

SEEING THROUGH WOKE-WASHING: EFFECTS OF PROJECTED DIVERSITY VALUES AND LEADER RACIAL DIVERSITY ON EQUITY IN WORKPLACE OUTCOMES

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Organizations that engage in “woke-washing,” in which they signal advocacy and commitment to a social-justice-related cause without taking actions to back up this appearance of intention (Vredenburg et al., 2020), may harm vulnerable minority groups. The presence of multicultural values, emphasizing the appreciation of distinct cultural identities, in companies’ promotional materials, versus color-blind values, which minimize cultural distinctions, may affect Black/Hispanic/Latinx (BHL) versus White individuals’ likelihood of applying to an organization differently, depending on the company’s demonstrated leader racial diversity (LRD). Participants ($N = 419$), recruited via Amazon MTurk, read a hypothetical job-application call and mission statement with a specific diversity ideology emphasized (multiculturalism, color-blind, control, Black Lives Matter [BLM]) and viewed headshots of the company C-suite with either low LRD (mostly White) or high LRD before filling out survey measures. Results revealed that BHL participants in the high-LRD condition were significantly more likely to apply to the organization than those in the low-LRD condition, emphasizing the importance of minority representation, whereas White participants in the BLM condition were significantly less likely to apply than in the multicultural condition. Additionally, identity threat, psychological safety, and organizational trust mediated the relationship between LRD and likelihood of applying. BHL participants experienced significantly higher identity threat and lower psychological

The principal investigator for this research was Adrienne Kafka, a recent graduate of Claremont McKenna College, where she studied psychology, dance, and leadership. She grew up in Bethesda, Maryland, a wealthy, predominantly White, and fairly homogeneous area. When she started studying at Claremont McKenna in 2017, it was the most diverse place she had been. As a White woman, she became acutely aware of the degree to which she hadn’t been taught about Whiteness. Since then, she has come to understand the importance of considering privilege and the variability of subjective experience. Through her research, she aims to examine how to maximize inclusivity, psychological safety, and authenticity within groups and workplaces. She hopes to increase intergroup understanding and effective collaboration across boundaries and, ultimately, increase equity in social systems.

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safety than White participants in the low-LRD condition. Analyses also revealed a significant moderation such that White participants low in social-dominance orientation (SDO) were more likely to apply in the high- than the low-LRD condition, unlike their high-SDO counterparts. Implications for how consultants may promote equitable workplace outcomes through organizational-change efforts are discussed.

What's It Mean? Implications for Consulting Psychology

This research provides implications about how organizational leadership may promote equitable outcomes for Black and Hispanic/Latinx (BHL) job applicants and how these strategies may ultimately expand in impact, helping to grow and retain BHL leaders. It considers minority outcomes in the context of social-justice movements, and it highlights the importance of demographic representation in leadership and explores important explanatory mechanisms for attitudes toward the workplace while proposing innovative solutions to advance BHL leaders and to drive systemic organizational change.

Keywords: diversity, color blindness, race, representation, leadership

In today's political and social context, many companies engage in "woke-washing," in which they say or do something to signal advocacy for a specific cause or value related to social justice while continuing to cause harm to vulnerable communities, potentially misleading consumers (Howard, 2021; Vredenburg et al., 2020). The research around the above interaction highlights that if companies are unable to match their projected diversity values and assurances through authentic company practices, job applicants may see through these empty promises and have negatively impacted performance and feelings of belonging (Walton et al., 2015).

As the demographic composition of the United States, and subsequently the U.S. workforce, rapidly shifts, becoming more diverse with respect to factors such as race, culture, religion, and sexual preferences (Buckley & Bachman, 2017), organizations must learn to manage diversity properly to harness potential benefits (Saxena, 2014; Stevens et al., 2008) and protect employee well-being. This is especially important in the face of persisting racial disparities, rooted in systemic racism, in the United States that pervade a multitude of domains: wealth, employment, criminal justice, education, housing, and health care (Plaut, 2010; Williams & Collins, 2001). These inequities inevitably translate to workplace contexts, greatly affecting Black and Hispanic/Latinx (BHL) employees, among others, who already earn less than White and Asian counterparts (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021; Thompson, 2013) and have been almost twice as likely as Whites to be laid off amid the pandemic (Jan & Clement, 2020).

A diverse workforce can lead to positive interpersonal and organizational outcomes, from decreased prejudice (Konrad et al., 2005, p. 60) to increased levels of innovation, productivity, and economic competitiveness (Konrad et al., 2005; Lambert, 2016; Roberts, 2020; Saxena, 2014). In fact, recent research from McKinsey & Company has shown that over the past 7 years alone, diverse companies have become significantly more likely to outperform industry peers on profitability (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020), and organizations who increase transparency around diversity policies and practices may have improved long-term shareholder value. However, to garner the benefits of diversity, organizational leadership must be aligned on diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, ensuring authentic investment to counter negative outcomes of diversity such as racism, discrimination, conflict, and compartmentalization (Jehn et al., 1999; Roscoe, 2019; Smith et al., 2012). Increasing demographic diversity and emphasizing the economic gains of diversity without initiating holistic initiatives for company culture, power structures, and procedures to accompany this increase may backfire; minority employees may feel undervalued and disrespected, while employees fail to learn to work across differences (Ely & Thomas, 2020).

Konrad et al. (2005) extended the argument for the fostering of diversity in the workplace past the business case, which justifies a diverse workforce through linking increased diversity to positive organizational outcomes primarily in terms of profit. They proposed a transformation of the “Discourse of Diversity” that redefines organizational purpose around enhancement of human well-being, individual fulfillment and happiness, and meaning rather than financial success and return on investment (pp. 87–88). Shaping organizations around human growth, connection, and cooperation across social boundaries may not only accompany monetary gain, but it may propel companies forward with respect to a multitude of measures of success, as human and community happiness are valued as ends rather than means to organizational prosperity. In a nation built on ideals entrenched in racism and White supremacy, with many systems that were created to be inequitable with barriers to marginalized groups (Tulshyan, 2020), it is important to consider how people in positions of power may intentionally and thoughtfully provide tools to support and empower marginalized groups, approaching diversity initiatives from a human-rights and human-dignity perspective, even if financial benefits provide additional incentive.

O’Leary and Weathington (2006) described how the motivations behind a “business case” for diversity are even antithetical to the ultimate goal of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, which should be to create a just workplace through proper diversity management. The business case for diversity may often be misinterpreted as the idea that team and organizational outcomes will automatically improve because there is diversity in the room. In reality, studies have shown that diverse teams realize performance benefits under certain circumstances in which feelings of inclusion, cooperation, and belonging are emphasized: “when team members are able to reflect on and discuss team functioning; when status differences among ethnic groups are minimized; when people from both high- and low-status identity groups believe the team supports learning; . . . when teams orient members to learn from their differences rather than marginalize or deny them”; and when psychological safety is high (Brett et al., 2006; Edmondson & Roloff, 2009; Ely & Thomas, 2001). Organizations must supplement the addition of diverse individuals to their teams with efforts that help all employees feel heard, included, and safe, often enacted through a combination of strategic messaging aligned with deliberate action.

Many leaders may not realize how the way their company is represented, through projected ideological values and diversity portrayal, can affect racial-minority applicants and employees, along with other interpersonal and organizational outcomes, throughout the employee life cycle (Walton et al., 2015). Therefore, in the current study, we examine how a company’s projected diversity values (PDV) and leader racial diversity (LRD) may affect BHL versus White individuals’ decision-making during the job-application process. By exploring these relationships, this research addresses and posits implications for how leaders may limit systemically racist practices to promote equitable outcomes, increase access to workplace opportunities, and grow and retain leaders of color through proper diversity management. The current study focused on how prospective employees may feel prior to entering an organization. However, if future research supports that the variables explored in this study have lasting impact beyond the recruiting stage, the results provide valuable implications regarding what factors will make employees stay at and thrive in organizations.

