What's in it for you? Demographics and self-interest perceptions in diversity promotion

Article in Journal of Applied Psychology · January 2020
DOI: 10.1037/apl0000478

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What’s In It for You? Demographics and Self-Interest Perceptions in Diversity Promotion

Danielle M. Gardner and Ann Marie Ryan
Michigan State University

As organizations continue to pursue achieving diversity and inclusion goals, how to propose and present efforts so as to maximize support and minimize resistance remains a challenge. The present set of studies, grounded in theory on the Attributional Analysis of Persuasion, examined how the demographics of diversity promoters relate to supportive attitudes and behaviors of others through perceptions of promoter self-interest. Via an experimental paradigm (Study 1), we found that White promoters were perceived as less self-interested than Black promoters of a diversity initiative, which in turn predicted more positive attitudes and support for the promoted effort. Using a sample of workplace critical incidents (Study 2), we found that diversity promoters who were demographically matched to the group for which they were advocating were perceived as more self-interested than those advocating for causes for which they were not demographically matched. Theoretical and practical implications, as well as study limitations, are discussed.

Keywords: diversity promotion, self-interest, demographics

Supplemental materials: http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/apl0000478.supp

Organizations around the globe are attempting to increase inclusion of underrepresented individuals through the use of diversity management practices and initiatives (Shore et al., 2011), including targeted recruitment, equitable selection methods, retention efforts for diverse employees, and diversity training (Ely & Feldberg, 2018). However, there is evidence of hesitance and resistance against diversity initiatives on the part of majority-group members, most often Whites and specifically White males (Kravitz et al., 2000; Lowery, Unzueta, Knowles, & Goff, 2006; Plaut, Garnett, Buffardi, & Sanchez-Burks, 2011). Researchers have explored a number of methods to lessen resistance, including program justification (Kidder, Lankau, Chrobot-Mason, Mollica, & Friedman, 2004) and program framing (Kravitz & Klineberg, 2000). What have received less attention in the organizational literature are the potential effects of who is promoting the diversity efforts on employee perceptions.

Some research suggests that majority-group members (i.e., individuals who belong to groups with greater societal power and advantage, such as Whites in the United States) may be helpful in combating interpersonal discrimination of minorities (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Petty, Fleming, Priester, & Feinstein, 2001). Such findings have stimulated thinking surrounding the utility of allies (i.e., individuals of nonstigmatized identities supporting and advocating for those stigmatized; Sabat, Martinez, & Wessel, 2013; Sabat et al., 2014). A recent study found that White male leaders are the least penalized for promoting diversity in the workplace (Hekman, Johnson, Foo, & Yang, 2017). However, a better understanding of the mechanisms as to why minorities and women may be viewed as less effective diversity and inclusion advocates is needed. Understanding how individuals view diversity promoters can aid in designing programs, messaging, and communication about efforts, as well as coaching those who are doing the promoting to effective behaviors. The present work tests hypotheses grounded in the Attributional Analysis of Persuasion (AAP), assessing one potential factor of differential reactions to who is promoting diversity and inclusion (D&I) using an experimental paradigm (Study 1) and an analysis of actual instances of workplace diversity promotion (Study 2).

Attributional Analysis of Persuasion

The AAP (Eagly & Chaiken, 1975; Eagly, Wood, & Chaiken, 1978) underscores the importance of a perceiver’s causal inferences concerning why a communicator is advocating a particular position. The AAP posits that message expectancy is related to subsequent perceiver persuasion, such that the less expected a communicator’s position given his or her personal characteristics and situational pressures, the stronger the perceiver’s inference that the message corresponds to reality (Eagly & Chaiken, 1975). Alternatively, when a communicator advocates for an expected
position, particularly one in which the communicator appears to personally benefit (i.e., has a self-interest), persuasion is less likely as perceivers question the communicator’s honesty (Priester & Petty, 1995) and bias (Eagly et al., 1978). Thus, women and racial minorities proposing diversity-related efforts may be less effective than majority-group members in persuasion, as the proposal may be perceived as expected given the communicator’s perceived self-interest. We evaluate this proposition in the presented studies.

Research on the AAP aligns with broader work on the norm of self-interest (Miller, 1999) or the implicit theory of motivation that individuals primarily act from self-interest (Miller & Ratner, 1998). The overestimation of self-interest as an influence on attitudes and behavior has been established as a pernicious perception (Darke & Chaiken, 2005), with research showing that individuals engage in attributional cynicism and reconstrue selfless acts as motivated by self-interest (Critcher & Dunning, 2011), and that perceiving others as self-interested enables maintaining the status quo (O’Brien & Crandall, 2005).

