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Beyond the Numbers:

How Perceptions of Diversity Impact

Employee Outcomes and Policy Support

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Management

by

Samantha Janette Kellar

2024

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Beyond the Numbers:
How Perceptions of Diversity Impact
Employee Outcomes and Policy Support

by

Samantha Janette Kellar

Doctor of Philosophy in Management

University of California, Los Angeles, 2024

Professor Miguel M. Unzueta, Chair

Diversity has become a buzzword in organizational discourse, yet its impact in organizations remains complex and multifaceted. In this dissertation, I investigate the role of subjective perceptions of diversity in shaping employees' individual outcomes in organizations. I theorize that employees' subjective perceptions of diversity positively impact their individual outcomes, even when objective diversity remains constant. However, I also propose that while perceptions of diversity are positively related to employees' individual outcomes, they are negatively associated with their support for diversity policies. I test these ideas across four studies and find that employees' perceptions of diversity are positively associated with their organizational commitment, engagement, and job satisfaction, and negatively associated with their turnover intentions. Furthermore, I find that although perceptions of diversity are positively related to

employees' individual outcomes, they are negatively associated with employees' support for diversity policies, such that the more diversity employees perceive, the less supportive of diversity policies they are. These results are robust to group membership (i.e., race and gender), group size, and how perceptions of diversity are measured. This research underscores the double-edged sword of diversity and highlights the importance of looking beyond numeric representation when examining the effects of diversity in organizations.

The dissertation of Samantha Janette Kellar is approved.

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University of California, Los Angeles

2024

Dedication

For my chosen family: Abby, Ashley, Emily, Evelyn, Gabby, Gloria, and Renee.

Thank you for your unwavering love and support.

I never could have done this without you.

Getting a PhD is an incredibly long journey filled with lots of life in between. It's a tremendous feat that requires a collective effort in all domains of life. I am incredibly thankful to the village of people that have helped me get to the end – WE did it.

First, I want to thank my dissertation committee members. Miguel, I have valued your support as an advisor but also as a person over the last five years. Thank you for your generosity and encouragement through the ups and downs. Corinne, I admire and respect you so much as a scholar and as a person. I have learned so many things from you that I will take with me throughout my career and life. Thank you for always being in my corner, being relentlessly supportive, believing in me when I needed it the most, and providing me with amazing opportunities to learn and grow. I couldn't have finished this without you. Joyce, thank you for your kindness and honesty. I have thoroughly enjoyed getting to spend time with you professionally and personally and it was a privilege and an honor to get to work with someone as smart, kind, and understanding as you. Sherry, it's crazy to think that we started at Anderson in the same year and what a ride it has been! Thank you for all your support over the last five years together.

To my PhD colleagues, Alice, Daniel, Jieun, Linda, Lizz, Lyangela, and Gloria – I couldn't have done this without all your support and commiseration. Gloria, when I reflect on this journey, there isn't anyone who has been closer to it all with me than you have. We went

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much together, and I cannot imagine being here, at the finish line without you. There are so many struggles and parts of my life that you have been able to uniquely understand. You bring so much laughter, comfort, and understanding to my life. Thank you for continuously showing up, it means more than I'll ever be able to explain. Gabby, so much life has happened since our time together in Atlanta. I am so proud of you for weathering the storms and so thankful for your support and humor through my own. Your enthusiasm for all the things in life that matter most (food, cocktails) brings me so much joy and I will never tire of making fun of you. Thank you for showing up and supporting me – there are few people that understand the PhD and the life part as much as you do. Renee, my big sister. You have been a steady and strong constant in my life over the last 10 years. We have grown and persevered through many chapters of life together – the highs, the lows, and everything in between. My travel soul sister. The things we have done and seen! Thank you for always saying “yes” and for being there for me through it all.

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Beyond the Numbers: How Perceptions of Diversity Impact Employee Outcomes and Policy Support

In recent years, promoting diversity has garnered considerable attention as a critical concern for organizations, yet its implications remain intricate and multifaceted. Both Americans' views and empirical research tend to suggest a complicated, even contradictory, perspective about the impact of diversity in the workplace and the best way to achieve it. Despite these complications however, most people say that diversity is a very good thing for the country (Pew Research Center, 2019). Furthermore, 76% of job applicants say that a diverse workforce is important when evaluating companies and job offers (Glassdoor, 2020). Many prospective employees care about potential employers' diversity so much that they are willing to sacrifice a higher salary to work at a more diverse company (Choi et al., 2022). For organizations, simply stating that diversity is valued increases their organizational attractiveness in the eyes of prospective employees (e.g., Thomas & Wise, 1999). These findings underscore the significance that prospective employees place on work force diversity and its potential impact on their outcomes in organizations.

While diversity may aid in attracting *prospective* employees, less is known about the impact of diversity on current employees' outcomes. Although most prospective employees prioritize diversity in their evaluations of companies, there is limited empirical research examining its effects on employees' individual outcomes post-employment. Existing organizational diversity research has primarily focused on examining the effect of diversity on team or organizational level outcomes, such as creativity and innovation (e.g., Van der Vegt & Janssen, 2003), information sharing (e.g., Phillips et al., 2004), and team- or firm-level performance (e.g., Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007; Roberson & Park, 2007). However, little attention

has been given to understanding how diversity impacts individual-level outcomes. The current research addresses this gap by examining the impact of diversity on employees' individual outcomes in organizations. Specifically, I focus on the role of subjective perceptions of diversity in shaping these outcomes. While organizational behavior research often relies on objective diversity metrics (e.g., Blau's (1977) index of heterogeneity) when examining the effects of diversity within organizations, I propose that the effect of diversity on employees' individual outcomes in organizations is largely dependent upon how diversity is measured – subjectively through employees' perceptions of diversity, or objectively through traditional numeric metrics.

I theorize that, even when objective diversity remains constant, subjective perceptions of diversity positively impact employees' individual outcomes in organizations, such that the more diversity they perceive, the more positive their individual outcomes are. However, I also posit, that employees' perceptions of diversity, while positively related to their individual outcomes, are negatively associated with their support for diversity policies, potentially hindering organizational diversity efforts.

Understanding how diversity impacts employees' individual outcomes in organizations is important for three primary reasons. First, given prospective employees' desire to work for diverse organizations, it is important to understand if this stated desire translates into positive experiences and outcomes for employees. Prior research suggests that peoples' stated beliefs or attitudes sometimes do not translate into their expressed behavior or outcomes. For instance, people typically exhibit more positive attitudes and behaviors towards diversity when they know they are being observed than they actually exhibit in the world (e.g., Kellar & Hall, 2022) and people are unwilling to express bias against minority groups when directly asked, regardless of their underlying attitudes (Petsko et al., 2022). Therefore, it is important to better understand if

prospective employees' stated preferences translate to positive outcomes after joining an organization.

Second, employees' outcomes in organizations profoundly impact organizations themselves. For example, voluntary turnover costs U.S. businesses \$1 trillion annually. The cost of replacing an employee is estimated to cost one-half to two times the employee's annual salary (Gallup, 2019). Furthermore, employees who are more engaged at work tend to be more committed to their organizations and act more positively within their roles to further the success of the company (Kahn, 1990). In light of the "great resignation", employees are less engaged, less committed, and more likely to leave their jobs than ever before (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Therefore, it is important to understand factors that might decrease employees' negative individual outcomes and increase their positive individual outcomes, such as organizational.

Finally, examining the impact of diversity on employees' individual outcomes can help broaden our understanding of how diversity impacts organizations. While the findings on diversity's effects on team and firm performance are mixed, taking a more micro approach to examining the effects of diversity may provide additional insights into how and when diversity may positively or negatively impact employees and organizations.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Diversity and Employees' Individual Outcomes

Advocates of demographic diversity in organizations frequently justify diversity with either the moral case – diversity is the right thing to do – or the business case – diversity is good for the bottom line. Whereas the appeal of the moral case tends to be limited to people with more liberal social values (e.g., Gromet et al., 2013; Mayer et al., 2019), the business case has become more broadly persuasive and prevalent because all business leaders and employees care about

core performance objectives (e.g., increasing profits). The business case for diversity has been touted across headlines, suggesting that diversity is good for both team and firm performance. However, the empirical research has led to little consensus regarding the performance effects in organizations (e.g., Carter & Phillips, 2017; Williams & O'Reilly III, 1998). On the one hand, diversity has potential value for teams through the dissemination of diverse information and knowledge (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). On the other hand, diversity may activate social categorization (Brewer & Brown, 1998) and lead employees to create “us” and “them” distinctions, that may, in turn, lead to intergroup bias and negatively impact group functioning. The bulk of this research, however, has focused on the economic benefits of diversity through productive team processes and functioning (e.g., integration of ideas, creativity, and problem solving). However, considering employees’ desire to work for diverse organizations (Glassdoor, 2020), diversity also has the potential to impact employees’ individual-level outcomes in organizations. More specifically, in the following sections, I theorize that subjective perceptions of diversity have a positive relationship with employees’ individual outcomes.

Measuring Diversity: Subjective vs. Objective Measures

The organizational behavior literature often discusses diversity as an objective property of a group (e.g., Mannix & Neale, 2005; Van Knippenberg et al., 2004; Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Objective measures of diversity capture some sort of numeric calculation of the diversity of a group, typically along a single dimension. There are a wide range of measures that can be used to calculate the objective diversity of a group, which are often referred to as diversity indices. The most commonly used objective measure of diversity is Blau’s index of heterogeneity (Blau, 1977). Blau’s index quantifies the probability that two members randomly selected from a group would be in different groups or categories (e.g., be different races or

genders). The index is at its minimum value (0) when there is no variety, or when all individuals are classified in the same group or category (e.g., a group that is comprised of all White people or all men), and at a maximum value (1) when there is "perfect" variety, or when all individuals are equally represented (e.g., a group that is 50% men and 50% women).