Projected Diversity Values

Ample research has explored the impacts of distinctive diversity-related philosophies within organizational culture and contexts. Studies have shown that multicultural (MC) values, defined as those that recognize, promote, and emphasize the maintenance and inclusion of distinct and unique cultural identities, are favored by and produce more positive workplace outcomes for racial minorities (Levin et al., 2012; Plaut, 2010; Plaut et al., 2018; Ryan et al., 2007; Wilton et al., 2015; Wolsko et al., 2006). Studies have also found multiculturalism in majority-group members, whether experimentally manipulated or measured as an individual difference, to be negatively associated with prejudice, negative stereotyping, and discrimination (Hachfeld et al., 2015; Leslie et al., 2020; Levin et al., 2012) and to have positive implications for interracial interaction, minority engagement and performance, and detection of discrimination in the workplace (Plaut et al., 2018). For example,

Plaut et al. (2009) found that White employees' multicultural beliefs positively predicted their minority coworkers' psychological engagement (and vice versa for color-blind beliefs), whereas Wilton et al. (2015) found that women of color performed better on a math test when primed with a multicultural rather than a color-blind message. However, although based in a desire to embrace group differences, social psychologists have explored the potential for the emphasis of multicultural values to lead to the essentialization of group differences, leading to increased stereotyping and stricter cultural boundaries (Gutiérrez & Unzueta, 2010; Plaut, 2010). Additionally, Whites may feel threatened by multiculturalism, provoking increased prejudice (Plaut et al., 2018; Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014).

Meanwhile, color-blind values, promoting the minimization of the significance of racial-group membership so that people are all treated equally as individuals (Levin et al., 2012; Plaut et al., 2018), which remain dominant in U.S. workplaces (Walton et al., 2015), have been endorsed over multiculturalism by White people and associated with stronger stereotyping among Whites (Ryan et al., 2007). Minorities, specifically Black and Latinx individuals, however, may perceive color-blind messages as exclusionary attempts to hide important group differences and erase cultural identities (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Markus et al., 2000; Ryan et al., 2007; Walton et al., 2015). In practice, majority-group members who promote color blindness may be less sensitive and attuned to racism and minority groups' lived experiences (Plaut et al., 2018). Hachfeld et al. (2015) found that teachers with a color-blind rather than multicultural orientation were less likely to adapt teaching to minority students' needs, whereas Apfelbaum et al. (2010) found that children primed in a color-blind condition were less likely to detect racial discrimination. Whites may adopt a color-blind approach and avoid speaking about race in fear of portraying themselves as prejudiced, even when race is situationally relevant (Apfelbaum, 2008). However, minorities may interpret this avoidance as prejudice (Apfelbaum et al., 2008).

Exploratory Variable for Black Lives Matter

Since the 2020 uprising of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, companies have released statements committing to "action," "justice," and "conversation" around issues of "racism" (Pacheco & Stamm, 2020). However, the actual impact of these statements on organizational behavior and culture change is unclear. Research has shown that BIPOC (Black Indigenous, and People of Color) in predominantly White settings, like many U.S. workplaces (Gorski, 2019; Smith et al., 2016), may experience elevated levels of racial battle fatigue, leading to expedited activist burnout and feelings of frustration, shock, anger, anxiety, hopelessness, and fear (Smith et al., 2016). These findings suggest that BIPOC may feel burnout when reminded of the BLM movement if messaging is accompanied by pictures of predominantly White company leadership, seeming inauthentic. Meanwhile, the impacts of BLM-focused messaging on Whites are widely variable (Luttrell, 2019).

Leader Racial Diversity

With a stark lack of racial diversity in leadership positions in major U.S. companies (Larcker & Tayan, 2020), it is important to examine the negative effects of underrepresentation in leadership positions. Applicants' impressions of a company may depend more on actual portrayal of diversity through demographic representation than how the company describes their diversity values. Pittinsky (2010) found that when followers belong to a different subgroup than their leader, their trust and support in their leader and identification with the organization decline. However, inclusive leadership behaviors and culture matter beyond just numerical representation; Jin et al. (2017) found that inclusive leadership, which involves openness, fairness, availability, and accessibility, predicts performance of employees of color more strongly than diversity policy alone, emphasizing the need for top management to model inclusive leadership behaviors.

When underrepresented job applicants see minority employees representing a company, this physical cue may signal the value the organization places on diversity, making them feel more comfortable. Young et al. (1997) found that participants had more positive reactions toward an open

teacher role at a school if shown a videotape of a racially-similar school administrator giving the recruitment message. [Lin et al. \(1992\)](#) found similar same-race effects in alignment with the similarity-attraction hypothesis in a job interviewer-interviewee scenario for Black and Hispanic applicants but not for White applicants. [Perkins et al. \(2000\)](#) and [Thomas and Wise \(2009\)](#) had similar findings; data supported that minority applicants, specifically Black applicants and women, saw recruiter characteristics as more important than non-minorities when examining the attractiveness of jobs and organizations.

In addition to negatively impacting perceptions of organizations, [Roberson et al. \(2003\)](#) found that a lack of racial representation at work may negatively impact Black employees' performance, possibly leading to long-term negative impacts on job and career trajectories. White job seekers in the United States may generally be less affected by racial cues due to their majority status in which they have the psychological privilege of rarely needing to consider what it would be like to experience the workplace as a racial minority ([Avery, 2003](#); [Perkins et al., 2000](#)).

The Authenticity of Projected Diversity Values

Although research has shown that both numerical representation of minorities in the workplace and the promotion of specific diversity ideologies have the potential to influence how minority job applicants perceive an organization, the research exploring the interaction between the two factors is scarce. However, existing findings suggest that sincerity matters when it comes to projecting a diversity-related image; woke-washing may not stand. BIPOC are more likely to find diversity-related messaging and promotions authentic if this projected diversity image is matched by diversity in demographic representation ([Avery, 2003](#); [Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008](#); [Smith et al., 2012](#); [Walton, 2015](#)). Individuals interpret cues from both numerical representation and mission and diversity statements when either consciously or unconsciously interpreting their own value within the context of an organization. For example, [Smith et al. \(2012\)](#) found that perceptions of an organization's commitment to diversity were highest when both numerical diversity and diversity image authenticity were high. [Purdie-Vaughns et al. \(2008\)](#) found that low minority representation cues coupled with a policy of color-blind diversity presented in relation to a workplace setting led to identity threat and distrust in Black participants, both of which are factors that may inevitably affect performance.

Mediators and Moderators

Researchers have begun to explore the potential mediating powers of identity threat, psychological safety, and trust on the relationship between diversity-related factors and perceptions and performance ([Adjei, 2020](#); [Blascovich et al., 2001](#); [Delizonna, 2017](#); [Edmondson & Lei, 2014](#); [Holoien & Shelton, 2012](#); [Kramer & Tyler, 1995](#); [McCluney et al., 2017](#); [Murphy et al., 2007](#); [Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008](#); [Roberson et al., 2003](#); [Singh et al., 2013](#); [Wilton et al., 2015](#)). Previous findings highlight the need to further explore the role of these constructs as potential explanatory mechanisms that companies can target to optimize organizational and individual outcomes, especially for minority employees.

Identity Threat

Identity threat, or the expectation one will be judged (and conform) based on group membership rather than performance and potential due to devaluation of this group ([Branscombe et al., 1999](#); [Tajfel & Turner, 1986](#); [Walton et al., 2015](#)), may negatively impact performance ([Kirnan et al., 2009](#); [Walton et al., 2015](#)). This effect could manifest as poor minority performance in preemployment selection tests, performance evaluations, and daily workplace exchanges, ultimately causing employees to be overlooked for hiring decisions, promotions, and other workplace decisions. Most identity-threat research has focused on women and racial minorities, especially Black and Hispanic individuals ([Walton et al., 2015](#), p. 525). Numeric underrepresentation and color-blind statements and policies have been identified as possible identity-threatening cues ([Walton et al., 2015](#), p. 528) as employees and applicants wonder whether nobody looks like them at this organization because of a specific stereotype, question whether the organization will respect their distinct background and

differences, or feel pressure to represent their group well. Identity-threat triggers may be subtle; Steele and Aronson (1995) and Kirnan et al. (2009) found that racial-minority individuals' test performance was impaired even when participants were merely asked their race before testing.

