legal recourse (Hebert, 2007). It has been estimated that 90% of organizations offer sexual harassment training because of concern regarding legal liability (Dolezalek, 2005; Martucci & Lu, 2005; McDonald, 2012; Perry, Kulik, Bustamante, & Golom, 2010). In some cases, the duration and content of SH training are dictated by law. For example, Californian employers must provide employees with a government brochure (outlining the legal definitions of SH, examples of SH, and a description of the organization’s internal complaint process), or an equivalent (California Department of Fair Employment and Housing, n.d.). Further, companies with 50 or more employees must provide at least 2 hours of interactive training to all supervisory employees every 2 years ([http://www.dfeh.ca.gov/Publications\\_StatLaws\\_SexHarrass.htm](http://www.dfeh.ca.gov/Publications_StatLaws_SexHarrass.htm)). Thus, it is not surprising that legal dictates have been instrumental in

shaping the methods used to address SH in organizations. Unfortunately, the legalization of SH training has created problematic dynamics, rather than addressing the issue effectively (Grossman, 2003; Hebert, 2007; Perry et al., 2010).

### **PROBLEMS WITH THE LEGALIZATION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT TRAINING**

The legalization of SH training has created a paradox of power (Sitkin & Bies, 1993) in which the espoused goal is to protect the less powerful while in reality it serves to protect the more powerful employer (Grossman, 2003). Disseminating legal definitions is important but not sufficient for dealing effectively with the subjective nature of perceived SH (Fitzgerald, Swan, & Magley, 1997). Further, the legal definition of SH and legal standards used for establishing SH have been criticized on several counts, including emphasis on sexual behaviors at the expense of the more pervasive phenomenon of gender harassment (which is not sexual in nature) and the subjectivity of hostile environment SH, which leads to questions such as, under what conditions is SH considered severe, pervasive, or unwelcome (Gutek et al., 1999; McGinley, 2012)?

An overemphasis on legal definitions can have unintended consequences. Employees may be reluctant to label sexual behavior at work as SH for fear of misdiagnosing the behavior they witnessed, or experienced, because their action could result in retaliation, ostracism, and/or a coworker losing his or her job. Ambiguity of the legal definition of SH may also explain the finding that targets of SH typically do not report their experiences (Hebert, 2007; Wasti & Cortina, 2002), inasmuch as they are uncertain that the behavior they experienced constitutes illegal harassment. Research suggests that observers of sexual behavior at work also have difficulty determining whether or not such behavior is unwelcome by targets or creates a hostile environment, and thus whether or not it constitutes SH (Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005). Furthermore, uncertainty regarding whether or not sexual behavior at work constitutes SH is negatively related to the likelihood that observers will define the sexual behavior they witness as an ethical issue and, in turn, express intentions to intervene (Bowes-Sperry & Powell, 1999).

Due in part to the vagueness surrounding the phenomenon, many people are reluctant to consider SH as an issue worthy of investigation or organizational resources (Berdahl & Aquino, 2009). The tendency to trivialize or dismiss SH claims is evidenced by the following excerpt from *USA Today's* Opinion and Editorial page (USA Today, 2011): "Sexual harassment claims are some sort of racket . . . Is there anyone who thinks SH is a real thing?" (Hersch & Moran, 2013, p. 753–754). This quote illustrates a perspective that sexual behavior at work is ordinary if not banal. The result is a critical disconnect between the magnitude of this organizational issue and the ineffectiveness of current means used to address it. The result is a lack of voice and perpetuation of the status quo.

In addition to issues arising from definitional ambiguity, issues associated with formalization (Sitkin & Bies, 1993) also serve to weaken the impact of organizational responses to SH. Formalized reporting mechanisms are the primary method used by organizations to address SH despite the fact that most targets will not use such mechanisms (Hebert, 2007), due in part to the potentially adversarial nature of the reporting and subsequent investigation procedures (Knapp, Faley, Ekeberg, & Dubois, 1997; Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2007). Thus, reporting mechanisms that are designed to decrease an organization's legal liability are not likely to resolve the majority of SH occurring in the workplace (Bisom-Rapp, 2001).

### **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT TRAINING**

While research on SH training provides recommendations for content and process (Macdonald, Charlesworth & Graham, 2015), overall, little is known about SH training effectiveness (Antecol & Cobb-Clark, 2003; Buchanan, Settles, Hall & O'Connor, 2014; Goldberg, 2011; Newman, Jackson, & Baker, 2003). Macdonald, Charlesworth, and Graham (2015) developed a conceptual framework of sexual harassment prevention strategies using existing empirical research on SH training and policies. Based on their review of the research, they conclude that SH training is most effective when training occurs more than once, all individuals within the organization are trained, and training is included in orientation. Using data from a 2002 Department of Defense survey, Buchanan, Settles, Hall, and O'Connor (2014) found the following factors to contribute to perceived effectiveness of SH training: defining what sexual harassment is, providing information about policies, procedures, and consequences associated with SH, and presenting information leading individuals to feel safe complaining about SH.