While these objective measures of diversity are commonly used to examine the effects of diversity in the workplace, prior research suggests that there is a great deal of subjectivity in how people think about diversity (Bell & Hartmann, 2007). Whereas objective measures of diversity capture the objective diversity of a group (e.g., the numeric proportion of women in a group), perceptions of diversity measure an individual's perception of how diverse a group, team, or organization is. In other words, these measures are subjective assessments of how diverse a given individual perceives a group to be.

Although both objective measures and subjective perceptions of diversity have their strengths and weakness and are important to consider, I propose that perceptions of diversity are more strongly related to employees' individual outcomes in organizations than are objective measures of diversity. This subjective lens through which people view diversity can significantly influence their attitudes, behaviors, and experiences within a group in several ways that objective diversity alone cannot. Of interest to the current paper, I propose that employees' perceptions of diversity, holding objective diversity constant, will be positively related to their engagement, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction, and negatively related to their turnover intentions. For instance, when people perceive a group as diverse, they are more likely to feel a sense of psychological ownership and belonging within that group (Ely & Thomas, 2001). This sense of ownership fosters a positive emotional connection to the group and motivates people to actively contribute to its success (i.e., engagement). Conversely, if people perceive a group as

homogeneous or exclusive, they may feel disconnected and disengaged. Subjective perceptions of diversity can also influence employees' perceptions of fairness and equity within an organization. When employees perceive a group or organization as diverse, they are more likely to perceive organizational practices and policies as fair and equitable (Bell & Hartmann, 2007). This perception of fairness enhances trust and confidence in an organization, leading to greater job satisfaction and organizational commitment amongst employees. Alternatively, if employees perceive a group or organization as lacking diversity, they may perceive organizational practices as biased or discriminatory, leading to feelings of injustice and resentment (Nishii, 2013), which may increase turnover. Additionally, subjective perceptions of diversity may shape employees' sense of identity and belonging within a group or organization. When people perceive an organization as valuing diversity and embracing differences, they are more likely to feel accepted and valued for their unique ideas and perspectives (Nishii, 2013). This sense of belonging fosters a positive organizational culture where people feel empowered to express themselves authentically and contribute to the organization's mission and goals. Whereas if people perceive an organization as homogenous, they may experience feelings of alienation or marginalization, leading to decreased morale and engagement (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Finally, when people perceive an organization as diverse, they are more likely to feel motivated to fully engage in their work and collaborate with others (Shore et al., 2011). This motivation stems from a sense of purpose and belonging with the organization, as people recognize the value of their contributions to a diverse environment. Conversely, if employees perceive organizations as lacking diversity, they may feel disengaged and demotivated, leading to decreased productivity and performance.

Overall, subjective perceptions of diversity play a critical role in shaping employees' individual outcomes in organizations. By influencing perceptions of ownership, fairness,

identity, belonging, and motivation, subjective perceptions of diversity can impact employee individual outcomes in organizations such as engagement, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions.

Perceptions of diversity may also capture aspects of diversity that are not captured by objective measures of diversity alone, such as the extent of inclusion, belongingness, and psychological safety within a group or organization (Nishii, 2013; Shore et al., 2011). For instance, even if a group has high levels of demographic diversity based on objective measures, employees may not perceive the group as diverse if they do not feel included or valued for their unique perspectives and contributions. Alternatively, a group with relatively low demographic diversity may be perceived as diverse if employees feel respected and empowered to voice their opinions and ideas. Mor Barak et al. (1998) proposed that people develop perceptions about an organization's stance on diversity (i.e., diversity climate). These perceptions are in turn found to impact employees' individual level outcomes in organizations. For instance, pro-diversity climate perceptions are positively related to employees' organizational commitment and job satisfaction and negatively related to turnover intentions (Hicks-Clarke & Iles, 2000; Holly et al., 2010; McKay et al., 2007; Stewart et al., 2011). Therefore, although measures of perceptions of diversity differ from measures of perceptions of diversity *climate* in that they only ask about perceptions of the demographic make-up of a group (e.g., this group has a high level of racial diversity), whereas diversity climate measures also encompass perceptions of inclusivity and personal experiences with diversity (e.g., people from diversity backgrounds are involved in decision making), measures of perceptions of diversity may still elicit considerations beyond numeric representations. In turn, this may mean that objective demographic diversity alone will not impact employees' individual outcomes, but employees' subjective perceptions of diversity

will. While both objective measures and subjective perceptions of diversity may play important roles in understanding the impact of diversity on employees' individual outcomes in organizations, perceptions of diversity are likely more closely related to employees' individual outcomes due to their subjective nature and their strong influence on attitudes, behaviors, and experiences within organizations. Specifically, I predict:

Hypothesis 1: Employees' perceptions of a groups' diversity will be positively associated with their individual outcomes in organizations, holding objective diversity constant.

Variation in Subjective Perceptions of Diversity

Perceptions of diversity have long been assumed to be essentially accurate (with some exceptions). On the surface, it might be expected that people's subjective perceptions of diversity are driven by the objective diversity of a group, but research on perceptions of diversity suggests that this is often not the case (Cox & Blake, 1991). Contrary to initial expectations, subjective perceptions of diversity are not always aligned with the objective composition of a group. Indeed, theorizing and research indicate that there is no one-to-one relationship between subjective perceptions of diversity and the objective diversity of a group (Strauss et al., 2001; Zellmer-Bruhn et al., 2008). Therefore, the assumption that objective diversity is always perceived as such is questionable (Homan et al., 2010). These findings challenge the assumption that there is a straightforward relationship between the objective composition of a group and peoples' subjective perceptions of that group.

If people's subjective perceptions of diversity and the objective diversity of a group are not highly correlated, there is likely variation in people's perceptions of diversity. Indeed, research finds that diversity perceptions are influenced by several factors such as racial group

membership (Bauman et al., 2014; Danbold & Unzueta, 2020; Unzueta & Binning, 2010, 2010), preference for group-based hierarchies (Unzueta et al., 2012), and concerns about ingroup representation (Chen & Hamilton, 2015). For instance, whereas racial minorities (i.e., Asian, Black, and Latino people) are associated more with diversity than are White people for people of all races, racial minorities associate their respective racial in-groups more strongly with diversity relative to minority out-groups (Bauman et al., 2014). Thus, White people tend to perceive a workgroup as diverse as long as the group includes any non-White member, whereas racial minorities tend to only perceive groups to be diverse when they include members of their racial ingroup. These findings highlight the nuanced nature of diversity perceptions within and across racial groups, suggesting that people may prioritize the representation of their own racial identity when evaluating diversity.

Furthermore, White people often feel the representation of racial minorities in low-status positions is enough to deem an organization as being diverse, while racial minorities are less willing to do so unless ingroup members are represented in both low- and high-status (i.e., managerial) positions in the organization (Binning & Unzueta, 2013; Unzueta & Binning, 2012). Finally, relative to members of nondominant groups (e.g., racial minorities, women), members of dominant groups (e.g., White people, men) report that diversity is achieved at lower representations of nondominant groups within an organization (Danbold & Unzueta, 2020).

In summary, research suggests that individual characteristics, particularly race and gender, play a pivotal role in shaping peoples' perceptions of diversity, leading to variation in diversity perceptions among individuals. More specifically, I predict:

Hypothesis 2: White people and men will perceive more diversity than racial minorities and women do.

Hypothesis 3: Race and gender will moderate the relationship between perceptions of diversity and employees' individual outcomes, such that the relationship will be stronger for racial minorities and women.

Defining Diversity: Broad vs. Specific

While diversity has become one of the most widely used terms in organizations in recent years, it often remains one of the most undefined. Diversity can encompass a wide range of dimensions, ranging from surface level characteristics such as race, gender, and age, to deep level characteristics such as attitudes, opinions, and values (Phillips & Loyd, 2006). Therefore, despite its prevalence in organizational discourse, diversity often remains an ambiguous concept with a wide range of possible definitions.

Systematic reviews and meta-analyses examining the effects of diversity in the workplace have highlighted the inherent complexity and ambiguity surrounding the operationalization of diversity. A key issue in reconciling disparate findings that emerges from these reviews and analyses is the ambiguity and variability in how diversity is defined and operationalized across studies (Harrison & Klein, 2007; Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007; Williams & O'Reilly III, 1998). For instance, Hambrick et al., (1996) defined top management team heterogeneity as "variation in team members' characteristics" (p. 662). Pelled et al., (1999) defined demographic diversity as "the extent to which a unit is heterogeneous with respect to demographic attributes (p. 1). These definitions tie diversity to differences but do not elaborate any further. They do not clearly state or substantiate the nature of these differences, meaning that the differences measured in one operationalization may be entirely different from the differences measured in another.

The ambiguity and variability in the conceptualization and measurement of diversity raises important questions about how different approaches to defining and measuring diversity may influence the relationship between employees' perceptions of diversity and their individual outcomes in organizations. More specifically, I delineate between measuring diversity broadly versus specifically. Broad measures of diversity typically measure diversity following the definitions provided above. They may specify that diversity refers to differences, or even that it refers to demographic differences, but do not go beyond this to distinguish the specific differences in question. Alternatively, specific measures of diversity focus on individual dimensions, such as race, gender, or functional background. Therefore, they clearly specify the kind of differences that they are referring to (e.g., gender diversity).

The decision to measure diversity broadly or specifically may have significant implications for peoples' perceptions of diversity. For example, broad measures of diversity may foster a sense of inclusivity and representation among employees, irrespective of their individual characteristics (Kulik & Roberson, 2008). When diversity is measured broadly, employees may form overarching impressions of inclusivity and representation within their work environments (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016). These broad perceptions may evoke feelings of belongingness, psychological safety, and organizational commitment (Van Dick et al., 2004), leading to positive individual outcomes such as increased engagement, job satisfaction, and reduced turnover intentions. Additionally, because people derive a sense of belonging and self-esteem from their identification with social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 2004), broad perceptions of diversity may activate a sense of shared identity and mutual respect among all employees, fostering a supportive organizational climate (van Knippenberg et al., 2013). Moreover,

broad perceptions of diversity may signal an organization's commitment to inclusivity and fairness, enhancing employees' trust and loyalty (Kulik & Roberson, 2008).