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is the shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking and that team members can express their authentic selves and beliefs without fear (Edmondson, 1999; Kahn, 1990); it helps to foster interpersonal and team trust (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Kahn, 1990; Nowack & Zak, 2021). Studies have shown that a more positive and supportive diversity climate, or employee perceptions about the extent to which an organization values, supports, and integrates diversity and equity-related initiatives (Kaplan et al., 2011; Mor Barak et al., 1998; Singh et al., 2013), maximizes psychological safety (Adjei, 2020; Singh et al., 2013). In addition to a positive association between diversity climate and psychological safety in employees, Singh et al. (2013) found that psychological safety mediated the relationship between diversity climate and performance, especially for racial minorities, implying that when an employee feels supported by an organization's diversity climate, they may feel safer and subsequently perform better in their role.

Organizational Trust

Studies have shown that diversity-related cues can impact minority employees' organizational trust, or the confidence that one will be treated fairly within their organization and that management will work to be honest and keep them safe and comfortable. For example, Purdie-Vaughns et al. (2008) found that cues of low minority representation coupled with color-blind messaging led African American professionals to distrust the organizational setting. Pittinsky (2010) explored how followers' trust may decrease when they belong to a different subgroup than their leader's subgroup, whether based on race or another characteristic. Zak (2018) proposed a model in which specific choices and practices for organizational leadership lead to oxytocin release in employees, in turn leading to a high-trust organizational culture that fosters improved performance, teamwork, engagement, and well-being. Research has highlighted that trust is vital in optimizing team and organizational outcomes and performance (Delizonna, 2017; Kramer & Tyler, 1995), emphasizing the need to examine how organizations can maximize trust, especially in minority employees who may struggle to trust organizational settings.

Social Dominance Orientation

Studies have linked increased levels of social dominance orientation (SDO), or the generalized desire for group inequality and dominance (Pratto et al., 2014), in White people to increased prejudice against outgroups (Kteily et al., 2011; Levin et al., 2012; Michinov et al., 2005; Whitley, 1999) and decreased willingness to reduce racial inequality (Stewart & Tran, 2018). These findings suggest that Whites high in SDO may feel threatened if they believe a company values minority racial groups. Low-SDO Whites, by contrast, value group equality and are more likely to support institutions that value minority groups and hierarchy-attenuating social movements like BLM. Although research around the relationships between diversity ideologies and SDO has been scarce, producing mixed findings (Levin et al., 2012; Morrison et al., 2010), it seems likely that White people who desire group inequality and dominance may be deterred from applying to a company boasting racial diversity in leadership and multicultural or BLM-related philosophies supporting appreciation of distinct cultural groups. Meanwhile, Whites low in SDO may be more likely to apply to a company promoting multiculturalism, BLM, and high racial diversity compared to color blindness and low racial diversity because of their willingness to support hierarchy-attenuating institutions and policies, similar to BIPOC individuals.

The Present Study

The present study explores how LRD, PDV, and the interaction between the two affect BHL versus White applicants' decision-making through possible mediators and moderators. Specifically, it explores how a company's PDV and LRD affect likelihood of applying to an organization in BHL

versus White applicants using a 2 (Race: BHL, White) \times 2 (LRD: Low, High) \times 4 (PDV: multicultural, color-blind, control, BLM) between-subjects quasi-experimental factorial design. The chosen dependent variable will illustrate whether the way companies represent themselves to potential applicants may deter BIPOC applicants from certain roles, consequently causing them to miss out on potentially beneficial career-advancing opportunities.

Initially, the study was designed to examine White, Black, and Hispanic/Latinx individuals separately, as participants of different racial/ethnic groups are likely to react differently to various diversity-related stimuli, especially with regard to BLM. However, due to challenges recruiting Black individuals, a larger group of marginalized individuals (including both Black and Hispanic/Latinx individuals) was formed to ensure the study had enough experimental power to detect significant effects. As members of marginalized groups, both Black and Hispanic/Latinx employees have faced similar disadvantage in the workplace relative to their White counterparts (Jan & Clement, 2020; *Median Usual Weekly*, 2021; Thompson, 2013) and may even respond similarly to BLM messaging in the workplace. Many Hispanic/Latinx individuals have backed BLM protests in recent years, while also demanding change for themselves (Medina, 2020), and have generally been found to support BLM once made aware of its goals (Corral, 2020).

Based on the review of the literature, several hypotheses are offered:

Hypothesis 1a: For BHL participants, likelihood of applying will be higher in the multicultural and BLM conditions than the color-blind condition.

Hypothesis 1b: For BHL participants, higher LRD will increase likelihood of applying.

Hypothesis 1c: For BHL participants, there will be a two-way interaction between LRD and PDV such that the effect of PDV will be greater under high LRD than low LRD. Research findings have highlighted the importance that minority applicants place on racial representation cues. Under high LRD, BHL applicants should have a higher baseline level of attraction and comfort regarding the company compared to low LRD, and this baseline level of comfort will allow them the freedom to have higher standards when it comes to factors such as PDV. Meanwhile, in the low-LRD condition, BHL participants likely will not care as much about the specifics of PDVs because they have already seen that even if the PDV is appealing, the LRD does not match, showing that the actions of the company do not match their promises.

Hypothesis 2: For White participants, likelihood of applying will be lower in the multicultural and BLM condition than in the color-blind condition.

Hypothesis 3: There will be a three-way interaction such that the two-way interaction between PDV and LRD should depend on race: For BHL participants, the effect of PDV should depend on LRD, whereas for Whites the effect of PDV should not depend on LRD. This three-way interaction is expected because a two-way interaction between PDV and LRD is expected for BHL applicants because they are more attuned to the nuances of diversity cues, but this same two-way interaction is not expected for White participants.

Hypothesis 4: Identity threat, psychological safety, and organizational trust will mediate the relationships between the independent variables and likelihood of applying, and the independent variables will have stronger effects on the mediators for BHL participants than for White participants. Because LRD and PDV values are race- and diversity-related factors that have generally been found to affect BIPOC preferences, feelings, and decision-making more than the preferences, feelings, and decision-making of Whites, (Avery, 2003; Lin et al., 1992; Perkins et al., 2000; Singh et al., 2013), these independent variables are expected to have stronger effects on the mediating variables for BHL participants than White participants.

Hypothesis 5: For White participants, SDO will moderate the relationships between the independent variables and likelihood of applying: White participants with higher SDO will be less likely to apply under multiculturalism, BLM, and high-LRD conditions compared to color

blindness and low-LRD conditions. Meanwhile, White participants with lower SDO will be more likely to apply under multiculturalism, BLM, and high-LRD conditions compared to color blindness and low-LRD conditions.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited via Amazon MTurk, a crowdsourcing marketplace, using the CloudResearch MTurk Toolkit, in which they took a 12-minute Qualtrics survey approved by an institutional review board for the opportunity to receive 50 cents between February 24th and March 3rd, 2021. (Halfway through data collection, payment was raised to \$1.50 in order to recruit more BHL participants.) Participants with an education level lower than a high-school degree or equivalent, who were not Black, Hispanic/Latinx, or White and who were not U.S. citizens, were filtered out using a qualification system. Participants were asked to identify their race (White/Caucasian, Black/African American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, other/self-describe) and ethnicity (Hispanic and/or Latino [HL] or non-HL) in two separate questions. Although 430 people attempted the survey, 11 individuals were removed, either due to incomplete data ($n = 7$), because they accessed the survey without meeting race restrictions ($n = 3$), or because they failed the 1-item attention check ($n = 1$), leaving 419 participants in the final sample: 226 White (which included anyone who identified as White and non-HL) and 193 BHL (which included anyone who identified as Black non-HL, Black HL, and HL of any other race besides Black—i.e., HL White, HL Asian, etc.), with an average of 26.19 participants in each of the 16 experimental conditions. The mean age of participants was 40.26 years ($SD = 13.821$), and there were 236 women and 177 men, with 6 people who preferred to self-describe their gender. Additionally, 25 participants identified as very conservative, 79 as conservative, 113 as independent, 149 as liberal, and 51 as very liberal, with 2 failing to respond. Highest level of education was a high-school degree or equivalent for 50 participants, some college or a 2-year college degree for 124, a 4-year college degree or some graduate school for 166, and a master's degree or doctorate degree for 79.