On the other hand, Buchanan et al. (2014) found that when SH training was perceived as ineffective, women were less likely to report their harassment because they felt too uncomfortable to report it or because another employee "talked them out of" reporting it. Goldberg's (2007) results also indicate a reduced likelihood of trainees to confront harassers after a lecture-based training session. This finding may be due to the nature of the training, which included discussion of negative consequences (e.g., retaliation) that can be associated with reporting SH. In contrast, GVV training empowers individuals to overcome reasons and rationalizations as to why they should not "voice their values" in response to wrongdoing. Given the findings of

Goldberg (2007) and Buchanan et al. (2014), the GVV principles and practices could make a significant contribution to SH training effectiveness.

It is questionable whether increased knowledge regarding one's legal responsibilities in regard to SH translates into changed behavior in the workplace or attitudes in general (Bisom-Rapp, 2001). There is evidence that existing SH training (typically driven by and focused on legal considerations, as already delineated) can result in negative outcomes such as a decreased likelihood of recognizing behaviors as sexually coercive and of willingness to report SH, as well as an increased likelihood of blaming the victim (Bingham & Scherer, 2001). Moreover, the perception that litigation avoidance is the impetus behind SH training may decrease learner motivation (Kath, 2005) and can result in a mentality of punishment avoidance (Asgharzadeh, 2013), thereby producing unintended consequences such as social distancing between colleagues (Thongsukmag, 2003) and discouraging senior men from mentoring young women (Epstein, Saute, Oglensky, & Gever, 1995). Research suggests face-to-face training is more effective than computer-based methods in training intended to change attitudes (Perry et al 1998). Further, experiential methods are more powerful than other methods for increasing empathy, reducing resistance, and increasing self-efficacy (Buchanan et al., 2014; Zawadzki, Shields, Danube, & Swim, 2014). The research of Perry et al. (2010, p. 199) indicates that best training practices are "of secondary importance or perhaps even irrelevant" to the perceived effectiveness of SH training that is implemented to reduce legal liability because the mere act of offering the training meets legal requirements—there is no requirement for the training to change attitudes, behaviors, or results related to SH. This is an example of the justice paradox emanating from legalization (Sitkin & Bies, 1993, p. 349) because the managerial decision to offer SH training for the purpose of legal compliance may interfere with actually addressing and preventing SH in the organization, resulting in "law without justice". Resources (i.e., time and money) employed to deliver training that does not deliver behavioral change could be used for other, more effective, efforts. Given the legal requirements and the difficulty of dealing with emotionally laden topics (Jackson, 1999), it is understandable that much training has focused on raising awareness of the legal consequences and participants' ability to recognize SH. Yet it is not enough for SH training to improve knowledge of the legal aspects of SH and/or attitudes toward SH. The business ethics literature is replete with stories of individuals knowing the "right" action to take yet choosing not to take it for a variety of reasons (Gentile, 2010a).

In summary, there is evidence that SH training focused primarily on the legal aspects surrounding SH is lacking in effectiveness. We argue that in addition to increasing knowledge of legal aspects, SH training must develop the skills of SH targets, observers, and managers who have decided that taking action is the right thing to do. While avoiding lawsuits is a response to SH, we argue that it is not sufficient to eliminate SH. In this context, we suggest the Giving Voice to Values (GVV) approach developed by Gentile (2010a) as a method for improving the effectiveness of organizational responses to SH.

## **THE GVV OPTION**

GVV (Gentile, 2010a) is both a philosophy and an innovative collection of curriculum materials that is transforming ethics education. The GVV curriculum is not about developing a person's moral reasoning but rather enabling people to voice the values of their current level of moral development. GVV is a thought experiment that asks, "If I were to voice and act on my values, what would I do and say?" This is a subtle but important shift in developing ethical awareness and action in that the focus moves from deciding whether one should act to how one can most effectively act when facing a values conflict (Gentile, 2012). The underlying premise is that giving voice is a muscle that needs to be developed. Through practice, we can build a fitness in our ability to voice that extends our set of available options. GVV enables a range of possibilities between the two extremes of remaining silent and exploding with self-righteous value assessments.

In a GVV case, the person experiencing a values conflict to which the person wishes to give voice is called the protagonist. With regard to SH in the workplace, GVV protagonists could include (a) individuals who feel implicitly pressured to join in SH (i.e., by laughing at an offensive joke, overlooking a candidate for a promotion, etc.), (b) individuals who are the target of SH, and (c) individuals who have witnessed SH (i.e., observers). The GVV curriculum and philosophy offer a performative and practice-based ethical approach to addressing these situations (Edwards et al., 2015):

Performative ethics places communicative acts at the centre of all ethical problem solving. Engaging in dialogue, finding out what shared values and interests we may have in common is a *starting point* [emphasis added] for a more honest engagement with ethical issues. Resolving an ethical dilemma . . . means engaging in a shared process that gives expression to peoples' closely held values. Possibility and engagement through the performing of speech acts is the key feature of performative ethics. (p. 253)

The boundary conditions for the GVV thought experiment are constructed by the GVV assumptions and are listed in Table 1.