Conversely, specific measures may highlight disparities or underrepresentation within certain demographic groups, potentially leading to feelings of marginalization or exclusion for some group members (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). When diversity is measured specifically, individuals may attend to particular dimensions of diversity, such as gender or race, and evaluate their personal relevance and significance within the context of their workgroups. While specific perceptions of diversity may provide valuable insights into unique challenges faced by different demographic groups, they may not consistently be related to or predictive of employees' individual outcomes as robustly as perceptions of broad diversity are. Specific perceptions of diversity may activate social identity processes, wherein individuals compare themselves to others within their social category and assess their relative status and treatment (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Consequently, people may react differently to specific perceptions of diversity based on their own demographic characteristics and experiences, resulting in mixed or weaker associations with employees' individual outcomes, whereas broad perceptions of diversity should have stronger and more consistent positive associations with these outcomes.

I hypothesize that the relationship between perceptions of diversity and employees' individual outcomes will be stronger when diversity is measured specifically compared to when it is measured broadly. This is because broad perceptions of diversity capture the overarching sense of inclusivity and representation within workgroups, leading to more robust associations with individual outcomes. In contrast, specific perceptions of diversity may yield more nuanced effects, particularly regarding the salience of dimensions of diversity in shaping employees' experiences and behaviors. Therefore, I propose that the relationship between perceptions of

diversity and employees' individual outcomes may vary depending on whether diversity is measured broadly or specifically. More specifically, I predict:

Hypothesis 4: Perceptions of broad diversity will be positively associated with employees' individual outcomes, whereas perceptions of specific diversity will yield mixed or weaker associations.

The Role of Group Size

The size of the target group likely also plays an important role in the relationship between employees' perceptions of diversity and their individual outcomes at work. People categorize themselves and others into in-groups and out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), a process that is deeply influenced by group size. According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), individuals seek to enhance their self-esteem by identifying with groups that they perceive as positively distinct from other groups. Group size influences the salience of these group identities, with larger groups potentially amplifying the distinctions between in-groups and out-groups. Larger groups may heighten the need for people to categorize themselves and others into distinct social categories, which may increase their perceptions of diversity. Indeed, larger groups tend to be perceived as more heterogeneous and diverse than smaller groups, regardless of the actual demographic composition (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016; Hewstone, 2015; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000a, 2000b; Williams & O'Reilly III, 1998). For example, Chatman and O'Reilly (2004) examined reactions to work group sex diversity and found that larger groups were consistently perceived as more diverse compared to smaller groups, despite no significant differences in the demographic makeup between the groups. These findings suggest that perceptions of diversity are influenced by group size, with larger groups being more likely to be perceived as heterogeneous. This increased perception of diversity in larger groups likely stems from the

amplification effect of group size, wherein the mere presence of a greater number of individuals leads people to perceive greater diversity (Hewstone et al., 2002).

In larger groups where perceptions of diversity are more pronounced, the presence of diverse perspectives and experiences may foster greater cohesion and collaboration among group members, leading to more positive individual outcomes, such as increased engagement and performance (Mannix & Neale, 2005). Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that the amplification effect of group size on perceptions of diversity can lead to more pronounced effects on individual outcomes. For instance, in larger groups perceived as more diverse, people may experience heightened feelings of belongingness and inclusion, which are associated with positive individual outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Haslam et al., 2009). Moreover, the social dynamics within larger groups, influenced by perceptions of diversity, can enhance group cohesion and collaboration. In larger groups where perceptions of diversity are more pronounced, the presence of diverse perspectives and experiences may foster greater cohesion and collaboration among group members, leading to more positive individual outcomes such as increased engagement and performance (Mannix & Neale, 2005).

Building upon the understanding that perceptions of diversity are significantly influenced by the amplification effect of group size, these magnified perceptions likely have a significant impact on employees' individual outcomes. Prior research suggests that larger groups, perceived as more diverse, foster heightened feelings of belongingness, inclusion, and collaboration among group members (Haslam et al., 2009; Mannix & Neale, 2005). Therefore, I hypothesize that the relationship between perceptions of diversity and employees' individual outcomes will be more pronounced in larger groups compared to smaller ones. Specifically, I predict:

Hypothesis 5: Perceptions of diversity will be more strongly associated with employees' individual outcomes in larger vs. smaller groups.

Support for Diversity Initiatives and Policies

Prior research finds that dominant group members are generally less supportive of diversity policies and initiatives than minority group members are (Chow et al., 2013; Dover et al., 2016; Lowery et al., 2006, 2007; Plaut et al., 2011). Most research examining why this is the case has focused on intergroup bias and hierarchy maintenance as explanations for why dominant group members are less supportive of diversity initiatives and policies than minority group members are. For instance, dominant group members often perceive diversity initiatives as threatening to their privileged positions within existing social hierarchies. This perception, in turn, triggers a defensive response towards diversity initiatives aimed at preserving their status and advantages in society (Lowery et al. 2006). Furthermore, dominant group members often express concerns about reverse discrimination and fairness when it comes to diversity policies which stem from perceptions of threat to the dominant group's status and resources, lowering their support for diversity initiatives compared to minority group members support (Plaut et al., 2011).

I add to this research by suggesting that another reason why dominant group members may be less supportive of diversity policies and initiatives could be because their support is contingent upon their *subjective perceptions* of diversity, not the objective numeric make up a group, which influences their support for diversity policies. If majority group members perceive more diversity than minority group members do, even when it does not exist, then they are likely to believe that diversity policies are no longer needed sooner than minority group members do. Indeed, prominent legislation in support for diversity initiatives often hinges on the premise that diversification efforts should expire once diversity is sufficiently "achieved" (e.g., *Grutter v.*

Bollinger, 2003). Furthermore, research on diversity thresholds suggests that dominant group members (e.g., White people and men) believe that diversity is achieved at lower levels of representation of nondominant group members (e.g., racial minorities and women) than members of nondominant groups do (Danbold & Unzueta, 2020). Dominant group members, relative to nondominant group members, are more likely to declare that an organization is sufficiently diverse at a lower percentage of members of the nondominant group and these perceptions of when sufficient diversity is achieved are highly correlated with perceptions of when diversity initiatives are no longer necessary. Consequently, the misalignment between perceived and objective diversity in a group or organization may diminish support for diversity policies and initiatives. Specifically, I predict:

Hypothesis 6: Perceptions of diversity will be negatively associated with support for diversity policies, such that the more diversity employees perceive in a group, the less supportive of diversity policies they will be.

Hypothesis 7: The relationship between perceptions of diversity and support for diversity policies will be moderated by race and gender such that the relationship will be stronger for White people (vs. racial minorities) and men (vs. women).

OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

I conducted four studies to test the hypotheses above, where I examined the relationship between employees' perceptions of diversity and their individual outcomes in organizations. In Study 1, I present analyses from a large field-survey of 6,520 employees at a large public sector organization that tests for the relationship between perceptions of diversity and four primary individual outcome variables (Hypothesis 1): engagement, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. I also examine whether dominant group members perceive

more diversity than nondominant group members do (Hypothesis 2) and whether race and gender moderate the relationship between perceptions of diversity and employees' individual outcomes (Hypothesis 3). In Study 2, I present analyses of MBA student teams to test for the same patterns in Study 1 in a different context (Hypotheses 1-3). In Study 3, I examine whether measuring perceptions of diversity broadly or specifically differentially impacts the relationship between perceptions of diversity and employees' individual outcomes (Hypothesis 4). Additionally, I look at the relationship between perceptions of diversity and employees' support for diversity policies (Hypothesis 6) and examine whether race and gender moderate this relationship (Hypothesis 7). Lastly, in Study 4, I examine how group size effects the relationship between perceptions of diversity and employees' individual outcomes in organizations (Hypothesis 5) and provide an additional test of the relationship between perceptions of diversity and policy support (Hypothesis 6-7).

STUDY 1

Study 1 provides an initial test of Hypotheses 1-3 using a field survey with a large public sector organization. This is a valuable sample for investigating our relationships of interest for several reasons. First, it allows me to look at these relationships in a large field setting where I can measure employees' actual experiences in their workplace as well as their perceptions of their actual workplace environment within a single organization. Second, the organization consists of 44 distinct departments that employees are nested in, providing a diverse set of unique departments with varying diversity. The organization collects and maintains demographic data at the department level which they provided us with. Therefore, this sample provides employees' perceptions of their department's diversity, as well as the *actual* race and gender diversity of their departments. Finally, the sample is incredibly demographically diverse

and thus, offers strong external validity while also allowing us to test for group differences with enough statistical power.

Methods

Participants and Procedure. Participants were 6,520 employees in 44 departments at a large public sector organization (31.1% Latinx, 25.8% White, 18.5% Asian, 11.1% Black, 10.5% Multiracial, 2.4% Other, .58% American Indian; 50.5% male, 47.6% female). The measures included in the present analysis are taken from a larger survey related to culture, diversity, equity, and inclusion conducted directly with the organization. The survey was distributed to all employees in the organization by department managers and was voluntary.

Measures.

Perceptions of Diversity. To measure perceptions of diversity, I used a two-item composite measure adapted from Vorauer and Sakamoto (2008): “There is a high degree of diversity among my day-to-day coworkers” and “There is a high degree of diversity among the departmental management” (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree, $\alpha = .73$). These items were part of a broader set of questions about employees’ perceptions of their department’s diversity and diversity efforts. While these items did not include perceptions of specific dimensions of diversity (i.e., race and gender), participants were told the following prior to responding to the items:

Now, we want to learn more about the differences among people in your department. In this section, we will use the following terms:

Social identities refer to personal, demographic characteristics, such as gender expression, race/ethnicity, age, LGBTQ+ status, political ideology, disability status, etc.

