

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Discriminatory Diversity Definitions:

The Ironic Consequences of Managerial Diversity Conceptions

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of  
Philosophy in Management

by

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2013



## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in Management

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

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Recent research has documented the increasing managerialization of diversity definitions (i.e., the focus on non-legal dimensions of diversity; Edelman et al., 2001). In three studies, we examine how managerial diversity definitions may affect the perpetuation and enhancement of social inequality in organizations. In Study 1 we find in a survey that organizations with managerial diversity definitions are more likely to have employees who believe their organizations do not have racial diversity problems. In Study 2, we provide direct causal evidence that managerial diversity definitions lead to the belief that an organization does not have a racial diversity problem (even when the organization has clear racial inequality). We also find that this effect occurs because the managerial definition causes people to perceive greater diversity (presumably because they are attending to non-racial dimensions of diversity). Finally, in Study 3 we find that managerial diversity definitions may lead directly to acts of racial discrimination in hiring among those who are relatively high in social dominance orientation.

Taken together, these studies illustrate the ironic effects of diversity definitions on social hierarchies in organizations. Theoretical and organizational implications are discussed.

The dissertation of Geoffrey C Ho is approved.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my family (who prepared me for this journey), my wife (who stood by me during this journey), my friends (who helped me through this journey), and my bunnies (who kept me company during this journey).

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to first thank the chair of my dissertation committee and advisor, Miguel Unzueta. His mentorship and encouragement were essential to my successes in the doctoral program (including the completion of this dissertation). I am also grateful to Margaret Shih for her guidance and support throughout the last 5 years, both professionally and personally. I might not have made it through the program without her. In addition, I am thankful to Jenessa Shapiro, and Yuen Huo for their expertise and wisdom, specifically for this dissertation and more generally during my doctoral journey. Finally, I am indebted to Stéphane Côté, who inspired me to dedicate my life to understanding human behavior in the workplace.

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## **Discriminatory Diversity Definitions: The Ironic Consequences of Managerial Diversity Conceptions**

Consider whether the senior leadership team of ExxonMobil, the largest company in the world (CNN Money, 2011), is diverse. Its senior executives are comprised entirely of white men over the age of 50 (ExxonMobil, 2011). However, they each have different occupational (i.e., engineering, operations, finance, accounting, and marketing) and geographic backgrounds (i.e., Washington, D.C., Texas, Alberta, Massachusetts, Oklahoma). Would you consider this a diverse senior leadership team? In this paper, we propose that the answer depends on how diversity is defined by the organization and that these diversity definitions may have important effects on social hierarchies in organizations. For instance, if ExxonMobil defined diversity with an emphasis on occupational and geographic backgrounds, individuals may be less likely to notice the underrepresentation of racial minorities and women in the senior leadership team because they are focused on the high levels of occupational and geographic heterogeneity. This could lead to an ironic situation where a diversity definition could inadvertently perpetuate the racial/gender underrepresentation among the senior executive team at ExxonMobil because the inequality remains unrecognized.

### ***The Inception and Evolution of Organizational Diversity Rhetoric***

Diversity rhetoric and initiatives have their roots in affirmative action and equal employment opportunity programs. Specifically, affirmative action and equal employment opportunity programs began experiencing increasing opposition in the 1980s from the Reagan administration (Skrentny, 1996) and a conservative Supreme Court (Freeman, 1990). In response to this trend, affirmative action and employment equity specialists, hired to develop and manage

these programs, began repackaging affirmative action and equal employment opportunity practices as diversity and diversity management (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998).

Furthermore, to differentiate diversity from affirmative action, a new rationale for the policies was employed to demonstrate that diversity was not a code word for affirmative action (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Lynch, 1997). That is, the rationale and purpose of diversity shifted from social justice and equality to being about organizational effectiveness (i.e., *the business case for diversity*). The justification for the “business case for diversity” rationale was provided by a body of literature created and disseminated by management consultants, academics, and business associations (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998). For instance, major support for this perspective came in the publication *Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the 21st Century* (Johnston & Packer, 1987), which predicted a demographic shift in the labor and consumer markets away from American-born white males toward females and minorities. This trend suggested that organizations that wanted to be competitive would need to become a friendly place for gender and ethnic minorities<sup>1</sup> (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998).

To illustrate, consider IBM’s (2011) diversity webpage description of its evolution from Diversity 1.0 to Diversity 3.0:

IBM has a long history of commitment to Diversity...It began in the mid-20th century, grounded in Equal Opportunity legislation and compliance (Diversity 1.0). We moved forward to Diversity 2.0 in the 1990s with a focus on eliminating barriers, and understanding regional constituencies and differences between the constituencies. As our demographics changed, we adapted our workplace to be more flexible and began our focus on work-life integration...This strong foundation brings us to where we are today — Diversity 3.0. This is the point

where we can take best advantage of our differences — for innovation. Our diversity is a competitive advantage and consciously building diverse teams helps us drive the best results for our clients.

Thus, IBM provides an apt example of how organizational diversity rhetoric has evolved from a concern regarding social equality to a focus on organizational effectiveness (i.e., the business case for diversity).

### ***Diversity Definitions***

As the rationale of diversity has shifted to organizational effectiveness, diversity definitions in organizations have also evolved from focusing on categories protected by civil-rights legislation (i.e., the legal definition of diversity) to referring to a wide array of dimensions not protected by law (i.e., the managerial definition of diversity; Avery, Volpone, & Myers, 2013; Edelman, Riggs, & Mara-Drita, 2001; Opie, Akinola, Brief, & Sullivan, 2013). Historically, the legal conception of diversity defines diversity along categories explicitly designated by the law (and works in tandem with the social justice rationale for diversity). The Civil Rights Act and other statutes designate race, sex, national origin, religion, age, sexual orientation<sup>2</sup>, veteran status, pregnancy, and disability status as protected social groups. The legal definition of diversity represents social categories that are not randomly assembled, but instead embraces the *moral ideal that certain social groups have been historically discriminated against and are entitled to protection and fair opportunity in employment* (Opie et al., 2013). For example, UC Berkeley (2011) defines faculty diversity as representation among “members of groups that have been historically underrepresented in higher education such as women, ethnic minorities, religious minorities, differently-abled, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender and others”.

In contrast, the managerial conception of diversity (working in tandem with the business rationale for diversity) is defined along both legal and non-legal categories with an emphasis on the non-legal dimensions (Edelman et al., 2001). That is, categories that are believed to produce an *effective and creative workforce in order to maximize profit and organizational effectiveness* (e.g., communication style, organizational rank, function, educational background, problem-solving styles, attitudes, etc.) supplant legal categories that were based on historical disenfranchisement (Avery et al., 2013). For example, the U.S. Air Force defines diversity along the categories of: “personal life experiences, geographic background, socioeconomic background, cultural knowledge, educational background, work background, language abilities, physical abilities, philosophical/spiritual perspectives, age, race, ethnicity and gender” (Ricks, 2011).

The managerialization of diversity definitions is particularly stark in the management literature (Avery et al., 2013). For instance, in the *Academy of Management Review*, diversity is defined very broadly by Harrison and Klein (2007) as “The distribution of differences among the members of a unit with respect to a common attribute X, such as tenure, ethnicity, conscientiousness, task attitude, or pay” (p. 1200). Furthermore, some definitions of diversity exclude legal categories altogether in defining diversity. Specifically, Liao, Chuang, and Joshi (2008), in a recent article in *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, define diversity as heterogeneity in “personality attributes, personal values, work attitudes, education, and lifestyle” (p. 112). In sum, diversity definitions regarding organizations have evolved from being about heterogeneity in legal categories to referring to heterogeneity on just about any dimension.

### *Functions and Benefits of Managerial Diversity Definitions*

Why has the definition of diversity expanded beyond the legal categories with certain legal categories being purposefully excluded in favour of categories without historical meaning (e.g., Liao, Chuang, & Joshi, 2008)? Recent managerial research in workgroup diversity has focused on examining how diversity affects group and organizational performance (see van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007 for review). Drawing from an information-processing/decision-making perspective (Mannix & Neale, 2005; van Knippenberg, De Dreu, & Homan, 2004) scholars argue that diversity can increase creativity and performance because heterogeneous teams possess greater breadth in potentially task-relevant knowledge, expertise, and perspectives relative to homogeneous teams (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007).

However, despite the plethora of research examining the effects of diversity on performance, results have been inconsistent (Bowers et al. 2000, Ilgen, Hollenbeck, Johnson, & Jundt, 2005; Guzzo & Dickson, 1996, Kerr & Tindale, 2004; Jackson, Joshi, & Erhardt, 2003; Milliken & Martins, 1996; Webber & Donahue 2001; Williams & O'Reilly 1998). In order to reconcile these conflicting results, some scholars have taken the strategy of creating diversity typologies. For example, Harrison, Price, and Bell (1998) separate diversity into surface level (i.e., group member differences in explicit, physical, and biological characteristics) vs. deep level (i.e., group member differences in attitudes, beliefs, and values) diversity. Jehn, Northcraft, and Neale (1999) demarcated diversity into social, informational, and values diversity. These scholars argued that the crucial types of diversity would be the ones that facilitate information gains.



Accordingly, some management scholars suggest that studies examining the effects of diversity on performance have yielded mixed results because scholars have focused on surface, demographic, or social diversity (i.e., similar to legal definitions of diversity). This is an issue because, while surface-level diversity may be easier to measure and may be important because of legislation prohibiting discrimination on many of the surface-level categories, deep-level diversity is thought to be more directly related to informational diversity, and may lead to greater breadth of information available for task performance (Harrison et al., 1998). That is, surface-level diversity may merely acts as a proxy for deep, informational diversity in relation to performance (e.g., an De Ven, Rogers, Bechara, & Sun, 2008; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007).

