DEPARTMENT of PSYCHOLOGY

The Effect of Diversity Initiatives and Meritocratic Values on Belief in Anti-Black Discrimination

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Abstract

This experimental study investigates the effect of diversity initiatives on White individuals' perception of discrimination against minorities and whether this relationship interacts with their meritocratic values. With an increased global emphasis on diversity and inclusion, organizations strive to reduce discrimination and instead promote a culture that values diversity. However, the effectiveness of these diversity initiatives is often met with mixed reactions, particularly from members of dominant groups. This study investigates if meritocratic values influence White participants' perceptions of discrimination when exposed to two distinct organizational diversity policies emphasizing different values: Multiculturalism and Multicultural Meritocracy. This study uses multiple regression analysis to reveal a significant interaction between meritocratic values and diversity initiatives, leading to varied perceptions of racial discrimination. Specifically, as a response to a diversity policy emphasizing multiculturalism, the finding suggests that individuals with strong meritocratic values might be less inclined to perceive discrimination against Black individuals than those who attribute less importance to merit. The meritocratic threat may offer a possible explanation for these patterns, where this study contributes to a broader understanding of the challenges in implementing effective diversity initiatives, suggesting that personal values around meritocracy, play a crucial role in individuals' responses to such efforts.

Keywords: Diversity initiatives, Meritocratic values, Racial discrimination, Multiculturalism, Multicultural meritocracy, Meritocratic threat, Organizational policy, Social dominance orientation.

Introduction

As a consequence of today's globalized and interconnected world, organizations are faced with the challenge of working to reduce discrimination against minorities and create an inclusive environment that embraces all kinds of diversity. The introduction of different types of diversity initiatives has been a critical step in this direction. The effectiveness and reception of these initiatives have had mixed results. Several studies have revealed a backlash effect, where diversity initiatives can cause dominant group members to be less perceptive of discrimination against minorities (Gündemir et al., 2017; Kaiser et al., 2013).

There are individual differences among dominant group members that have a relationship with lower perceptiveness of discrimination against minorities (Gündemir et al., 2017; Kaiser et al., 2022; Kaiser et al., 2013; Yi et al., 2023). For instance, Social dominance orientation and Modern racism both have a relationship with perceived discrimination against minorities (Kaiser et al., 2022; Yi et al., 2023). However, individuals high in these parameters perceive less discrimination regardless of how much an organization focuses on diversity.

There has been little success within research in finding convincing evidence for why dominant group members react negatively to diversity initiatives. However, Gündemir et al. (2017) introduced Multicultural meritocracy in a study, a diversity policy focusing on both meritocracy and multiculturalism. The authors discovered that this combined policy made minorities feel included and simultaneously did not lead White participants to be less perceptive of discrimination.

This study delves deeper into the findings made by Gündemir et al. (2017), with a perspective never previously tested within this context. Using the framework of Meritocratic threat (Knowles et al., 2014), where the realization of unearned privileges can provoke a sense of threat among White individuals valuing meritocracy, this study will investigate the dynamics between meritocratic values and responses to diversity initiatives. Through controlled experimental design and utilizing quantitative analyses, including multiple regression, this study will reveal how the response to two distinct diversity policies, Multiculturalism and Multicultural Meritocracy, together with individual differences, influence White individuals' perceptions of racial bias and discrimination in the workplace.

These findings can contribute to the literature on why diversity initiatives could negatively affect individuals and further improve how organizations work with inclusion. This is paramount since diversity initiatives, if implemented incorrectly, might not only be ineffective but also create a false fairness effect and lead to negative consequences for ethnic minorities (Gündemir & Galinsky, 2018).

Racial discrimination

Several studies show that minorities still experience more discrimination than majority group members. One meta-analysis gathered data from studies that compared women's and minorities' perceived mistreatment of men and dominant group members (McCord et al., 2018). Mistreatment in this study comprises several ways individuals can have negative experiences at work. For instance, harassment, interpersonal conflict, and discrimination. Their results showed that minorities experience significantly more mistreatment than White individuals, $\delta = .14$, 95% CI $= [.08, .19]$, $k = 69$. The authors also analyzed specific forms of mistreatment. Discrimination was defined as when a person in a social category is disadvantaged in the workplace relative to other groups with comparable potential or proven success. This mistreatment was also perceived higher by minority than majority group members, $\delta = .30$, 95% CI $= [.16, .43]$, $k = 29$. These differences were more prominent when Black and White employees were compared in mistreatment, $\delta = .17$, 95% CI $= [.07, .27]$, $k = 22$, and discrimination, $\delta = .34$, 95% CI $= [.11, .56]$, $k = 11$.