Diversity refers to the representation of people with different social identities in a group. If many different social identities are represented among the members of a group, that would be a high degree of diversity. If only a few social identities are represented among the members of a group, that would be a low degree of diversity.

Thus, participants were instructed to think specifically about the representation of people with different social identities (i.e., demographic characteristics) when responding to these items.

*Objective Racial Diversity*¹. I used Blau's (1977) index of heterogeneity to develop a measure of objective departmental racial diversity (American Indian, Asian, Black, Latinx, Multiracial, White). Blau's index is calculated as $1 - \sum P_i^2$, where P is the proportion of individuals in a category and i is the number of categories, thus values could theoretically range from 0 to .80. A score of zero would indicate perfect homogeneity (e.g., a department with only Asian employees or only White employees), whereas a score of .80 would indicate perfect heterogeneity (i.e., a department with equal proportions of American Indian, Asian, Black, Latinx, and White employees). In the current sample, Blau's index values for race ranged from 0 to .75 ($M = .70$, $SD = .07$).

*Objective Gender Diversity*². To measure objective gender diversity, I also used Blau's (1977) index of heterogeneity (Female, Male). Theoretically, values could range from 0 to .50. In the current sample, Blau's index values for gender ranged from .35 to .50 ($M = .45$, $SD = .03$).

Organizational Commitment. To measure organizational commitment, I used a 3-item scale adapted from Allen and Meyer (1996). Items include: "I am proud to tell others that I am

¹ As a robustness check, I also analyzed objective diversity using the proportion of racial minorities within a given department. Results are consistent with the Blau's (1977) index of heterogeneity.

² Like objective racial diversity, I also analyzed objective diversity using the proportion of women within a given department. Results are consistent with the Blau's (1977) index of heterogeneity.

part of this department.”, “I talk up this department to my friends as a great department to work for.”, and “I feel a sense of “ownership” of this department rather than being just an employee.” (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree; $\alpha = .83$).

Engagement. To measure engagement, I used the 3-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2019). Items include: “At work, I feel bursting with energy.”, “I am enthusiastic about my job.”, and “I am immersed in my work.” (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree; $\alpha = .76$).

Job Satisfaction. To measure job satisfaction, I used the single-item scale from Dolbier et al. (2005): “Taking everything into consideration, how do you feel about your job as a whole? (1 = Extremely dissatisfied, 7 = Extremely satisfied).

Turnover Intentions. To measure turnover intentions, I used a two-item scale from Colarelli (1984). Items include: “I frequently think of quitting my job” and “I am planning to search for a new job during the next 12 months.” (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree; $\alpha = .70$).

Controls. I included the following relevant job characteristics, demographic, and departmental control variables: supervisor status, position type, job type, number of hours worked per week, department tenure, race, gender, age, political ideology, and objective departmental racial and gender diversity (when relevant).

Results

Perceptions of Diversity. To examine the relationship between perceptions of diversity and employees’ individual outcomes, I ran OLS regression models with department as a random effect to account for within-department non-independence. All models were first run without control variables and then with control variables. As hypothesized, there was a positive

relationship between perceptions of diversity and organizational commitment both without ($\beta = 0.34, p < .001$), and with control variables ($\beta = 0.33, p < .001$). There was also a positive relationship between perceptions of diversity and engagement both without ($\beta = 0.23, p < .001$), and with control variables ($\beta = 0.23, p < .001$). Next, there was a positive relationship between perceptions of diversity and job satisfaction both without ($\beta = 0.32, p < .001$), and with control variables ($\beta = 0.30, p < .001$). Finally, there was a negative relationship between perceptions of diversity and turnover intentions both without ($\beta = -0.25, p < .001$), and with control variables ($\beta = -0.26, p < .001$).

Next, I examined whether these results held while controlling for objective racial and gender diversity. Results were consistent for organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.29, p < .001$) engagement ($\beta = 0.21, p < .001$), job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.28, p < .001$), and turnover intentions ($\beta = -0.24, p < .001$), indicating that holding objective racial and gender diversity constant, the more diversity that employees perceive, the more positive, and less negative, their individual outcomes at work. Furthermore, none of the objective diversity control variable coefficients were significant in the current model or in models only including objective racial or gender diversity without perceptions of diversity. This indicates that there is no relationship between objective diversity and employees' individual outcomes, and that the relationship between diversity and employees' individual outcomes is driven by employees' perceptions of diversity. Indeed, there is no correlation between employees' perceptions of diversity and the objective racial ($r = 0.02, p = .12$) or gender ($r = -0.01, p = .64$) diversity of their department. Since the perceptions of diversity items did not ask directly about perceptions of racial and gender diversity, but about perceptions of demographic diversity, broadly, as a robustness check, I created a composite measure of objective diversity using the objective racial and objective gender indices to better

capture objective demographic diversity, more broadly. There was also no correlation between employees' perceptions of diversity and this composite measure of objective racial and gender diversity ($r = 0.02, p = .22$).

Race and Gender Differences in Perceptions of Diversity. I next tested whether there were differences in perceptions of diversity across demographic groups (i.e., race and gender). To examine this, I ran OLS regression models with department as a random effect to account for within-department non-independence. Pairwise comparisons revealed significant differences between racial groups' perceptions of diversity. More specifically, holding objective diversity constant, Asian ($\beta = -0.28, p < .01$), Black ($\beta = -0.78, p < .001$), and Latinx ($\beta = -0.22, p = .02$) employees all perceived significantly less diversity than White employees did. Additionally, Black employees perceived significantly less diversity than Asian ($\beta = -.50, p < .001$), Latinx ($\beta = -.57, p < .001$), and Multiracial ($\beta = -0.61, p < .001$) employees did. Pairwise comparisons also revealed significant differences in men's and women's perceptions of diversity, such that holding objective diversity constant, men perceived more diversity than women did ($\beta = -.36, p < .001$). Taken together, these results suggest that, controlling for objective diversity, White employees perceive more diversity than racial minorities, Black employees perceive less diversity than both racial majority and other racial minority groups do, and men perceive more diversity than women do. However, contrary to predictions, race or gender did not moderate the relationship between perceptions of diversity and any of the individual outcomes.

Discussion

Study 1 provides initial evidence that diversity is positively associated with employees' individual outcomes at work. More specifically, holding objective diversity constant, employees' perceptions of their department's diversity are positively associated with their individual

outcomes, whereas objective diversity is not associated with these outcomes (Hypothesis 1). I find that subjective demographic diversity (i.e., perceptions of diversity) and objective demographic diversity are not correlated, substantiating past literature that there is no one-to-one comparison between subjective perceptions of diversity and objective diversity. Furthermore, I find that men and White employees perceive more diversity than racial minorities and women do. These findings highlight discrepancies in diversity perceptions across demographic groups, with White employees and men perceiving more diversity compared to Asian, Black, Latinx, and female employees. This points to potential issues of representation within organizations that need to be addressed. For instance, while majority group members may perceive their organization to be sufficiently diverse, minority group members may not, leading to disparate individual outcomes for the employees. Together these findings further support prior research suggesting that diversity is not an objective concept but rather a subjective one, shaped by individual experiences, beliefs, and biases (Bauman et al., 2014; Unzueta & Binning, 2010; Unzueta & Binning, 2012; Unzueta et al., 2012;).

While majority group members perceived more diversity than minority group members did, race nor gender did not moderate the relationship between perceptions of diversity and employees' individual outcomes. This finding is contrary to predictions and prior findings in diversity research. Previous studies have often suggested that minority groups (e.g., women and racial minorities) experience the effects of diversity differently than majority groups (e.g., men and White employees) due to their unique experiences (Hicks-Clarke & Iles, 2000; Nishii, 2013). However, the current results indicate that the positive impact of perceived diversity on employees' individual outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and engagement is consistent across different demographic groups. This suggests a universal benefit

of perceived diversity that transcends individual demographic differences. This study highlights the significant impact of employees' subjective perceptions of diversity on their individual outcomes at work for all employees, suggesting that it is important for organizations to recognize that employees' perceptions of diversity, rather than the objective demographic composition of organizations, play a crucial role in shaping employee experiences and individual outcomes at work.

Study 1 has several strengths, including high external validity and measures of both subjective and objective diversity within a single organization. At the same time, the subjective measure of diversity was a broad measure of demographic diversity in the sense that it did not specify a dimension of demographic diversity (e.g., race, gender).. To address this limitation, I conducted another field survey where I measured perceptions of diversity on specific dimensions of diversity.

STUDY 2

Study 2 provides a replication of the results in Study 1 testing Hypotheses 1-3 in a different context and at a different level (i.e., team diversity), while also addressing limitations related to the perceptions of diversity measure. In the current study, I ask participants to provide their perceptions of their team's diversity, broadly (as in Study 1), but also in relation to specific dimensions of diversity (e.g., race, gender, functional background).

Methods

Participants and Procedure. Participants were 278 full-time MBA students at a large West Coast university (46.6% Asian, 27.7% White, 9.8% Multiracial, 9.8% Latinx, 3.8% Other, 2.3% Black; 63.1% male, 36.8% female). At the start of the program, students were assigned to "learning teams" (n = 59) which are teams of 4-6 students who complete their core classes and

group assignments together throughout the course of their first year in the program. At the end of their first quarter, all students in the cohort were invited to participate in the survey. In addition to the survey data collected, student learning team number, class section³, race, gender, and functional background data were collected from the full-time MBA office.

Measures.

Perceptions of Diversity. I measured perceptions of diversity using 6 different measures. First, to measure general perceptions of diversity, I used a three-item composite measure adapted from Unzueta and Binning (2011): “My learning team includes a high degree of diversity”, “I consider my learning team to be diverse”, and “My learning team includes a low degree of diversity” (1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree, $\alpha = .88$). Then, to measure perceptions of diversity along more specific dimensions, I used single-item measures to assess perceptions of (1) racial, (2) gender, (3) sexual orientation, (4) student status (i.e., domestic vs. international), and (5) functional background diversity. Sample item: “I consider my learning team to be diverse in terms of race” (1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree).

