

Richard Allen (USA), Gail A. Dawson (USA), Kathleen Wheatley (USA), Charles S. White (USA)

## Linking diversity practices and perceived diversity in management

### Abstract

Our study contributes to the diversity literature in two ways. First, it provides interesting insight into how race (black/white) influences the perception of diversity. Our findings suggest that race has a significant impact upon perception of diversity. Second, the study provides important information about diversity practices and perceived managerial diversity. We consider the role of perceived diversity at both the management and senior management levels in relation to mentoring programs for minorities, use of minority interns, existence of support networks, and existence of diversity goals. Our findings strongly support the positive relationship between these diversity practices and perceived diversity at both the senior level of management and other levels of management except for a non-significant relationship between existence of diversity goals and perceived diversity. This non-significant finding is most interesting as it suggests that affirmative action-type goals are not sufficient to create a climate open to diversity, but rather what is more effective are highly visible practices such as internships and mentoring programs. These findings should be helpful as organizations attempt to manage diversity and to improve the perception of diversity within the ranks of management.

**Keywords:** diversity practices, perceived diversity, diversity management.

**JEL Classification:** M.

### Introduction

Demographically, the United States has experienced dramatic shifts in composition, particularly in recent years. From 1990 to 2000, the U.S. Hispanic population has grown from 9% to approximately 12.5%. During the same time period, the black or African American population has grown from 11.7% to 12% and Asian from 2.7% to 3.6%. Meanwhile, the percentage of whites of non-Hispanic origin decreased from 75.6% to 69% (www.census.gov). Toossi (2002) projects the population will be 15% Hispanic, 13% African American, 7% Asian, and 65% white by 2020; and 23% Hispanic, 15% African American, 11% Asian, and 54% white by 2050. As our population becomes more diverse, our workforce also becomes more diverse. With the increase in the diversity of our workforce, it is understandable that more attention focuses on diversity in the workplace.

Prior research has examined the potential benefits of diversity, including the ability to attract and retain the best talent available, reduced costs due to lower turnover and fewer lawsuits, enhanced market understanding and marketing ability, greater creativity and innovation, better problem solving, greater organizational flexibility, better decision making, and better overall performance (Carlozzi, 1999; Cox, 1991; Cox, 1993; Cox and Blake, 1991; Giscombe and Mattis, 2002; McAllister, 1997; Richard and Johnson, 2001; Robinson and Dechant, 1997; Watson et al., 1993). Cox (1991) suggests that if diversity is effectively managed, it provides potential benefits for organizations. Conversely, other prior research has uncovered some potentially negative impacts of diversity, such as lower employee satis-

faction and higher turnover (O'Reilly et al., 1989), creating a sense of organizational detachment (Tsui et al., 1992), lower cohesiveness, difficulties in communications, and inter-group conflict and tension (Cox, 1993; Richard et al., 2003).

With the understanding that diversity will continue to be a part of organizations, some researchers have focused on effectively managing diversity, creating an inclusive work environment, or providing a good climate for diversity. We see these concepts as being linked. For example, it would be difficult to effectively manage diversity without providing a good climate for diversity. Research indicates that a positive climate for diversity is linked to positive outcomes for organizations as well as the job and career attitudes of employees (Buttner et al., 2006; Hicks-Clarke and Iles, 2000). McKay, Avery, Tonidandel, Morris, Hernandez, and Hebl (2007) suggest that the perception of a positive diversity climate may reduce organizational turnover.