In fact, one perspective, drawing from social categorization theory (Turner, 1987), social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971; Jackson, Stone, & Alvarez, 1992), argues that demographic or surface types of diversity are not just proxies, but can actually be harmful to group and organizational processes (e.g., Jackson et al., 1991; Riordan & Shore, 1997; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). Specifically, some scholars argue that people in organizations with similar others (e.g., others that belong to the same social group) are more satisfied and motivated relative to people in organizations with greater demographic and social diversity (Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). Thus, these arguments have led to the popular belief (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007; Webber & Donahue, 2001) and theorizing (Jehn et al. 1999, Pelled et al. 1999) that job-related, informational, or deep level diversity should lead to positive group performance while less job-related, demographic, surface-level diversity should lead to negative group processes and performance.

Furthermore, research has suggested that it is deep-level diversity that truly affects group processes in the long run (Harrison et al., 1998; Harrison, Price Gavin & Florey, 2002). That is, while surface level diversity may impact work groups in the short term because surface, demographic, and social characteristics are most salient in initial meetings, deep-level diversity has long run impact because surface-level differences give way to deep-level differences over the long haul as organizational and group members get to know one another. Thus, when looking at dimensions of diversity, it could be interpreted that the focus on diversity should be regarding the dimensions at the deep-level of diversity that directly lead to information diversity and performance in the long run as opposed to proxies for diversity that are at the surface level and have less long run implications.

Another perspective (Klein & Harrison, 2007) suggests that results regarding the effects of diversity on performance are inconsistent because the construct of diversity has itself been inconsistently operationalized. Specifically, it is argued that researchers must differentiate between three types of diversity regardless of the dimension of diversity they are studying: separation, disparity, and variety. Separation diversity is the “composition of differences in lateral position or opinion among unit members” (Harrison & Klein, 2007, p. 1203). Disparity is the “composition of vertical differences in proportion of socially valued assets or resources held among unit members” (Harrison & Klein, 2007, p.1203). Variety is the “composition of differences in kind, source, or category of relevant knowledge or experience among unit members” (Harrison & Klein, p. 1203). Importantly, variety is theorized to be the most important diversity type in achieving performance gains because variety is equivalent to information diversity. Under this framework, legal categories are downplayed because “variety” on most

dimensions will increase the probability of increasing knowledge available for tasks (Klein & Harrison, 2007).

These academic arguments have been incorporated by organizations as sociologists have documented a trend whereby diversity is increasingly expressed as a resource because heterogeneity on multiple dimensions of diversity provides companies a competitive advantage through increased creativity, expertise, and flexibility (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998). For instance, Dell Inc. (2011) conceptualizes diversity as: “similarities and differences, defining it more broadly than just race, gender and ethnicity. It's about diversity of thinking, leadership, skill set and style. And by harnessing our differences in pursuit of common business goals, our teams can bring about innovation and new ways of achieving objectives.” Thus the managerial definition of diversity, focusing on dimensions that imply performance gains, allows organizations to express diversity as a resource and espouse its commitment to organizational performance.

### ***Negative Externalities of Managerial Diversity Definitions?***

While managerial diversity definitions may allow for scholars to more precisely examine how diversity affects performance in organizations and allow for organizations to express a “business case for diversity” rationale, this paper suggests that there are negative consequences and externalities to organizations defining diversity as such. Past research has found that managerial language can lead to changes in perceptions and behaviors. Specifically, Ferraro, Pfeffer, & Sutton (2005) argue that the teaching of economic ideas and theories can create the conditions under which economic ideas and theories become true. For instance, taking a micro-economics course can cause individuals to increase self-interested and unethical behaviors (Frank, Gilovich, & Regan, 1993). The language, assumptions, and theories taught in economics likely exert a “subtle, but powerful influence on behaviour, including behaviour in organizations,

through the formation of beliefs and norms about behaviour that affect what people do and how they design institutions and management” (Ferraro et al., 2005, p. 20). In sum, appropriate behaviors and actions may be learned through the language of economics (Miller, 1999).

Analogous to the way in which economic language may subtly influence people’s behavior, we suggest that the proliferation of managerial diversity definitions may affect perceptions of social inequality and discrimination. Specifically, managerial diversity definitions, by shifting diversity discourse away from social categories protected by law, may cause people to focus attention on other managerial dimensions of diversity. This may lead to the overlooking of situations of social inequality in organizations because of the deflection of attention away from harmful social practices and policies (Edelman et al., 2001).

Attention, or the selective processing of one aspect of information while ignoring other irrelevant aspects (Dijksterhuis & Aarts, 2010), is important because of the vast amounts of stimuli humans automatically perceive (Koch & Tsuchiya, 2006). In order to determine what stimuli to focus on, most attention processes are driven by top-down processes (i.e., goals; Corbetta & Shulman 2002, Dehaene, Changeux, Naccache, Sackur & Sergent, 2006, Koch & Tsuchiya 2006). That is, incoming information that is relevant for the attainment of active goals will be more likely to be processed while irrelevant information is filtered out (Aarts, Dijksterhuis, & De Vries, 2001). In this way, the presentation of managerial diversity definitions may lead to individuals focusing attention on the dimensions of diversity that are believed to be important for the organization (i.e., managerial dimensions) while ignoring dimensions that are perceived as less relevant to the organization (i.e., legal dimensions). Thus, the evolution of diversity definitions from legal to managerial may increasingly render social inequalities difficult to identify and address (Bell & Hartmann, 2007). In other words, a negative externality of

increasingly managerialized diversity definitions may be that intergroup inequality concerns will become increasingly neglected because individuals are focusing their attention toward non-legal dimensions of diversity. Thus a diversity definition that is inclusive of too many social groups could ironically lead to a situation where the social groups in greatest need of social representation are underrepresented and discriminated against.

*Hypothesis 1:* Diversity definitions will affect individuals' likelihood of recognizing social inequality. Specifically, individuals exposed to a managerial diversity definition will be more likely to overlook social inequalities and discrimination than individuals exposed to a legal diversity definition.

*Hypothesis 2:* Diversity definitions will affect individuals' likelihood of overlooking social inequalities because diversity definitions may focus individuals' attention on either legal or managerial dimensions of diversity.

### ***Overview of Studies***

In three studies, we will examine the effects of diversity definitions on the perpetuation and enhancement of social hierarchies in organizations. Study 1 will use a survey to examine whether a relationship between organizational diversity definitions and the overlooking of social inequality in organizations exists among former employees. Study 2 will use an experiment to determine causality and also to elucidate the mechanism responsible for the effect. Namely, we will test whether diversity definitions affect the dimensions of diversity that individuals focus on and whether this is the reason diversity definitions affect the degree to which individuals overlook social inequality in organizations. Finally, Study 3 will determine whether diversity definitions can allow for anti-egalitarian individuals to actualize their motivation to enhance social hierarchies via acts of racial discrimination. Furthermore, Study 3 will attempt to

determine the underlying process through which anti-egalitarian individuals justify their discrimination.

### **Study 1**

In Study 1, we used a survey to explore the relationship between organizational diversity definitions and the degree to which racial inequality is overlooked by former employees. We predict that former employees of organizations with more managerial diversity definitions will believe their company is less likely to have a racial diversity problem. Furthermore, we expect that this relationship will be explained by the fact that employees in organizations with more managerial diversity definitions will perceive greater diversity (presumably because they are focusing on other dimensions of diversity beyond race).

### ***Methodology***

#### ***Participants***

Seventy-three participants<sup>3</sup> (45 men, 27 women, 1 unreported) were recruited from the MBA program of a large public university on the West Coast. MBA participants were targeted because of their recent work experience that would allow them to complete the survey regarding diversity definitions at the most recent organization they worked at. Age ranged from 24 to 38 years ( $M = 28.39$ ,  $SD = 2.27$ ) with work experience ranging from 1 to 13 years ( $M = 4.80$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ). The self-identified racial composition of the sample consisted of 37 White, 31 Asian, 3 Multiracial, 1 Hispanic, and 1 unreported participant.

#### ***Procedure***

After giving informed consent, participants were provided the following directions: “Most large organizations have diversity practices and policies in place. Please write a few

sentences regarding how the last organization you worked at defined diversity (including the social groups that may be covered by the diversity definition)". Upon filling in their answer, participants then completed survey items regarding their former organization's diversity definition, how diverse they perceived their former organization to be, the degree to which they believed their former organization had a racial diversity problem, and finally completed a demographics questionnaire.

### ***Independent Variables***

*Managerial Definition Focus (Self-Perceived).* Participants indicated the degree to which their former organization's diversity definition focused on managerial dimensions using an item (i.e., My organization's diversity definition focuses on representation among groups with different skills and abilities, such as individuals with different personalities and occupational backgrounds) on a 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 = (*Strongly Agree*) Likert scale ( $M = 4.01$ ;  $SD = 1.97$ ).

*Legal Definition Focus (Self-Perceived).* Participants indicated the degree to which their former organization's diversity definition focused on legal dimensions using an item (i.e., My organization's diversity definition focuses on representation among historically underrepresented groups such as ethnic minorities and women) on a 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 = (*Strongly Agree*) Likert scales ( $M = 5.12$ ;  $SD = 1.68$ ).