Objective Diversity. As in Study 1, Blau’s (1977) index of heterogeneity was used to develop a measure of objective departmental racial diversity (Asian, Black, International⁴, Latinx, Multiracial, White). In the current sample, Blau’s index values for race ranged from .38 to .76 ($M = .62$, $SD = .08$). To measure objective gender diversity, I also used Blau’s (1977) index of heterogeneity (Female, Male). In the current sample, Blau’s index values for gender ranged from 0 to .50 ($M = .44$, $SD = .09$). In the current study, I was also able to calculate

³Participants were enrolled across 5 class sections during the time of the survey. Thus, participant’s teams were clustered in class sections.

⁴ The MBA office does not collect race/ethnicity information from international students, therefore their race/ethnicity is reported as “international.” Because I did not have accurate race/ethnicity data for these students I calculated Blau’s index of heterogeneity using “International” as a race/ethnicity category.

objective student status diversity (i.e., domestic vs. international) and objective functional background diversity. In the current sample, Blau's index values for student status ranged from .32 to .50 ($M = .47, SD = .04$) and .56 to .84 ($M = .79, SD = .05$) for functional background.

Organizational Commitment. To measure organizational commitment, I used a 3-item scale adapted from Allen and Meyer (1996). Items include: "I am proud to tell others that I go to (school name).", "I talk up (school name) to my friends as a great department to work for.", and "I feel a sense of "ownership" of (school name) rather than being just a student." (1= Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree; $\alpha = .77$).

Engagement. To measure engagement, I used the 3-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2019). Items include: "At school, I feel bursting with energy.", "I am enthusiastic about school.", and "I am immersed in my schoolwork." (1= Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree; $\alpha = .82$).

Job Satisfaction. To measure job satisfaction, I used the single-item scale from Dolbier et al. (2005): "Taking everything into consideration, how do you feel about (school name) as a whole? (1= Extremely dissatisfied, 7= Extremely satisfied).

Controls. I included the following relevant demographic control variables: race, gender, age, and political ideology when relevant.

Results

Perceptions of Diversity. To examine the relationship between perceptions of diversity and students' individual outcomes, I ran OLS regression models with class section as a random effect to account for within-section non-independence. All models were first run without control variables and then with control variables, including objective racial, gender, sexual orientation,

student status, and functional background diversity. Results replicate Study 1 for broad perceptions of diversity for some of the outcome variables. First, there was a positive relationship between general perceptions of diversity and organizational commitment both without ($\beta = 0.17, p < .01$), and with control variables ($\beta = 0.16, p = .01$). There was also a marginally positive relationship between general perceptions of diversity and engagement both without ($\beta = 0.11, p = .09$) and with control variables ($\beta = 0.11, p = .10$). However, while there was a marginally significant relationship between general perceptions of diversity and job satisfaction without control variables ($\beta = 0.10, p = .10$), this relationship went away with control variables ($\beta = 0.09, p = .14$).

Next, I examined whether there was a relationship between any specific dimensions of diversity and students' individual outcomes. First, there was a positive relationship between perceptions of racial diversity and organizational commitment both without ($\beta = 0.18, p < .01$), and with control variables ($\beta = 0.17, p < .01$). However, there was no relationship between perceptions of racial diversity and engagement ($\beta = 0.00, p = .97$; $\beta = 0.02, p = .75$), and perceptions of racial diversity and job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.10, p = .12$; $\beta = 0.08, p = .17$), without and with control variables. It is important to note here that the measure of objective racial diversity in the present study has limitations. As previously mentioned, the MBA office does not collect race or ethnicity data for international students. Therefore, the only race and or ethnicity data available for international students is 1) that they are an international student and 2) their country of origin. In the present analysis I use "international" as a racial group category. This has its shortcomings, such that international students come from a wide range of countries and are not racially homogenous. To try to circumvent this, I coded international student's race by referring to their country of origin (e.g., South Korea = Asian). However, I acknowledge that this

also has its limitations such that it assumes that student's race is that of the racial majority in their country of origin, which could not be the case. This coding produces the same results reported⁵.

There was no relationship between perceptions of gender diversity or perceptions of sexual orientation diversity and any of the three outcome variables both with and without control variables. Conversely, there was a positive relationship between perceptions of student status diversity (domestic, international) and organizational commitment without ($\beta = 0.13, p = .04$) control variables, and a marginally positive relationship with control variables ($\beta = 0.13, p = .07$). However, there was no relationship between perceptions of student status diversity and engagement or job satisfaction without or with control variables. Finally, there was a significant relationship between perceptions of functional background diversity and organizational commitment both without ($\beta = 0.20, p < .01$), and with control variables ($\beta = 0.20, p < .01$). There was also a marginally significant relationship between perceptions of functional background diversity and job satisfaction both without ($\beta = 0.11, p = .07$), and with control variables ($\beta = 0.12, p = .06$). There was no relationship between perceptions of functional background diversity and engagement without or with control variables.

Finally, replicating the results from Study 1, none of the objective diversity control variable coefficients were significant in the current models or in models only including objective racial, gender diversity, student status, or functional background diversity without perceptions of diversity. This further suggests that there is no relationship between objective diversity and employees' individual outcomes, and that the relationship between diversity and employees' individual outcomes is driven by employees' perceptions of diversity.

⁵ Due to these limitations, I cannot confidently rely on the results of the racial diversity measures in the present study. Student status diversity is the most proximal variable.

Race and Gender Differences in Perceptions of Diversity. Next, I examined whether there are race and/or gender differences in perceptions of diversity, controlling for demographic characteristics and objective racial, gender, student status and functional background diversity. To examine this, I ran OLS regression models with class-section as a random effect to account for within-section non-independence. Pairwise comparisons revealed a significant difference between White and Asian students' general perceptions of diversity ($\beta = -0.47, p = .01$), such that holding objective diversity constant, White students perceived more diversity than Asian students did. While no other pairwise comparisons were significant (likely due to small sample sizes in other racial group categories), results trended in the same direction as Study 1, such that White students perceived more diversity than all other racial groups did. Due to small sample sizes, I combined all racial minority students into a single racial category to look at differences in perceptions of diversity between White vs. non-White students. Holding objective diversity constant, White students perceived significantly more general diversity ($\beta = -0.49, p < .001$) than non-White students did.

Looking at race and gender differences in perceptions of specific types of diversity, similar to general perceptions of diversity, White students perceived significantly more racial and gender diversity than Asian students did. While there were no significant racial differences in perceptions of sexual orientation, student status, and functional background diversity, estimated marginal means revealed that directionally, White students perceived more diversity than all other racial groups did in all types of diversity. Furthermore, while there was no significant difference between men's and women's perceptions of racial, gender, sexual orientation, student status diversity, or functional background diversity, results trended in a similar direction, such that directionally, Women perceived less diversity than men did in all

types of diversity, except for functional background diversity, in which Women directionally perceived more functional background diversity than men did. I also analyzed differences in perceptions of specific types of diversity using a binary race variable (White, non-White). White students perceived significantly more racial diversity ($\beta = -0.30, p = .03$) than non-White students did. However, there was no difference in perceptions of gender diversity ($\beta = -0.07, p = .59$), sexual orientation diversity ($\beta = -0.18, p = .20$), student status diversity ($\beta = -0.13, p = .31$), or functional background diversity ($\beta = -0.06, p = .65$) between White and non-White students. Additionally, contrary to predictions, but replicating the results from Study 1, gender did not moderate the relationship between perceptions of diversity (broad or specific dimensions) and any of the individual outcomes.

Discussion

Study 2 replicates some key findings from Study 1. Overall, there was a positive association between broad perceptions of diversity, and organizational commitment, suggesting that students who perceive their work groups as more diverse, are more committed to their institution. Additionally, objective diversity was not significant in any of the models, replicating the finding that the relationship between perceptions of diversity and individual outcomes is primarily driven by subjective perceptions rather than objective demographic diversity. However, the relationship between broad perceptions of diversity and engagement and job satisfaction were not significant and therefore did not replicate.

Adding to the findings from Study 1, perceptions of racial, student status, and functional background diversity were all positively and significantly associated with organizational commitment. However, again, there was no association with job satisfaction or engagement. Additionally, there was no relationship between perceptions of gender and sexual orientation

diversity and any of the individual outcomes. Therefore, these results only provide partial support for Hypothesis 1. Additionally, White students perceived more diversity than non-White students did across all dimensions of diversity (Hypothesis 2), and while gender differences in perceptions of diversity were not significant, they trended in the same direction, such that, directionally, women perceived less diversity than men did. Finally, race or gender again did not moderate the relationship between perceptions of diversity and any of the individual outcomes. This is particularly interesting in the models that included perceptions of specific dimensions of diversity, where moderations may be even more expected. For instance, race did not moderate the relationship between perceptions of racial diversity and individual outcomes and gender did not moderate the relationship between perceptions of gender diversity and individual outcomes.

While Study 2 replicated some of the findings from Study 1, there were some inconsistencies, suggesting the need for further investigation into the factors influencing these discrepancies. Key differences between Study 1 and Study 2 may provide insight into these inconsistencies. First, in Study 1, I measured perceptions of broad diversity and in Study 2 I added in measures of perceptions of specific types of diversity, which led to mixed findings depending upon on how perceptions were measured. Furthermore, in Study 1 the sample consisted of employees reporting perceptions of their department's diversity, whereas Study 2 consisted of students reporting perceptions of their student teams' diversity. To determine whether there are differences in perceptions of diversity and their relationship with employees' individual outcomes based on how perceptions of diversity are measured, I next conducted an experiment focusing on employee work groups. Additionally, up to this point, the results suggest positive implications for organizations when employees perceive more diversity. For instance, employees who perceive more diversity are more committed, engaged, and satisfied, and less

likely to turnover. However, it is important to note perceptions of diversity may also have negative implications for organizations. For instance, if employees' perceptions of diversity are overly optimistic, it may obscure the need for continuous improvement in DEI efforts.