Schneider, Gunnarson, and Niles-Jolly (1994) describe climate as, the atmosphere employees perceive is created by the practices, procedures and rewards within the organization. The diversity climate can be further described as being derived from the perception of "the importance of employer efforts to promote diversity" (Kossek and Zonia, 1993, p. 63) and attitudes in the organization about the qualifications and abilities of women and minorities. Therefore, the diversity climate and the perception of diversity can be based on a combination of the practices, procedures, and rewards an organization has in place regarding diversity as well as the attitudes expressed about the qualifications and abilities of women and minorities within the organization. Mor Barak, Cherin, and Berkman (1998) conceptualize diversity perceptions based on an organizational dimension, which accounts for the

policies and procedures, and a personal dimension which looks at the individual's views and prejudices "that can affect attitudes and behaviors toward others in the organization" (p. 85). The study of the perceptions of diversity is both reasonable and necessary if they "form the pivotal dimension for diversity's effects" (Harrison and Sin 2006, p. 200). The implication is that employees will respond to their perceptions about diversity. The perception of diversity can have a positive effect. In other words, perception becomes reality as the perception of diversity is shaped by the practices, procedures and rewards that an organization uses to promote diversity. Without a perception of diversity within an organization there is no reality of diversity and the potential benefits will unlikely be realized.

Therefore, for the purpose of this research, we chose to focus on employee perceptions of diversity and the potentially important organizational procedures, practices and rewards that may help to create this perception of a diversity climate within organizations. We chose to look at perceived diversity for a number of reasons. First, the measurement of diversity is fairly complex with many different interpretations of what diversity is and how it should be measured, while, although the concept of perceived diversity is equally complex, it is relatively easy to get a global measure of the employee's perception of diversity using a Likert scale. Harrison and Sin (2006) have raised questions of how diversity is defined and what should be measured. They have attributed some of the inconsistencies in the diversity literature to problems with measurement. In addition, Konrad, Prasad, and Pringle (2006) note not only the differences in definitions of diversity, but also in the varied ways of studying workplace diversity and/or measuring diversity. Second, as previously explained, employees tend to react and interact based on their perceptions of diversity rather than reality; in a sense, a person's perception does indeed become their reality. Some researchers have even suggested that perception may be more important than reality (Strauss et al., 2001; Turban and Jones, 1988). In addition, taking a broad perspective of perceived diversity enables the capture of components that individuals feel are important as they define diversity. This use of perceived diversity is not new to the diversity literature (Harrison et al., 1998; Harrison et al., 2002; Hobman et al., Jehn et al., 1999; 2004; Kirchmeyer, 1995; Orpen, 1984; Strauss et al., 2001; Turban and Jones, 1988; Wayne and Liden, 1995).

More specifically, our contribution to the diversity literature is twofold. First, we examine the effect that race of the respondent may have on perceptions of managerial diversity. Second, we consider the

effect that several diversity practices and policies have on perceived diversity at two different managerial levels within the organization, the managerial and senior managerial levels. The perception of diversity within the managerial levels of organizations has become an important topic. The concept of a "glass ceiling" is an important perceptual barrier for women and minorities within organizations. The perception of a proportionate number of women and people of color within an organization's managerial and senior managerial levels has a profound impact on the rest of the organization. Our distinction between managerial and senior managerial levels is somewhat exploratory in nature. Our main interest for this study is in understanding the view of diversity at the decision-making level of the organization. We want to break out senior management but do not want to miss any interesting information that might be gleaned from a difference between the managerial and senior levels of management.

### **1. Race and perceptions of managerial diversity**

Perceptions are influenced by characteristics which are salient to an individual (Hobman et al., 2004). For example, Kossek and Zonia (1993) found that race and gender affected perceptions of diversity climate by faculty at a large university. In a study of women in management, Hite (2006) found that black women in managerial positions were more likely to perceive the existence of institutional racism, more likely to perceive that race would affect one's chances of success in their organization, and more likely to perceive that whites were oblivious to racism in our society than white female managers. These perceptions about racism within their organizations are likely to have a negative effect on their perception of diversity in their organization since the perception of diversity is based in part on the policies, practices, and rewards regarding diversity and the value the organization places on diversity. Mor Barak et al. (1998) found that Caucasian men perceived their organization as being more fair and inclusive than Caucasian women and racial/ethnic minorities, who were also credited as being more comfortable with diversity and seeing more value in it.