*Managerial Definition Focus (Coded).* Another measure of the degree to which participants' descriptions of their former organizations' diversity definitions focused on managerial dimensions was drawn from participants' responses to how the last organization they worked at defined diversity. Specifically, this managerial definition focus (coded) variable was calculated by dividing the total number of *managerial* dimensions of diversity mentioned (e.g.,

skills, work function, personality, etc.), by the sum total of the total number of *managerial* dimensions of diversity mentioned and the total number *legal* diversity dimensions mentioned (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, etc). For example, if an organization defines diversity as heterogeneity on race, gender, and functional background, the managerial percentage of this particular diversity definition would be .33 (as calculated by the following:  $1/(1+2)$ ). This measure has been used in previous research (Opie, Akinola, Brief, & Sullivan, 2013;  $M = .26$ ;  $SD = .36$ ) and was calculated in this study in order to provide a more objective measure of the managerialization of diversity and to avoid common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012).

### ***Dependent Variable***

*Perceived Racial Diversity Problem.* Participants' indicated the degree to which they believe the organization has a racial diversity problem using two items (i.e., My former organization has a racial diversity problem; My former organization does not have a racial diversity issue (reverse-scored)) on 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 = (*Strongly Agree*) Likert scales ( $M = 3.34$ ;  $SD = 1.33$ ;  $r = .76$ ).

### ***Mediator Variable***

*Perceived Diversity.* Participants' indicated the degree to which they perceive the organization is diverse using three items (i.e., My former organization is a diverse organization; My former organization has a high level of diversity; My former organization has very little diversity (reverse-scored)) from past research (Unzueta, Knowles, & Ho, 2012) on 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 = (*Strongly Agree*) Likert scales ( $M = 4.72$ ;  $SD = 1.57$ ;  $\alpha = .93$ ).



## Results

### Main Analyses

See Table 1 for correlations between measured variables.

*Perceived Racial Diversity Problem.* In order to examine the relationship between the independent variables and perceived racial diversity problem, we conducted three separate linear regressions with perceived racial diversity problem as the dependent variable and managerial definition focus (self-perceived), legal definition focus (self-perceived), and managerial definition focus (coded) as the independent variables respectively. Consistent with our predictions, managerial definition focus (self-perceived) was negatively related to perceived racial diversity problem,  $B = -.20$ ,  $SE B = .08$ ,  $t(71) = -2.66$ ,  $\beta = -.30$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $R^2 = .09$ ,  $F(1, 71) = 7.07$ ,  $p < .01$ . Furthermore, we found that legal definition focus (self-perceived) was not significantly related to perceived racial diversity problem<sup>4</sup>,  $B = .10$ ,  $SE B = .09$ ,  $t(71) = 1.06$ ,  $\beta = .12$ ,  $p = .29$ ;  $R^2 = .02$ ,  $F(1, 71) = 1.06$ ,  $p = .29$ . Finally, managerial definition focus (coded) was negatively related to perceived racial diversity problem at marginally significant levels,  $B = -.80$ ,  $SE B = .47$ ,  $t(71) = -1.70$ ,  $\beta = -.21$ ,  $p < .10$ ;  $R^2 = .04$ ,  $F(1, 65) = 2.87$ ,  $p = .09$ .

*Perceived Diversity.* In order to examine the relationship between the independent variables and perceived diversity, we also conducted three separate linear regressions with perceived diversity as the dependent variable and managerial definition focus (self-perceived), legal definition focus (self-perceived), and managerial definition focus (coded) as the independent variables respectively. Consistent with our predictions, managerial definition focus (self-perceived) was positively related to perceived diversity,  $B = .38$ ,  $SE B = .08$ ,  $t(71) = 4.57$ ,  $\beta = .48$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $R^2 = .22$ ,  $F(1, 71) = 20.88$ ,  $p < .001$ . Furthermore, legal definition focus (self-perceived) was not significantly related to perceived diversity,  $B = .12$ ,  $SE B = .11$ ,  $t(71) = 1.01$ ,

$\beta = .13, p = .29; R^2 = .02, F(1, 71) = 1.15, p = .29$ . Finally, managerial definition focus (coded) was positively related to perceived diversity at marginally significant levels,  $B = .91, SE B = .55, t(65) = 1.65, \beta = .20, p = .10; R^2 = .04, F(1, 65) = 2.72, p = .10$ .

### ***Mediation Analyses***

As managerial definition focus (self-perceived) and managerial definition focus (coded) both significantly (or marginally significantly) predicted perceived racial diversity problem and perceived diversity, we examined each of these predictors as independent variable in respective mediation analyses.

*Managerial Definition Focus (Self-Perceived)*. In order to test for whether perceived diversity can explain the relationship between managerial definition focus (self-perceived) and perceived racial diversity problem, we followed Baron and Kenny (1986)'s approach to statistical mediation analysis. As reported in the preceding section, managerial definition focus (self-perceived) was significantly related to both perceived racial diversity problem and perceived diversity (Steps 1 and 2 of mediation test). To test Steps 3 and 4 of the mediation model, we regressed perceived racial diversity problem on both managerial definition focus (self-perceived) and perceived diversity. As shown in Figure 1, the relationship between managerial definition focus (self-perceived) and perceived racial diversity problem was no longer significant,  $B = -.08, SE B = 0.08, t(70) = -.93, \beta = -.11, p = .35$ , while the relationship between perceived diversity and perceived racial diversity problem was significant,  $B = -.33, SE B = 0.10, t(70) = -3.27, \beta = -.40, p = .002; R^2 = .21, F(2, 70) = 9.36, p < .001$ . Nonparametric bootstrapping analyses (Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Preacher Rucker, & Hayes, 2007) using 10,000 bootstrap samples respectively confirmed that perceived diversity conveyed the indirect effects

of managerial definition focus (self-perceived) on perceived racial diversity problem, 95% CI [-0.256, -0.037].

*Managerial Definition Focus (Coded)*. We also performed mediation analysis to test whether perceived diversity can explain the relationship between managerial definition focus (coded) and perceived racial diversity problem. As reported in the preceding section, managerial definition focus (coded) was significantly related to both perceived diversity (Step 1) and perceived racial diversity problem (Step 2). To test Steps 3 and 4 of the mediation model, we regressed perceived racial diversity problem on both managerial definition focus (coded) and perceived diversity. As shown in Figure 2, the relationship between managerial definition focus (coded) and perceived racial diversity problem was no longer significant,  $B = -.46$ ,  $SE B = 0.44$ ,  $t(66) = -.12$ ,  $\beta = -.12$ ,  $p = .29$ , while the relationship between perceived diversity and perceived racial diversity problem was significant,  $B = -.36$ ,  $SE B = 0.10$ ,  $t(66) = -3.75$ ,  $\beta = -.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $R^2 = .22$ ,  $F(2, 64) = 8.74$ ,  $p < .001$ . Nonparametric bootstrapping analyses (Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Preacher Rucker, & Hayes, 2007) using 10,000 bootstrap samples respectively confirmed that perceived diversity conveyed the indirect effects of managerial definition focus (coded) on perceived racial diversity problem at marginally significant levels, 90% CI [-0.855, -0.041].

### ***Discussion***

In Study 1, we found that both managerial definition focus (self-perceived) and managerial definition focus (coded) were negatively related to perceived racial diversity problem. In other words, the more managerialized an organization's diversity definition was, the less participants believed their organization had a racial diversity problem. Furthermore, perceived diversity was found to statistically mediate these relationships. These result suggests that individuals may be less likely to perceive a racial diversity problem when their respective

organizations' definitions are more managerial because managerial diversity definitions lead to individuals seeing greater amounts of diversity (presumably because they are focusing their attention on other categories of diversity beyond the legal dimensions). Interestingly, legal definition focus (self-perceived) was not significantly related to perceived racial diversity problem or perceived diversity, which may be a hint that it is the managerial definition of diversity that leads individuals to overlook inequality as opposed to the legal diversity definition leading individuals to focus on inequality.

While these results supported our hypotheses and statistical mediation analyses was suggestive of direction and causality, there are potentially confounding variables that are not addressed by this study because of the correlational nature of the survey. Furthermore, it is unknown whether there were in fact racial diversity problems in the organizations the participants worked at. A more internally valid demonstration of the Study 1 phenomenon would come in the form of an experiment manipulating diversity definitions while providing a clearly racially unequal organization for participants to evaluate. Study 2 seeks to address these issues.

## **Study 2**

Study 2 uses an experiment to examine whether diversity definitions causally affect the degree to which individuals may overlook social inequality at an organization. To this end, we will ask participants to evaluate an organization characterized by racial inequality (and high occupational representation) while varying the organization's definition of diversity. We predict that individuals in the managerial diversity definition condition will be less likely to believe that the organization has a racial diversity problem. Furthermore, we expect that this effect will be caused by the perception of higher levels of diversity at the organization. Specifically, individuals in the managerial diversity condition will exhibit decreased belief that the

organization needs diversity, relative to individuals in the legal diversity condition, because they perceive a greater degree of diversity (presumably because they are more likely to attend to the occupational heterogeneity presented).

## ***Methodology***

### ***Participants***

One hundred and fifty participants (78 women, 72 men) were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk, a sample that is significantly more diverse and representative of the general population than typical college samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). Age ranged from 18 to 80 years ( $M = 35.55$ ,  $SD = 12.30$ ) with work experience ranging from 0 to 48 years ( $M = 10.03$ ,  $SD = 11.29$ ). The self-identified racial composition of the sample consisted of 119 White, 11 Asian, 7 Black, 7 Hispanic, 3 Multiracial, 2 American Indian or Alaska Native, and 1 unreported participant.

