

## Research Statement

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A large and increasing number of organizations are pursuing workforce diversity (e.g., greater than 70% of Fortune 500 companies have diversity initiatives in place). My research seeks to illustrate both the *challenges and benefits of pursuing and managing diversity in organizations*. To this end, my research has focused on two areas. Firstly, I have worked on determining how the pursuit of diversity can ironically contribute to social inequality as opposed to egalitarianism in organizations. Secondly, I have worked on demonstrating how the salience of different social identities (e.g., gender, employment status, sexual orientation) can affect important organizational outcomes such as leadership emergence, hiring decisions, and performance.

### **Ironic Consequences of Pursuing Organizational Diversity**

While one of the goals of diversity is ostensibly to increase the representation of minority groups at all levels of an organization, my research suggests that diversity related policies and definitions, if not managed properly, can lead to the unintended consequence of social hierarchy enhancement as opposed to attenuation.

#### *Anti-egalitarians for Affirmative Action?*

Affirmative action policies are intended to promote social equality and research has demonstrated their effectiveness at achieving this goal. Thus it is logical that anti-egalitarian individuals (i.e., individuals who desire intergroup hierarchies) would be against affirmative action. Indeed, past research supports this idea both theoretically and empirically. However, in a manuscript that has been invited for resubmission to the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (Ho & Unzueta, 2012), we argue and find that anti-egalitarian individuals may actually be supportive of affirmative action when the policies are particularly strong (i.e., policies that heavily weigh social group membership in recruitment and hiring decisions). Furthermore, we find evidence that this effect occurs because strong policies are more likely to recruit minority beneficiaries that are *believed to be incompetent* which would serve to enhance social hierarchies in the organization (i.e., incompetent minorities are likely remain at the bottom of organizational hierarchies). Thus in this research we demonstrate that affirmative action policies can ironically be used as an instrument to create and perpetuate social inequality in organizations.

#### *Diversity Is What You Want It to Be*

Diversity has its roots in affirmative action and is a widely celebrated concept in many organizations. However, its definition remains ambiguous. For instance, imagine an organization that has no racial minorities, but is well represented in terms of occupational groups (e.g., accountants, lawyers, engineers)—would such an organization be considered diverse? In a paper recently published in *Psychological Science* (Unzueta, Knowles, & Ho, 2012), we argue that because of the ambiguity around the definition of diversity, individuals' perceptions of diversity can shift according to their social motivations and that this shift has consequences for racial hierarchies in organizations. For example, we find that anti-egalitarian individuals will call the aforementioned racially unequal organization diverse when there exists a high level of occupational heterogeneity. This perception of diversity (brought upon by the occupational heterogeneity) was used to legitimize *opposition* toward race-based affirmative action. In contrast, egalitarian individuals tended to perceive the racially unequal organization as low in diversity, regardless of whether occupational heterogeneity was high or low. This perception was used to legitimize *support* for race-based affirmative action. These and other results from our paper suggest that diversity is “in the eye of the beholder” and the concept can be used to both perpetuate and attenuate racial hierarchies in organizations in accordance with social dominance motivations.

### *Discriminatory Diversity Definitions*

Diversity has historically been defined along legal dimensions (e.g., race, gender) because of its roots in affirmative action and civil-rights legislation. However, there has been a recent trend toward the managerialization of diversity definitions (i.e., the increasing focus on non-legal dimensions of diversity such as personality or functional background). In my dissertation, I propose four studies to test whether this managerialization of diversity may lead to the perpetuation and enhancement of social inequality in organizations. Studies 1 and 2 will determine whether managerialized diversity definitions cause individuals to overlook social inequality and discrimination toward ethnic and gender minorities, because of a shift in attention away from ethnicity and gender. These outcomes may in turn be demonstrated to have consequences for gender and ethnic hierarchies in organizations via decreased affirmative action support. Building on these studies, Study 3 will examine whether managerialized diversity definitions may lead directly to acts of racial discrimination in hiring by human resource practitioners who are high in social dominance orientation. Finally, Study 4 will seek to increase the ecological and external validity of these ideas by examining the relationship between organizational diversity definitions and minority representation and retention using organizational level data from the legal industry. Taken together, these studies seek to illustrate the ironic effects of managerialized diversity definitions on social hierarchies in organizations. I am currently in the data collection stage of this project and anticipate completing my dissertation by May 2013.