Researchers have extended the AAP and research on self-interest to diversity-relevant contexts. Petty and colleagues (2001) conducted an experiment in which participants read an essay written by a first-generation Black student. Within the essay, the student either advocated for a new scholarship to benefit racial minorities (confirmed expectation, given perceived self-interest) or children of alumni (disconfirmed expectation, given writer could not benefit). Results showed that when the student disconfirmed individual interest by advocating for a cause not benefiting himself, he was rated as more trustworthy.

Related research has focused on the differential effectiveness of discrimination confrontations based on demographics of the confrontation. For example, Czopp and Monteith (2003) manipulated the race and gender of a confederate confronting participants regarding a sexist or racist statement. The authors found that confrontations from those who were not the target of the bias elicited more participant guilt, less participant discomfort, and were viewed as less of an overreaction than confrontations by target individuals. The researchers hypothesized that these outcome differences were rooted in differential perceptions of confronter self-interest, with recent research providing evidence with this line of thought (Gulker, Mark, & Monteith, 2013). In the studies presented here, we extend this research by considering whether self-interest plays a role in reactions to diversity promotion efforts.

Additional support for considering this attributional mechanism in reactions to diversity promotion comes from broader research on self-interest. O’Brien and Crandall (2005) demonstrated that persuasive arguments are seen as more motivated by self-interest if they are from those representing smaller rather than larger groups, from low-status rather than high-status groups, and are meant to change rather than keep the status quo. Taken together, AAP and self-interest research suggests why diversity-valuing advocacy by minorities and women may be viewed less positively than by majority-group allies. Consequently, we predicted:

**Hypothesis 1:** Promoter demographics will be related to perceptions of promoter self-interest, such that those advocating for a cause related to their demographics will be rated as more self-interested than those advocating for a cause unrelated to their demographics.

**Hypothesis 2:** Perceptions of promoter self-interest will be negatively related to positive attitudes regarding the diversity promotion behavior.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Promoter race</td>
<td>1.49 (0.50)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Promoter gender</td>
<td>1.49 (0.50)</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Self-interest</td>
<td>2.99 (1.00)</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>(93)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Attitudes toward diversity promotion</td>
<td>5.36 (1.39)</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.43</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Voting</td>
<td>0.69 (0.47)</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.36</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Money allotment</td>
<td>1869.94 (1386.91)</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Charity donation</td>
<td>0.34 (0.47)</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. SDO</td>
<td>2.33 (1.25)</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>-.50</td>
<td>-.32</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Participant demographics</td>
<td>1.59 (0.49)</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Bolded values indicate significant relationships at p < .05. SDO = Social Dominance Orientation. Promoter race coded 1 = White, 2 = Black. Promoter gender coded as 1 = Male, 2 = Female. Voting coded 0 = Against Proposed Initiative, 1 = In support of proposed initiative. Charity donation coded 0 = Non-diversity-focused charity, 1 = Diversity-focused charity. Participant demographics coded 1 = White male participants, 2 = Female and non-White participants.
Attitudes and Support for Diversity and Inclusion

We hypothesize a relationship between one’s attitudes toward the diversity promotion and one’s support of that effort. The theory of planned behavior identifies an individual’s intention to perform a given behavior as a central predictor of action (Ajzen, 1991), as stronger intentions to engage in a behavior are associated with greater likelihood that the behavior will be performed. A crucial antecedent for behavioral intention is attitude toward the behavior, such that positive attitudes will lead to greater intention to perform the behavior. We predicted:

Hypothesis 3: Positive attitudes regarding the diversity promotion behavior will be related to support for the proposed effort.

Within our examination of Hypothesis 3 (H3) in Study 1, we operationalized behavioral support both proximally and distally to the diversity promotion scenario. Specifically, we included both dichotomous (i.e., voting) and continuous (i.e., money allotment) support outcomes explicitly related to the promoted effort; however, we also included a distal measure of support (i.e., donation to a diversity-focused charity) to examine whether the hypothesized effects of the examined mechanisms could impact diversity support outside the specific promotion situation.

Controlling for Prejudice

In considering the role of self-interest in reactions to diversity promoter social identity, it is important to clarify perceptions that may be rooted in prejudice. Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) has been defined as the extent an individual endorses beliefs that preserve the differential power structure between groups of varying statuses (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). The support of such ideologies legitimizes the status quo and holds people and groups responsible for their differential outcomes, rather than recognizing differences in societal opportunity and advantage (Wu, Lyons, & Leong, 2015). SDO has been found to correlate highly with measures of ethnic prejudice, sexism, homophobia, and generalized prejudice (Ekemanar, Akrami, Glyke, & Zakrisson, 2004; Pratto et al., 1994). Therefore, in both studies we examined whether individual SDO correlated with outcomes and controlled for bias in such cases, given its potential as an alternative explanatory mechanism for any observed differences (Bernerth & Aguinis, 2016).