### ***Procedure***

After giving informed consent, participants were informed that they would be providing their impressions of an organization's policies and provided with a brief description of an organization that was based on materials used in previous research (Unzueta, Knowles & Ho, 2012). Participants were randomly assigned to either the legal or managerial definition condition. Participants in the legal definition condition read the following description (with the managerial condition in parentheses):

Strathmore International is a product design firm operating in California that specializes in the development of solar energy technology. Strathmore prides itself on being a diverse organization and defines diversity as heterogeneity on *the*

*attributes of race and ethnicity (all the attributes that make individuals unique).*

This includes *employees from different racial and ethnic groups (employees with different skills, abilities, and all the other differences that make each of us who we are)*. Recently, Strathmore conducted an internal audit on employee groups in its workforce. Below are the results of the audit:

At this point, participants were presented with pie charts (see Appendix A). The pie chart on the top describes the racial composition of Strathmore while the pie chart on the bottom describes the organization's occupational composition. The purpose of these pie charts is to demonstrate that the organization is characterized by low levels of racial heterogeneity and high levels of non-racial (i.e., occupational) heterogeneity. Participants will then respond to several items assessing their perceptions of diversity and the degree to which they believe there exists a racial diversity problem at Strathmore.

### ***Experimental Manipulation***

*Diversity Definition.* Participants' will be randomly assigned into either the legal diversity definition condition or the managerial diversity definition condition as described in the preceding section.

### ***Dependent Variable***

*Perceived Racial Diversity Problem.* Participants will indicate the degree to which they believe the organization has a racial diversity problem using two items (i.e., Strathmore has a racial diversity problem; Strathmore does not have a racial diversity issue (reverse scored)) on 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 = (*Strongly Agree*) Likert scales ( $M = 5.20$ ;  $SD = 1.58$ ;  $r = .76$ ).

### ***Mediator Variable***

*Perceived Diversity.* Participants will indicate the degree to which they perceive the organization is diverse using three items (i.e., Strathmore is a Diverse Organization; Strathmore has a high level of diversity; Strathmore has very little diversity (reverse-scored)) from past research (Unzueta, Knowles, & Ho, 2012) on 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*) Likert scales ( $M = 2.54$ ;  $SD = 1.32$ ;  $\alpha = .88$ ).

## ***Results***

### ***Main Analyses***

We first conducted a series of independent-samples t-tests to examine the effects of diversity definition on perceived racial diversity problem and perceived diversity respectively. Firstly, we found that participants in the managerial diversity definition condition ( $M = 4.91$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ ) perceived there to be significantly less of a racial diversity problem at Strathmore than participants in the legal diversity definition condition ( $M = 5.51$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ),  $t(147) = 2.31$ ,  $p = .02$ ). Secondly, we found that participants perceived higher levels of diversity in the managerial diversity definition condition ( $M = 2.79$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ) as compared to the legal diversity definition condition ( $M = 2.29$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ),  $t(148) = -2.37$ ,  $p = .02$ ).

### ***Mediation Analysis***

In order to test for mediation, we again followed Baron and Kenny (1986)'s approach to statistical mediation analysis. First, we regressed perceived diversity on the dummy coded diversity definition condition variable (legal = 0; managerial = 1) and found a significant positive relationship,  $B = .50$ ,  $SE B = 0.21$ ,  $t(148) = 2.37$ ,  $\beta = .19$ ,  $p = .02$ ;  $R^2 = .04$ ,  $F(1, 148) = 5.61$ ,  $p = .02$ . Next, we regressed the perceived racial diversity problem variable on the diversity

definition condition variable and found a significant negative relationship,  $B = -.59$ ,  $SE B = 0.26$ ,  $t(148) = -2.31$ ,  $\beta = -.19$ ,  $p = .02$ ;  $R^2 = .04$ ,  $F(1, 148) = 5.35$ ,  $p = .02$ .

Finally, we regressed perceived racial diversity problem on both diversity definition and perceived diversity,  $R^2 = .25$ ,  $F(2, 147) = 24.64$ ,  $p < .001$ . As illustrated in Figure 3, the relationship between diversity definition and perceived racial diversity problem was no longer significant,  $B = -.30$ ,  $SE B = 0.23$ ,  $t(146) = -1.30$ ,  $\beta = -.09$ ,  $p = .19$ , while the relationship between perceived diversity and perceived racial diversity problem was significant,  $B = -.57$ ,  $SE B = 0.88$ ,  $t(146) = -6.51$ ,  $\beta = -.48$ ,  $p < .001$ . Nonparametric bootstrapping analyses using 10,000 bootstrap samples (Preacher & Hayes, 2004; Preacher Rucker, & Hayes, 2007) confirmed that perceived diversity conveyed the indirect effect of diversity definition on perceived racial diversity problem, 95% CI [0.053, 1.258].

### ***Discussion***

In Study 2, we found direct causal evidence that diversity definitions affect the degree to which individuals believe there exists a racial diversity problem in an organization (even when it is clearly racially unequal). Namely, individuals exposed to a managerial diversity definition believed that racial diversity was less of a problem relative to those in the legal diversity definition condition, despite the fact that the organization was comprised of 98% White employees. Furthermore, we found that perceived diversity statistically mediated this effect. In other words, managerial diversity definitions may lead to the overlooking of racial inequality because individuals may be perceiving greater levels of diversity from non-racial diversity dimensions (i.e., in this case, the occupational diversity dimension). Thus these results provide evidence that managerial diversity definitions may be devices through which social hierarchies are maintained (see also Unzueta, Knowles, & Ho, 2012).



### Study 3

While Studies 1 and 2 demonstrated that the exposure to managerial diversity definitions could lead to the overlooking of social inequalities, we believe there exist circumstances where managerial diversity definitions could lead to direct discrimination against racial minorities. Specifically, individuals motivated to enhance social inequality may believe that they can legitimately act in a discriminatory manner when exposed to a managerial diversity definition (relative to a legal diversity definition).

According to Social Dominance Theory, individuals possess varying levels of anti-egalitarian sentiment (Knowles, Lowery, Schaumberg, 2009) and desire to establish and support group-based hierarchies (Sidanius, Pratto & Bobo, 1996). The central construct used to measure this anti-egalitarian sentiment in Social Dominance Theory is Social Dominance Orientation (SDO; Sidanius, 1993; Sidanius & Pratto, 1993). Anti-egalitarians (i.e., individuals relatively high in SDO) are motivated to enhance or maintain social hierarchies while egalitarians (i.e., individuals relatively low in SDO) seek to attenuate social hierarchies. Social dominance orientation motives are directed at social hierarchies that are particularly salient and have the greatest power differentials between groups. In the United States, SDO motives are generally directed at racial hierarchies because race is one of the predominant forms of social stratification (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Recent work has found that people may construe diversity using the dimensions that allow them to actualize their social dominance motivations (Unzueta, Knowles, & Ho, 2012). Specifically, when presented with a racially unequal organization, anti-egalitarian individuals tended to construe diversity in non-racial categories in order to justify opposition toward racial

hierarchy-attenuating policies. On the other hand, egalitarian individuals focused on the racial category. Thus, it may also be possible that the presence of a diversity definition could serve the purpose of allowing individuals to fulfill their social dominance motives. Specifically, anti-egalitarians may seize the opportunity to discriminate when provided a managerial diversity definition because it may become more socially acceptable to discriminate against minorities when diversity is defined on dimensions not focusing on legally protected social groups. On the other hand, egalitarians may not show a greater pattern of discrimination in the managerial condition, because of their general concern for equality.

*Hypothesis 3:* SDO will interact with diversity definitions in affecting the degree to which individuals discriminate against racial minorities. That is, high SDO individuals will discriminate against racial minorities to a greater extent when exposed to the managerial diversity definition relative to the legal diversity definition. In contrast, low SDO individuals, may not demonstrate differential discrimination against racial minorities when exposed to either the legal or managerial diversity definition.

According to social dominance theory, individuals endorse various legitimizing ideologies in line with their social dominance motives in order to justify their hierarchy-enhancing or hierarchy-attenuating actions and positions. Specifically, legitimizing ideologies are the values, attitudes, beliefs, causal attributions, and ideologies that provide moral and intellectual justification for social practices that increase, maintain, or decrease levels of social inequality among social groups (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). For instance, anti-egalitarian individuals tend to embrace hierarchy-enhancing ideologies such as Conservatism, racism, and

sexism. On the other hand, egalitarian individuals tend to embrace hierarchy-attenuating ideologies such as Liberalism, anti-racism, and feminism.

We expect that colorblind ideology will be the hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing ideology through which anti-egalitarian individuals justify their discrimination toward racial minorities. Colorblind ideology advocates reducing, eliminating, and ignoring racial category memberships as the best way to organize a diverse society (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Plaut, 2010). Thus, anti-egalitarian individuals, when presented with a managerial diversity definition, may reason that race is relatively unimportant in society (i.e., increased colorblind ideology endorsement), which may in turn lead to increased racial discrimination.

Research on colorblind ideology has found that individuals in a colorblind mindset may be more likely to be prejudiced. For instance, colorblind ideology endorsement can lead to negative affect toward a minority partner (Vorauer Gagnon, & Sasaki, 2009), greater implicit and explicit racism (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004), decreased empathy toward Blacks (Burkard & Knox, 2004), and can increase the perceived bias felt by minorities (Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009). Thus, while ostensibly a noble pursuit (Apfelbaum, Pauker, Sommers & Ambady, 2010), individuals in a colorblindness mindset may be more likely to demonstrate prejudice. In line with this reasoning, we made the following prediction.

*Hypothesis 4:* Colorblindness endorsement will mediate<sup>5</sup> the relationship between the diversity definitions and SDO interaction and the degree to which individuals discriminate against minorities. In other words, individuals relatively high in SDO, when presented with a managerial diversity definition, will endorse colorblind ideology as a means to legitimize their discrimination against minorities.