### **The Effects of Social Identities in Organizations**

As diversity in organizations increase, there will be a greater number of social groups to manage. In my second line of research, I illustrate how the salience of different social groups and identities can affect important organizational outcomes. This research highlights the importance of effectively managing these social groups and identities in order to achieve ideal outcomes.

### *Labels and Leaders*

In a paper published in *The Leadership Quarterly* (Ho, Shih, & Walters, 2012), we demonstrate the importance of *gender* in affecting leadership emergence. While past studies have focused on how personality and character traits (e.g., dominance, extraversion, etc.) may lead to the emergence of leaders in groups, our research examines how an important situational influence (i.e., framing) can interact with gender in affecting leadership emergence in dyads. Specifically, in two studies we find that men are more likely to emerge as leaders when the same tasks (e.g., paper folding) are framed as stereotypically masculine (e.g., Building Project) while women are more likely to emerge as leaders when the same tasks are framed as stereotypically feminine (e.g., Art Project). Furthermore, we find that these effects occur because of changes in perceived competence. These results suggest that organizational decision makers need to strategically consider how naming projects and initiatives may affect perceptions of team member competence and leadership emergence in organizations that have multiple social groups.

### *The Psychological Stigma of Unemployment*

In a manuscript in preparation for *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (Ho, Shih, Walters, & Pittinsky, in preparation) we examine how identifying a job applicant as belonging to the *unemployed social group* can lead to stigma and hiring biases against that applicant. While there have been a growing number of reports of bias against the unemployed, psychologists have not examined how and when people stigmatize the unemployed. We demonstrate in our first two studies that psychological stigma occurs and leads to hiring biases, holding constant qualifications and minimizing unemployment duration (among samples of HR professionals and the general population). Moreover, rationales indicating the controllability of unemployment-onset (i.e., voluntarily left vs. laid-off), a causal dimension that has been found to mitigate negative responses toward stigma in past research, did not alleviate stigma. This may have occurred because of perceivers' fundamental tendency to overemphasize internal/dispositional explanations for target outcomes. In a third study, we find support for this reasoning by demonstrating

that providing a rationale indicating causal externality (i.e., employer bankruptcy), to correct for this attribution bias, alleviated unemployment stigma and discrimination. Thus we find that a psychological stigma against the unemployed exists, occurs instantaneously, is difficult to alleviate, and leads to hiring biases. Ironically, the psychological stigma of unemployment may harm not only the targets of unemployment stigma, but also the stigmatizers themselves (because qualified candidates for positions are being filtered out of the applicant pool).

#### *Don't Ask, Don't Tell?*

In a paper published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, we find that the disclosure of a *gay identity* can impact performance (Everly, Shih, & Ho, 2012). While supporters of policies that forbid disclosure of sexual orientation in the workplace (such as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”) argue that disclosure could harm performance, we suggest that forbidding disclosure could be a worse alternative. Specifically, concealing a gay identity could cause distraction and ambiguity regarding how to interact with partners and lead to performance decrements. In Study 1, we demonstrate that having a gay confederate partner disclose their gay identity led to higher participant performance on a cognitive (i.e., math) task. In Study 2, we find that having a gay confederate partner disclose their gay identity resulted in greater performance on a sensory-motor (i.e., video game shooting) task. These results suggest that policies creating distraction and ambiguity in social interactions by forcing concealment of social identities may harm as opposed to improve performance.

In sum my research illustrates both the challenges and benefits of pursuing and managing diversity in organizations. While pursuing and managing diversity has the potential to lead to positive outcomes (e.g., performance, leadership emergence, social justice), my research suggests that these positive outcomes may only be achieved under certain conditions and that well-intentioned policies can even be co-opted or backfire. I plan to continue pursuing these lines of research and shedding light on the specific conditions that lead to ideal outcomes for both employees and organizations.