Study 1

To test our hypotheses, we conducted an experiment in which the race and gender of an individual proposing a diversity initiative was manipulated, for a 2 (Promoter Race: White, Black) × 2 (Promoter Gender: male, female) factorial, between-subjects experimental design. These studies were approved by the Michigan State University Human Research Protection Program (Institutional Review Board Number ×17-1409e; i055226).

Method

Participants. Data from 420 adults was collected from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Participants were required to work full-time and live in the United States. Only data from those who passed two manipulation checks and one attention check was analyzed (see Appendix), leaving a final sample of 368 participants. This sample was mostly White (75.0%) and mostly male (54.6%; see Table 1 for exact demographic breakdown). Through the use of prescreening questions about ethnicity and gender, we ensured that our final sample included sufficient numbers of White male (40.8%) and female/non-White participants (59.2%). Participants were on average 34.76 years old (SD = 9.92) and had an average of 14.63 years of work experience (SD = 9.78). Participants received $1.30 for involvement lasting under 10 min, a rate comparable to federal minimum wage (i.e., $7.25/hr), in line with MTurk equitable pay recommendations (Brawley & Pury, 2016).

Procedure. Participants were asked to imagine working for an organization that has solicited proposals regarding initiatives employees would like the organization to pursue, and were tasked with evaluating the written proposal of a coworker. Participants...
first read an introduction of the proposal author, including a name and photo of the employee (either a White male, White female, Black male, or Black female). Four photos per condition were pilot tested for equivalence on attractiveness and perceived age by a group of 30 undergraduate students, with final photos selected to have the most equivalence on these metrics (see online supplemental materials for pilot means). Participants then read the proposal advocating for the establishment of a task force devoted to diversity, explicitly referencing both women and racial minorities. The proposal described plans to enact diversity training, targeted recruitment strategies, and mentoring programs for employees of these groups. Participants then completed a series of measures.

**Measures.**

**Attitudes toward diversity promotion.** Participants reported their attitudes toward the proposed initiative via a nine-item bipolar scale created for this study (see Appendix for items). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which a pair of opposite adjectives reflected their opinion toward the proposed initiative, by marking on a 7-point scale which adjective more accurately reflected their attitudes. This scale was pilot tested using a sample of 30 undergraduates to examine the measure’s internal reliability, variance, and clarity prior to implementation, with data from the final sample displaying strong internal consistency (α = .96).

**Support of proposed initiative.** Participants responded to a single, dichotomous item asking if they would vote in support of the proposed initiative (i.e., “Knowing that there are other proposals to consider and limited funding such that not all proposals will be implemented, would you vote in support for or against the proposed initiative?”), with a vote of support coded as 1, and a vote against coded as 0. Additional support was measured via a sliding-scale item assessing the amount of money the participant would allocate to the initiative (i.e., “How much money would you choose to allot to the proposed initiative out of the $5000 available, knowing that there are other proposals to consider and accommodate?”).

**Perceived promoter self-interest.** Most researchers manipulate rather than measure self-interest perceptions, or reference outcomes unique to studies (e.g., money, grades). Thus, to assess perceived promoter self-interest, we adapted items from Gerbasi and Prentice’s (2013) self-interest subscale and Tseng and Fan’s (2011) Self-Interest Scale (see Appendix for items) to fit the context of this study. This five-item measure was captured on a 5-point, Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree) and showed strong consistency (α = .93).

**SDO.** Participants completed Pratto and colleagues’ (1994) 16-item measure of SDO, captured on a 7-point, Likert-type scale (α = .95).

**Distal diversity-supportive behavior.** To assess generalized support of diversity, participants were informed that along with their compensation, the researchers pledged to donate additional funds to one of three charities for each survey completed. Participants were asked to choose which charity the donation associated with their survey would support. One was related to workplace diversity (American Association for University Women), while the other two were unrelated to diversity (Animal Welfare Institute and Coral Reef Alliance). Each of these charities received four-star overall ratings on Charity Navigator, and donations were made to the causes upon study completion ($0.50 for each participant selection). Donation to the diversity-related charity was coded as 1, while donation to either of the other charities was coded as 0.