To test these hypotheses, we will have individuals rate either a Black or White job candidate for a position at an organization. We predict that high SDO participants may actualize their motivations for enhancing racial hierarchies by discriminating against the Black (but not the White) candidate in the managerial definition condition to a greater extent than in the legal definition condition (because it may be more socially acceptable to do so with a definition that focuses on dimensions other than race). However, we do not expect to see differences in discrimination between diversity conditions among low SDO individuals for either the Black or White candidate because of their concern for egalitarianism. Furthermore, we expect that colorblind ideology will serve as the legitimizing belief through which anti-egalitarians justify their discrimination against ethnic minorities.

## ***Methodology***

### ***Participants***

Two hundred and forty six (131 men, 115 women) were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk. Age ranged from 18 to 66 years ( $M = 31.96$ ,  $SD = 10.54$ ) with work and recruitment experience ranging from 0 to 44 years ( $M = 7.44$ ,  $SD = 8.75$ ) and 0 to 25 years ( $M = 1.39$ ,  $SD = 3.81$ ) respectively. The self-identified racial composition of the sample consisted of 188 White, 22 Asian, 12 Hispanic, 10 Multiracial, 9 Black, 4 American Indian or Alaska Native, and 1 unreported participant.

### ***Procedure***

After giving informed consent, participants filled out a social dominance orientation scale, and were then provided with a brief description of an organization similar to the vignettes used in Studies 1 and 2. Participants were randomly assigned to either the legal or managerial definition

condition. Participants in the legal definition condition read the following description (with the managerial condition in parentheses):

Please imagine you are an employee at Strathmore International, a product design firm operating in California that specializes in the development of solar energy technology. Strathmore prides itself on being a diverse organization and defines diversity as the representation of *historically underrepresented groups (groups with different skills and abilities)* such as *ethnic minorities* and *women (individuals with different personalities and occupational backgrounds)*. Strathmore is in need of a human resources analyst and has asked you to help them make a hiring decision. Please examine the resume below and answer the questions following the resume.

At this point, participants were randomly assigned to review a resume of either a Black or White job applicant (see Appendix B and Appendix C) that has been used in prior research (Ho, Shih, Walters, & Pittinsky, 2012). Finally, participants responded to several items regarding the hirability and interviewability of the job candidate, a colorblind ideology endorsement scale, and a demographics questionnaire.

### ***Independent Variables***

*Social Dominance Orientation.* Participants completed an eight-item SDO scale (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Sample items include “To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups of people,” and “We should strive for increased social equality between groups” (reverse scored). Participants responded to these items using a 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree) Likert scale ( $M = 2.42$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ;  $\alpha = .85$ ).

*Diversity Definition.* As in Studies 2 and 3, participants were randomly assigned into either the legal diversity definition condition or the managerial diversity definition condition as described in the preceding section.

*Race of Target (Job Candidate).* Participants were randomly assigned to review either a White or Black job candidate's resume. The resumes were identical except for the name and professional association the candidate belonged to. In the White candidate condition, participants saw a resume with the name Greg Baker and saw that he belonged to the California Professionals Network. In the Black candidate condition, participants saw a resume with the name Jamal Jones and saw that he belonged to the Black Professionals Network. The names Greg Baker and Jamal Jones have been found in prior research to be perceived to belong to White and Black individuals respectively (Oberholzer-Gee, 2008).

### ***Dependent Variables***

*Hirability.* Participants indicated the degree to which they would like to hire the job candidate on one item (i.e., To what extent would you like to hire the job applicant?) based on past research (Rudman & Glick, 1999) on a 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 = (*Strongly Agree*) using a Likert scale ( $M = 5.00$ ;  $SD = 1.19$ ).

*Interviewability.* Participants indicated the degree to which they would like to interview the job candidate on one item (i.e., To what extent would you like to interview the job applicant?) using a 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 = (*Strongly Agree*) Likert scale ( $M = 5.72$ ;  $SD = 1.26$ ).

*Colorblind Ideology Endorsement.* Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they endorse colorblind ideology using four items (i.e., I wish people in this society would stop obsessing so much about race; People who become preoccupied by race are forgetting that we are all just human; Putting racial labels on people obscures the fact that everyone is a unique

individual; Race is an artificial label that keeps people from thinking freely as individuals) from past research (Knowles, Lowery, Chow, & Hogan, 2009) on Likert scales ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 = (*Strongly Agree*),  $M = 5.59$ ;  $SD = 1.27$ ;  $\alpha = .87$ .

## **Results**

### **Hirability**

In order to test our hypotheses, we conducted a linear regression analysis in which hirability was regressed on diversity definition (0 = legal; 1 = managerial), race of target (0 = White; 1 = Black), and SDO (mean-centered). The analysis revealed a marginally significant main effects of race of target, as well as the predicted SDO  $\times$  Diversity Definition  $\times$  Race of Target interaction (see Table 2),  $R^2 = .09$ ,  $F(7, 231) = 3.44$ ,  $p = .002$ . Simple-effects tests were conducted to decompose the observed significant three-way interaction (Aiken & West, 1991).

*Black Target.* Simple-effects testing revealed that the two-way interaction between SDO and diversity definition was significant in the Black race of target condition,  $B = -.45$ ,  $SE B = .19$ ,  $t = -2.37$ ,  $\beta = -.29$ ,  $p = .02$  (See Figure 4). Further decomposing this interaction by conducting simple slope analyses, we found that SDO was negatively associated with hirability in the managerial diversity definition condition,  $B = -.54$ ,  $SE B = 0.13$ ,  $t = -4.03$ ,  $p < .001$ , but not in the legal diversity definition condition,  $B = -0.09$ ,  $SE B = .14$ ,  $t = -0.65$ ,  $p = .51$ .

Examining the interaction another way, the managerial diversity definition decreased the hirability of the Black candidate for high-SDO (+1 *SD*) participants,  $B = -.56$ ,  $SE B = .28$ ,  $t = -2.02$ ,  $p = .04$ , but not for low-SDO (-1 *SD*) participants,  $B = .38$ ,  $SE B = .28$ ,  $t = 1.34$ ,  $p = .18$ . These results suggest that, when exposed to a managerial diversity definition, people high in SDO may discriminate against Black job candidates (by being less likely to hire them) whereas those low in SDO may not alter their hiring of Black candidates based on diversity definitions.

*White Target.* Within the White race of target condition, simple-effects testing did not reveal a significant two-way interaction between SDO and diversity definition,  $B = .19$ ,  $SE B = .20$ ,  $t = .95$ ,  $\beta = .13$ ,  $p = .34$  (See Figure 5). These results, taken together with the results in the Black target condition, suggest that the managerial diversity definition is used by high SDO's to discriminate only against Blacks and not Whites.

### ***Interviewability***

In order to test our hypotheses, we also conducted a linear regression analysis in which interviewability was regressed on diversity definition (0 = legal; 1 = managerial), race of target (0 = White; 1 = Black), and SDO (mean-centered). The analysis revealed a significant main effect of SDO and a marginally significant main effects of race of target, as well as the predicted SDO  $\times$  Diversity Definition  $\times$  Race of Target interaction (see Table 3),  $R^2 = .16$ ,  $F(7, 230) = 6.35$ ,  $p < .001$ . Simple-effects tests were conducted to decompose the observed significant three-way interaction (Aiken & West, 1991).

*Black Target.* Simple-effects testing revealed that the two-way interaction between SDO and diversity definition was significant in the Black race of target condition,  $B = -.60$ ,  $SE B = .19$ ,  $t = -3.12$ ,  $\beta = -.35$ ,  $p = .002$  (See Figure 6). Further decomposing this interaction by conducting simple slope analyses, we found that SDO was negatively associated with interviewability in the managerial diversity definition condition,  $B = -.81$ ,  $SE B = .14$ ,  $t = -5.97$ ,  $p < .001$ , but not in the legal diversity definition condition,  $B = -.21$ ,  $SE B = .14$ ,  $t = 1.53$ ,  $p = .13$ .

Examining the interaction another way, the managerial diversity definition decreased the interviewability of the Black candidate among high-SDO (+1 *SD*) participants,  $B = -.80$ ,  $SE B = .28$ ,  $t = -2.80$ ,  $p = .005$ , but not for low-SDO (-1 *SD*) participants,  $B = .46$ ,  $SE B = .28$ ,  $t = 1.62$ ,  $p = .11$ . These results suggest that, when exposed to a managerial diversity definition, people



high in SDO may discriminate against Black job candidates (by being less likely to interview them) whereas those low in SDO may not alter their interviewing of Black candidates based on diversity definitions.

*White Target.* Within the White race of target condition, simple-effects testing did not reveal a significant two-way interaction between SDO and diversity definition,  $B = .11$ ,  $SE B = .22$ ,  $t = .50$ ,  $\beta = .0$ ,  $p = .62$  (See Figure 7). These results, taken together with the results in the Black target condition, suggest that the managerial diversity definition is used by high SDO's to discriminate only against Blacks and not Whites.

### ***Colorblind Ideology Endorsement***

In order to test for our mediation hypotheses, we conducted a linear regression analysis in which colorblind endorsement was regressed on diversity definition (0 = legal; 1 = managerial), race of target (0 = White; 1 = Black), and SDO (mean-centered). The analysis did not reveal any significant main effects or interactions (see Table 4). Thus, we did not proceed to examine whether colorblind ideology endorsement was a potential mediator for the interactive effects of SDO, diversity definition, and race of target on hirability and interviewability respectively.