Design and Procedure

After reading a vague explanation of the study and signing the informed consent form, participants were presented with a hypothetical scenario in which they were asked to imagine that they really wanted to find a job because they were recently laid off and the new roles had a competitive salary. They viewed a mock job call for a fake hotel chain created by synthesizing and revamping existing application calls found on the Internet. Then, participants were presented with a mock diversity statement, framed as a general mission statement so they could “learn more about the company,” with a manipulated PDV for the company, and a picture of the corporate suite of the company, showing either high or low leader racial diversity, depending on experimental condition in order to “see their future colleagues!” Next, participants completed measures of identity threat, psychological safety, organizational trust, likelihood of applying, and exploratory qualitative measures examining the factors that they were thinking about when filling out the preceding measures. These surveys were followed by manipulation checks, a SDO measure, and a demographic questionnaire. MTurk workers who failed an attention check were excluded from analyses and were not paid.

PDV Manipulation

The PDV manipulation was enacted through the manipulation of company diversity statements. Participants were randomly assigned to either a multicultural, color-blind, control, or BLM condition. Under the multicultural and color-blind conditions, key language and themes highlighted in the research literature defining these ideologies were highlighted within a general company diversity mission statement. For example, the multicultural statement emphasized “embracing” different cultures and identities as well as “distinct” perspectives, whereas the color-blind statement emphasized

looking at people as “unique individuals” rather than through a lens of race or gender. In the control condition, participants were presented with a neutral mission statement focused on growth and benefits. Under the BLM condition, participants were presented with a mock BLM statement issued by the company in response to the killing of George Floyd created by synthesizing and compiling common themes and phrases found through an analysis of 2020 company BLM statements found on company websites, ranging from small businesses to Fortune 100 companies.

LRD Manipulation

The LRD manipulation was enacted through the manipulation of photos of C-suite members. Participants were assigned to either a low- or high-LRD condition. Participants in the low-LRD condition were presented with images of 10 people in the hotel chain’s C-suite (eight White-presenting, two of which were women; one Asian-presenting man; and one Black-presenting woman). Participants in the high-LRD condition were also presented with images of 10 people in the hotel chain’s C-suite (three White-presenting, one woman and two men; three Black-presenting, two men and one woman; two Asian-presenting, one woman and one man; and two Latinx presenting, one man and one woman).

Measures

Identity Threat

The measure for social-identity threat (Belmi et al., 2015) consisted of 5 items meant to assess college students’ worry about being seen negatively in school because of their ethnicity.¹ Each item was rated using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). In this study, the word *school* was changed to *company* and one item was excluded. The remaining four items were averaged, with the mean score representing a final identity-threat score, with higher numbers implying greater identity threat. An example item in this measure is, “At this company, I worry that people will draw conclusions about my competence based on my racial group.” $\alpha = .97$.

Psychological Safety

The measure for team psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), which has been extensively utilized and validated (Adjei, 2020), consisted of seven items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). In this study, the word *team* was changed to *company*, and the word *members* was changed to *employees*. Sentences were grammatically altered to represent that participants should be answering based on how they think they would feel at the company in real life. All items were averaged, with the mean score representing a final psychological-safety score, with higher scores representing higher psychological safety. An example item in this measure is, “Employees at this company are able to bring up problems and tough issues.” $\alpha = .60$.

Organizational Trust

The measure of organizational trust was adapted from Purdie Vaughns’ et al. (2008) trust-and-comfort measure, which consists of 11 items adapted from questionnaires measuring trust and satisfaction in the workplace (Tyler & Blader, 2013). Seven items were removed because of lack of relevance, and one was added. The five remaining items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). All items were averaged, with higher scores representing higher organizational trust. An example item in this measure is, “I think I would be treated fairly by my supervisor.” $\alpha = .95$.

¹Actual scales and other study materials are available upon request to the author to foster replicability.

Likelihood of Applying

Likelihood of applying was measured by three items in a self-created measure. An example item in this measure is, “How likely do you think you would be to apply to this organization in real life?” Answers were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not likely at all*) to 5 (*very likely*) and all items were averaged to calculate likelihood, with higher scores indicating higher likelihood of applying. $\alpha = .94$.

Social Dominance Orientation

The measure for social-dominance orientation (Ho et al., 2015) consisted of 16 items meant to assess an individual’s support for group-based hierarchies. Each item is rated using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly oppose*) to 7 (*strongly favor*). The items were averaged, with the mean score representing a final SDO score and higher numbers implying more support for group-based hierarchies. An example item in this measure is, “Groups at the bottom should not have to stay in their place.” $\alpha = .92$.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Skewness and kurtosis values for the dependent variable, moderator, and mediators were in normal range (-1 to 1). Although no variables were normal according to the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test of normality ($p < .05$), analyses were continued as planned since ANOVA as a statistical analysis is generally robust against deviations from normality. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics and correlations among study variables.

Manipulation Checks

The majority of participants in the low-LRD condition (69.38%) and high-LRD condition (99%) answered the manipulation check correctly. A chi-square test of independence confirmed the LRD-condition participants believed that they were in was associated with what condition they were actually in: $\chi^2(1, 419) = 215.34, p < .001$. For the PDV manipulation, 69.81% of participants in the multicultural condition, 85.05% of participants in the color-blind condition, 64.08% of participants in the BLM condition, and 63.11% of participants in the control condition answered the manipulation check correctly. A chi-square test of independence also confirmed an association between participant’s actual PDV manipulation condition and the manipulation condition they believed they were in, $\chi^2(9, 419) = 512.59, p < .001$.

Primary Analyses

Correlations between income ($r[419] = -.04, p = .47$) and education level ($r[419] = -.05, p = .34$) and likelihood of applying were not significant. Levene’s test of homogeneity of variance passed for

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Variables

| Measure | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | (α) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|--------------------------|----------|-----------|--------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|------|---|
| 1-Likelihood of applying | 3.62 | 1.12 | 0.94 | — | | | | | |
| 2-Psych safety | 3.58 | 0.67 | 0.6 | .52*** | — | | | | |
| 3-Org trust | 5.2 | 1.42 | 0.95 | .71*** | .74*** | — | | | |
| 4-Identity threat | 2.66 | 1.61 | 0.97 | -.31*** | -.62*** | -.51*** | — | | |
| 5-SDO | 2.35 | 1.25 | 0.92 | -.20*** | -.13** | -.23*** | -0.023 | — | |
| 6-LRD | | | | .14** | .29*** | .25*** | -.26*** | 0.02 | — |

Note. LRD included as dichotomous variable: 0 = low-LRD, 1 = high-LRD.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

likelihood of applying ($F[15, 403] = 1.39, p = .15$), confirming homogeneity of variances across all 16 cells in the $2 \times 2 \times 4$ study design.

Likelihood of Applying

A three-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of LRD, PDV, and race, in addition to their interactions, on likelihood of applying for all participants combined (White and BHL). Although the main effect of LRD ($F[1, 403] = 8.14, p = .005$) and interaction effect between race and PDV condition on likelihood of applying ($F[3, 403] = 2.75, p = .042$) were significant, other effects were not significant at $p < .05$. Contrary to predictions, the effect of PDV on likelihood of applying did not depend on LRD for any participants, and the three-way interaction with participant race was not significant either, failing to support hypotheses 1c and 3.