The GVV assumptions begin with the notion that we want to voice our values, we have done so in the past, and we can learn to do it better (Gentile, 2010a). The intention here is to foreground the reality that many people

have examples of both skillful responses to SH values conflicts (i.e., choosing not to laugh, to walk away, to state your disagreement, etc.), and, conversely, of regretfully thinking “this is what I should have said.” Consequently, we can identify with the possibility and desire to

**TABLE 1**  
The GVV assumptions

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1. I want to voice and act upon my values.
  2. I have voiced my values at some points in my past.
  3. I can voice my values more often and more effectively.
  4. It is easier for me to voice my values in some contexts than others.
  5. I am more likely to voice my values if I have practiced how to respond to frequently encountered conflicts.
  6. My example is powerful.
  7. Although mastering and delivering responses to frequently heard rationalizations can empower others who share my views to act, I cannot assume I know who those folks will be.
  8. The better I know myself, the more I can prepare to play to my strengths and, when necessary, protect myself from my weaknesses.
  9. I am not alone.
  10. Although I may not always succeed, voicing and acting on my values is worth doing.
  11. Voicing my values leads to better decisions.
  12. The more I believe it's possible to voice and act on my values, the more likely I will be to do so.
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*Note.* From Gentile (2010a, pp. 3–21).

build our capacity to speak more skillfully when we observe or experience SH. GVV recognizes that voicing our values is easier in some contexts than in others. As outlined earlier, giving voice in response to perceived SH at work is particularly challenging and therefore represents an area worthy of increased attention and potential. Another assumption of GVV is that we are more likely to give voice if we have practiced doing so (Gentile, 2010a). However, since most SH training focuses primarily on legal aspects of SH (e.g., McDonald, 2012; Perry et al., 2010), organizational members are not likely to have practiced voicing values in the context of sexual and sexist behavior at work. In contrast, the GVV curriculum engages learners in practicing the desired behaviors for addressing and preventing SH and so offers greater likelihood for training transference into the work-place (Burke, Bradley, Wallace, & Christian, 2009). Observing a colleague voice their displeasure with a sexist joke authorizes others who feel the same by showing them it is possible. The GVV view is that through voicing values and engaging in these difficult communications, we contribute to making better decisions for ourselves, and the systems of which we are a part, regardless of whether or not we feel successful in our attempts (Gentile, 2010a). Through planning and practicing responses to incidents of SH in the classroom, we build self-efficacy for doing so in real-time situations. To summarize, these assumptions provide a container for the GVV thought experiment. SH training programs employing the GVV pedagogy would invite participants to hold the space where these assumptions are a possible reality.

### **GVV IN ORGANIZATIONAL SETTINGS**

The GVV curriculum is flexible and action-oriented and uses the language of business (Gentile, 2012). Originally designed as an alternate approach for teaching business ethics to MBA students, GVV has been extended throughout and beyond university settings to more than 300 educational/executive settings (Gentile, 2013). Companies that have explored and/or piloted GVV include WalMart, Consolidated Edison, General Mills, Prudential, Northrup Grumman, General Dynamics, Bertelsman, Chemonics, National Grid, Mayo Clinic, Kaiser Permanente, The Institute for Chartered Accountancy of Ontario, Ethics Resource Center, Ethics and Compliance Officers' Association, National Investment Company Service Association, Net Impact, FriendFactor, and more (Gentile, 2014). Lockheed Martin began working with the GVV approach in 2011 and has since incorporated it into ethics, compliance, and leadership training programs (Gonzalez-Padron, Ferrell, Ferrell, & Smith, 2012). McKinsey & Company incorporates GVV into its internal leadership development training, and the International Development Bank (IDB) has integrated GVV with their existing ethics training in their strategy to build a “speak up culture” (Gentile, 2014).

### **EFFECTIVENESS OF GVV**

GVV is a relatively new curriculum, and as such, there are limited studies to date empirically measuring impact. Incorporating GVV across the undergraduate curriculum at Simmons College resulted in substantial gains in student learning regarding social responsibility: 39% more of the students demonstrated the

ability to link ethics and values to recommendations and 13% more of the students demonstrated consideration of a broader range of stakeholders' interests (Ingols, 2011). Using a pre-then-post design, Shaw (2013) identified a statistical difference in students' self-reported perceptions of ability to give voice to values as a result of their experience in an undergraduate course incorporating the GVV curriculum. Christensen, Cote, and Latham (2015) explored the association between levels of observed unethical behavior and type of ethical training. Using a between-subjects design, they collected student responses to an ethical challenge pre- and postimplementation of embedded GVV across the accounting curriculum. Prior to implementing GVV, in addition to the university academic integrity instruction, ethics education across the accounting program emphasized an ethical decision-making framework. The first student cohort in the study underwent this ethics education training prior to the implementation of GVV (see Christensen, Cote, & Latham, 2010). The second student cohort underwent GVV ethics education training in addition to the university academic integrity instruction. They found dramatically different results between the two cohorts. They observed consistent unethical behavior in the pre-GVV group but not in the GVV group ( $p .000$ ).