### **Current & Future Research Directions**

#### *Diversity Related Research*

My coauthors and I are currently working on a review paper detailing a new approach to studying diversity (Unzueta, Bauman, & Ho, 2012; invited submission to the *Academy of Management Annals*). Past research in diversity has focused on diversity as an independent variable both conceptually and operationally. We suggest that, while this approach is useful, it assumes diversity is an objective concept that is devoid of context. On the other hand, our proposed method examines diversity as a dependent variable (i.e., perceptions of diversity). This perspective allows for an understanding of when concerns with fairness and exploitation might arise. For instance, recent research finds that Whites and racial minority members perceive diversity in systematically different ways (racial minorities require both numerical and hierarchical representation while Whites require only one of the two types of representation in perceiving diversity). Findings like this that illustrate when individuals perceived diversity may have major implications for employee justice perceptions, satisfaction and commitment to organizations. We outline situational and individual factors that may affect people’s perceptions of diversity and call for further research in this important and underexplored area of research in diversity.

I also have empirical research in progress related to diversity. For instance, we are collecting data to determine whether individuals who are *externally* motivated to control prejudice are more likely to present diversity statistics for their organization in a way that obfuscates social inequalities whereas those that are *internally* motivated to control prejudice are more likely to present diversity statistics for their organization in a way that highlights social inequalities (Unzueta & Ho, in preparation). We have run one pilot study that has supported this hypothesis and are in the process of designing multiple studies in order to further explain this phenomenon.

We are also examining how people's implicit beliefs about the benefits of diversity may affect their support of affirmative action policies (Ho, Unzueta, Everly, & Carpinella, in preparation). Specifically, we have found that individuals are more supportive of affirmative action policies when it occurs at higher levels of the organization (i.e., managerial ranks) relative to the lower levels of the organization (i.e., janitorial ranks). We believe that this finding may be due to the implicit beliefs that certain organizational situations will benefit most from diversity (e.g., diversity among managers may be perceived to breed creativity while diversity among janitors may not be perceived to provide benefit). Further studies have been planned to elucidate whether diversity support is driven by people's implicit theories about the utility of diversity (e.g., we will examine whether support for diversity is higher in occupations and industries that are stereotyped to require creativity compared to ones that do not).

Finally, drawing from the frustration-aggression hypothesis (i.e., frustration leads to aggression directed toward the source of the frustration), we theorized that sexually frustrated heterosexual males would be relatively opposed to gender-based affirmative action (Ho, Unzueta, Yee, & Binning, in preparation) because of their need to aggress against women. We have found preliminary evidence of this (i.e., sexual frustration among heterosexual males had a negative correlation with gender-based affirmative action support and no correlation with race-based affirmative action support) and have further studies planned to demonstrate a direct causal link between sexual frustration and gender-based affirmative action support.

### *Social Identities in Organizations*

My co-authors and I are currently working on multiple projects to further elucidate the unemployment stigma phenomenon. In one project (Ho, Shih, & Walters, in preparation) we are determining how the economic state will affect unemployment stigma. We have found evidence that when individuals believe the economy is in a recession, unemployment stigma lessens. We are also determining whether unemployment stigma "sticks" to the individual even when he or she becomes re-employed (Shih, Walters, & Ho, under review at *Psychological Science*). In addition, we are currently implementing a field study on unemployment stigma that determines whether males or females experience differential levels of unemployment stigma (Shih, Walters, Hu, & Ho, 2012). Finally, we are completing a review paper (Ho & Shih, in preparation) that outlines how positive stereotypes may under certain circumstances lead to increases in performance among employees in multiple organizationally relevant domains (e.g., leadership, negotiations, cognitive, verbal, etc.).

### *Embodied Cognition in Organizations*

One side area of research I am engaging in is *embodied cognition*, which has been touted as a unifying program of research in psychology and a successor to the standard cognitive science model of the mind. Its theories have been applied to multiple domains (e.g., psychology, linguistics, philosophy, neuroscience, artificial intelligence, etc.) but have not been developed in organizational behaviour and theory. Drawing from these theories and findings that posit the mind as grounded in the body's sensorimotor systems, I theorized and found that physical warmth (manipulated via a haptic temperature manipulation) can affect how socially warm an organization is perceived to be and that this has important consequences for organizations (i.e., organizational attractiveness and willingness to buy products). Additional studies have been planned to examine whether physical warmth (e.g., via ambient temperature manipulations) can affect other important organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction and affective commitment via perceived organizational warmth (Ho, Shih, & Eisenberger, in preparation). I believe there is much work to be done in exploring the potentially profound effects of embodiment in managerial and organizational cognition and look forward to continuing pioneering this line of research.