Organizations may allocate resources for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts based on inaccurate perceptions, rather than actual demographic realities, hindering organization's ability to address genuine DEI challenges. I address this question in Study 3 by examining how perceptions of diversity impact employees' support for diversity initiatives.

STUDY 3

Study 3 provides a test of Hypotheses 4 using an experiment to test for differences in outcomes based on whether perceptions of diversity are measured broadly or specifically. This allows me to determine if the discrepancies between Study 1 and Study 2 are driven by how perceptions of diversity are measured. It also focuses on work groups to determine if differences in findings may also be impacted by the context. This study also tests Hypotheses 6-7 by examining how perceptions of diversity influence employees support for diversity initiatives.

Methods

Participants and Procedure. Participants were 1,440 full-time employees recruited from Prolific (28.1% Asian, 24.3% White, 22% Black, 19% Non-White Latinx, 6.5% Other; 49.7% Male, 49.2% Female).

At the start of the study, participants read about a hypothetical organization and were presented with an image of a hypothetical 10 person work team. They were asked to imagine that they have been hired by this organization and assigned to work with this team to lead a new project. The team was comprised of three women who were all White and seven men of whom four were White, one was Black, one was Latino, and one was racially ambiguous. The goal was

to present participants with an ambiguously diverse team so that I could get variance in their perceptions of diversity.

Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: perceptions of broad diversity or perceptions of specific diversity. In the perceptions of broad diversity condition, participants were asked to report their perceptions of the work team's diversity without any specificity of the *type* of diversity (i.e., This team includes a high degree of diversity). Conversely, in the perceptions of specific diversity condition, participants were asked to report their perceptions of the work team's *gender* diversity and *racial* diversity (i.e., This team includes a high degree of gender diversity; This team includes a high degree of racial diversity). In this condition the type of diversity was therefore specified. Following this, they then went on to answer questions about their individual outcomes at this organization and their support for diversity policies and initiatives.

Measures.

Perceptions of Broad Diversity. To measure participants' perceptions of diversity, I used a three-item composite measure adapted from Unzueta and Binning (2011): "This team includes a high degree of diversity", "I consider this team to be diverse", and "This team includes a low degree of diversity" (1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree, $\alpha = .77$).

Perceptions of Gender Diversity. To measure participants' perceptions of gender diversity, I used a three-item composite measure adapted from Unzueta and Binning (2011): "This team includes a high degree of gender diversity", "I consider this team to be gender diverse", and "This team includes a low degree of gender diversity" (1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree, $\alpha = .64$).

Perceptions of Racial Diversity. To measure participants' perceptions of diversity, I used a three-item composite measure adapted from Unzueta and Binning (2011): "This team includes a high degree of racial diversity", "I consider this team to be racially diverse", and "This team includes a low degree of racial diversity" (1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree, $\alpha = .80$).

Organizational Commitment. To measure organizational commitment, I used a 3-item scale adapted from Allen and Meyer (1996). Items include: "I would be proud to tell others that I am part of this team.", "I would talk up my team to my friends as a great team to work for.", and "I would feel a sense of "ownership" of my team rather than being just an employee." (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree; $\alpha = .88$).

Engagement. To measure engagement, I used the 3-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2019). Items include: "At work, I would feel bursting with energy.", "I would be enthusiastic about my job.", and "I would be immersed in my work." (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree; $\alpha = .90$).

Job Satisfaction. To measure job satisfaction, I used the single-item scale from Dolbier et al. (2005): "Taking everything into consideration, how would you feel about your team as a whole? (1 = Extremely dissatisfied, 7 = Extremely satisfied).

Turnover Intentions. To measure turnover intentions, I used a two-item scale from Colarelli (1984). Items include: "I would frequently think of quitting my job" and "I would plan to search for a new job during the next 12 months." (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree; $\alpha = .91$).

Support for Diversity Initiatives. To measure support for diversity initiatives, I used seven items from Kalev et al. (2006). Items included: I would support [company] dedicating resources to [an affirmative action plan; a committee of current employees who are responsible for

diversity efforts; a chief diversity officer; diversity trainings for current employees; periodic diversity evaluations; networking programs for minority employees; mentoring programs for minority employees]. Results were consistent across all items, so I created and report a composite measure for simplicity ($\alpha = .92$).

Controls. I included the following relevant control variables: race, gender, age, and political ideology. All results were the same with and without controls, therefore I only report results without these control variables for simplicity.

Results

Perceptions of Diversity. Results revealed there were no differences between conditions on employees' individual outcomes, such that the relationship between perceptions of broad diversity and individual outcomes and the relationship between perceptions of specific (gender and race) diversity and individual outcomes were the same and not significantly different from one another. Therefore, we present the results of both conditions here for parsimony.

Replicating the findings in Study 1 and 2, both perceptions of broad diversity and perceptions of specific diversity (gender and race) were positively related to employees' individual outcomes. First, perceptions of broad diversity were positively associated with employees' organizational commitment ($\beta = .56, p < .001$), engagement ($\beta = .39, p < .001$), and job satisfaction ($\beta = .59, p < .001$), and negatively associated with employees' turnover intentions ($\beta = -.42, p < .001$). Both perceptions of gender and racial diversity followed the same pattern. Perceptions of gender diversity were positively associated with employees' organizational commitment ($\beta = .52, p < .001$), engagement ($\beta = .39, p < .001$), and job satisfaction ($\beta = .59, p < .001$), and negatively associated with employees' turnover intentions ($\beta = -.42, p < .001$). Similarly, perceptions of racial diversity were positively associated with

employees' organizational commitment ($\beta = .52, p < .001$), engagement ($\beta = .33, p < .001$), and job satisfaction ($\beta = .51, p < .001$), and negatively associated with employees' turnover intentions ($\beta = -.30, p < .001$).

Support for Diversity Initiatives. In line with perceptions of diversity results, there were no differences between conditions on employees' support for diversity initiatives, such that the relationship between perceptions of broad diversity and the relationship between perceptions of specific (gender and race) diversity were the same and not significantly different from one another. Furthermore, results were consistent across all diversity initiatives/policies, therefore, we report results using a composite variable of all items.

The more diversity that employees perceived, the less supportive they were of diversity initiatives and policy within the organization. Perceptions of broad diversity ($\beta = -.30, p < .001$), perceptions of gender diversity ($\beta = -.35, p < .001$), and perceptions of racial diversity ($\beta = -.33, p < .001$) were all negatively associated with support for diversity initiatives, such that the more diversity employees perceived in their team, the less supportive they were of organizational diversity initiatives.

Group Differences. Results revealed significant differences by groups in perceptions of broad, gender, and racial diversity. First, White people perceived more broad diversity compared to Asian, Black, and Latinx employees. There were no differences between minority groups. Men also perceived more broad diversity than woman did. Next, there were no racial differences in perceptions of gender diversity, but men perceived more gender diversity than women did. Finally, there were no racial differences in perceptions of racial diversity, but again, men perceived more racial diversity than women did. However, results revealed that gender or race did not moderate the relationship between perceptions of diversity (broad, gender, or racial) and

any of the outcomes, replicating the results from Studies 1 and 2. Furthermore, gender or race did not moderate the relationship between perceptions of diversity (broad, gender, or racial) and support for diversity initiatives.

Discussion

The results of Study 3 suggest that perceptions of diversity, whether broad or specific, are positively associated with employees' individual outcomes such as organizational commitment, engagement, and job satisfaction, and negatively associated with turnover intentions. Contrary to predictions, I did not find any significant differences between conditions on employees' individual outcomes, suggesting that perceptions of both broad and specific diversity are significantly and positively associated with employees' individual outcomes. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was not supported. The finding that both broad and specific perceptions of diversity positively impact employees' individual outcomes again suggests a robust and universal benefit of diversity perceptions for employee outcomes. This suggests that whether employees perceive diversity in a general sense or in a specific demographic category (e.g., race, gender), the positive effects on their work-related attitudes and behaviors are significant. Additionally, the absence of significant differences between conditions on employees' individual outcomes challenges the assumption that specific types of diversity perceptions might be more influential than others. This finding suggests that employees' overall sense of being in a diverse environment is what drives positive outcomes, rather than the recognition of diversity in particular categories or along particular dimensions.

Study 3 replicates group differences in perceptions of diversity, such that White people and men perceived more diversity than racial minorities and women did (Hypothesis 2). Again, race or gender did not moderate the relationship between perceptions of diversity and any of the

individual outcomes. However, supporting Hypothesis 6, employees who perceived more diversity were less supportive of organizational diversity initiatives and policies. Surprisingly however, this relationship was also not moderated by race or gender, therefore, Hypothesis 7 was not supported. While perceptions of diversity may be positively associated with employees' individual outcomes in their organizations, diversity perceptions may also have negative, long term, implications for organizations, particularly in regard to their DEI efforts. While employees' perceptions of diversity may positively impact their organizational commitment, engagement, and job satisfaction, and negatively impact their turnover intentions, they are also negatively related to their support for diversity policies.

Study 3 replicates many of the findings from Study 1, while also shedding light on the potential reasons for the disparate findings between Study 1 and Study 2. By examining whether broad vs. specific perceptions of diversity differentially influence employees' individual outcomes, Study 3 aimed to reconcile the differences observed in the previous studies. The results of Study 3 indicate that the way diversity is measured, whether broadly or specifically, does not affect its impact on employees' individual outcomes. This suggests that perceptions of diversity correlate with favorable outcomes, regardless of the level of specificity.