**Results**

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between variables are available in Table 2. SDO scores were used as a control for all analyses involving gender and race manipulations to address underlying levels of bias, given the consistent correlations between SDO and the outcomes of interest (see online supplemental materials for results without SDO as a control).

### Table 5

**Prediction of Study 1 Attitudes Toward Diversity Promotion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P-value</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>6.68</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SDO</td>
<td>−0.56</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>−0.5</td>
<td>−10.78</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>7.72</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SDO</td>
<td>−0.46</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>−0.41</td>
<td>−8.81</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-interest</td>
<td>−0.43</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>−0.31</td>
<td>−6.69</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** SDO = Social Dominance Orientation.

### Table 6

**Hierarchical Logistic Regression Predicting Voting in Study 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>P-value</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
<th>Cox &amp; Snell R²</th>
<th>Nagelkerke R²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>61.75</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SDO</td>
<td>−0.57</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>34.35</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>−8.97</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>48.92</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SDO</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attitudes toward diversity</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>6.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** SDO = Social Dominance Orientation.
To test Hypothesis 1 (H1), we conducted a hierarchical regression with participant SDO as the first step, and promoter race (White coded as 1, Black coded as 2) and promoter gender (male coded as 1, female coded as 2) as the second step predicting perceptions of promoter self-interest. As seen in Tables 3 and 4, promoter race significantly predicted self-interest perceptions over and above participant SDO. Specifically, Black promoters ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.05$) were rated as more self-interested than White promoters ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.94$; $d = .19$), in line with H1. No effect of promoter gender was observed, and no interaction was found between promoter race and promoter gender, $F(1, 344) = 0.17, p = .68$.

In line with Hypothesis 2 (H2), a hierarchical regression with SDO as the first step and self-interest perceptions as the second step predicting attitudes toward the diversity promotion displayed a significant negative relationship (see Table 5). Hayes’ (2013) PROCESS Macro (Model 4) identified a significant bootstrapped indirect effect of promoter race (predictor) on attitudes (outcome) through self-interest ratings (mediator; $b = -.10$, $SE = .04$, CI $[-.19, -.02]$), suggesting that self-interest mediates the relationship between promoter race and attitudes toward the promotion.

To test H3, a series of hierarchical linear and logistic regressions were run examining the relationships between attitudes toward the diversity promotion and outcomes including voting, money allotment, and donation. In line with H3, attitudes were found to positively predict voting (see Table 6), money allotment (see Table 7), and donation to a diversity-focused charity (see Table 8) over and above participant SDO. Analyses conducted using Hayes’ (2013) PROCESS Macro (Model 4), suggest attitudes serve as a mediator between self-interest ratings (predictor) and examined outcomes, as significant bootstrapped indirect effects were found with all three outcome variables (voting: $b = -.99$, $SE = .16$, CI $[-1.34, -.72]$; money allotment: $b = -242.99$, $SE = 44.13$, CI $[-329.49, -158.79]$; charity donation: $b = -.16$, $SE = .06$, CI $[-.29, -.06]$).

### Additional Analyses

We tested whether outcomes differed based on participant demographics via a series of ANCOVAs with participant demographics (i.e., White male vs. Female or racial minority) as the fixed factor, SDO as the covariate, and self-interest perceptions, attitudes toward diversity promotion, voting, money allotment, and charity donation as the outcomes. Significant differences were found when comparing White male participants to all other participants (i.e., female and/or racial minority participants; Table 9). White men rated promoters as more self-interested ($d = .34$), reported less positive attitudes toward the diversity promotion ($d = .38$), and voted against the proposed initiative more frequently ($d = .30$) than did female or racial minority participants (see Table 10). No differences between White male and other participants were found on charity donation or monetary allocation outcomes.

### Study 2

Although Study 1 provides support for hypothesized relationships with respect to promoter race, some limitations are worthy of note. While the manipulations associated with experimental studies enable causal interpretations, they have limited external validity. Additionally, Study 1 may have had demand characteristics as the photos would make race and gender highly salient. Further, Study 1 examined a diversity initiative that was broad in terms of diversity activities and targeted identity groups; however, individuals might advocate for specific groups within their workplace (e.g., religious minorities, sexual minorities, individuals with dis-
abilities and initiatives associated directly with their identity group (i.e., a mentoring program for women). Accordingly, we conducted a second study of workplace incidents of diversity promotion to examine whether the hypothesized relationships (specifically, H1 and H2) replicated in actual diversity promotion contexts.