In addition to the recent research just described, current evidence for the impact of the GVV curriculum/pedagogy falls into three categories: (a) research regarding best practice of ethics training programs, (b) research from social psychology underpinning the core concepts in the GVV approach, and (c) anecdotal evidence from faculty and companies who have adopted the curriculum (Haidt, 2014). Consistent with best practice for ethics training programs, the GVV curriculum/pedagogy incorporates all seven components of an effective learning environment for business ethics education (Sims & Felton, 2006): reciprocity of learning from peers, experienced-based learning, personal application, self-direction, peer coaching, experimentation, and the potential for an ongoing learning process (Gonzalez-Padron et al., 2012). The GVV pedagogy is also consistent with many of the best practices in SH training in that it is experiential, involves role-plays, and incorporates practice of interpersonal skills, conflict management, and emotion management (see McDonald et al., 2015). Further, the GVV approach draws on research from social psychology and cognitive neuroscience regarding positive deviance (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004) and the importance of rehearsal, practice, and habit in learning new behaviors (Doidge, 2007; Duhigg, 2012; Ericsson, 2006).

Finally, evidence for the impact of the GVV curriculum exists in the support it has received from both academic and corporate adopters. More than 48 peer-reviewed journal articles and 14 book chapters, published between 2008 and 2015, endorse the GVV pedagogy as a powerful innovation in business ethics education (i.e., Arce & Gentile, 2014; Chappell, Web and Edwards, 2011; Edwards & Kirkham, 2014; Edwards et al., 2015; Gonzalez-Padron et al., 2012; Greenberg, McKone-Sweet, Wilson, 2011; etc.). Many companies initiate contact with GVV around their ethics and/or compliance programs (i.e., Lockheed Martin and IDB, as discussed earlier) but soon realize the broader application to leadership and building the capacity to have conversations about difficult subjects. As such, GVV finds its way into other elements of corporate culture development such as leadership training, corporate messaging, and stakeholder management.

Consequently, given the research underpinning and emerging evidence of impact of GVV, we argue that the foundational concepts in the GVV curriculum should be applied to existing SH training to create a more effective pedagogy. We explore the conceptual basis for GVV through the lens of SH at work. We use examples from a GVV case that includes several incidents of sexual behavior at work, as well as incidents reported in the news and our own personal anecdotes, to illustrate specific responses that can be taken in response to SH. This is followed by a discussion of the specific elements that GVV based SH training would entail.

## **THE GVV PILLARS**

The conceptual base of this pedagogy is contained in the Seven Pillars of GVV as summarized in Table 2: values, choice, normalization, purpose, self-knowledge/image and alignment, voice, and reasons/rationalizations (Gentile, 2010a). The GVV Pillars provide the foundation for voicing and acting on one's values in response to various "wrongs" encountered in the workplace. We discuss them here in the specific context of SH training at work and application to organizational SH training.

The *GVV Pillar of Values* provides a different language for conversations about perceived SH than the dichotomy between ethical and unethical behavior, which has been the focus of research on SH (e.g., O'Leary-Kelly & Bowes-Sperry, 2001; Pierce & Aquinus, 2005). The brevity of the list of widely shared values (i.e., honesty, responsibility, respect, fairness, compassion) reminds us that differences exist and we cannot assume people will make meaning of a situation as we do because they may value different things, or they may operationalize the same value differently than we do. One person may experience a sexual advance as complimentary (Pierce, Byrne, & Aquinis, 1996; Powell & Foley, 1998), while another may experience it as harassment and disrespectful (e.g., Berdahl & Aquino, 2009; Berdahl, 2007). These different reactions may even occur within the same person. Consider the example of Maria (name changed for the purpose of anonymity in this article), who was deeply offended and embarrassed when her colleague Sean jokingly quipped "Who did you have to sleep with to get that company polo-shirt?" Initially, Maria froze and said nothing. Later she reflected that Sean

might have been making an offhand joke but she was also worried about how others might have interpreted both the comment and her silence.

Recognizing that the behaviors we observe are the tip of the iceberg and result from underlying value systems that we may not read correctly is a powerful lever for opening up conversation. In Maria's case, the values that seem most relevant for discussing her concerns were respect, fairness, and safety. Incorporating a component in SH training programs, and other organizational communications, that discusses how sexual and sexist behavior at work can violate such commonly held values would open conversations and enable voice. Naming the value that we hold dear and feel has been violated is much more likely to invite a dialogue than judging observed behaviors as unethical, because it invites disclosure of our internal

TABLE 2  
The GVV Pillars

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1. Values—Know and appeal to a short list of widely shared values, such as honesty, respect, responsibility, fairness, and compassion. In other words, don't assume too little—or too much—commonality with the viewpoints of others (p. 24).
  2. Choice—Discover and believe you have a choice about voicing values by examining your own track record. Know what has enabled and disabled you in the past, so you can work with and around these factors. And recognize, respect, and appeal to the capacity for choice in others (p. 47).
  3. Normalization—Expect value conflicts so that you approach them calmly. Overreaction can limit your choices unnecessarily (p. 72).
  4. Purpose—Define your personal and professional purpose explicitly and broadly before values conflicts arise: What is the impact you want to have in your job, profession, or career? Similarly, appeal to a sense of purpose in others (p. 86).
  5. Self-Knowledge, Self-Image, and Alignment—Generate a “self-story” or personal narrative about your decision to voice and act on your values that is consistent with who you already are and builds on the strengths and preferences that you already recognize in yourself. There are many ways to align your unique strengths and style with your values (p. 108).
  6. Voice—Voice is developed over time, with practice. Practice voicing your values using the style of expression with which you are most skillful and which is most appropriate to the situation. You are most likely to say those words that you have prescribed and already heard yourself express, at earlier times in your career or in practice sessions (p. 135).
  7. Reasons and Rationalizations—Anticipate the typical rationalizations given for ethically questionable behavior and identify counterarguments. These rationalizations are predictable and vulnerable to reasoned response (p. 170).
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*Note.* From Gentile (2010a).