### ***Discussion***

In Study 3, we found that, when exposed to a managerial diversity definition, people high in SDO were more likely to discriminate against (i.e., be less likely to hire and interview) Black job candidates whereas those low in SDO were not found to alter their propensity to discriminate against Black candidates as a function of diversity definitions. Furthermore, the managerial diversity definition was used by high SDO's to discriminate only against Blacks and not Whites. Notably, we also found that in the managerial diversity definition condition, high SDO

individuals are more likely to discriminate against the Black candidate than low SDO individuals. However, this difference did not exist in the legal diversity definition condition. In addition, this effect disappeared when high SDO's were evaluating a White candidate. Taken together, these results suggest that high SDO's may be using the managerial diversity definition as a means to actively maintain and enhance social hierarchies.

### **General Discussion**

In three studies, we found evidence that diversity definitions can effect the perpetuation and enhancement of social hierarchies in organizations. In Study 1 we found a relationship between organizations' diversity definitions and the degree to which former employees perceived the existence of a racial diversity problem at their respective organizations. Namely, the more managerial the organization's diversity definition was, the less likely former employees believed their organization had a racial diversity problem. These results were explained by the amount of diversity former employees perceived at their organizations (i.e., organizations with more managerial diversity definitions had employees who believed their to be greater diversity in the organization, presumably because they have managerial diversity dimensions to perceive diversity).

In Study 2, we experimentally determined that diversity definitions directly affect the degree to which individuals perceive a racial diversity problem to exist in a racially unequal organization. That is, individuals who were exposed to a managerial diversity definition were less likely to perceive the existence of a racial diversity problem at an organization that was clearly racially unequal (i.e., comprised of 98% White employees). Furthermore, this effect was found to be caused by the amount of diversity individuals perceived at their organization (i.e., individuals in the managerial diversity definition condition perceived greater diversity at their

organization), which suggests that managerial diversity definitions may shift people's attention toward non-racial (in this case occupational heterogeneity) categories of diversity.

While Studies 1 and 2 examined how diversity definitions could lead to acts of omission in maintaining social hierarchies (i.e., the overlooking of racial inequality), Study 3 examined an act of commission that could enhance social hierarchies (i.e., direct discrimination). Specifically, in Study 3 we found that diversity definitions allowed for anti-egalitarian individuals to actualize their motivation to enhance social hierarchies via acts of racial discrimination in resume selection. High SDO individuals were more likely to discriminate against a Black job candidate (but not a White job candidate) upon having read a managerial diversity definition (as compared to a legal diversity definition). In contrast, Low SDO individuals did not show this pattern of discrimination against Black or White job candidates and were unaffected by diversity definitions. We did not find colorblind ideology endorsement to be used as a means for high SDO individuals to legitimize their discrimination against the Black job candidate. Taken together, these studies demonstrate that managerialized diversity definitions can directly lead to the maintenance and enhancement of social inequality in organizations.

### ***Theoretical and Organizational Implications***

Our studies build on the research that has documented the managerialization of diversity definitions (Edelman, Riggs, & Mara-Drita, 2001; Opie, Akinola, Brief, & Sullivan, 2013). While this past research has demonstrated that diversity definitions have becoming increasingly managerialized over the years, our research demonstrates that this managerialization of diversity has measureable outcomes and consequences to organizations and societies. Furthermore, we demonstrate that managerial diversity definitions can be taken advantage of by individuals who may be intent on building social hierarchies.

In line with this idea, this research has also provides a contribution to the recently growing body of literature that individuals high in SDO are capable of sophisticated hierarchy enhancing strategies, that may at first glance appear hierarchy-attenuating. For instance, past research has found that anti-egalitarians supported Obama (Knowles, Lowery & Schaumberg 2009), colorblind ideology (Knowles, Lowery, Chow, & Hogan, 2009), and affirmative action (Ho & Unzueta, 2012) if they believed these ostensibly hierarchy-attenuating attitudes and actions would ultimately lead to hierarch-enhancement. In this case, anti-egalitarians used managerial diversity definitions (which appear to be hierarchy-attenuating because they are more inclusive of people from a greater number of social groups) to discriminate against a racial minority group.

Importantly, diversity research in management has shifted toward managerial diversity definitions to be more precise in examining how diversity improves performance (Opie, Akinola, Brief, & Sullivan, 2013). Thus, management researchers have been inclined to view managerialized diversity definitions as a benefit to organizations because they can better explain team processes and performance (e.g., Harrison et al., 1998; Harrison, Price Gavin & Florey, 2002). However, our research may be the first to highlight how this managerialization trend may have negative consequences. That is, we demonstrate that there are harmful consequences and externalities to organizations defining diversity beyond the legal dimensions.

In addition to academia, many organizations (e.g., Fortune 500) possess managerialized diversity definitions (Avery, Volpone, & Myers, 2013). While it may appear progressive for organizations to include as many dimensions of diversity as possible into their diversity definition, our research highlights that this strategy can have negative consequences for legally protected minority groups both inside an outside the organization which can in turn can have

negative consequences for the organization. For instance, leaders and employees in organizations may be less likely to notice that their teams are not racially or gender diverse (e.g., ExxonMobil senior executive team in opening example of this paper) and be less likely to identify this as a problem because they perceive diversity in other non-legal categories (e.g., diverse occupational backgrounds). This inattention and perpetuation of underrepresentation caused by managerial diversity definitions could lead to a situation where minority employees feel alienated because there are so few of them.

Importantly, the managerialization of diversity definitions in organizations could even lead to a situation where minority job candidates are being unfairly discriminated against. Our studies demonstrated this occurrence in a hiring situation; however, it would not be a stretch to imagine other forms of discrimination occurring as a result of managerial diversity definitions being used by high SDO individuals. For instance, racial minorities and women could face greater harassment, be undervalued in organizations, receive harsher performance evaluations, be passed up on promotions, or be terminated by high SDO managers who may use managerial diversity definitions to legitimize their discriminatory actions.

Thus while HR and Diversity Specialists began managerializing diversity definitions to support the business case for diversity as a means to justify their roles and responsibilities (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998), our results suggest that this strategy may no longer be tenable. Specifically, our studies clearly demonstrate that managerial diversity definitions can lead to social inequalities and discrimination. These outcomes are important for businesses to avoid, not only because they may be socially irresponsible, but also because they can easily lead to litigation and bad press. These issues are especially paramount in organizations with extant social inequalities because of the greater possibility of litigation.

HR and Diversity specialists may need to consider shifting diversity definitions' focus back to legal dimensions because our research provides evidence that there may in fact be a business case for *legal* diversity definitions. While managerial diversity definitions may focus attention toward managerial diversity dimensions, legal diversity definitions may refocus attention toward legally protected social groups. This would assist managers in identifying pernicious situations where social inequality exists among legally protected social groups and decrease the risk for litigation and bad press, which is good for business.

### ***Limitations and Future Research Directions***

In Study 1, both measures of the managerialization of diversity were significantly related to perceived racial diversity problem and perceived diversity while the legalization of diversity measure was not significantly related to either outcome variable. These results hint that it is the managerial definition of diversity that leads individuals to overlook racial inequality as opposed to the legal diversity definition leading individuals to focus on racial inequality. However, because we did not have a control definition condition in our experiments, we cannot draw a firm conclusion on this matter. Future studies may consider using a control diversity definition (e.g., no diversity definition). Furthermore, while our studies examined the overlooking of racial inequality and racial discrimination as outcomes of different diversity definitions, we expect that diversity definitions should have similar effects on social groups beyond race (e.g., gender). We hope that future studies will test for the generalizability of these effects.

In addition, we find that the effects of Studies 1 and 2 are driven by perceived diversity. This mechanism suggests that people are paying greater attention to non-legal dimensions of diversity (e.g., the occupational category in Study 2) when exposed to managerial diversity

definitions, which leads them to believe there is less of a racial diversity problem. Future studies may consider greater precision in measuring this mechanism by employing eye tracking equipment that could determine what specific categories of diversity individuals pay attention to when exposed to different diversity definitions.

Finally, while we found that high SDO individuals were more likely to discriminate against Black job candidates when exposed to managerial diversity definitions, we did not find that colorblind ideology endorsement mediated this effect. Future studies may consider examining other legitimizing ideologies that may be used by high SDO individuals to justify discrimination against racial minorities as triggered by managerial diversity definitions.

### **Conclusion**

As diversity definitions have become increasingly managerialized, academic researchers have focused on how non-legal dimensions of diversity may lead to improved team and organizational performance. That is, they have focused on the positive consequences of the managerialization of diversity. In contrast, our research demonstrates in four studies how this managerialization can have unintended negative consequences (i.e., the perpetuation and enhancement of social hierarchies in organizations). It is our hope that these results may spur both researchers and organizations to begin examining not only the positives, but also the negatives of employing managerial diversity definitions because while the ever-expanding managerial definition of diversity may ostensibly improve performance and be more inclusive of a greater number of social groups, it may ironically lead to the exclusion of social groups that are in greatest need of fair representation in organizations.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Note that Workforce 2000 was wrong about how quickly this change would occur (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Some but not all jurisdictions protect sexual orientation.

<sup>3</sup> 100 participants were recruited in all, however, 27 participants were excluded from analyses because they either did not know their former organization's diversity definition or did not fill in an answer.

<sup>4</sup> We found that the managerial definition focus (self-perceived) variable and ethnicity (White vs. Asian) interactively affected both perceived diversity ( $p < .04$ ) and perceived racial diversity problem ( $p < .01$ ) whereby Asians were largely responsible for the observed relationships. Past research has demonstrated that while people in Western cultures attend to stimuli as independent from the context it is embedded in (i.e., Analytic Perception), while people in East Asian cultures attend to the relationship between stimuli and the context it is embedded in (i.e., Holistic Perception; Nisbett & Miyamoto, 2005). Thus it is possible we observed this interaction because Asians are more likely to examine diversity definitions in relation to the organizations' diversity levels while Westerners are more likely to examine diversity definitions in isolation from the organizations' diversity levels. We do not expand on this discussion further as we did not find any significant two-way interactions involving the managerial definition focus (coded) variable and ethnicity. Furthermore, in Study 2 where we experimentally replicate the main findings, we did not find any significant two-way interactions between diversity definitions and ethnicity.