Method

Participants. Our sample comprised 113 employed adults recruited from MTurk. Participants met inclusionary criteria if they were employed full-time (i.e., 35+ hours/week) outside of MTurk, if they worked alongside others, and if they could recall an instance in which an individual within their organization promoted diversity broadly or pointed out a diversity-related issue in the past 6 months. Participants with open-ended responses that were gibberish or irrelevant were excluded (N = 85). Our sample was majority White (68.2%; 13.6% Black, 10.0% Latino, 7.3% Asian, 0.9% “Other”), majority male (58.6%), on average 34.0 years of age (SD = 9.61), and were employed at their current organization for an average of 6.87 years (SD = 8.24). Participant job titles included graphic designer, machine operator, travel agent, and sales representative. Participants received $1.50 for study involvement lasting around 10 min.

Procedure. Participants were asked to describe an incident in which an individual either promoted diversity or pointed out a diversity-related issue within their organization within the past 6 months. A series of probing questions followed to encourage the provision of as much detail as possible regarding the issue/point that was made by the diversity-promoting individual, as well as the context of the incident and general reactions to the point or suggestion.

Measures. Participants reported the race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, and age of the individual described within the situation (if known). Participants completed the same attitudinal reaction measure (α = .96), perceived self-interest measure (α = .91), and SDO measure (α = .95) as used in Study 1, before providing their own demographic information.

Results

Description of incidents. Table 11 displays examples of reported incidents of workplace diversity promotion. The majority of incidents involved either race/ethnicity or gender issues within a workplace, with the remainder related to LGBTQ+ employees, employees with disabilities, and older employees. These described instances included both formal efforts (e.g., holding a diversity training, writing a letter to corporate; 42.0%), as well more informal efforts (e.g., mentioning a perceived lack of racial diversity among managers; 58.0%).

Hypothesis testing. See Table 12 for means, standard deviations, and correlations between study variables. H1 suggests a relationship between diversity promoter demographics and perceived promoter self-interest. We first created a content/demographic match variable (0 = not matched, 1 = matched) indicating whether the promoting individual was a member of the group for which he or she was advocating (i.e., Was the individual advocating for increased gender equality male or female? Was the individual advocating for racial diversity in the racial minority/majority?). This coding revealed a slight majority of incidents in which promoters advocated for causes matched (56.7%), as opposed to unmatched (43.2%), to their demographics.

To examine H1, we conducted a hierarchical regression with SDO as the first step, and the content match variable, promoter gender (male coded as 1, female coded as 2), and promoter race (White coded as 0, non-White coded as 1) as the second step, predicting perceived promoter self-interest (see Table 13). We examined the promoter demographic variables alongside the demographic match variable to discern if the demographics themselves, or alternatively the relationship between the demographics and the topic that drive potential effects. This analysis revealed an effect of demographic topic matching over and above participant SDO, although no effects of promoter race or promoter gender were found; specifically, those who were demographically matched to the cause for which they were advocating were rated as more self-interested (M = 2.75, SD = 0.96) than were those advocating for a cause for which they were not demographically matched (M = 2.36, SD = 1.17; d = .36). Therefore, H1 was supported.

Table 10

Means and Standard Deviations of Study 1 Outcomes by Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>White male participants</th>
<th>Female and non-White participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-interest</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes toward diversity promotion</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money allotment</td>
<td>1,734.04</td>
<td>1,194.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charity donation</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Voting coded 0 = Against proposed initiative, 1 = In support of proposed initiative. Charity donation coded 0 = Non-diversity-focused charity, 1 = Diversity-focused charity.

Table 9

F Values for Univariate ANCOVAs Examining Differences Based on Study 1 Participant Demographics (i.e. White Male Participants Versus Non-White Male Participants), Controlling for SDO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Df(Error)</th>
<th>MSE</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-interest</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>6.85</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes toward diversity promotion</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>14.52</td>
<td>10.05</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money allotment</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>2,022.888.87</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>.285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charity donation</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SDO = Social Dominance Orientation; MSE = Mean Squared Error. Df between for all presented analyses = 1.

1 With respect to diversity promotion incidents involving multiple identity groups (e.g., women and racial minorities), promoters were coded as a “match” if their demographics reflected at least one of the referenced groups. In the case of diversity promotion of intersected identities (i.e. Black women), promoters were coded as a “match” if their demographics reflected that specific intersection.
step in predicting subsequent attitudes toward the diversity promotion. In line with our prediction, ratings of perceived promoter self-interest were significantly negatively related to positive attitudes toward the diversity promotion above participant SDO (see Table 15). Therefore, H2 was supported. However, mediational analyses using Hayes’ (2013) PROCESS Macro (Model 4) were not supported, as the confidence intervals of the bootstrapped indirect effect of promoter demographic content match (predictor) on diversity promotion attitudes (outcome) through perceived promoter self-interest (mediator) included zero, \( b = -0.09, SE = 0.05, CI = [-0.28, 0.02] \). Despite this lack of mediational evidence, we do still find support for each of the individual hypothesized paths.