meaning-making rather than relying on external standards of ethics (Gentile, 2010a). Extending traditional SH training by incorporating content from the GVV pillar of choice encourages discussion of alternate meaning-making of sexual behavior at work and could in turn facilitate greater voice regarding forms of sexual behavior that are not obviously included in the legal definition of SH.

Acknowledging that we are meaning making creatures enables the *GVV Pillar of Normalization*, which reframes the experience of values-based conflicts from exceptional situations to normal happenings between human beings. Given that more than 70% of employees report they observed or participated in a workplace romance (Dillard & White, 1985), we can and should expect to encounter situations involving sexuality at work. Research indicates that almost 60% of employees report experiencing some form of sexual behavior at work, and that sexual behavior at work involving sexual jokes, language, and materials occurs much more frequently than sexual behavior at work involving direct sexual comments and advances (e.g., Berdahl & Aquino, 2009; Cortina, 2001). Thus, it appears more practical and realistic to consider alternative positive means for navigating sexualized aspects of relationships at work, rather than sanitizing the workplace from sexuality (Schultz, 2003). Consequently, SH training drawing on the GVV curriculum would invite participants to identify common situations where SH might occur (i.e., in male-dominated industries and occupations, where individuals are required to work one-on-one with a colleague, in travel situations, during after-work social events, etc.) and/or where sexual behavior at work might be perceived as SH by others (i.e., commenting on a new employee's sexual attractiveness, sexualized jokes, etc.).

The *GVV Pillar of Choice* invites us to see that voicing and acting on our values is a choice that we make. The GVV curriculum identifies common enablers that can facilitate the choice to voice our values, including finding allies, gathering information, asking questions, and framing the situation strategically (Gentile, 2010a). The choice to voice one's values in the context of SH poses unique challenges because its

ambiguity makes it difficult for targets and observers to make sense of their experiences (e.g., Bowes-Sperry & O’Leary-Kelly, 2005). Target responses to SH fall into four distinct categories that vary in effectiveness (Knapp et al., 1997). Avoidance/denial strategies are the most commonly employed, despite the fact that they are also the least effective in ending the SH behavior (Knapp et al., 1997). Similarly, social coping (e.g., making sure another person is present during interactions with the harasser, or discussing their experiences with others to gain additional insight into the situation) is a common strategy with limited success in ending the harassment because it does not communicate to the perpetrator the impact or consequences of that person’s actions. However, social coping can be a powerful source of psychological support and may be an interim step toward more assertive courses of action (Cortina & Wasti, 2005).

Strategies focused on the perpetrator, such as negotiation/confrontation and advocacy seeking (e.g., reporting the behavior to a supervisor or outside agency), are the most effective at stopping SH and yet they are the least frequently employed strategies of SH targets (Knapp et al., 1997). Targets of SH tend to sequence through the strategies, moving from self to supported action (Gutek & Koss, 1993). For example, Lisa Baxter (Gentile, 2010b) initially felt the SH she experienced was something she had to handle on her own and did not seek external support until she realized other women were also at risk of SH. Research indicates that targets engage in advocacy-seeking actions when they do not fear retaliation (e.g., being fired or transferred to another department against their will), believe that the organization will take complaints seriously and work to end the SH, understand and are comfortable with the procedures for reporting SH, and perceive the SH as severe (Bergman, Langhout, Palmieri, Cortina, & Fitzgerald, 2002; Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2007). More recently, “findings suggest a victim’s perceptions of and satisfaction with the reporting process may impact well-being more strongly than whether the victim made a report to authorities” (Bell, Street, & Stafford, 2014, p. 133). Extending traditional SH training with the GVV pillar of choice would facilitate discussion of the range of potential responses, and relative strengths and weaknesses of each, beyond the formal SH reporting mechanism. The *GVV Pillar of Purpose* invites us to consciously and explicitly reflect on the broadest intention for our career (Gentile, 2010a). For many people, work represents the single largest investment of their time. As such, what we do and how we do it is significant to our legacy. As described previously, sexually harassing and sexist behavior are prevalent in many organizations. SH that goes unchallenged can result in a spiral of pain and hurt and contributes to an environment that encourages SH. Thus, a broadly defined purpose could include the aim to voice and act in ways that contribute to enabling meaning-making around these complex dynamics so as to make organizations more inclusive, fair, and safe. In the case of Lisa Baxter, it was clear that she included keeping others safe as part of her purpose, because she did not report her own experiences of SH until she realized that women more junior than herself were being harassed (Gentile, 2010a).