It is conceivable that these differences based on race and gender are the result of prior experience in which women and people of color have historically been exposed to institutional racism and sexism which make their race and/or gender more salient within this context and heighten the value they place on diversity. This heightened value of diversity may in turn result in greater sensitivity to and cognizance of the diversity or lack of diversity around them. For this reason, we believe the race of the individuals will affect their perceptions of diversity level within

the management ranks of their organization. More specifically, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 1A: Perceived diversity of management in a respondent's organization will differ based on the race of the individual reporting it.*

*Hypothesis 1B: Perceived diversity of senior management in a respondent's organization will differ based on the race of the individual reporting it.*

## **2. Diversity practices and perceptions of managerial diversity**

Research has identified a number of barriers to advancement for women and minorities in corporate America, including stereotypes about roles and abilities, scarcity of mentors, and lack of personal networks (McCarty Kilian et al., 2005). Key practices that have been developed to address these barriers include minority mentoring programs, internships, support networks, and the establishment of diversity goals (Kalev et al., 2006; McCarty Kilian et al., 2005).

**2.1. Minority mentoring.** Mentoring is described as one of the most important relationships and research has shown mentor relationships to be beneficial for the protégé, the mentor, and the organization (Witt Smith et al., 2000). Other researchers have noted that mentor relationships are complex and the effects may differ when the relationship involves diverse employees (Blake-Beard, 2001; McCarty Kilian et al., 2005; Ragins, 1997). Overall, mentoring has been associated with career development, more promotions, higher incomes, reduced turnover, and easier socialization (Blake-Beard, 2001). Thomas (2001) notes that mentors of minority professionals must be aware of the challenges that race can present in order to help them build networks with people who can help pave the way to executive levels. Mentoring is focused on creating upward mobility for minorities in organizations; therefore, we would expect mentoring to affect the perception of diversity within the managerial and senior managerial levels as well as the actual diversity within those managerial levels. We do not expect mentoring to have an effect on the perceived diversity at the non-managerial level.

*Hypothesis 2A: The existence of a mentoring program for minorities will be positively related to perceived diversity at the manager level.*

*Hypothesis 2B: The existence of a mentoring program for minorities will be positively related to perceived diversity at the senior manager level.*

**2.2. Minority interns.** The use of minority interns may be perceived as an attempt to identify and develop minority talent. This would provide opportu-

nities for minority workers to have access to jobs and, potentially mentoring relationships that would otherwise not be available. Typically, interns who show high potential are hired into entry-level managerial positions and subsequently groomed for higher managerial positions and put on career paths that may culminate in senior management positions. Therefore, we hypothesize that use of minority internships should affect perceptions of diversity at the managerial and senior manager levels.

*Hypothesis 3A: The use of minority interns will be positively related to perceived diversity at the manager level.*

*Hypothesis 3B: The use of minority interns will be positively related to perceived diversity at the senior manager level.*

**2.3. Minority networks.** Another issue for women and minorities in organizations is the issue of isolation and lack of access to information. A common approach that has been adopted by organizations to provide better opportunities for women and minorities is the formation of support network groups that may include groups of minority or female employees that meet for social and career support (Friedman et al., 1998). Support network groups provide social support that help minorities socialize in the workplace and help reduce turnover as well as provide for exchange of information that may benefit its members (Friedman et al., 1998; Mollica et al., 2003). Networking is a key tactic used to find out about and obtain managerial positions. Networking is also vital in facilitating movement up the corporate managerial hierarchy. Therefore, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 4A: The existence of support networks for minorities will be positively related to perceived diversity at the management level.*

*Hypothesis 4B: The existence of support networks for minorities will be positively related to perceived diversity at the senior management level.*

