Will you value me and do I value you? The effect of phenotypic racial stereotypicality on organizational evaluations

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Racial stereotypicality is a social identity contingency cue for minorities.
- Blacks expressed trust toward organizations with racially stereotypic members.
- Identity-related trust affected their desire to work in organizations.
- Diversity should be considered at both the within group level and group level.

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates whether within-group differences in phenotypic racial stereotypicality (i.e., extent to which individuals possess physical features typical of their racial group) of ingroup members serve as social identity contingency cues for Blacks evaluating organizations. It is hypothesized that Blacks draw information about whether their social identity would be valued based on the represented phenotypic racial stereotypicality of Black organization members. Participants viewed organizations that included high phenotypically stereotypic (HPS) Black (e.g., darker skin tones, broader facial features), low phenotypically stereotypic (LPS) Black, or only White employees. Results confirmed that Black, but not White, evaluators reported more diversity, salary, desire to work, and social identity-related trust toward the HPS, compared to LPS and White, organizations. The relationships between phenotypic racial stereotypicality condition on organizational attractiveness and diversity perceptions were mediated by identity-related trust. Results suggest considering diversity at both the group level and within group level to achieve broader benefits.

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Introduction

In 2004, clothing retailer Abercrombie & Fitch (A&F) settled a class-action race and gender discrimination lawsuit in which they agreed to increase diversity by adding more non-White models and employees (Greenhouse, 2004). After the settlement, critics of A&F noted, while increasing group level diversity in their hires and models, A&F still featured a "specific type" of minority, selecting lighter-skinned and straight-haired minorities (Critical Race Studies Second Annual Symposium, 2008; Noble, 2006; Rodonline, 2005). These descriptions depict individuals that are lower in phenotypic racial stereotypicality, which is the degree to which individuals possess the typical physical features of their racial group (Eberhardt, Davies, Purdie-Vaughns, & Johnson, 2006; Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davies, 2004; Kahn & Davies, 2011). Although the company increased group level diversity, hiring low

phenotypically stereotypic minorities led many minorities to distrust A&F for not representing diversity to the fullest extent (Critical Race Studies Second Annual Symposium, 2008; Noble, 2006; Rodonline, 2005). A&F is not alone in such preferences, as other companies have faced backlash from minorities due to their, sometimes explicit, predilections for featuring only light-skinned minorities (e.g., Hardigree, 2012).

We argue that perceptions of racial diversity are not only based on group level representations of minorities, but that the phenotypic racial stereotypicality of group members may also be an important aspect of diversity. We suggest that these within group differences in perceived phenotypic racial stereotypicality will serve as social identity contingency cues for minorities and affect their organizational evaluations.

Racial diversity as social identity contingency cues

Racial diversity, traditionally defined as representation or inclusion of racial group members at the group level, can have benefits for both individual group members as well as organizations as a whole. These

benefits can include increased sales, broader clientele, and higher levels of productivity (Herring, 2009; Kochan et al., 2003; Rhode & Packel, 2010; Richard, 2001; however, see also Mannix & Neale, 2005). To achieve racial diversity, organizations must attract, and keep, minority employees. The perceived racial diversity of an organization is important to potential minority applicants and increases the likelihood that a minority individual will join an organization (Avery, 2003; Murphy, Steele, & Gross, 2007; Thomas & Wise, 1999).

Group level racial diversity is important to minorities because it serves as a social identity contingency cue to potential minority group members. Social identity contingencies are cues in the environment that influence perceptions regarding whether an individual's social identity will be accepted in a given situation (Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Ditlmann, & Crosby, 2008). Because they are a member of a negatively stereotyped group, this acceptance may be highly variable and situationally dependent for minorities. Social identity contingencies, such as the presence of fellow racial group members and inclusive organizational diversity statements, increase minorities' social identity-related trust and comfort with an organization (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008). The trust and comfort secures their identity in the face of identity threat or uncertainty, allowing them to feel that they could be themselves at the organization.

Minority and majority group members are differentially influenced by represented racial diversity and other minority identity-related cues in a setting. For racial minorities, social identity cues involving perceived racial diversity affect the extent to which racial minorities view an organization as a trustworthy and desirable place to work (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008; see also Bauman, Trawalter, & Unzueta, 2014). Minorities also report greater trust and comfort toward organizations that espouse more racially inclusive than restrictive diversity policies (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008). Conversely, Whites are less affected by the number of minority group members employed by the organization compared to minority group evaluators (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008; see also Avery, 2003) and perceive more diversity than minorities within the same environment (Mor Barak, Cherin, & Berkman, 1998). Environmental cues, including physical objects that are closely associated with particular social identities, can also signal identity-related threat for racial minorities and negatively stereotyped groups, while being less influential for majority group members (Cheryan, Plaut, Davies, & Steele, 2009). Further, White perceivers are primarily sensitive to the total raw number *or* hierarchical representation of minority employees in the organization, whereas minority perceivers assess organizational diversity using both the total number of minority employees in combination with their location in the organization's hierarchy (Binning & Unzueta, 2013; Unzueta & Binning, 2012). These structural cues may signal to minorities their potential for advancement and lead to differential social identity-related trust with the organization.

