

# Can Diversity Beget Diversity?: Favoritism threat as a barrier to advocacy for similar others

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# Diversity in Organizations

## A Problem

- Lack of representation, especially at high levels of organizations.

## A Solution (In theory)

- Actively diversify the workforce
  - Diversity begets diversity
    - They act as role models
    - They act as advocates

If the solution is working.....

.....it's moving at a glacial pace

# A barrier to advocacy

## **Favoritism Threat**

Threat of appearing positively biased toward a demographically similar other

- Advocating for the similar candidate may seem like illegitimate favoritism
- Like discrimination it runs counter to impartiality and to a meritocratic ideal.

(Duguid, Loyd, & Tolbert, 2012)

# Factors underlying Favoritism Threat



## □ Distinctive/Token

- Peripheral member
- Representation signals what's preferred / required to be an effective contributing member

## □ Social status

- Less valuable contributor

(Duguid, Loyd, & Tolbert, 2012)

In diverse decision-making groups, what is the impact of distinctiveness and status on concerns and evaluations?

# Studies 1 & 2, Lab experiment

College scholarship evaluation context.

- Procedure: College student participants review two equivalent candidates (one male, one female) in anticipation of a group decision
- 2x2 Design:
  - Distinctiveness: Solo or majority in group
  - Social status: Male or female
- Dependent Variables:
  - Study 1: **Favoritism threat** – concern with appearing positively biased (7 point scale)
  - Study 2: **Candidate evaluation** – objective and subjective

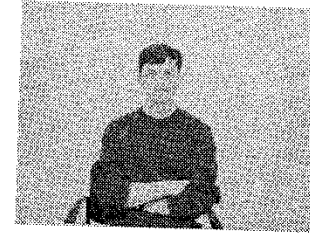
# Distinctiveness and Status Manipulation



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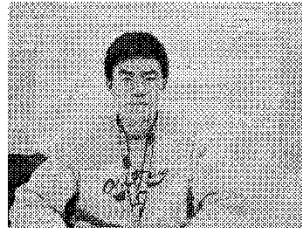
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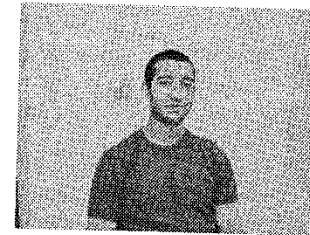
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# Studies 1 & 2 Findings

- Distinctive group members reported higher favoritism threat than non-distinctive group members (regardless of status).
- There was no significant difference in evaluation across the conditions for the objective measures.
- On subjective measures, low status, distinctive group members (compared to the other conditions) evaluated the out-group candidate more favorably than the in-group candidate.

(Loyd & Amoroso, 2018)

# Study 3, Qualitative

## Design

Scenario where they are in a low status distinctive position, evaluating a demographically similar other.

## Participants

- 264 working professionals of color
  - African-American 61.8%; Hispanic 15.6%; Asian 10.8%
  - 55.6% female
  - Mean age = 26.9 years (SD 2.84 years)
- Over 85% reported working in orgs where <10% of top managers shared their race or ethnicity



# Study 3 Scenario

You are part of a 5-person hiring committee, and you are the only racial/ethnic minority on the team.

You now have a short-list of 6 candidates. Your group can make one offer and is meeting shortly to decide who will receive it.

**All of the candidates seem qualified** with differing strengths and weaknesses. One of the candidates shares your race/ethnicity. That candidate also happens to be your first choice.

**Please write the thoughts that are going through your head as you anticipate discussing your evaluation of your top choice with the other group members.**

80% (212 out of 264) of participants provided a written response

# Study 3 Results

Among these working professionals, 54.2% (n=115) spontaneously expressed concerns about favoritism threat.

## Examples

- *Other team members may think that I am favoring my choice b/c of race/ethnicity. That might hurt my image @ work.*
- *Will I be looked upon as showing ethnic favoritism? Will this hurt my career and for more opportunities to be on another similar committee?*
- *Team members will probably think that I've chosen who I have because he/she has the same racial background.*

# Potential Organization-level Solutions

- Substantially increase the diversity of the decision-makers
- Reduce the decision-making committee size in strategic way
- Increase inclusion – make people feel like they are individuals not merely representatives of some category
- Provide opportunities for feedback outside of meetings or anonymously (e.g., Delphi or Qualtrics)
- Coalition-building where high status, less distinctive co-workers are targeted

## Conclusion

- Favoritism threat is a significant barrier to increasing organizational diversity
- Organizational context frequently makes favoritism threat more likely

Thank you!