### Additional Analyses

As in Study 1, we examined the potential influence of participant demographics on outcomes via two ANCOVAs comparing ratings of promoter self-interest and participant attitudes across White male versus female/racial minority participants, with SDO as a covariate. Differences across groups on these outcomes did not reach statistical significance (see Table 15), despite White males’ higher ratings of perceived self-interest \( (d = .35) \) and lower ratings of attitudes toward the diversity promotion \( (d = .48) \) than female/racial minority participants’.

### Discussion

The purpose of these studies was to examine whether and why the demographics of an individual promoting workplace diversity might relate to subsequent attitudes and support of the diversity-related effort. Using logic grounded in the AAP and the norm of self-interest, we predicted that those promoting diversity efforts related to their own group membership would be perceived as more self-interested than those promoting diversity unrelated to their personal demographics. Across both hypothetical scenarios and actual incidents, we found evidence to suggest that promoter demographics were related to differential attitudinal reactions to diversity promotion. While the mediational effect was not found in

### Table 11

**Examples of Study 2 Reported Incidents of Workplace Diversity Promotion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident type</th>
<th>% of total incidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>62.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ+</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Percentages do not equal 100% because multiple identity groups may have been the focus of a single incident (e.g. workplace advocacy for Black women), in which case all groups of focus would have been counted (e.g. both race and gender in the previous example).*

### Table 12

**Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Study 2 Variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Demographic content match</td>
<td>0.56 (0.50)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Promoter race</td>
<td>1.74 (1.18)</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Promoter gender</td>
<td>1.42 (0.50)</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Self-interest</td>
<td>2.57 (1.05)</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>(.91)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Attitudes toward diversity promotion</td>
<td>5.42 (1.46)</td>
<td>−.19</td>
<td>−.10</td>
<td>−.10</td>
<td>−.33</td>
<td>(.96)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. SDO</td>
<td>2.42 (1.35)</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>−.04</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>−.41</td>
<td>(.95)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Participant demographics</td>
<td>0.40 (0.49)</td>
<td>−.02</td>
<td>−.14</td>
<td>−.23</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>−.24</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Bolded values indicate significant relationships at \( p < .05 \). Demographic content match coded as 0 = Promoter demographics did not match diversity promotion content, 1 = Promoter demographics did match diversity promotion content. Promoter race coded as 0 = White, 1 = non-White. Promoter gender coded as 1 = Male, 2 = Female. SDO = Social Dominance Orientation. Participant demographics coded 0 = Female and non-White participants, 1 = White male participants.*
were relatively small (i.e., broadly within a hypothetical context. Finally, although effect sizes is a more salient characteristic when considering the topic of diversity explicit support for both women and racial minorities, perhaps race Study 1 may be explained in that despite the diversity advocacy’s individual paths were as expected. The lack of gender effect in Prediction of Perceived Promoter Self-Interest in Study 2 Based on Promoter Demographics and Demographic Topic Match

Table 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P-value</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SDO</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SDO</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demographic topic match</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promoter race</td>
<td>-.35</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-1.44</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promoter gender</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.  SDO = Social Dominance Orientation. Demographic Topic Match coded 0 = No match, 1 = Match. Promoter Race coded 0 = White, 1 = non-White. Promoter Gender coded 0 = Female, 1 = Male.

Study 2, the smaller N in that study likely accounts for that, as all individual paths were as expected. The lack of gender effect in Study 1 may be explained in that despite the diversity advocacy’s explicit support for both women and racial minorities, perhaps race is a more salient characteristic when considering the topic of diversity broadly within a hypothetical context. Finally, although effect sizes were relatively small (i.e., d = 19–38, ΔR² = .01–.26), changes of that magnitude in voting behavior or money allotment can mean the difference between success and failure of an initiative.

Additional findings suggest the demographics of individuals evaluating a diversity effort may relate to attitudes and support above and beyond personal social dominance beliefs. Specifically, Study 1 found that White male participants held less positive attitudes and displayed less support compared to female and non-White participants, controlling for SDO. Study 2 found similar trends of comparable effect sizes to Study 1, but effects were not significant with respect to attitudinal reactions to workplace diversity promotion. Previous studies have noted differences between White males’ and others’ opinions toward workplace diversity (Kossek & Zonia, 1993; Mor Barak, Cherin, & Berkman, 1998), but have not separated effects attributable to individual biases/ beliefs (assessed by SDO here) from effects due to perceived promoter motives. Differences across studies may be attributable to the specified target of efforts in Study 1 (women and minorities) and the varied targets (varied identity groups) in Study 2.