The main effect of LRD indicated that participants in the high-LRD condition ($M = 3.79, SD = 1.13$) were significantly more likely to apply to the organization than participants in the low-LRD condition ($M = 3.46, SD = 1.1$). This finding is consistent with predictions for BHL participants but not for White participants (for whom no difference was expected).

In order to test the specific hypotheses about PDV for each racial condition, two-way ANOVAs for the effects of PDV and LRD were run separately for White and BHL participants. See Table 2 for ANOVA results about likelihood of applying.

White Participants. A main effect of PDV was found $F(3, 218) = 4.13, p = .007$. Post hoc analyses (Scheffé) indicated that White participants in the BLM condition were significantly less likely to apply ($M = 3.25, SD = 1.3$) to the organization than in the multicultural condition ($M = 3.93, SD = .88, p = .013$). These findings fail to support hypothesis 2, which was that for White participants, likelihood of applying in BLM and multicultural conditions would be lower than in the color-blind condition. Instead, they simply show that White participants were significantly less likely to apply in the BLM condition than the multicultural condition, which had the lowest and highest means for likelihood of applying for White participants, respectively. However, no

Table 2
ANOVA Summary Table for Likelihood of Applying

| Source | <i>df</i> | MS | <i>F</i> | <i>p</i> | Effect size |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-------|----------|----------|-------------|
| All participants | | | | | |
| Race | 1 | 0.78 | 0.64 | .42 | 0 |
| PDV | 3 | 1.88 | 1.55 | .2 | 0.01 |
| LRD | 1 | 9.86 | 8.14* | .005 | 0.02 |
| Race \times PDV | 3 | 3.34 | 2.75* | .042 | 0.02 |
| Race \times LRD | 1 | 1.17 | 0.97 | .33 | 0 |
| PDV \times LRD | 3 | 1.69 | 1.4 | .24 | 0.01 |
| Race \times PDV \times LRD | 3 | 0.66 | 0.55 | .65 | 0 |
| Within groups | 403 | 1.21 | | | |
| Total | 419 | | | | |
| White participants only | | | | | |
| PDV | 3 | 5.22 | 4.13* | .01 | 0.05 |
| LRD | 1 | 2.31 | 1.82 | .18 | 0.01 |
| PDV \times LRD | 3 | 1.13 | 0.89 | .45 | 0.01 |
| Within groups | 218 | 1.27 | | | |
| Total | 226 | | | | |
| BHL participants only | | | | | |
| PDV | 3 | 0.699 | 0.609 | .61 | 0.01 |
| LRD | 1 | 8.23 | 7.18* | .01 | 0.04 |
| PDV \times LRD | 3 | 1.15 | 1.01 | .39 | 0.02 |
| Within groups | 185 | 1.15 | | | |
| Total | 193 | | | | |

Note. MS = *M* squares; effect size = partial η^2 .

* $p < .05$.

significant main effect regarding LRD or interaction effect between LRD and PDV for White participants was found, aligning with the lack of hypotheses regarding LRD main effects or PDV-LRD interactions for White participants. See Figure 1 for visual representation.

BHL Participants. A main effect of LRD was the only significant effect found for BHL participants, such that participants in the high-LRD condition ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 1.03$) were significantly more likely to apply to the organization than those in the low-LRD condition ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.10$): $F(1, 403) = 7.18$, $p = .01$. These findings support hypothesis 1b, that for BHL participants, higher LRD would increase likelihood of applying. However, these findings fail to provide support for the predicted two-way interaction between LRD and PDV, likely because there was no main effect of PDV for BHL participants, failing to support hypotheses 1a and 1c.

Mediation Analyses

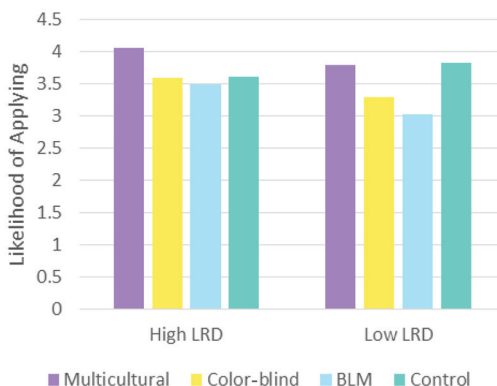
Initial analyses used the Baron and Kenny method due to the use of multiple independent variables. See Table 1 for correlational analyses, demonstrating the significant positive correlations between LRD and psychological safety and organizational trust, as well as the negative correlation between LRD and identity threat.

First, multiple regression analysis was used to test if the three independent variables significantly predicted likelihood of applying. The results indicated the three predictors explained 3.9% of the variance in likelihood of applying ($R^2 = .04$, $F[5, 413] = 3.33$, $p = .006$). For this regression, PDV manipulation conditions (multicultural, color-blind, and BLM) were dummy-coded so that each participant in that condition was assigned a value of “1,” whereas participants in each other condition were assigned a value of “0.” Consistent with the analysis performed as an ANOVA, only LRD significantly added to the prediction at $p < .05$.

Following the independent-variable/dependent-variable regression, a multiple regression was performed to examine the relationship between the mediators and likelihood of applying. The results indicated the three predictors explained 50.3% of the variance in likelihood of applying ($R^2 = .503$, $F[3, 415] = 140.05$, $p < .001$). Organizational trust significantly added to the prediction ($\beta = .71$, $p < .001$), whereas the significance of the prediction of identity threat on likelihood was marginal ($\beta = .082$, $p = .065$). Meanwhile, psychological safety did not account for any unique variance: $\beta = .046$, $p = .415$.

Finally, regression analyses were performed to examine the relations between the independent variables and each mediator. All three multiple regressions were significant: psychological safety

Figure 1
Effects of PDV and LRD on Likelihood of Applying for White Participants



Note. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

($R^2 = .08$, $F[5, 413] = 7.91$, $p < .001$), organizational trust ($R^2 = .065$, $F[5, 413] = 5.76$, $p < .001$), and identity threat ($R^2 = .12$, $F[5, 413] = 11.45$, $p < .001$). However, LRD was the only predictor that significantly contributed to each mediator ($p < .05$).

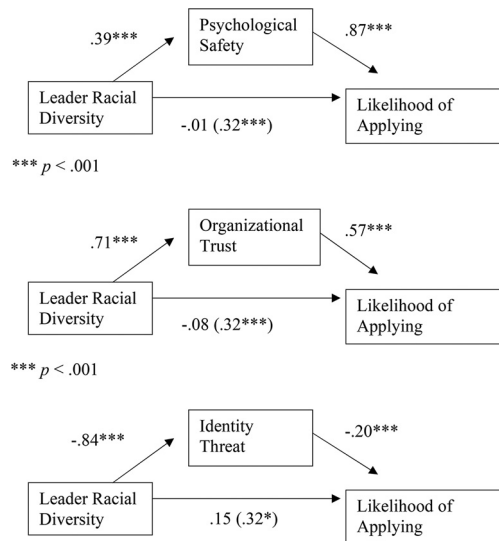
Next, because only the LRD independent variable significantly added to the prediction between independent variables and likelihood of applying, further mediation analysis with LRD as the only predictor variable was performed using PROCESS Model 7 (Hayes, 2013) bootstrapping procedures. Three separate analyses were performed (one for each mediator) in order to prevent suppression effects and make results easier to interpret, especially because of the conflicting directional effects of the different mediators. Mediation analyses revealed a significant indirect effect of LRD on likelihood of applying through psychological safety, ($ab = .34$, 95% CI [.22, .47], $P_M = 1.06$), through organizational trust ($ab = .40$, 95% CI [.25, .56], $P_M = 1.26$), and through identity threat ($ab = .17$, 95% CI [.09, .27], $P_M = .53$). Supporting hypothesis 4, participants were more likely to apply to an organization when the leadership team was more diverse because greater LRD was associated with increased feelings of psychological safety and organizational trust and with lower identity threat. See Figure 2 for mediation results. It is important to note that these models each included only a singular mediator, not accounting for the variance predicted by the other two. As written above, organizational trust was the only unique mediator that predicted likelihood of applying within the multiple regression. This means there is likely a relationship between identity threat and psychological safety with organizational trust such that the first two are correlated with, and do not contribute beyond, organizational trust.