A recent *New York Times* article (Lewin, 2014) on SH and gender discrimination at Yale University provides a timely example. When the dean commented that a task force on gender equity was necessary “because some women felt there were problems,” a male professor interjected that it was not just women complaining, to which the dean responded, “O.K., Dan and some women think there’s a problem.” Implicit in Dan’s decision to voice is a broadly defined purpose that includes gender equality. A broadly defined purpose provides us with the motivation and justification for voicing and acting. It does not eliminate value conflicts. In reality, as we broaden our purpose we also expand our perspective and may find ourselves surrounded by increasing areas of gray rather than clear-cut right and wrong. However, a broadly defined purpose enables us to see ourselves as part of a larger movement that can improve workplace interactions and personal well-being. SH training that invites participants to think about their personal and professional purposes would frame the decision to voice and act in a broader context.

The *GVV Pillar of Self-Knowledge/Self-Image/Alignment* focuses on understanding one’s strengths and preferred style of communication and behavior. Gentile (2010a) notes that managers who have acted on their values describe the ability to voice their values as deriving from personal identity traits (e.g., desire to avoid confrontation, fear, loyalty) rather than moral goodness. Taking effective values-based action is less difficult when individuals are able to perceive it as consistent with their personal identity. Gentile (2010a) suggests, for example, if you are a pragmatist, find a way to envision values-based action in response to SH as pragmatic. Lisa Baxter’s response to her chief executive officer (CEO), who assigned her group to read a book with a “great deal of extremely explicit, rough sexual content,” exemplifies this idea. Although Baxter identified herself as someone who respected authority, she found a way to voice her values that was still respectful of the other person’s formal authority—she simply stated “this doesn’t work for me” (Gentile, 2010a). Alternatively, an individual who uses humor to deal with difficult situations might find this an effective tool for shifting another person’s perspective.

Identifying our personal strengths enables us to use them to address SH and could form a powerful aspect of effective SH training. Consider the situation involving Oxana (name changed for the purpose of anonymity in this article), a gregarious, long-time office manager of a university department. Oxana is comfortable with sexually demonstrative behavior as evidenced in her decision to approach a PhD student, use

her hands to cup the student's breasts, and exclaim, "You really need a better bra to support these!" SH training infused with this GVV pillar would provide the opportunity for participants to identify their strengths and strategize how they might be used in voicing our values. For example, someone with the self-knowledge that they have a risk-averse personality could learn to draw on this as motivation to voice and act so that Oxana and the organization are not subject to a SH claim. Alternatively, someone more comfortable with confrontation could learn to draw on this element of his or her personality to voice and act as skillfully as possible. Once we understand "who we are" and the approaches with which we are most comfortable, the GVV Pillar of Voice prompts us to improve our skills by practicing these preferred styles.

The *GVV Pillar of Voice* suggests this is a capacity that develops with time and includes a variety of ways to speak. Our choices are not limited to remaining silent or forcefully declaring our opposition to an action with which we disagree. The broad range of options is evident in the way Maria exercised her voice in a series of conversations starting with a university professor she trusted, then an employee assistance program advisor, and finally her manager. She did not speak directly with the perpetrator of the perceived SH.

Individuals sought out by SH targets for social coping and advocacy seeking, as well as those who witness SH firsthand, are considered observers. Research on observer responses to SH has identified factors that enable values-based action, including the existence of skills acquired through role modeling and intervention scripts (Bowes-Sperry & O'Leary-Kelly, 2005). The GVV pedagogy supports these findings with an emphasis on developing skills and preparing scripts, as demonstrated in the case of Stephanie (names changed for the purpose of anonymity in this article), an SH observer. Stephanie was approached by her friend Nicola regarding unwanted flirtations from their mutual colleague John. Because she was familiar with the GVV curriculum, Stephanie understood how important it was that Nicola have a script ready for the next inappropriate interaction with John. Stephanie invested time and energy in asking skillful questions so that Nicola felt ownership of the way forward. The pair of friends role-played the situation a number of times so that Nicola could develop "muscle memory" of the words and actions that she wanted to take. A few days after their session, Nicola came into Stephanie's office, closed the door and exclaimed, "I did it! I did it exactly as we had practiced!" The scripting had been an important part of Nicola's ability to voice and act on her values when experiencing SH. The GVV pillar of choice would extend traditional SH training by providing practice in developing scripts and inculcating the mental model of doing so.

The *GVV Pillar of Reasons and Rationalizations* conveys the wisdom that we can prepare to encounter and effectively engage with defensive responses to our decision to give voice (Gentile, 2010a). Defensiveness is a normal human behavior in response to a perceived challenge or threat (Gray, 1988) and particularly so in situations of ambiguity and social stigma. Defensiveness can be intra- or interpersonal. It can come from those who witness or experience the SH (i.e., observers and targets) as well as those to whom we might give voice (i.e., the SH perpetrator and other people, including those with a stake in the status quo). Regardless, there are common rationalizations that a GVV protagonist can expect to encounter both as self-talk and from those to whom they give voice (Table 3). Rationalizations are intended to disempower the GVV protagonist from giving voice and to protect the status quo. Taking the time to identify the rationalizations in our own thinking, and those we might encounter from others, is a critical first step.