Theoretical Implications and Research Directions

Theoretically, our findings are in line with general theories of discrimination in that in-group (i.e., majority or historically dominant) persuaders were viewed more positively than were out-group persuaders (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Further, the present work contributes to organizational diversity science by expanding our understanding of when promoting diversity might connect to backlash or other nonsupportive behaviors in organizations. Specifically, Leslie (2019) suggested that what a diversity initiative signals (e.g., target group will succeed, target group needs help) may lead to negative reactions. Hekman et al. (2017) suggested that diversity-valuing behaviors by minorities and women may be evaluated negatively because of inferred motives of social competition (i.e., improving standing of low-status group at expense of higher status group; Chattopadhyay, Tluchowska, & George, 2004). Our studies add to these works regarding why negative reactions to diversity efforts may occur by demonstrating that the promoter’s identity group may signal self-interest, and the norm of inferring self-interested motives is a dominant influence on perceptions. Thus, our work falls in line with other efforts focused on signals and attributions related to diversity valuing; future research that considers a comprehensive range of attributions and/or signals (e.g., self-interest, social competition) in conjunction with promoter characteristics (e.g., status) and the specific content of efforts (e.g., breadth of activities, targeted groups) would move research even further.

The current findings also have important implications for the budding literature on workplace allyship (Sabat et al., 2013, 2014). While the term ally comes from the LGBTQ+ community (Washington & Evans, 1991), it has recently been used to refer to any member of a nonstigmatized group who engages in supportive behaviors on behalf of those of stigmatized identities (Sabat et al., 2013). The findings here reveal how lower self-interest perceptions may play a role in understanding why allies may be effective. Future research on attributions of ally behavior and persuasion can inform knowledge of diversity promotion.

Practical Implications

The findings here should not be interpreted as suggesting only those of majority-group, nonstigmatized identities should propose

Table 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P-value</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>ΔR²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>6.49</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SDO</td>
<td>-.45</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>7.09</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SDO</td>
<td>-.38</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-interest</td>
<td>-.30</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.  SDO = Social Dominance Orientation.
diversity efforts. Taking away agency from those in stigmatized groups would be counter to inclusion goals. The hope is that the present findings encourage those of nonstigmatized identities to add their voices in support of diversity-related causes, while making sure not to overpower or silence the voices of those advocating on their own behalf (i.e., become effective allies).

How might these findings help underrepresented group members who occupy D&I roles? To understand who might be more engaged in the formal instances of diversity promotion within organizations, we coded the race and gender of 500 individuals presently employed in D&I as indicated in their LinkedIn profiles, identified via search terms “diversity officer” and “diversity manager” (see Table 16), finding that the majority of individuals in such positions in this sample were non-White (72.8%) and/or female (68.2%), with only 4.8% of workers coded as White males. The findings here are of practical significance for those leading D&I efforts: when the promoter was White, participants allocated an average of $221 more to the diversity initiative, were 12% more motivated in designing training programs, messaging, and communication about diversity efforts, as well as coaching promoters who occupy D&I roles? To understand who might be more engaged in the formal instances of diversity promotion within organizations, we coded the race and gender of 500 individuals presently employed in D&I as indicated in their LinkedIn profiles, identified via search terms “diversity officer” and “diversity manager” (see Table 16), finding that the majority of individuals in such positions in this sample were non-White (72.8%) and/or female (68.2%), with only 4.8% of workers coded as White males. The findings here are of practical significance for those leading D&I efforts: when the promoter was White, participants allocated an average of $221 more to the diversity initiative, were 12% more likely to vote in favor of the initiative, and were 55% more likely to donate to a diversity-related charity as compared to when the promoter was Black (Study 1).

To ensure that underrepresented individuals can most effectively promote D&I initiatives, directly confronting perceptions of self-interest in designing training programs, messaging, and communication about diversity efforts, as well as coaching promoters to effectively address perceptions of self-interest is required. Working to break the norm of seeing others as motivated by self-interest is not easy (Miller, 1999; Miller & Ratner, 1998), and efforts to directly confront self-interest perceptions by noting “common good” outcomes or lack of personal gain can be employed, as well as engaging in acts contrary to self-interest (Combs & Keller, 2010). However, attempts to show that other-interests and self-interests align (e.g., noting altruistic reasons while acknowledging one’s benefit) may backfire given heightened awareness that a persuasive effort is underway, eliciting psychological reactance (Feiler, Tost, & Grant, 2012). Future research on how to reduce self-interest perceptions of individuals advocating for their own groups, or how to reduce the influence of such perceptions on reactions are needed to lessen resistance to diversity efforts.