Perceived phenotypic racial stereotypicality as a social identity contingency cue

Might perceived phenotypic racial stereotypicality of ingroup members also serve as a social identity contingency cue for Blacks evaluating an organization? Perceived phenotypic racial stereotypicality increases racial stereotyping by perceivers, such that high phenotypically stereotypic minorities are targeted by more stereotyping and prejudice than those lower in phenotypic stereotypicality (Blair, Judd, & Chapleau, 2004; Blair, Judd, & Fallman, 2004; Blair, Judd, Sadler, & Jenkins, 2002; Eberhardt et al., 2004; Eberhardt et al., 2006; Kahn & Davies, 2011; Livingston & Brewer, 2002; Maddox, 2004). Minorities are also aware of their own phenotypic stereotypicality levels and the associated difference in treatment it entails (Kahn, 2010). Darker-skinned minorities report experiencing more discrimination than lighter-skinned group members (Klonoff & Landrine, 2000). Highly phenotypically stereotypic Blacks are also more sensitive to social identity-related threats based on race, including stereotype threat (Kahn, 2010; Kahn, Lee, Renauer, Henning, & Stewart, submitted for publication).

Blacks' sensitivity to identity-related threats leads to our hypothesis that Blacks will use the phenotypic racial stereotypicality of existing ingroup members as a social identity contingency cue when evaluating an organization. Blacks may be distrustful of organizations in which the sole Black ingroup members are low in phenotypic stereotypicality. We hypothesize that the racial phenotypic stereotypicality of Blacks will be less influential on Whites' evaluations, due to the lack of information that these cues provide about their own group's potential treatment.

To test the hypotheses, Black and White participants evaluated organizations that featured highly phenotypically stereotypic (HPS) Black employees, low phenotypically stereotypic (LPS) Black employees, or only White employees. We predict that Black, but not White evaluators, will perceive the HPS, compared to the LPS, organization as more diverse, espouse more social identity-related trust and comfort, report a higher potential salary, and view the organization as a more attractive place to work. Because social identity contingency cues increase social identity-related trust and comfort (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008), we predict that trust and comfort will mediate the effect of the organization's represented phenotypic racial stereotypicality on our key outcomes: organizational attractiveness, racial diversity perceptions, and predicted salary.

Finally, we examine whether these effects are moderated by Blacks' level of racial identification and own level of phenotypic racial stereotypicality. The more central one's racial group is to their social identity, the more influential social identity contingency cues may be on their evaluations. Similarly, Black evaluators' level of racial phenotypic stereotypicality may increase their reliance on and the importance of the represented phenotypic stereotypicality levels of the presented employees, as the LPS company could signal the company's exclusion of their social identity. Lack of moderation by these two participant level identity-related cues and beliefs would suggest that this process is present for Blacks more broadly.

Method

Participants and design

One hundred fifty six participants (60 Black and 96 White, 112 female and 44 male) took part in the study for partial course credit or $3.00. Participants were recruited from a database of working individuals and students in Los Angeles. The experiment was a 2 (Participant Race: Black vs White) × 3 (Employee Phenotypic Racial Stereotypicality: High vs. Low vs. White only) between subjects design. Black and White participants did not significantly differ on level of education, political attitudes, English as a first language, gender, or age.

Materials

Organization website

Three company websites were created for the fictitious Crestfield Consulting firm: a high phenotypically stereotypic (HPS) Black employee version, a low phenotypically stereotypic (LPS) Black employee version, and a White version (see Appendix A). The professional looking websites contained neutral information about the company's mission and were modeled after real consulting websites (e.g., "Crestfield Consulting promotes a vibrant and challenging atmosphere that allows its employees to produce top quality results.").

The three websites varied in the presented phenotypic stereotypicality of two Black employees. The two Black employee photographs in the LPS and HPS sites were altered using Photoshop following racial phenotypic stereotypicality photograph manipulation protocols (e.g., Kahn & Davies, 2011). The HPS versions received a darker skin tone and more stereotypic features, including a broader nose and thicker lips than the LPS version. By altering the same photographs, subtle individual differences about the featured person are controlled. In the White version, the central photograph of a Black employee was replaced with a White employee, and a second Black employee was cropped out of a