**2.4. Diversity goals.** Obtaining management commitment and accountability is critical to managing diversity in organizations. The efficacy of goal has a long research history of empirical support setting (Locke and Latham, 1990). One way organizations can apply goal-setting theory is by tying achievement of diversity goals to management compensation or bonuses (Giscombe and Mattis, 2002). McCuiston, Ross Woolridge, and Pierce (2004) recommend designing a measurement and reward system to support the inclusion policy of the organization. Establishing diversity goals, measuring achievement, and holding management accountable to them certainly sends the message that it is impor-

tant to the organization. Thus, the existence of diversity goals is also likely to correlate with perceived diversity. Therefore, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 5A: The existence of diversity goals will be positively related to perceived diversity at the management level.*

*Hypothesis 5A: The existence of diversity goals will be positively related to perceived diversity at the senior management level.*

### 3. Methods

We conducted surveys using a convenience sample in which employees from multiple organizations were surveyed and asked for information regarding their company's diversity practices as well as information on their perception of their company's minority representation in the management and senior management ranks. Working members of organizations were contacted and interviewed using our survey instrument to guide the questions asked regarding diversity practices of their respective organization. Each respondent was asked demographic information concerning his/her gender, race, position within the organization and length of time in the organization. We surveyed a total of 391 employees from 130 separate companies of sizes ranging from five employees to organizations with over one million. The median size of the companies we surveyed was 5,000 employees. The firms we investigated included governmental agencies, insurance, health care providers, heavy manufacturing as well as a wide variety of other types of service and manufacturing companies. The average time on the job of the respondents was ten years and nine months.

At least one minority and one non-minority respondent from each company was represented in the sample in order to insure that we captured the perceptions of both minorities and non-minorities. A firm was not included in the study unless a minority or non-minority employee could be used for the sample. Minority status consisted either of a female respondent or a racial minority. Of the 396 respondents, 315 reported they were at the managerial level, 31 reported they were at the non-managerial level, and 39 reported their job status as "other." Eleven respondents did not give their position status. Our sample contained a wide diversity of managerial representation. The respondents were at managerial levels ranging from first-line supervisor through directors, professional staff, owners, vice-presidents, and presidents of organizations. The sample was comprised of 237 male and 154 female respondents of which there were 303 white, 75

black, 5 Hispanic, 3 Asian, and 5 "Other" respondents. Because we were very interested in the perception of racial minorities and because of the small number of Hispanic, Asian, and "Other" respondents, these three groups were excluded from the analysis.

The survey instrument was divided into several major sections. The first section asked respondents to report on the presence or absence of fourteen diversity practices and policy issues. These issues were:

1. This organization conducts diversity awareness training.
2. This organization has a diversity department.
3. This organization has a steering committee comprised of top-level managers that oversees the organization's diversity initiatives.
4. This organization has a long-term strategic plan designed to ensure that diversity is achieved and maintained throughout the organization.
5. This organization's mission statement specifically mentions diversity achievement or maintenance as a goal.
6. This organization has established a zero-tolerance policy with regards to discrimination.
7. This organization has set specific numeric diversity goals.
8. Managers in this organization have established diversity goals for their work unit or department.
9. Job postings are advertised in diverse venues with the intention of targeting minorities and other underrepresented groups.
10. This organization uses minority interns, co-ops or student workers.
11. This organization has a mentoring program for minorities.
12. This organization has established a support network for minority employees.
13. This organization has established a telephone hotline that any employee can use to report discrimination incidents.
14. Managers are rewarded based on achievement of diversity goals.

The responses to these types of questions were coded as either affirmative, negative, or "don't know". Next, we asked the respondents to report on their perceptions of minority representation at the managerial and senior management levels. The questions were of the form, "Minorities are proportionately represented among this organization's senior managers", and "Minorities are proportionately represented among this organization's managers", with five-point Likert scale responses ranging from 1 – "strongly disagree" to 5 – "strongly agree."