<sup>5</sup> A legitimizing myth or ideology can only be classified as such if it serves as a statistical mediator between social dominance orientation and support for a hierarchy-enhancing or hierarching-attenuating social policy (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Table 1

*Study 1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Measured Variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Managerial Definition Focus (Self-Perceived)				
2. Legal Definition Focus (Self-Perceived)	-.15			
3. Managerial Definition Focus (Coded)	.52***	-.50***		
4. Perceived Diversity	.48***	.13	.20†	
5. Perceived Racial Diversity Problem	-.30**	.12	-.21†	-.45***

*Note:* N ranged from 67 to 73. † $p = .10$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 2

*Hirability as a function of Social Dominance Orientation, Diversity Definition, and Race of Target.*

Effect	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Social Dominance Orientation (SDO)	-.21	.15	-.19	-1.44	.15
Diversity Definition (DD)	-.05	.21	-.02	-.24	.81
Race of Target (RT)	.36	.20	.16	1.80	.07
SDO $\times$ DD	.19	.20	.13	.97	.33
SDO $\times$ RT	.13	.20	.08	.62	.53
DD $\times$ RT	-.06	.29	-.02	-.22	.83
SDO $\times$ DD $\times$ RT	-.64	.28	-.30	-2.32	.02

Table 3

*Interviewability as a function of Social Dominance Orientation, Diversity Definition, and Race of Target.*

Effect	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Social Dominance Orientation (SDO)	-.30	.16	-.25	-1.95	.05
Diversity Definition (DD)	.23	.22	.09	1.02	.31
Race of Target (RT)	.41	.21	.16	1.93	.05
SDO $\times$ DD	.11	.21	.07	.52	.60
SDO $\times$ RT	.09	.21	.06	.44	.66
DD $\times$ RT	-.42	.31	-.15	-1.36	.17
SDO $\times$ DD $\times$ RT	-.71	.30	-.30	-2.43	.02

Table 4

*Colorblind Ideology Endorsement as a function of Social Dominance Orientation, Diversity Definition, and Race of Target.*

Effect	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Social Dominance Orientation (SDO)	-.07	.17	-.06	-.42	.67
Diversity Definition (DD)	.09	.24	.04	.38	.70
Race of Target (RT)	.09	.23	.04	.39	.70
SDO × DD	.02	.23	.01	.09	.93
SDO × RT	.11	.23	.07	.49	.63
DD × RT	.02	.34	.01	.07	.95
SDO × DD × RT	-.45	.32	-.19	-1.40	.16

Figure 1.

Perceived Diversity mediating the effect of Managerial Definition Focus (Self-Perceived) on Perceived Racial Diversity Problem.

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

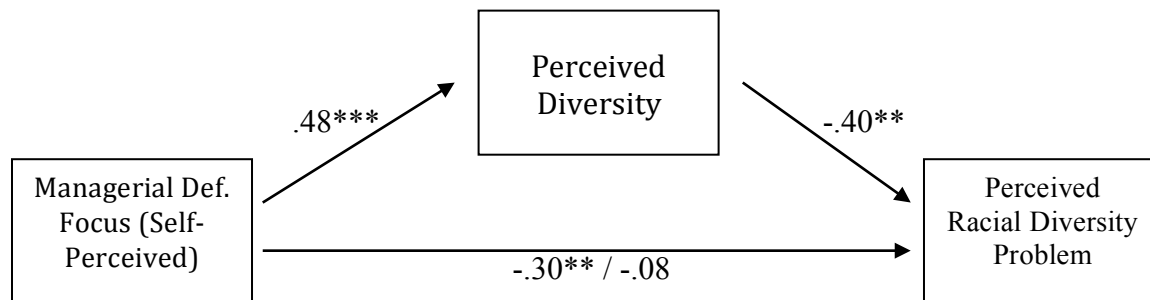


Figure 2.

Perceived Diversity mediating the effect of Managerial Definition Focus (Coded) on Perceived Racial Diversity Problem.

†  $p = .10$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

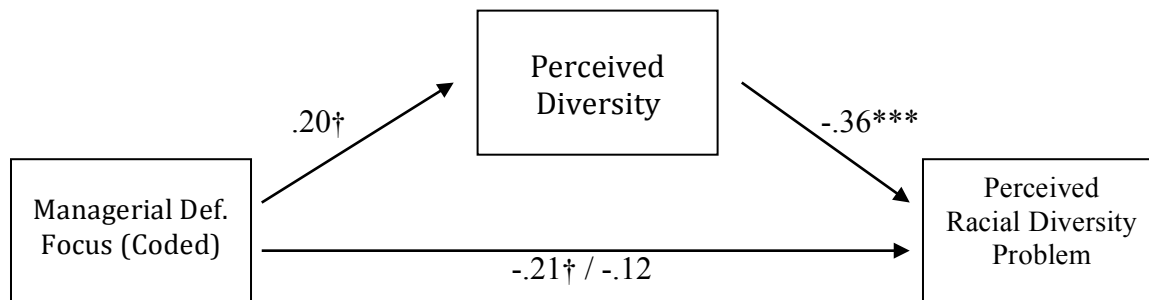


Figure 3.

Perceived Diversity mediating the effect of Diversity Definition on Perceived Racial Diversity

Problem.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

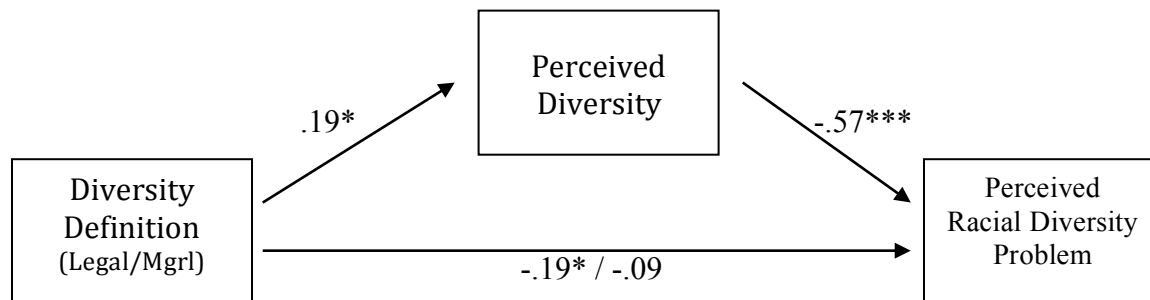




Figure 4.

Hirability as a function of social dominance orientation and diversity definition in the Black race of target condition.

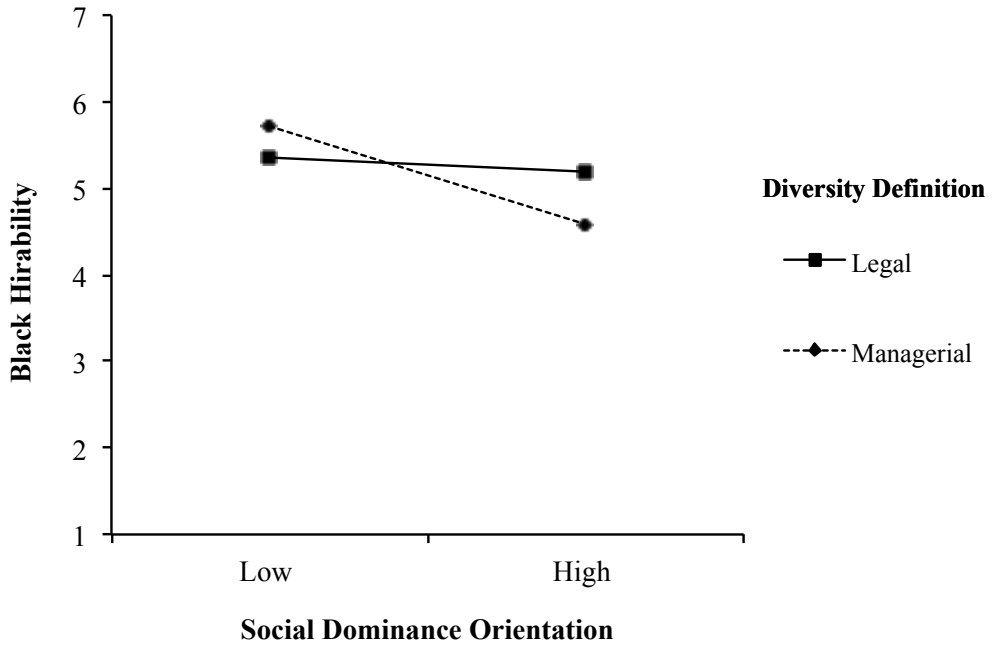


Figure 5.

Hirability as a function of social dominance orientation and diversity definition in the White race of target condition.