For example, when experiencing an SH values conflict, a common rationalization the GVV protagonist can expect to hear (both in the form of self-talk and from others to whom they give voice) is "that's just the way things are around here." This rationalization may have silenced observers of the derogatory and gender-based comments made by a firearms instructor to probationary police officer Kathy Durkin in the Chicago Police Department (Morlan, 2003). Identifying this rationalization in their own thinking would have been an important first step for these observers in developing alternate frames, such as: The only constant is change. Maybe it's time for a change?; Maybe the way things are done around here is out of step with the way things are done elsewhere; If no one gives voice about this, how will things ever change?; I wonder if there are any unintended costs to doing things this way?

Unfortunately, in this case, no one spoke out, and significant negative consequences ensued for both Kathy and the organization. However, this does not have to be the case, as we know from experiences of GVV protagonists such as Lisa Baxter (Gentile, 2010b), who successfully influenced events by sharing with her boss her discomfort with sexual behavior at work. Although we do not know what Lisa's self-talk was following the incident, it is not unreasonable to think it could have included statements such as "that's just the way things go, it's a boys' club!" or "it's not my place to change this practice, the senior manager should have said something." And yet, what we can infer is that Lisa's decision to speak with the senior manager means her sense of purpose enabled her to mitigate the possible influence of the obedience to authority and standard practice cognitive biases. We can learn from Lisa's example and examine our own thinking for such rationalizations not to voice. When held accountable, SH perpetrators provide one of four remedial accounts: denial (i.e., it didn't happen; she misinterpreted me; she's lying), excuses (i.e., peer pressure made me do it; I thought she was coming on to me because . . .), justifications (i.e., I just wanted to go on a date with her; it



wasn't meant to be harmful), or concessions (i.e., I acknowledge what I did was inappropriate, it was wrong of me and I will change my behavior) (Tata, 2000). Similarly, common rationalizations from people to whom we might give voice regarding SH might include denying the harassment, blaming the victim, minimizing the seriousness of the incident, protecting valued employees, and ignoring a habitual harasser (Pierce, Smolinski, & Rosen, 1998). Anticipating these reactions, examining them for potential cognitive biases, and scripting our responses to them can be both empowering and effective. Consequently, this element of the GVV curriculum would form a powerful extension to traditional SH training.

To summarize, the conceptual framework of the GVV pedagogy, as contained in seven interrelated content areas, can be applied to SH at work: values, choice, normalization, purpose, self-knowledge/image and alignment, voice, and rationalizations. Each pillar facilitates deeper discussion of the complex phenomenon of SH and contributes to building a performative skill set for effectively giving voice and acting in response to SH at work.

### **ELEMENTS OF GVV-BASED SH TRAINING**

GVV is intentionally designed to be flexible in delivery, as evidenced by the many ways the curriculum has been incorporated into learning experiences (Gentile, 2011, 2012, 2013). Although organizations will have differing approaches, there are foundational elements to successfully incorporate GVV into a traditional SH training program: (a) introducing the

Expected or standard practice:

- That's just the culture around here.
- This is the way it's always been.
- .

• TABLE 3

Common rationalizations in response to SH

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- I never think it's a big thing because they do it to everyone.
  - Exceptional situation That's just her/him.
  - I know it's not really appropriate behavior, but he/she is a really good employee and the organization really needs him/her.
  - Lack of materiality
  - No one is really getting hurt.
  - It's all meant in good fun. We all need a laugh.
  - She/he doesn't seem to be upset or offended. No one complained.
  - External locus of responsibility
  - It's not my job to say anything—the problem is above my pay grade. She doesn't seem to mind—her reaction didn't seem negative.
  - Minimization
  - Why would you ruin a man's career just because you can't take it? You call that sexual harassment? It's not a big deal.
  - Denial
  - They are such a nice person, there is no way they would act that way. It looks like the behavior is/was consensual.
  - Pandora's box
  - This is just the tip of the iceberg.
  - If we say something about this, we are opening a whole lot of trouble.
  - Lack of power
  - No one will believe me/you.
  - What good would it do for me to say something? I/you don't have the power to change this.
  - The cost of speaking up is greater than the potential for making things different.
  - Obedience to authority
  - The boss doesn't think this is a problem.
  - False dichotomies
  - Truth versus loyalty: . . . but X is such a good person. Individual versus company: This is going to hurt the company.
  - Short term versus long term: This isn't something that is a priority right now, we have bigger problems to deal with.
  - Justice versus mercy: I'm sure it was a mistake, maybe you/I should just let this one go?
- 

assumptions and thought experiment of the GVV reframe,  
(b) teaching the foundational tools required for GVV, and (c) engaging in peer coaching and ongoing practice.

We discuss each of these in turn.