## 5. Results

The means, standard deviation, and Pearson correlations of independent and dependent variables are

reported in Table 1. In summary, we found support for all our hypotheses except for 5A and 5B which posited a relationship between the existence of diversity goals and perceived organizational diversity.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations (N = 392)

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Sr. manager	2.76	1.43	--	0.740***	0.119*	0.113*	0.187**	0.027
Manager	3.21	1.43		--	0.118*	0.096	0.253**	0.117*
mentoring program	0.91	1.17			--	0.300**	0.541**	0.327**
Minority interns	1.01	0.74				--	0.310**	0.212**
Support networks	1.01	1.28					--	0.254**
Minority goals	0.81	1.05						--

Note: \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ .

Hypotheses 1A and 1B were concerned with differences in perception of actual diversity with respect to the respondents' racial differences. Both hypotheses 1A and 1B were tested using a T-test for equality of group means. Subjects were asked on the questionnaire to report their perception of diversity represented in their organization for both the organization's management as well as the organization's senior management. The mean response for black respondents for perceived diversity representation in the management ranks (hypothesis 1A) was 2.75 on the Likert scale whereas their white counterparts responded to this question with an average of 3.33. A pooled t-test was calculated to verify that a statistically significant difference was present in the data. The difference was significant between the two groups ( $t = 3.19$ ,  $df = 379$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The mean response for black respondents for perceived diversity representation in the senior management ranks (hypothesis 1B) was 2.20, whereas their white counterpart responded to this question with an average of 2.90. The difference was significant between the average responses ( $t = 3.94$ ,  $df = 379$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, both hypotheses 1A and 1B were supported by the data. A statistically significant perceptual difference of the organizations' minority representation at the managerial and senior managerial levels based on the race of the respondent did exist.

Hypotheses 2A and 2B were tested by use of separate multiple regression models. Hypothesis 2A addressed the relationship between mean responses for respondents reporting their organization had a "mentoring program for minorities" and perceived diversity representation in the management ranks. Because there was a strong relationship between a respondent's race and their perception of minority representation in the management ranks, race was included as an independent variable in the analysis. Management representation was regressed on race and presence of a "mentoring program for minori-

ties". The regression equation generated was significant ( $F = 8.801$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The resulting equation was:

$$\text{Management representation} = 3.09 + 0.54 (\text{mentoring program}) - 0.48 (\text{race})$$

The regression equation for perceived diversity representation in the senior management ranks (hypothesis 2B) was also significant ( $F = 13.57$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The regression equation was:

$$\text{Senior management representation} = 2.65 + 0.68 (\text{mentoring program}) - 0.63 (\text{race})$$

Hypotheses 2A and 2B were both supported by the data.

Hypotheses 3A and 3B were concerned with the relationship between a "minority intern program" (interns) and perceived diversity representation in the management ranks. To test hypothesis 3A, management representation was regressed on race and "minority intern programs". The resulting regression was significant ( $F = 10.79$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The regression equation was:

$$\text{Management representation} = 2.90 + 0.532 (\text{interns}) - 0.648 (\text{race})$$

Hypothesis 3B was tested with a regression analysis also using race and use of a "minority intern program" as independent variables. The analysis was significant ( $F = 11.35$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) with a regression equation of:

$$\text{Senior management} = 2.46 + 0.516 (\text{interns}) - 0.702 (\text{race})$$

Hypotheses 3A and 3B were both supported by the data.

Hypotheses 4A and 4B were concerned with the use of a "minority support network program" (support). Hypothesis 4A was tested by regressing manage-

ment representation onto “minority support network program” and race. The regression equation was significant ( $F = 18.97, p < 0.001$ ). The resulting equation was:

$$\text{Management representation} = 2.94 + 0.921 (\text{support}) - 0.598 (\text{race})$$

The regression for respondents reporting their organization had a “minority network program” for perceived diversity representation in the senior management ranks (hypothesis 4B) was also highly significant ( $F = 14.539, p < 0.001$ ). The equation was:

$$\text{Senior management representation} = 2.62 + .0696 (\text{support}) - 0.715 (\text{race})$$

Hypotheses 4A and 4B were both strongly supported by the data.