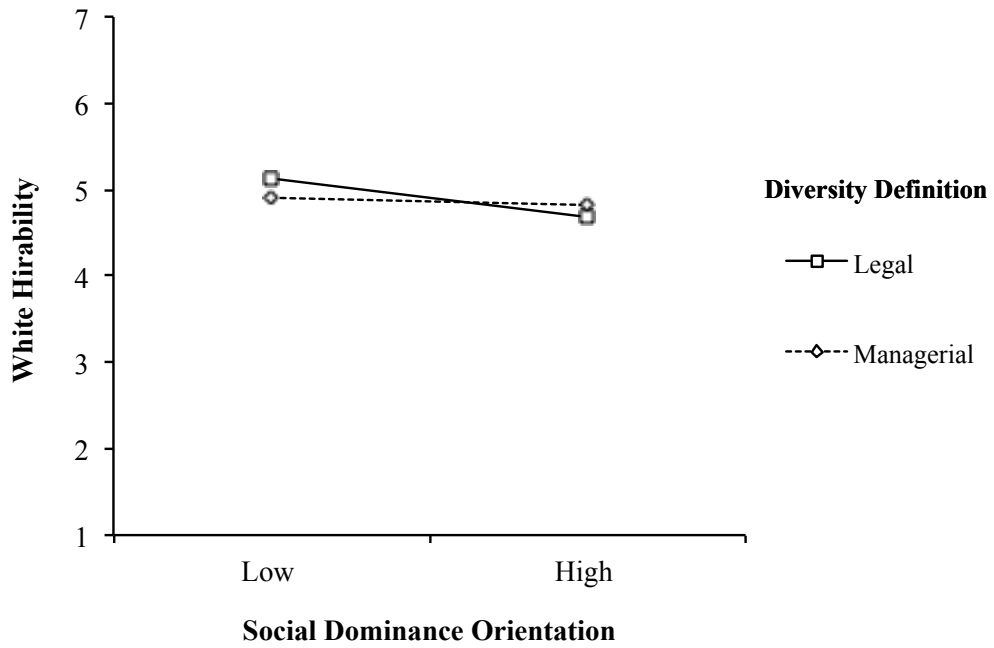


Figure 6.

Interviewability as a function of social dominance orientation and diversity definition in the Black race of target condition.

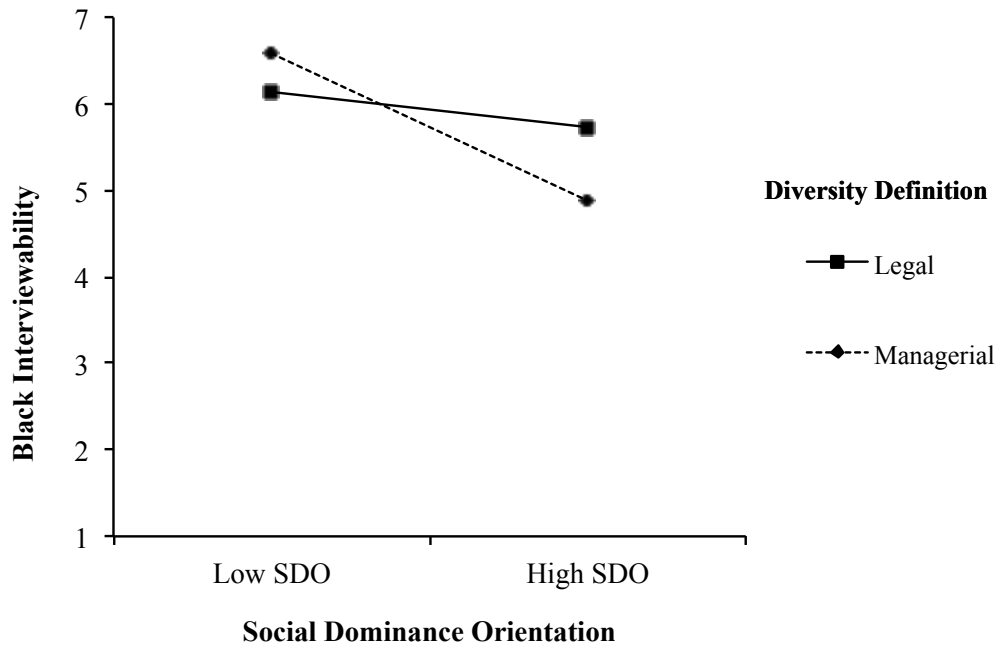
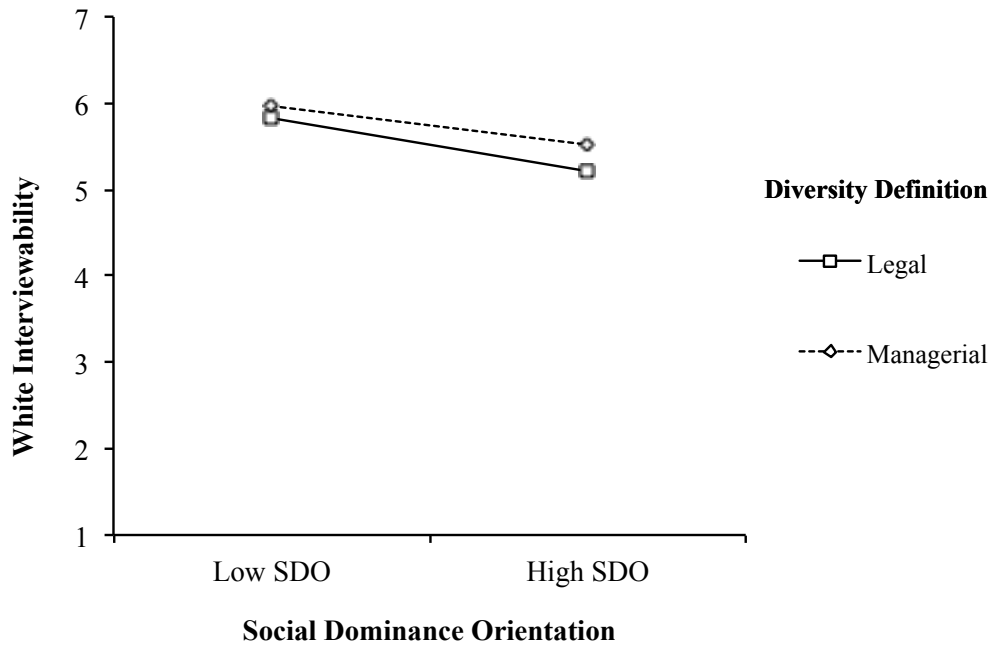


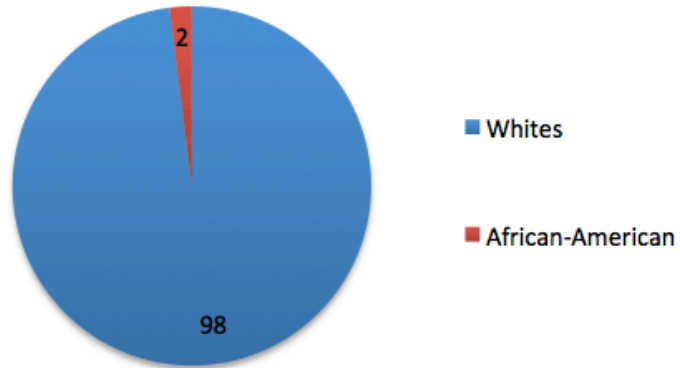
Figure 7.

Interviewability as a function of social dominance orientation and diversity definition in the White race of target condition.

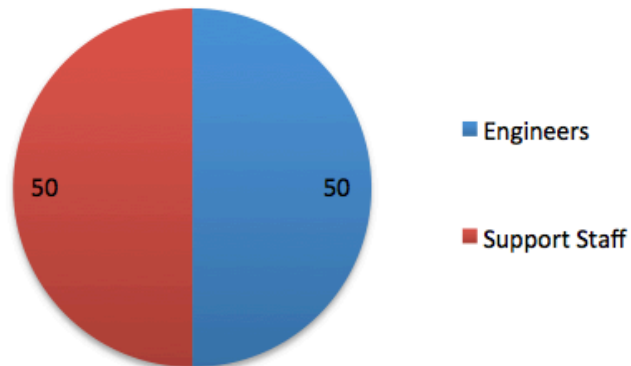


Appendix A.

### % Employees in Racial Groups



### % Employees in Functional Groups



Appendix B.

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**EXPERIENCE**

---

**Patrick Industries Inc.** Los Angeles, CA  
*Human Resources Administrator* 09/2007 – Present

- Conducted recruitment & selection of employees
- Lead orientation sessions for newly hired employees
- Collected employee performance data

**Medtronic Inc.** Los Angeles, CA  
*Administrative Aid* 07/2007 – 08/2007

- Organized meetings and events
- Recorded and filed employee expense reports
- Purchased office supplies

**EDUCATION**

---

**California State University, East Bay** Hayward, CA  
*Human Resources Management Certificate* 2006 – 2007

**University of California, Riverside** Riverside, CA  
*Bachelor of Arts, Psychology* 2001 – 2005

**PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS**

---

- California Professionals Network, Society for Human Resource Management

**SKILLS**

---

- Microsoft Office / Outlook / PeopleSoft HRMS / Kenexa

Appendix C.

**Jamal Jones**  
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**EXPERIENCE**

---

**Patrick Industries Inc.** Los Angeles, CA  
*Human Resources Administrator* 09/2007 – Present

- Conducted recruitment & selection of employees
- Lead orientation sessions for newly hired employees
- Collected employee performance data

**Medtronic Inc.** Los Angeles, CA  
*Administrative Aid* 07/2007 – 08/2007

- Organized meetings and events
- Recorded and filed employee expense reports
- Purchased office supplies

**EDUCATION**

---

**California State University, East Bay** Hayward, CA  
*Human Resources Management Certificate* 2006 – 2007

**University of California, Riverside** Riverside, CA  
*Bachelor of Arts, Psychology* 2001 – 2005

**PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS**

---

- Black Professionals Network, Society for Human Resource Management

**SKILLS**

---

- Microsoft Office / Outlook / PeopleSoft HRMS / Kenexa

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