Perceived discrimination, however, is a subjective phenomenon. While it indeed is a strong indication that minorities are discriminated against, people could have different perspectives on what they categorize as behavior towards them that is based on their ethnic appearance. One study has, for instance, shown that minorities have a higher level of perceptiveness for discrimination when they are primed with stereotypes of a group to which they feel belongingness to (Owuamalam & Zagefka, 2014). A possible explanation is that minorities have prior experience, which makes it easier to spot when someone behaves differently based on their appearance.

On the other hand, discrimination can also be measured in other ways. One study did a meta-analysis of 28 experimental studies between 1989 and 2015 that compared frequencies of callbacks between ethnic minorities and White individuals (Quillian et al., 2017). In total, callbacks from 55,842 applications were analyzed. The results showed that White applicants received 36 percent more callbacks than Black applicants. The study also analyzed the relative change of the difference in callbacks between the groups from 1989 to 2015 using the logarithm of ratio. The results showed a four percent increase in the difference between these groups, indicating that discrimination in employee selection processes has not decreased in the last 30 years (Quillian et al., 2017).

Even if the norms regarding racism have changed in the last 50 years, these findings suggest that discrimination is still a problem in today's organizations. A reason for this could be that the actual attitudes towards ethnic minorities have not improved at the same rate as

the norms (Dovidio, 2001). The term modern racism explains this phenomenon as a combination of negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities while at the same time adhering to the norm against blatant racism. Unlike old-fashioned racism, which includes blatant attitudes and beliefs about ethnic minorities being inferior, modern racists instead express skepticism about the work ethic of minorities and the belief that they have already received sufficient support (Dovidio, 2001).

Furthermore, aversive racist attitudes are comprised of the combination of having explicit positive attitudes towards ethnic minorities but, at the same time, having implicit negative attitudes (Dovidio, 2001). Individuals with these attitudes might be motivated to not appear or behave in discriminating ways towards minorities, while they still unconsciously react negatively. These phenomena could be an explanation for why minorities still experience discrimination at their workplace and can give clues on how it can be reduced.

Incentives to implement diversity initiatives

Beyond the apparent argument that discrimination makes organizations miss out on the best-qualified workers, several meta-analyses have shown that perceived discrimination has a negative effect on mental and physical health (Dhanani et al., 2018; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Triana et al., 2015). A meta-analysis investigating the issue in a European context also shows that ethnic minorities' perceived discrimination is associated with psychiatric disturbances, depression, psychosis, and perceived stress (de Freitas et al., 2018). While improving the work conditions for ethnic minorities has a moral value in itself, discrimination or prejudice also has a more direct effect on a targeted individual's work performance. One theory that captures this effect is Stereotype threat, which explains a phenomenon where individuals may feel anxiety or apprehension when they know about negative stereotypes linked to their social or demographic group, fearing that their actions or performance might validate these stereotypes (Nguyen & Ryan, 2008; Spencer et al., 2016).

Lastly, an organization could benefit from a diverse workforce since it can enhance information-processing and complex decision-making (van Knippenberg & Mell, 2016). However, diversity has also been called a double-edged sword, where research has shown that it could lead to interpersonal challenges in organizations. It is, therefore, paramount for organizations to find the most effective way to work with diversity.

Effectiveness of diversity initiatives

For over 50 years, organizations have tried to tackle discrimination and improve inclusion by employing different forms of diversity initiatives (Portocarrero & Carter, 2022).

However, the effectiveness of these initiatives is in question since long-term results are hard to measure (Bezrukova et al., 2016).