An alternative explanation for the inconsistent findings between Study 1 and Study 2 could be attributed to variations in the context/group size. Study 1 involved employees reporting their perceptions of their department's diversity, which are typically large and vary in size. In contrast, Study 2 focused on students' perceptions of their 4–6-person student teams within an MBA program. These teams are smaller and less variable in size and were student teams, rather than work teams. This difference in context and group size may have influenced participants' perceptions differently. For instance, participants in Study 1, although asked about their

perceptions of their department's diversity, may have predominantly considered their direct work group, which is generally smaller and could have a different demographic make-up than their department does. This discrepancy may have contributed to the variation in results between Study 1 and Study 2. Given the similar context between Study 1 and Study 3, where participants were asked about their perceptions of a group at work, and the consistency in results between the two studies, it is plausible that context plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of diversity and its impact on individual outcomes. I address this question in Study 4 by examining how group size effects the relationship between perceptions of diversity and employees' individual outcomes.

STUDY 4

Study 4 provides a test of Hypotheses 5 using an experiment to test for differences in the relationship between perceptions of diversity and employees' individual outcomes based on group size. This study also provides additional tests for Hypotheses 6-7 by examining how perceptions of diversity influence employees support for diversity initiatives.

Methods

Participants and Procedure. Participants were 1,315 employees recruited from mTurk (67.3% White%, 12.2% Black, 7.1% Asian, 7% Non-White Latinx, 7.1% Other; 53.1% Female, 46% Male). Participants read the same information from Study 3 about a hypothetical organization. Then, they were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: small team (5), medium team (10), or large team (20). The medium team was the identical image used in Study 3, comprising three women who were all White and seven men of whom four were White, one was Black, one was Latino, and one was racially ambiguous. The goal was then to create a set of teams that varied in group size but that were as similarly diverse in terms of proportional

representation as possible to keep the objective diversity of the teams consistent across group size. To do this, I created a small team of 5 employees using five of the same images from the medium size team, however, this team was comprised of one White woman, two White men, one Black man, and one Latino man. Finally, I created a large team of 10 employees using the same 10 images from the medium team in addition to 10 more. This team was comprised of six women who were all White and 14 men of whom eight were White, two were Black, two were Latino, and two were racially ambiguous. Therefore, these teams each contained 20-30% women and 30-40% racial minorities. Following this manipulation, all participants answered questions about their broad and specific (i.e., race and gender) perceptions of the team's diversity, their individual outcomes at the organization, and their support for diversity policies and initiatives.

Measures.

Perceptions of Broad Diversity. To measure participants' perceptions of broad diversity, I used the same three-item scale as in Study 3 ($\alpha = .44$; Unzueta & Binning, 2011).

Perceptions of Gender Diversity. To measure participants' perceptions of gender diversity, I used the same three-item scale as in Study 3 ($\alpha = .67$; Unzueta & Binning, 2011).

Perceptions of Racial Diversity. To measure participants' perceptions of racial diversity, I used the same three-item scale as in Study 3 ($\alpha = .74$; Unzueta & Binning, 2011).

Organizational Commitment. To measure organizational commitment, I used the same three-item scale as in Study 3 ($\alpha = .84$; Allen & Meyer, 1996).

Engagement. To measure engagement, I used the same three-item scale as in Study 3 ($\alpha = .89$; Schaufeli et al., 2019).

Job Satisfaction. To measure job satisfaction, I used same the single-item scale from Study 3 (Dolbier et al. 2005).

Turnover Intentions. To measure turnover intentions, I used the same two-item scale from study 3 ($\alpha = .90$; Colarelli, 1984)

Support for Diversity Initiatives. To measure support for diversity initiatives, I used the same seven items as in Study 3. Results were again consistent across all items, so I created and report a composite measure for simplicity ($\alpha = .91$; Kalev et al., 2006).

Controls. As in Study 3, I included the following relevant control variables: race, gender, age, and political ideology. All results were the same with and without controls, therefore I only report results without these control variables for simplicity.

Results

Replicating the results in Studies 1 and 3, both perceptions of broad diversity and perceptions of specific diversity (i.e., gender and race) were positively related to employees' individual outcomes. First, perceptions of broad diversity were positively associated with employees' organizational commitment ($\beta = .52, p < .001$), engagement ($\beta = .36, p < .001$), and job satisfaction ($\beta = .60, p < .001$), and negatively associated with employees' turnover intentions ($\beta = -.26, p < .001$). As in Study 3, both perceptions of gender diversity and racial diversity followed the same pattern. Perceptions of gender diversity were positively associated with employees' organizational commitment ($\beta = .31, p < .001$), engagement ($\beta = .23, p < .001$), and job satisfaction ($\beta = .38, p < .001$), and negatively associated with employees' turnover intentions ($\beta = -.12, p < .001$). Similarly, perceptions of racial diversity were positively associated with employees' organizational commitment ($\beta = .38, p < .001$), engagement ($\beta = .31, p < .001$), and job satisfaction ($\beta = .43, p < .001$), and negatively associated with employees' turnover intentions ($\beta = -.18, p < .001$).

Next, I ran a one-way between-subjects ANOVA to compare the effect of condition on perceptions of broad diversity. First, results revealed significant differences in perceptions of broad diversity across conditions ($F(2, 1263) = 8.0, p = .001$). More specifically, post hoc pairwise comparisons using Tukey's HSD revealed that perceptions of broad diversity were significantly higher in the large team condition ($M = 3.01, SD = .76$) compared to both the small team condition ($M = 2.83, SD = .81; p < .01$) and the medium team condition ($M = 2.86, SD = .82; p = .02$). However, there was no difference in perceptions of broad diversity between the small team condition and the medium team condition. Results also revealed significant differences in perceptions of gender diversity across conditions ($F(2, 1263) = 302.8, p < .001$). Pairwise comparisons revealed significant differences between all three conditions such that perceptions of gender diversity were higher in the large team condition ($M = 3.71, SD = 1.09$) compared to both the small team ($M = 2.55, SD = 1.07; p < .001$) condition and the medium team condition ($M = 3.39, SD = 1.06; p < .001$) and in the medium team condition compared to the small team condition ($p < .001$). Furthermore, results revealed significant differences in perceptions of racial diversity across conditions ($F(2, 1263) = 69.4, p < .001$). While pairwise comparisons revealed significant differences between the medium team ($M = 2.61, SD = 1.15$) and the small team ($M = 3.13, SD = 1.12; p < .001$) and between the large team ($M = 3.09, SD = 1.20$) and the medium team ($p < .001$), there was no significant difference in perceptions of racial diversity between the large team and the small team.

While people generally perceived more diversity in larger teams, results did not consistently show that perceptions of diversity were more strongly associated with employees' individual outcomes in larger vs. smaller teams (Hypothesis 5). The relationship between perceptions of broad diversity and all outcome measures (i.e., organizational commitment,

engagement, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions) did not vary by group size. Furthermore, the relationship between both gender diversity and racial diversity and organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions did not vary by group size. However, two significant interactions arose. First, contrary to predictions, the relationship between perceptions of gender diversity and engagement was stronger in smaller vs. larger teams. Conversely, the opposite was for the true relationship between perceptions of racial diversity and engagement, such that this relationship was stronger in larger vs. medium teams.

The results for the relationship between perceptions of diversity and support for diversity initiatives replicated the findings in Study 3. Further supporting Hypothesis 6, the more diversity that employees perceived, the less supportive they were of diversity initiatives and policy within the organization. Perceptions of broad diversity ($\beta = -.47, p < .001$), perceptions of gender diversity ($\beta = -.23, p < .001$), and perceptions of racial diversity ($\beta = -.26, p < .001$) were all negatively associated with support for diversity initiatives, such that the more diversity employees perceived in their team, the less supportive they were of organizational diversity initiatives. Gender or race did not moderate the relationship between perceptions of diversity (broad, gender, or racial) and support for diversity initiatives.

Discussion

Study 4 further replicates the findings from Study 1 and Study 3. Again, perceptions of diversity (both broad and specific) were positively associated with employees' individual outcomes. These findings align with theories suggesting that diverse work environments foster a sense of belonging and fulfillment among employees. Furthermore, the results of Study 4 suggest that perceptions of diversity are influenced by group size. More specifically, larger teams tend to be perceived as more diverse than smaller teams, even when these differences do not reflect the

objective demographic composition of the teams. Finally, the findings in Study 4 further support predictions of a negative association between perceptions of diversity and support for diversity initiatives and policies within organizations. In line with Study 3, despite the positive relationship with individual outcomes, employees who perceive more diversity within their teams are less supportive of diversity initiatives and policies. This paradoxical relationship highlights the “double edged sword” of diversity (e.g., Carter & Phillips, 2017) – in that it can lead to both positive and negative outcomes in organizations.

However, contrary to the initial hypothesis (Hypothesis 5), Study 4 did not find consistent evidence that perceptions of diversity are more strongly associated with employees’ individual outcomes in larger teams compared to smaller teams. This suggests that the positive effects of perceptions of diversity on individual outcomes may also not be contingent upon group size. Yet, two notable interactions did emerge: perceptions of gender diversity were more strongly associated with engagement in smaller teams, whereas perceptions of racial diversity showed a stronger relationship with engagement in larger teams. These findings further underscore the nuanced nature of diversity.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Across four studies, the current research offers convergent evidence that employees’ perceptions of diversity are positively associated with their individual outcomes in organizations and negatively associated with their support for diversity policies. In Study 1, I showed that holding objective diversity constant, employees’ perceptions of their department’s diversity was positively associated with their organizational commitment, engagement, and job satisfaction, and negatively associated with their turnover intentions. Results further revealed that objective demographic diversity and the subjective perceptions of this diversity are not correlated,

suggesting that there is indeed no one-to-one relationship between perceptions of diversity and objective diversity. Additionally, contrary to past research, theorizing, and predictions, race or gender did not moderate the relationship between perceptions of diversity and employees' individual outcomes even though White employees and men perceived more diversity than did Asian, Black, Latinx, and female employees. In Study 2, I measured perceptions of both broad and specific dimensions of diversity (e.g., race). The results replicated the positive link between perceptions of broad diversity and organizational commitment found in Study 1, but the results were inconsistent for engagement and job satisfaction. Furthermore, while specific dimensions of diversity were positively associated with organizational commitment, there were no significant associations with job satisfaction or engagement. Group membership (i.e., race and gender) again did not moderate any of the relationships. Finally, in Studies 3-4, perceptions of team diversity (broad and specific) were positively associated with employees' individual outcomes. This relationship did not change based on how diversity was measured (i.e., broadly, or specifically; Study 3) or based on the size of the group (Study 4). The results in Studies 3-4 also revealed that perceptions of diversity are negatively associated with employees' support for diversity initiatives and policies, such that the more diversity employees perceive, the less supportive they are of diversity policies. Contrary to predictions, these differences were also not moderated by individual differences (i.e., race and gender).