Exploratory ANOVAs Examining Effect of Race on Mediators

Exploratory two-way ANOVAs were run to explore the relations between LRD, race, and their interaction on each mediator because hypothesis 4 specified stronger mediation effects for BHL than White participants.

Figure 2

Standardized Regression Coefficients for the Relationship Between Leader Racial Diversity and Likelihood of Applying as Mediated by Psychological Safety, Organizational Trust, and Identity Threat



Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

First, a two-way ANOVA was run exploring the effects of LRD and race on psychological safety. In addition to the main effect of LRD— $F(1, 415) = 39.3, p < .001$ —an interaction between LRD and race was found— $F(1, 415) = 4.47, p = .035$. Although both BHL ($p < .001$) and White participants ($p = .002$) experienced significantly higher psychological safety in the high-LRD condition (White $M = 3.75, SD = .64$; BHL $M = 3.8, SD = .63$) than the low-LRD condition (White $M = 3.49, SD = .63$; BHL $M = 3.27, SD = .67$), the difference for BHL participants was twice the size as for White participants. Furthermore, least significant difference pairwise comparisons indicated that BHL participants ($M = 3.27, SD = .67$) had significantly lower psychological safety than White participants ($M = 3.49, SD = .63$) in the low-LRD condition ($p = .015$).

Next, a two-way ANOVA was run exploring the effects of LRD and race on organizational trust. Results revealed only the main effect of LRD reported above. No interaction effect was found ($p = .05$).

Next, a two-way ANOVA was run exploring the effects of LRD and race on identity threat. In addition to the main effect of LRD reported above, a main effect of race was found, with BHL participants having significantly higher identity threat ($M = 3.04, SD = 1.75$) than White participants ($M = 2.34, SD = 1.41$): $F(1, 415) = 21.65, p < .001$. An interaction effect was also found: $F(1, 415) = 7.13, p = .008$. Although comparisons revealed that both BHL ($p < .001$) and White participants ($p = .02$) experienced significantly higher identity threat in the low-LRD condition (White $M = 2.57, SD = 1.5$; BHL $M = 3.66, SD = 1.83$) than the high-LRD condition (White $M = 2.11, SD = 1.28$; BHL $M = 2.4, SD = 1.42$), the difference for BHL participants was nearly three times the size as for White participants. Least significant difference pairwise comparisons indicated that BHL participants had significantly higher identity threat ($M = 3.66, SD = 1.83$) than White participants ($M = 2.57, SD = 1.5$) in the low-LRD condition ($p < .001$).

Findings reveal that the effects of LRD on identity threat and psychological safety depended on participant race, whereas the same dependence was not found for organizational trust. Although both BHL and White participants experienced significantly lower identity threat and higher psychological safety in the high-LRD condition compared to the low, BHL participants experienced significantly higher identity threat and lower psychological safety than White participants in the low-LRD condition. Although the mediation analyses were run for the entire sample as a whole, including both White and BHL participants, the ANOVA results showing the main and interaction effects involving race support the second part of hypothesis 4, that the independent variables would have stronger effects on the mediators for BHL participants compared to White participants.

Moderation Effects of SDO

To test hypothesis 5, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted on White participants only. The SDO variable was centered by subtracting the mean from each SDO term. In the first step, dummy-coded variables for LRD (with low racial diversity as the reference group), and for PDV (with the control condition as the reference group), were included: These variables accounted for a significant amount of variance in likelihood of applying: $R^2 = .06, F(4, 221) = 3.66, p = .007$. Next, SDO was added to the regression as the potential moderator, which accounted for a significant proportion of variance in likelihood of applying: R^2 Model 2 = .12, $F(5, 220) = 5.8, p < .001$ (R^2 Change = .05, $p < .001$). An increase in 1 unit of SDO predicted a $-.2$ decrease in likelihood of applying.

Next, the interaction term between the LRD-dummy variable and SDO was added to the regression model, which also accounted for a significant proportion of variance in likelihood of applying: R^2 Model 3 = .15, $F(6, 219) = 6.46, p < .001$ (R^2 Change = .03, $p = .003$). This demonstrates a moderating effect of SDO on the relationship between LRD and likelihood of applying for White participants. Examination of the interaction plot showed that likelihood of applying increased with greater LRD for low-SDO White participants but not for their high-SDO counterparts. These results provide partial support for hypothesis 5, which predicted that SDO would moderate the effects of the independent variables for White participants on likelihood of applying. ANOVA analyses using a median-split on SDO demonstrated that likelihood of applying was significantly higher in the high-

LRD ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.09$) compared to the low-LRD condition ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.04$) for White participants with low SDO ($F[1, 101] = 4.64$, $p = .034$), whereas there was no significant difference between LRD conditions for White participants with high SDO ($F[1, 121] = .12$, $p = .73$).

Finally, the interaction terms between PDV-dummy variables and SDO were added to the model but did not account for a significant change in the proportion of variance in likelihood of applying: R^2 Model 4 = .18, $F(9, 216) = 5.2$, $p < .001$ (R^2 Change = .03, $p = .06$). See Table 3 for a summary of the hierarchical regression. It is important to note, however, that the interaction effect between BLM and SDO was marginally significant ($p = .059$), and, therefore, with higher experimental power, a real effect may exist. Examination of the interaction plot showed that likelihood of applying decreased in the BLM condition relative to control for high-SDO White participants more than for low-SDO counterparts. ANOVA analyses using a median split on SDO demonstrated that likelihood of applying significantly decreased in the BLM condition ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.25$) compared to the control condition ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.14$) for White participants with high SDO ($F[1, 121] = 9.16$, $p = .003$), whereas there was no significant difference between BLM and control conditions for White participants with low SDO ($F[1, 101] = 1.20$, $p = .28$).

Exploratory Analyses: White Versus Black Versus Hispanic/Latinx

Because of the significant findings regarding likelihood of applying, an additional exploratory three-way ANOVA on LRD, PDVs, and race was run, but this time the race category was divided into three levels, White, Black, and Hispanic/Latinx. For these analyses, participants who identified as both Black and HL were removed ($n = 11$), leaving 91 participants who identified as Black and non-HL and 91 participants who identified as HL and non-Black (and 226 Whites). In addition to the main effect of LRD found in the primary ANOVA analyses above, the interaction between race and PDVs was significant: $F(6, 384) = 2.25$, $p = .04$. Least significant difference pairwise comparisons indicated that Black participants were significantly more likely to apply to the organization in the BLM condition ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.07$) than in the control condition ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.43$; $p = .03$), but no pairwise comparisons were significant for Latinx participants. These findings indicate the potential for additional and stronger effects with a larger sample of only Black participants, as well as possible differences in the effects of PDVs on Black versus HL participants and the ways each group viewed the manipulation materials.