Another important aspect is that these diversity initiatives have shown to have both positive and negative results, both regarding minorities and majority group members. The positive effect is that it helps members of underrepresented groups feel more included and inclined to work in an organization focusing on diversity (Gündemir et al., 2019). On the other hand, research has also shown that, for White employees, diversity initiatives could increase stereotype activation and feelings of exclusion and decrease the perception of fairness, racial discrimination, and willingness to support discrimination lawsuits (Dover et al., 2020; Dover et al., 2014; Gündemir & Galinsky, 2018)

While individual differences such as Social dominance orientation, Prejudice, and White identity centrality have a relationship with many of the outcomes mentioned above, research has not found evidence that individual differences like these interact with the negative responses of diversity initiatives (Dover et al., 2016; Kaiser et al., 2022; Yi et al., 2023).

Meritocratic threat

One clue for why some react negatively to diversity initiatives is the difference in how dominant group members react to a company policy emphasizing meritocracy compared to multiculturalism. Several studies have found evidence that White participants feel more valued and respected and perceive more discrimination against Black individuals if the company's policy focuses on merit instead of multiculturalism (Georgeac & Rattan, 2023; (Gündemir et al., 2017; Kaiser et al., 2022). One study has also found that the combination of meritocratic and multicultural values in a policy, compared to a policy with solely multicultural values, makes White individuals feel more engaged, perceive more anti-Black discrimination, and experience more fairness (Gündemir et al., 2017).

One possible reason for this effect that has yet to be tested is what Knowles et al. (2014) call a meritocratic threat. They argue that White individuals with high meritocratic values feels that their self-image is threatened when exposed to the fact that a part of their success stems from White privileges and not merit. To tackle this threat, White individuals might downplay racial inequity. Several studies have tested this idea by manipulating participants' self-image when measuring their meritocratic value and their perception of racial inequality (Knowles & Lowery, 2012; Phillips & Lowery, 2015; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). To test whether a self-image threat moderates the relationship between meritocratic values and perceived racial inequity, a study by Knowles and Lowery (2012) manipulated

participants' self-image through fictitious feedback from a personality test. The results showed that this manipulation moderated the relationship between meritocratic values and belief in racial inequity, where only the group that received negative (vs. positive) feedback from the test had a significant relationship between meritocratic values and perceived inequity. The results show that White participants are more inclined to perceive racial inequity if they have low meritocratic values and that this relationship is moderated by self-image (Knowles & Lowery, 2012; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). Specifically, meritocratic values had a significant relationship with both perceived anti-Black discrimination and White privilege. However, this relationship was only moderated by self-image in the latter, where only participants with high meritocratic values were affected by self-image manipulation.

The pattern that manipulation of self-image has a relationship with belief in racial inequality has also been discovered in other studies, where the framing (own privilege vs others disadvantages) seems to constantly matter (Lowery et al., 2007). In addition, members of higher social economic classes have been shown to claim hardship to larger extent after being exposed to self-image threat and the fact that they have privileges (Phillips & Lowery, 2020).

Thus, the phenomenon could also be found in other types of groups. This finding indicates that White individuals' meritocratic values has a relationship with their perceptiveness of racial inequity and the moderation trough self-image show indication that the relationship occurs because racial inequity causes a meritocratic threat.

The first research question

This experimental study aims to explore how diversity initiatives influence the perceptions of discrimination among White individuals through the concept of meritocratic threat. It seeks to determine whether a company's diversity initiatives can elicit the same meritocratic threat response in White individuals as when realizing unearned privileges. This will be tested by investigating whether the perception of anti-Black discrimination differs depending on whether White individuals are exposed to a diversity policy emphasizing only multiculturalism (experimental condition one) or a diversity policy emphasizing both multiculturalism and meritocracy (experimental condition two).