The first element of introducing GVV into traditional SH training is to present the GVV thought experiment as it applies to SH: a shift from awareness to action. Traditional SH training provides greater awareness and sensitivity to SH in the work- place. The GVV thought experiment builds on this awareness and sensitivity. It creates a safe place to acknowledge and explore the space between knowing and doing what is right. This element of SH training could be facilitated through discussion of the foundational exercise of “A tale of two stories” (or some customized version), reviewing the GVV assumptions, and/or discussing the common enablers/disablers for giving voice (Gentile, 2010a). The objective for this segment of the GVV SH training would be to establish the laboratory in which participants can explore (a) the gap between awareness of and action in response to SH, and (b) the power of asking a very different question, namely, “If I were going to voice my values, what would I do and say?” (Gentile, 2010a).

The second element of incorporating GVV into SH training would involve learning foundational skills: (a) self-knowledge and alignment, (b) tools for scripting, (c) knowledge of reasons and rationalizations, and (d) identifying levers for change. Each of these could form the basis for a module within the SH training and they are described in more detail elsewhere (see Gentile, 2010a). The foundational idea here is that engaging in conversations about difficult subjects is a competency that can be learned and developed with knowledge about oneself and specific influence strategies. However, competency in giving voice does not come through knowledge acquisition but through practice and application (Doidge, 2007; Ericsson, 2006). Consequently, the final and most substantial element of a GVV SH training program would involve practice in scripting, action planning, and peer coaching. Participants would work with case studies to apply the tools described in the preceding element of training. Case studies from the GVV collection and/or customized to highlight the organizations context provide a safe place to start. Writing out actual scripted language, testing it out in a practice conversation, and getting feedback from peers is both powerful and enabling. The recommendation is that this should form the majority of the GVV SH training time, with the assumption that teachable moments regarding the GVV thought experiment and the tools required for GVV will emerge within these practice sessions.

Clearly, the process described in the preceding exceeds the minimal legal requirement for SH training (i.e., of a few hours every 2 years). This is a necessary investment when shifting SH training from disseminating information to developing the competency to engage in difficult conversations (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001). However, this leadership competency benefits the organization beyond avoiding expensive SH litigation. A culture of candor enhances innovation, facilitates course corrections, and drives a high-performance culture (Collins, 2001; O’Toole & Bennis, 2009; Welch & Welch, 2005).

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

As detailed in the preceding, research on the efficacy and impact of the GVV curriculum is limited and so represents an area full of opportunities for researchers. Much is known about best practice in training design (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001). However, research designs and methods that allow for evaluation of behavioral change resulting from GVV-based SH training would make a significant contribution. Such research could employ either a pretest/posttest design or a between-subjects design. It may be that the latter, in which one group receives GVV-based SH training and another receives traditional SH training, is necessary to establish the effectiveness of GVV-based SH training relative to more traditional forms of SH training. The future research opportunities described in the following can be conducted using either or both research designs. Since the ultimate goal of GVV-based SH training is for individuals to voice their values in response to SH, research assessing their ability to do so would provide the strongest evidence of the benefits of such training. This research could take the form of individuals’ self-reported perceptions of their ability to give voice as done in previous research on GVV (Shaw, 2013). However, actually assessing an individual’s ability would be possible by having individuals prepare for and engage in role-plays in which they demonstrate GVV-based responses. This would provide more robust evidence of GVV’s effectiveness because it is a skill-based outcome (Kraiger, Ford, & Salas, 1993).

Research examining individual aspects of the training and intermediate outcomes would also be valuable for improving understanding of the effectiveness of GVV-based SH training. For example, participants could be asked to critique a peer (or video case) of someone responding to a SH incident. While such cognitive outcomes do not establish that participants themselves are able to use GVV-based techniques in response to SH, it establishes that they understand and can recognize such techniques, which is a prerequisite for using them (Kraiger et al., 1993). Another avenue that could provide important information for evaluating the effectiveness of GVV is research designed to determine participants’ abilities to develop scripts for responding to SH incidents. Subject-matter experts in GVV and SH would evaluate participants’ critiques of others responding to SH, as well as plans and scripts to determine the extent to which they utilize principles taught during the training. Finally, and arguably most importantly, future research needs to determine whether GVV-based SH training

enhances and/orcompromises participants' understanding of the legal aspects and requirements of SH.

## SUMMARY

We began this article by arguing that an emphasis on litigation avoidance has unduly and negatively influenced the ways in which organizations address the problem of SH. We offered an alternative to the current focus on legal issues in SH training: the innovative Giving Voice to Values philosophy and curriculum (Gentile, 2010a). GVV is an action-oriented approach to business ethics education offering a framework and conceptual base that is relevant to addressing SH at work. Further, elements of best practice are explicit in the GVV pedagogy, including the importance of engaging learners, developing scripts, and practicing role-plays. We specifically explore how GVV can be used to improve the ways in which organizations address the phenomenon of SH, and more specifically how GVV can be used to prepare targets and observers of SH to take values-based action when they encounter this behavior at work. The result is a shift in focus from legal definitions toward exploring meaning and a shift from escalating silence to expanding options for voice. In conclusion, we suggest that GVV is an antidote to the paradoxes of organizational legalization (Sikin & Bies, 1993) in response to SH. Future research that empirically examines the effectiveness of SH training based on the Giving Voice to Values framework will benefit scholarship on SH as well as organizations trying to prevent and correct SH.

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