Discussion and Organizational Implications

Main Effects: Findings

BHL

For BHL participants alone, the most prominent main effect found was that participants under high LRD were more likely to apply to the organization than those under low LRD, consistent with hypothesis 1b, but failing to provide support for hypotheses 1a and 1c. These results highlight the importance of racial representation in leadership to job applicants of color. The idea that “representation [of underrepresented groups] matters” has been discussed in a variety of fields (Bühlmann & Schädel, 2012; Tukachinsky, 2015), and these findings corroborate that for BHL participants, actions may speak louder than words, especially at a time when many companies have promised to fight for racial justice. Organizations should think about different stages in the employee life cycle where they can make racial minorities more comfortable through meaningful representation. For example, increasing mentorship programs in which new hires are matched with experienced employees of the same race or cultural background could increase retention and growth of minority employees while showing that they, too, have the potential to rise to leadership positions. However, underrepresented minorities are less likely to hold positions of power and influence in organizations (Cheng et al., 2020; Gee & Peck, 2018), which may mean that same-race mentor dyads are useful for relational/psychosocial aspects of mentoring but not as much for career developmental functions. Although same-race mentorship programs may reap benefits, organizations should also ensure

Table 3
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Likelihood of Applying Including SDO Moderator (for White Participants Only)

| Variable | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | | Model 4 | |
|----------------------------|---------|--------------|---------|--------------|---------|--------------|---------|--------------|
| | B | β (SE) | B | β (SE) | B | β (SE) | B | β (SE) |
| LDR | 0.26 | 0.098 | 0.24 | 0.1 | 0.23 | 0.1 | 0.16 | 0.07 |
| BLM dummy | -0.42 | -0.16 | -0.51* | -0.2 | -0.63** | -0.24 | -0.68** | -0.26 |
| Multicultural dummy | 0.26 | 0.1 | 0.22 | 0.08 | 0.14 | 0.05 | 0.14 | 0.05 |
| color-blind dummy | -0.23 | -0.08 | -0.27 | -0.1 | -0.3 | -0.11 | -0.3 | -0.11 |
| SDO | | | -.2*** | -0.24 | -0.04 | -0.05 | 0.04 | 0.04 |
| LDR \times SDO | | | | | -.32** | -0.27 | -0.35 | -0.29 |
| BLM \times SDO | | | | | | | -0.28 | -0.18 |
| Multicultural \times SDO | | | | | | | -0.06 | 0.03 |
| color-blind \times SDO | | | | | | | .12** | 0.06 |
| R^2 | | .06** | | .12*** | | .15*** | | .18*** |
| Adj. R^2 | | .05** | | .1*** | | .013*** | | .14*** |
| ΔR^2 | | | | 0.05 | | .03* | | .03* |

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

that they facilitate cross-race mentorship opportunities and inclusive mentorship practices to optimize the success of their BIPOC employees.

The lack of effects regarding PDV condition for BHL participants may indicate that they were not attuned to these factors in the presence of LRD cues, maybe because of a higher value placed on actions and results, which signal integrity and transparency, over words and promises. However, it may indicate that some BHL participants may support, even if indirectly, some ideas present in color-blind messaging more than expected. Research has shown that color-blind messaging may negatively impact BIPOC. However, there is a lack of consensus around the most effective ideology when it comes to promoting race relations, with almost half of racial and ethnic minority groups saying it is better to focus on what different groups have in common than on each group's unique experiences, aligning with a color-blind approach (Horowitz et al., 2019).

White

For White participants alone, the only main effect found regarding the primary independent variables was that White participants were significantly less likely to apply in the BLM than the multicultural condition. These findings partially contradict hypothesis 2, in which White participants were expected to be less likely to apply in the multicultural and BLM conditions than the color-blind condition. These findings indicate that this specific multicultural statement may have hinted at ideals present in the all-inclusive multiculturalism model, which emphasizes that diversity includes both minorities and nonminorities and is meant to appeal to Whites (Stevens et al., 2008). White people may also be recognizing the pitfalls of color blindness, including how it may allow people to ignore racism and discrimination rather than try to mitigate it, as these pitfalls become more well-known with increased coverage from mainstream media outlets (Fuchs, 2020; Stafford, 2015; Wingfield, 2015).

The findings about Whites' preference for multicultural PDVs, over BLM, suggest that organizations may be able to expand the strategies, messaging, and ideals they use to appeal to racial minorities while not alienating Whites. As part of the social minefields that are increasingly confronting organizations, leadership must attempt to appeal to and protect racial minorities while simultaneously avoiding the infuriation of majority-group members. As more people understand the dangers of ignoring race, racism, and discrimination, and become aware that diversity programming is meant to make workplaces and teams safer and more productive for all, companies may be able to increasingly incorporate multicultural messaging. This all-inclusive style can emphasize the value of recognizing and respecting different values, backgrounds, and cultures, such as by acknowledging cultural-specific holidays, as well as the strengths that diversity can bring to a team, while avoiding placing blame on nonminority individuals.

However, Whites' decreased likelihood of applying in the BLM PDV condition, likely driven by high-SDO Whites according to SDO-related analyses, appears to have significant implications for how organizations can most effectively address certain issues of social change. In this study, only a brief message about the organization's support of BLM and acknowledgment of racism was presented, and results suggest that White people may have felt excluded from, threatened by, or alienated by this brief statement of support. It is possible that more education around the background of BLM and its goals would be necessary to help ensure Whites that no one at their organization is blaming them, as individuals, for omnipresent racism and discrimination. Companies must emphasize that race-related initiatives to help BIPOC are meant to counteract disproportionate suffering in times of crisis and long-standing inequities and discrimination against BIPOC (Tulshyan, 2020), rather than blame or disadvantage White employees.

It is also conceivable that bringing BLM, which has become a highly politicized social movement, into the conversation in such a broad manner in the recruiting stage could be counterintuitive and damaging, causing individuals to latch onto opinions and ideas they have heard from their close social and political circles. Instead, organizations may see better results if they ground and center diversity-related narratives around their own employees' experiences and organizational goals. They may emphasize how their singular institution is not exempt from the responsibility of counteracting a perpetual history of racism and how to make people feel safe within organization-specific

practices and programming. BLM may more naturally enter the conversation through critical discussion, reflection, and activities among employees. Ultimately, programming, initiatives, and messaging for diversity, equity, and inclusion that emphasize an aspiration to help people grow and feel included will likely more effectively draw in majority-group members, change behaviors and beliefs, and drive results compared to any messaging that could be interpreted as blaming or shaming.

Three-Way Interaction and Universal Main Effect

Because the expected PDV-LRD two-way interaction did not occur for BHL participants, in addition to a lack of two-way interaction for White participants, there was no significant three-way interaction, such that the effect of PDV would depend on LRD for BHL participants but not for White participants (H3). This effect may have been hidden due to unexpected outcomes regarding the PDV condition or a lack of experimental power. However, it is also likely, especially because of the positive main effect of LRD on likelihood of applying for all participants combined and the universal positive effects found of high LRD on the three mediating variables, that the effects of LRD, specifically, are more universal rather than race-dependent.

Explanatory Mediating Mechanisms

Consistent with hypothesis 4, identity threat, psychological safety, and organizational trust all significantly mediated the relationship between LRD and likelihood of applying in the hypothesized directions for both White and BHL participants combined. These mediators start to shed light on the *why* behind the effects of diversity messaging on outcomes in BHL versus White applicants as explanatory mechanisms, helping to move the present study beyond one of the typical questions asked in diversity research: “Does diversity have positive or negative ramifications for teams, individuals, and organizations?” Instead, through focusing on the *why* behind low LRD negatively affecting diverse applicants, through mediating variables such as psychological safety, identity threat, and organizational trust, this study brings focus to how organizations can protect and nurture a diverse workforce, optimizing outcomes for all.

Although this study specifically examined the effects of diversity-related variables on participants’ likelihood of applying to a company, the mediational findings suggest broad implications for employees and organizations beyond the recruiting stage of the employee life cycle. Organizational trust, psychological safety, and identity threat have been found to be related to a multitude of employee outcomes, from performance to well-being (Walton et al., 2015; Zak, 2018); therefore, by ensuring that positive diversity-related cues extend past the recruiting stage, organizations can, in turn, magnify impact, moving from recruiting diversity to driving cultural change, retaining diversity, and growing minority leaders. To improve recruitment, retention, and development efforts with potential Black (and other minority) employees, organizations must identify and expand aspects of organizational climate, in addition to increasing representation in recruitment materials, that affect these mediating factors (especially organizational trust, as the only significant unique mediator). For instance, organizations may explicitly integrate diversity-focused initiatives into various business processes, through methods such as highlighting the selection of minority-owned partner companies, increasing same-race mentorship and coaching opportunities for minority employees, celebrating and giving time off for minority-culture holidays, and ensuring all employees are trained on how to center feedback around tangible accomplishments and skills rather than identity markers such as race.