Theoretical Implications

This research theoretically contributes to the literature on perceptions of diversity, group membership, group dynamics, and diversity management. First, I propose and empirically examine how diversity, beyond mere numeric representation, impacts employees' individual outcomes, organizations, and diversity efforts. Diversity research typically uses objective

measures of diversity when examining the effects of diversity in organizations (Harrison et al., 1998; Jackson et al., 2003; Tsui et al., 1992). While objective diversity is an important and insightful metric, research also suggests that employees' perceptions of diversity may be a stronger and more consistent predictor of outcomes (Kulik & Roberson, 2008; Shore et al., 2009). The present research supports these claims by providing evidence of a significant and positive relationship between employees' perceptions of diversity and their individual outcomes in organizations, holding objective diversity constant. This aligns with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which posits that individuals derive a sense of identity and belonging from their group memberships. The current research suggests that the perception of being part of a diverse group, team, or organization fosters positive organizational outcomes such as higher organizational commitment, engagement, and job satisfaction, and lower turnover intentions. I show that the impact of diversity on employees' individual outcomes in organizations goes beyond the numbers, such that how employees perceive diversity is what ultimately influences their individual outcomes in organizations. Furthermore, these findings substantiate past research suggesting that employees want to work for diverse organizations by demonstrating that their stated desires do indeed translate into positive individual outcomes when they are perceived to be achieved.

Second, this research contributes to the research on the impact of group membership on the effects of diversity on outcomes in organizations. Prior theorizing has largely emphasized that group membership, particularly race and gender, plays a critical role in moderating the relationship between diversity and various organizational outcomes. For example, past research has highlighted that minority group members (e.g., racial minority employees and women) tend to experience the benefits and challenges of diversity differently than majority group members

(e.g., White employees and men) do (e.g., Avery et al., 2007; Nishii, 2013). These studies suggest that employees from different demographic groups perceive and are affected by diversity in varying ways, often due to their unique experiences of inclusion, discrimination, and representation within organizations.

Contrary to theoretical predictions and past literature, the current research robustly finds that neither race nor gender significantly moderates the relationship between perceptions of diversity and employees' individual outcomes. This divergence from previous findings is both important and intriguing. One plausible explanation for this finding is that perceptions of diversity might transcend individual demographic characteristics when it comes to influencing employees' individual outcomes in organizations. This makes sense in light of the findings that perceptions of diversity in and of themselves are influenced by group membership, such that the same group is perceived differently by different people. These results suggest that as long as an individual perceives a group to be diverse (in their eyes), it positively impacts their individual outcomes. In other words, when employees perceive their group or organization as diverse, the positive impacts on their outcomes might be universally experienced, regardless of their specific group membership. This suggests that the overall sense of working in a diverse environment could be powerful enough to foster positive outcomes for all employees. This aligns with the notion that inclusive organizational climates can create a shared sense of belonging and equity that benefits everyone (Shore et al., 2011).

Third, the present research contributes to the research on group dynamics by demonstrating how they interact with perceptions of diversity. By investigating the role of group size in shaping perceptions of diversity and its impact on employees' individual outcomes, the findings provide insights into the amplification effect of group size on diversity perceptions. This

contributes to theories related to social categorization, in-group and out-group dynamics, and group cohesion. The nuanced findings regarding the effect of group size on perceptions of diversity and its impact on employees' individual outcomes highlights the complex interplay between contextual factors and diversity perceptions. While larger teams are generally perceived as more diverse, even when these perceptions do not reflect reality, the relationship between perceptions of diversity and employees' individual outcomes generally remains consistent across group sizes. Understanding how group size influences perceptions of diversity and its downstream effects on individual outcomes can inform theories about group processes in diverse organizational contexts. Fourth, the findings that both broad and specific perceptions of diversity positively impact employees' individual outcomes suggests a robust benefit of diversity perceptions. These findings indicate that whether employees perceive diversity in a broad or specific sense, the effect of these perceptions on their individual outcomes is positive and significant.

Lastly, this research contributes to theories and research related to diversity initiatives and policies and diversity management within organizations. The negative association between perceptions of diversity and support for diversity initiatives underscores the importance of going beyond the numbers and considering employees' subjective perceptions in diversity management efforts. These findings add to the growing body of research suggesting that diversification efforts are often perceived to only be necessary until diversity is sufficiently "achieved" (Danbold & Unzueta, 2020; *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003). This contributes to the understanding of diversity thresholds (Danbold & Unzueta, 2020; Chang et al., 2019) and the perceived necessity of diversity initiatives. The idea that diversification efforts are often seen as necessary only until a certain level of diversity is achieved reinforces prior findings on diversity thresholds – or the

minimum level of representation of underrepresented groups that individuals believe is necessary for an organization to be considered diverse (Danbold & Unzueta, 2020; Chang et al., 2019). Surprisingly, this relationship was also robust across group members. Taken together, all of these findings suggest that the impact of perceptions of diversity on employees' individual outcomes and their support for diversity policies is not impacted by group membership, group size, or whether perceptions of diversity are measured broadly or specifically.

Practical Implications

The findings have several practical implications for organizations seeking to foster inclusive workplaces and implement effective diversity initiatives. First, organizations should recognize the significance of employees' perceptions of diversity in shaping their attitudes and behaviors. Efforts to promote diversity and inclusion should not only focus on objective measures of diversity but also address employees' subjective perceptions and experiences. Despite the positive effects of perceived diversity on employees' individual outcomes, perceptions of diversity may also lead to decreased support for organizational diversity initiatives. This is problematic for several reasons. First, if employees' perceptions of diversity are inaccurate, particularly, inflated, organizations may allocate resources (such as training, development programs, or recruitment efforts) based on inaccurate perceptions rather than on demographic realities. This overestimation of diversity could lead to inefficiencies and ineffective use of resources, hindering organizations' ability to address genuine diversity and inclusion challenges.

Second, overestimation of diversity may create a false sense of accomplishment or complacency within organizations, leading them to believe they have achieved diversity and inclusion goals when, in fact, disparities and inequities persist. This could undermine genuine

efforts to promote diversity and inclusion and perpetuate inequity. Third, in environments where perceived diversity outweighs actual representation, there's a risk of tokenism, where individuals from underrepresented groups are treated as symbols of diversity rather than valued contributors. This can lead to feelings of tokenism among minority employees and inhibit their full participation and engagement within the organization. Lastly, if discrepancies between perception and reality are exposed or if individuals from underrepresented groups perceive that their experiences are not accurately reflected in the organization's diversity initiatives, it could lead to feelings of disillusionment, distrust, and resentment.

In summary, while the positive association between overestimation of diversity and individual outcomes may seem advantageous on the surface, it's essential for organizations to recognize the potential negative consequences of inflated perceptions. Therefore, it is important that organizations consider both the objective diversity of their organizations along with their employees' subjective perceptions when navigating diversification efforts. Relatedly, organizations should be mindful of the potential unintended consequences of inflated perceptions of diversity. While promoting diversity and inclusion is crucial, organizations must also ensure that employees' perceptions align with the reality of diversity within the organization. Transparent communication and ongoing education about diversity can help mitigate the negative effects of inflated perceptions of diversity on support for diversity initiatives while maximizing the positive effects.

Limitations and Future Research

The current research is not without limitations. First, none of the studies establish a causal relationship between perceptions of diversity and employees' individual outcomes. Although reverse causality is unlikely in this relationship, such that more positive individual

outcomes lead to increased perceptions of diversity, it is important to rule out. Future studies should manipulate perceptions of diversity to rule out reverse causality and demonstrate causality.

Second, I did not identify any significant direct mediators or moderators. The findings that group membership, group size, or how perceptions of diversity are measured did not impact the relationship between perceptions of diversity and employees' individual outcomes is indeed important and interesting. However, future research could explore other factors such as organizational climate or the extent to which employees value diversity. Additionally, future studies should directly examine why perceptions of diversity are positively associated with employees' individual outcomes. One plausible explanation is that perceiving one's group as diverse increases feelings of inclusion and identification (Boehm et al., 2014; McKay & Avery, 2005).

Third, future research should examine if perceptions of diversity and perceptions of diversity climate differentially impact employee outcomes. While their face validity and operationalization are different, their effect on employees' outcomes seems to be similar. Researchers should examine how these two constructs differ from each other and whether their effect on employee outcomes varies and if so, how.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the effects of diversity in organizations requires going beyond the numbers (i.e., objective diversity) to examine the role of employees' perceptions of diversity. In the current research, I examined how employees' perceptions of diversity impact their individual outcomes in organizations. I show that, holding objective diversity constant, employees' perceptions of diversity are positively associated with their organizational commitment,

engagement, and job satisfaction, and negatively associated with their turnover intentions. Group membership, how perceptions of diversity are measured, or the size of the group do not affect this relationship. However, results also show that employees' perceptions of diversity are negatively associated with their support for diversity policies, such that the more diversity they perceive, the less supportive they are of organizational diversity policies. This research sheds light on the importance of also considering how employees' subjective perceptions of diversity impact their outcomes and policy support in organizations.

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