Hypotheses 5A and 5B were concerned with the use of “racial goals” as a diversity strategy. Hypothesis 5A was tested by regressing management representation onto the use of “racial goals” and respondent’s race (race). Although race entered the regression equation at a significant level, the use of “racial goals” was non-significant in the equation.

Hypothesis 5B was likewise tested by the use of a regression analysis. Similar to Hypothesis 5A, the respondent’s race entered the equation but the use of “racial goals” was non-significant. Therefore, neither hypothesis 5A nor hypothesis 5B, were supported by the data. Summary results of hypotheses testing are reported in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2. Regression results for “management representation”

Hyp	Independent variables	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	F
2A	Mentoring race	0.54** -0.48*	0.056	8.801
3A	Interns race	0.53** -0.65**	0.059	10.786
4A	Support race	0.92*** 0.60**	0.122	18.970

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ .

Table 3. Regression results for “senior management representation”

Hyp	Independent variables	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	F
2B	Mentoring race	0.647*** -0.626***	0.084	13.570
3B	Interns race	0.516** -0.702***	0.062	11.355
4B	Support race	0.696*** -0.715***	0.089	14.539

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*  $p < 0.05$ .

For hypotheses two through five, interaction terms were checked between the independent variables of concern and the respondent’s race. No significant interaction terms were found.

## 5. Discussion

Based on our findings there are several major conclusions we can infer from this research. First, the race of the perceiver appears to play an important role with respect to their perceptions of minority managerial representation within these organizations. The black respondents clearly perceived there to be less management and senior management minority representation than the white respondents. More specifically, the black respondents tended to disagree that minorities were proportionally represented at the managerial and senior managerial levels within their organizations. In contrast, the whites tended to think that there actually was proportional minority representation at the managerial level. Accordingly, although the whites agreed that minorities were underrepresented at the senior management level, their responses were significantly closer to neutral than the black portion of the sample.

We speculate that the reason for these findings of perceptual differences may be due to the black group, being minorities themselves are more attuned to racially based inequalities in their organizations. They are likely to interpret a lack of proportional minority representation as meaning a lack of blacks in management.

This basic perceptual difference may be responsible for many organizations failing to even identify the need to put in place specific practices aimed at increasing racial diversity (i.e., minority-based mentoring programs, interns, support networks and goals). If white managers do not even perceive there is a lack of proportional minority managers, then it is unlikely that they will be motivated to take any sort of corrective action. This is particularly relevant since nearly 80% of our sample were managers. Basic perceptual differences such as these, on the part of managers, may indeed make it less likely that these organizations will be inclined to take actions to increase the level of minorities within management.

Conversely, since blacks were more likely to perceive a lack of minority managerial representation, they may be less likely to feel that equal promotional opportunities exist for them and may be more inclined to leave their current organization. If black managers leave these organizations they will be even less likely to ever attain racial diversity at the senior management level.

These perceptual differences may indeed create sort of a self-fulfilling prophecy inside these organizations whereby racial diversity in management is never achieved.

A sort of “perceived glass ceiling” may be present in many of these organizations that may prohibit minorities from moving into managerial and ultimately senior management roles. But how might organizations go about breaking this “perceived glass ceiling” and enable more minorities to be represented in senior management positions? It appears that goal setting alone will not increase the perception of managerial diversity. Our data suggest that affirmative action-type goals are not effective at improving the perception of diversity within the managerial ranks of organizations. Apparently, organizations must also invest in the critical practices including internships, mentoring, and support networks for minorities if they hope to actually positively influence the perception of managerial diversity within their organizations. We speculate that by using these highly visible practices organizations actually help to create an organizational climate that is perceived as conducive to the promotion of minorities into management roles and eventually into senior management positions. For example, minority internship programs are typically targeted at attracting high potential minority college students into organizations. Backed with the prerequisite level of education and work experience these minorities are in a better position to eventually be hired or promoted into management positions within these organizations. Minority mentoring programs and support networks can complement these internship programs by giving existing management potential minorities, as well as new hires, an advocate and guide to help them prepare for and succeed in managerial positions. An ongoing mentoring program along with a minority support network can help enable entry-level minority managers to succeed, be retained and eventually be promoted into senior managerial positions.