To further link these potential differences to meritocratic threat, the study will measure individuals' meritocratic values. This is based on prior research suggesting that the impact of a meritocratic threat is contingent upon an individual's valuation of meritocracy (Knowles & Lowery, 2012). If diversity initiatives indeed trigger a comparable threat, it is expected that participants with high meritocratic values will be less perceptive of

discrimination against Black individuals in a company with multicultural (vs. multicultural meritocracy) diversity initiatives. Consequently, this study aims to assess whether White individuals' responses to diversity initiatives interact with their meritocratic values. Thus, the first research question this study aims to answer is:

- *Does the effect of diversity policies on White individuals' perception of racial bias depend on individual differences in meritocratic values?*

Hypothesis

To answer this research question, this study will test the following hypothesis:

- *H1: Diversity policy has a main effect on Belief in anti-Black discrimination.*

- *H2: Preference for the merit principle interacts with the effect of Diversity policy on White participants' Belief in anti-Black discrimination.*

The second research question

A second explorative purpose of this study is to dive deeper into White individuals' responses to diversity initiatives and investigate if their personality traits moderate the relationship between meritocratic values and perception of discrimination against Black individuals. These possible moderations could produce more insight into diversity initiatives' effect on perceived discrimination and its interplay with meritocratic values. The second research question is, therefore:

- *Do personality traits of White individuals moderate the relationship between their meritocratic values and their belief in discrimination against Black individuals?*

Method

Diversity initiative experiment

This study conducted an experiment with two conditions to explore how White individuals' beliefs in anti-Black discrimination are influenced by a company's diversity policy focus. To create the experiment, participants were asked to read a description of a fictive company's policy, designed to manipulate their exposure to a company's policy regarding diversity. Participants were randomized into two groups and read one of the

following policies: A policy that focuses solely on multicultural values or a policy combining multicultural and meritocracy values. This created the independent experimental variable named Diversity policy with two conditions: Multiculturalism condition and Multicultural meritocracy condition.

The text used to create these experimental conditions originated from the research conducted by Gündemir et al. (2017). The multiculturalism condition included the segment, "At Revian Consulting, our commitment to diversity contributes to our success as a company." Conversely, In the multicultural meritocracy condition, the same segment was adjusted to "At Revian Consulting, our commitment to the combination of merit and diversity contributes to our success as a company."

As demonstrated by the examples above, the policies express different values. The multiculturalism condition highlights only multicultural values, while the multicultural meritocracy condition expresses the importance of both multiculturalism and meritocracy. As a manipulation check, the participants answered whether they saw the policy promoting multiculturalism, meritocracy, or both.

Procedure and Research design

The data was collected using a digital survey in Qualtrics. After giving their consent, participants were asked about their gender, age, occupational status, country of residence, and ethnicity. The participants were then presented with statements measuring Preference for the merit principle, Social dominance orientation, Ethnic social identity, and the Big Five personality traits. Subsequently, the participants read a short description of the fictive company Revian Consulting and were randomized into one of the two experimental conditions of the independent variable Diversity policy.

After reading the text in the different conditions, participants were asked to read a news article about a discrimination lawsuit filed by former employees at Revian Consulting against the company. The text used for this came from a study by Gündemir and Galinsky (2018). A few changes were made to fit a European context better. Before continuing the survey, participants were presented with a control question, which made it possible to exclude participants who did not read the instructions well enough.

Participants were then asked questions about how legitimate they thought the lawsuit was, which measured the dependent variable Support for lawsuit. They were also asked how much money they think Revian Consulting should claim if they countersued the former employees, which measured the dependent variable Countersue.

In the last part of the study, the participants answered two types of questions. First, to measure the dependent variable Belief in White privilege, participants were asked how prevalent they thought White privilege was at the company. Second, to measure the dependent variable Belief in anti-Black discrimination, participants were asked how common they thought discrimination against Black employees was at Revian Consulting.

Measures

Preference for Merit

The Preference for the merit principle (PMP) scale by Davey et al. (1999) was used to measure the extent to which the individual values merit in a work context. It contained 15 items, and a 7-point scale was used (strongly disagree to strongly agree).

Social dominance orientation

The 4-item Short social dominance orientation (SSDO) was used (Pratto et al., 2013). I decided to measure SDO since previous research has shown that it has a relationship with individuals' agreement with whether discrimination occurs in a workplace (Kaiser et al., 2022). By measuring this variable, I could control for the variance explained by it and, therefore, reduce the otherwise statistical noise in the analysis. It also served as a possible replication of previous findings of the construct's relationship with Belief in discrimination.