The exploratory ANOVAs between LRD and race demonstrated stronger independent-variable/mediator relationships for BHL than White individuals, specifically showing that low LRD was a stronger predictor of lower psychological safety and higher identity threat for BHL than for Whites. However, mediations were significant for all participants, albeit less so for Whites, in that in general all had lower identity threat and higher psychological safety and trust in the high-LRD condition, showing that helping BHL applicants by increasing LRD could in turn benefit White applicants rather than deter them. The reasoning behind the significant mediations for Whites should be explored further. These results suggest the possible benefits of approaching the improvement of

organizational climate and culture in a universal sense, rather than from a mind-set of only improving the employee experience for minorities. Efforts to show the representation of different races and cultures may improve the overall employee experience, including feeling safe to bring one's authentic self to work, trusting organizational leadership, and not feeling prejudged because of skin color, for all employees, including Whites. Every individual, including White people, likely enter an organization with insecurities and unseen identities they may feel insecure about, and greater representation of race may subliminally signal a more general organizational culture of openness and acceptance.

However, because racial-minority applicants are likely more affected by diversity-climate and cultural factors such as representation, organizations may benefit by focusing on what policies and programs make minority applicants and employees comfortable, as well as by hopefully focusing on making the most marginalized person in the room feel safe, other individuals will begin to feel the same. Essentially, these results show that efforts to improve the psychological safety and trust of minority-group members should not negatively affect majority-group members; positive changes to inclusive organizational culture should benefit the collective, regardless of race. Still, organizational leadership must put the time in to identify specific practices, activities, policies, and trainings that positively contribute to organizational-diversity climate factors such as trust.

SDO Moderator

Partially consistent with hypothesis 5, findings demonstrated that for White participants, likelihood of applying significantly increased with greater LRD for low-SDO White participants but did not significantly decrease with greater LRD for their high-SDO counterparts. Although high-SDO Whites were expected to be significantly less likely to apply under high LRD, interestingly, the primary effects found about LRD were among low-SDO White participants, indicating that low-SDO Whites reacted in favor of the company's diversity more than high-SDO Whites reacted against it. Additionally, likelihood of applying decreased more substantially in the BLM condition relative to control for high-SDO Whites compared to low-SDO counterparts.

These findings indicate that rather than thinking about White individuals as a homogeneous group, like in some of the present study's hypotheses, it may be beneficial to think about White people in relation to SDO. Low-SDO participants in this study responded similarly to issues of diversity as BIPOC. They were more likely to apply under high LRD compared to low, aligning with the idea that low-SDO individuals are likely to support institutions that value minority groups and hierarchy-attenuating social movements like BLM. In this case, diversity representation seemed to send a welcoming signal to low-SDO individuals but did not sound an alarm for high-SDO individuals, who were not significantly more or less likely to apply in either LRD condition. This result implies that in trying to optimize outcomes for BHL applicants, companies are not hurting or deterring White applicants and are likely attracting White applicants who will contribute positively to a diverse and inclusive culture. However, for high-SDO individuals, it was BLM that sounded an alarm, as they were significantly less likely to apply in the BLM compared to the control condition. Researchers and practitioners may want to shift focus onto how support for pro-diversity initiatives and social movements like BLM can be framed in non-threatening ways to high-SDO Whites that emphasize equity over blame. If high-SDO Whites felt threatened by the explicit mention of BLM but not necessarily the presence of more diverse leadership, it is likely that slight shifts in the framing and positioning of diversity-related matters have the potential to affect how high-SDO Whites respond.

Limitations

First, fewer participants than expected passed manipulation checks. Especially in the BLM condition, which was the only option that mentioned BLM, it was surprising that 36% of participants could not identify the correct condition. The hypothetical, virtual, anonymous nature of the study may have failed to elicit thought patterns and stress in participants comparable to those that job applicants would experience in the real world, lacking ecological validity, affecting variable interpretations, and possibly causing participants to lack attention toward study materials. Although specific phrases in the PDV statements were bolded to emphasize experimental conditions, in the real

world, projected diversity values may also be present in a variety of other materials, such as offer letters.

Also lacking ecological validity, the high-LRD condition showed an image that likely does not match the levels of racial diversity seen even in many companies that consider themselves diverse, with 70% of the people in the C-suite photo presenting as BIPOC, representing a hopeful vision for the future in which C-suites are more representative of national demographics compared to the current state of companies. Future researchers may aim to increase the resemblance of manipulations to real-world scenarios and offer varying levels of LRD to capture when the effects found in this study are catalyzed, in addition to including a gender intersectionality analysis. Although the high- and low-LRD conditions maintained similar gender breakdowns, participant perceptions were likely influenced to some degree by the intersection of race and gender presented.

In this study, participants who failed the manipulation checks were included in analysis, both to preserve experimental power and because it was possible that manipulations could have still affected participants who failed the manipulation check. The inclusion of these participants, however, could have weakened the effects found, and future researchers may want to examine the impacts of perceptions of diversity climate by using the manipulation conditions participants believed they were in rather than the conditions they were actually in.

Suggestions for Future Research and Practice

Although results showed that racial representation matters in promoting equitable outcomes for job applicants, this is not enough. In fact, until adequate and robust diversity infrastructure and policies are in place beyond representation, it may harm underrepresented applicants by luring them into a space where they may feel undervalued and pigeonholed. Even if an applicant is attracted to a company because of diverse representation, they may feel threatened or unsafe if once they begin working, internal company values fail to match their own. The present study demonstrated that identity threat, psychological safety, and organizational trust explained the relationship between LRD and likelihood of applying, illustrating that these are important constructs for organizations to target in promoting a healthy organizational-diversity culture.

For company leadership and practitioners, it is important to consider how diversity ideologies and feelings of comfort translate to policies, actions, and procedures in real-world settings. What does multiculturalism look like in practice? How do feelings of psychological safety and trust manifest, and how can organizations target these mechanisms? Additionally, although findings demonstrate the importance of demographic representation, organizations cannot increase racial representation overnight and therefore must commit to long-term initiatives dedicated to supporting and growing employees of color to show authentic commitment to increasing representation. Future researchers should expand this research with increased external and ecological validity through experimentation in real-world settings and different populations. For example, researchers may expand to other races and countries, additional diversity philosophies, and alternative cues, such as pictures on the wall in an interview room.

It is also vital that future research explores the multidimensionality of the term *minority* through an intersectional lens, ensuring that minority individuals are not treated as a monolithic entity. As the findings from the White versus Black versus HL analyses demonstrate above, in which Black applicants preferred the BLM messaging over the control but the same effect was not significant for the HL group, different racial groups, in addition to mixed-race individuals, likely respond differently to certain diversity-related stimuli. Although the current study examined Black individuals within a BHL group, more focused research is appropriate and critical to determine if specific strategies are more successful in growing and retaining Black leaders compared to other minority groups. This is especially important in the context of specific social movements, like BLM, which can cause megathreats, or “large-scale, diversity-related episodes that receive significant media attention,” which may negatively impact specific minority groups in and out of the workplace (Leigh & Melwani, 2019). Additionally, how could alternative factors such as gender and education level interact with the variables in question? There is no one-size-fits-all

approach to diversity; different strategies may work to improve employee and organizational experiences depending on situational nuances.

The current study has provided an important step toward filling prior research gaps related to the exploration of diversity management and outcomes through a thorough investigation of the interactions between diversity-related variables and potential explanatory mechanisms. LRD proved to be the most important variable in predicting the measured outcomes for BHL participants, sending a strong message to organizations; their actions may speak louder than their words. However, this information comes with the caveat that increasing demographic diversity is not enough. This research specifically examined job-applicant perceptions, but a large part of diversity-related work must be focused on internal culture and values, ensuring that hired applicants feel valued once they work at an organization. The current research suggests that identity threat, psychological safety, and organizational trust are key factors that companies should consider when attempting to help underrepresented individuals feel safe and valued, ultimately promoting the growth and development of these employees and helping them to advance into leadership roles.

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