Limitations

Our experimental study allowed for stronger causal inferences, but was also limited in examining a single proposal focused only on race and gender. However, these were by far the identities of focus in Study 2 workplace incidents. Study 2 provided stronger external validity as individuals described actual events, but only allowed consideration of attitudinal reactions and not support. The high correlations between attitudes and support in Study 1 suggest we might expect connections in actual work contexts, but this awaits empirical testing. Further, our Study 1 operationalization of distal diversity support involved a gender-related charity; future work should examine both broad and identity-specific diversity-supportive behaviors. Study 2 is cross-sectional, and consequently common method bias is a concern. Finally, Study 2 involves recall of past events, so retrospective bias is a possibility; however, as participants were instructed to only report incidents within the past 6 months, we suspect the effect of this bias is reduced.

Conclusion

As companies work toward increased diversity and inclusion, the question of how to present such efforts so as to maximize support remains relevant. Using logic grounded in the AAP and the norm of self-interest, via both an experimental paradigm and real-world incidents of diversity promotion, we found evidence that attitudinal reactions and support for a diversity initiative differed as a function of promoter identity group through perceptions of self-interest. These findings have important implications for organizations considering how to balance what is signaled with diversity efforts and attributions perceivers make about such efforts.

Table 15
Results of Univariate ANCOVAs Comparing White Male Participants to Non-White-Male Participants on Ratings of Promoter Self-Interest and Initiative Attitudes in Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>df(Error)</th>
<th>MSE</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P-value</th>
<th>White M (SD)</th>
<th>Non-White M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes toward diversity promotion</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>6.23</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>5.00 (1.65)</td>
<td>5.71 (1.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-interest</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>2.81 (1.17)</td>
<td>2.44 (0.96)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Social Dominance Orientation included as a covariate. MSE = Mean Squared Error. df between for all presented analyses = 1.

References


Appendix

Study 1 Manipulation Checks and Study Measure Information

Study 1 Manipulation/Attention Checks

1. What was the race of the author whose proposal you just read? (98% pass rate)
   a. White
   b. Black
   c. Hispanic
   d. East Asian

2. What was the gender of the author whose proposal you just read? (97% pass rate)
   a. Male
   b. Female

3. What was the topic of the proposed initiative you just read? (94% pass rate)
   a. Health and wellness incentive plan
   b. Diversity task force
   c. Upgrade of company desktops

Note. 91.0% of participants passed Checks #1 and #2; 92.6% of participants passed checks #1 and #3; 93.6% of participants passed checks #2 and #3. Participants were only included in analyses upon passing all three checks (87.6%).

Attitudes Toward Diversity Promotion Scale

Instructions: Please rate the extent to which the following adjectives most closely reflect your attitudes towards the proposed initiative (Study 1)/diversity promotion incident (Study 2).

1. Not valuable _ _ _ _ _ _ Valuable
2. Not needed _ _ _ _ _ _ Needed
3. Irrelevant _ _ _ _ _ _ Relevant
4. Implausible _ _ _ _ _ _ Plausible
5. Impractical _ _ _ _ _ _ Practical
6. Unlikely to be implemented _ _ _ _ _ _ Likely to be implemented
7. Not worthwhile _ _ _ _ _ _ Worthwhile
8. Low quality _ _ _ _ _ _ High quality
9. Not beneficial _ _ _ _ _ _ Beneficial

Note: This measure was a 7-point, bipolar scale with no scale anchors between the positive and negative descriptors flanking each end of each item.

Perceived Self-Interest Measure (adapted from Gerbasi & Prentice, 2013; Tseng & Fan, 2011)

Instructions: Please rate the extent to which the following statements reflect your feelings regarding the author of the proposal you read (Study 1)/the individual in the incident I described earlier (Study 2).

Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree

1. The author of this proposal is looking for opportunities to achieve higher social status.
2. The author of this proposal is looking for ways to get ahead.
3. The author of this proposal is keeping an eye out for his/her interests.
4. The author of this proposal, by and large, is pursuing his/her own interest.
5. The author of this proposal is protecting his/her own interests above other considerations.
6. The author of this proposal is acting self-interestedly.

Received October 24, 2018
Revision received December 9, 2019
Accepted December 10, 2019