Seemingly, use of these three practices pays off in greater perceived management diversity. Our data indicate that both blacks and whites in these organizations perceived there to be significantly more minority representation in management and senior management positions when organizations have minority internships, mentoring programs, and support networks.

## 6. Limitations and areas for future research

It is appropriate to point out some limitations of our study that should be addressed through future research. First, limitations exist with the use of the survey approach to data collection. Our choice to use survey data was a trade-off, providing us with

interesting insights into the perceptions of workers but limiting us in taking the next step and tying these perceptions back to any kind of objective measurement of actual diversity within the organizations. An opportunity for future research would involve matching perceptions to reality by incorporating objective measures to complement the inherent subjective qualities of a survey. But more objective measures of actual diversity may be difficult to obtain. Many organizations would be unwilling to share these sensitive data and the response rate could be adversely impacted.

Second, the topic of diversity is inherently sensitive as are several topics in the human resource function. Political correctness or answering the survey with what the researcher wants to hear may have skewed some of our data. Although our study used an interview format to conduct the survey, a less intrusive approach, such as paper and pencil survey, may reduce this respondent bias because of the more anonymous format. In a similar vein, some of our measures were perhaps too simplistic and open to interpretation. For instance, we never specifically defined “minorities” for our respondents. Since we were looking at perceptions we allowed each respondent to interpret what a minority is themselves. Some respondents may not have considered anything other than race in their interpretation which may be a bit limiting. Sexual orientation, religion, or gender could also have been considered. Similarly, the wording we used regarding whether minorities were “proportionally” represented in management may have been open for interpretation. Some of the difference that we noticed between the black and white respondents may be due to differences in interpretation of what “proportionally” truly means.

Third, a more balanced response rate between white and black respondents would have given us more robust results. Our sample was comprised of 303 white respondents and 75 black respondents. Although our sample is reflective of many corporations’ employee make-up, a larger black respondent group or other minority groups would provide stronger findings. This sample selection suggestion should be addressed in future research.

Fourth, our minority sample was comprised overwhelmingly of blacks. Hispanic representation is forecasted to grow at the fastest rate in the future. It would be beneficial to include more Hispanics in a future study and test for perceptual differences between them and the black and white groups.

Fifth, our study only considers four diversity practices. There are many more practices that have been developed to help promote diversity in organizations which we did not investigate (e.g.,

providing diversity awareness training, including diversity initiatives in long-term strategic plan and mission of organization, having a zero tolerance policy, being rewarded for meeting diversity goals). A more thorough investigation of other diversity practices would provide human resource managers with even more information on what works to create a climate of diversity and what does not.

Finally, our research introduces the important notion of perception and racially based differences with regards to diversity programs. Future research may benefit by exploring the potential moderating or mediating impact of perception upon the relationship between diversity programs and organizational performance.

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## Conclusions

Limitations aside, this study provides interesting findings about race and perceived diversity and the role that diversity practices play as related to perceived diversity. Based on these findings it appears to be important for organizations to implement and invest in practices that employees believe will help minorities move through the ranks of management. These diversity practices need to be highly visible and represent a true motivation on the part of the organization for creating a climate for diversity. Simply creating a diversity goal is not enough because the goal does not provide tangible tools to achieve diversity. These findings should help human resource managers to invest in more appropriate programs to gain the most benefit. If this is accomplished then organizations will truly benefit from diversity.

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