Personality trait

The International personality item pool 30 item version (IPIP-NEO-30, Kajonius & Johnson, 2019) was used to measure participants' personality traits. This version is comprised of 30 items, 6 per trait, from the IPIP-NEO-120 scale (Johnson, 2014).

Ethnic identity centrality

The subscales Private regard and Identity from the Collective self-esteem scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) was used to measure the extent to which the participants see their ethnicity as a part of their self-image. While this variable has not yielded any significant results, it still made theoretical sense to include it in the model. The reasoning was if self-image threat is dependent on whether they are White or not, then their level of identification with this ethnicity might play a role in that. However, previous studies investigating White individuals' reaction to diversity initiatives have not found convincing support for the variable playing a role in White individuals' negative response to diversity initiatives.

Agreement with lawsuit

After reading the fictive news article about the company Revian Consulting being sued, the participants responded to four items measuring support for the lawsuit. The

questions were taken from the study by Gündemir et al. (2017) and were modified to fit the context.

Belief in anti-Black discrimination and White privilege

Participants answered questions regarding how prevalent they thought discrimination against Black employees and privileges for White employees were at the company. The items measuring belief in discrimination against Black employees were taken from the scale Other-focused belief in discrimination *(*Iyer et al., 2003), which is shaped to gather participants' beliefs in discrimination from an outside perspective. The questions were modified to fit a workplace context since the original scale focuses on discrimination in general.

The questions surrounding belief in White privilege were taken from The White privilege scale (Swim & Miller, 1999).

Sample

The intended sample size was 130 adult participants with Caucasian ethnicity. This was calculated with the software G*power for a Multiple regression analysis with a fixed model, effect size deviation from zero, alfa value at .05, and an expected effect size of .15. The final sample size reached $n = 87$, which gave the analysis with Support for lawsuit and Belief in anti-Black discrimination as dependent variable a power of .96 and .81, respectively.

I gathered the sample through my personal network. The survey was distributed through companies' internal communication channels, such as group chats and email. The reason for this approach was that individuals employed at regular office jobs may have encountered workplace diversity initiatives before and, therefore, could easily imagine the context presented to them in the study. The survey was also distributed on LinkedIn and student chat groups. There were no exclusion criteria in the data gathering since the essential demographic characteristics were included as questions in the survey.

Ethical considerations

This research project, conducted within the Department of Psychology at Lund University, adheres to the ethical standards in psychological research. Recognizing the importance of ethical responsibility, this study has committed to ensuring the protection and respect of all participants involved. The project aligns with the ethical principles stipulated by the Swedish law (2003:460) on Ethics of Research Involving Humans. The risk for physical or mental harm to the participants was assessed and deemed low. Participants were not given information about the exact phenomenon the study was measuring. However, they received

information that the study was investigating the most effective way to work with diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

Furthermore, participants were given information about the duration of the study and information that they could withdraw from it at any time without any repercussions, ensuring their participation was entirely voluntary. Participants were also provided with the author's contact information for further questions or concerns.

Regarding personal sensitive data, information about participants' ethnicity was collected in this study. However, participants' anonymity was ensured since there were no personal identifiers collected that could link their responses back to them. In addition, the data was collected using Qualtrics, where the IP addresses of participants were also protected. This also means the data collected does not fall under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). In addition, all data were handled and stored so that only the author could access them, thus ensuring confidentiality.

Analysis strategy

Multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the data. The experimental variable Diversity policy was transformed into a dummy variable with two levels (0 = Multiculturalism/ 1= Multicultural meritocracy). This variable, together with Social dominance orientation (SDO) and Preference for the merit principle (PMP) formed the Model 1. The purpose of Model 1 was to test the first hypothesis, which is investigating the main effect of diversity initiatives on both Support for lawsuits and Belief in anti-Black discrimination.

The purpose of Model 2 was to test the second hypothesis, namely the potential interaction between Diversity policy and PMP on Support for lawsuit and Belief in anti-Black discrimination. Therefore, an interaction term between Diversity Policy and PMP was calculated and used as a predictor in the second model. If the interaction term is revealed to be significant, then that shows initial support for the second hypothesis. Similar to the first model, Model 2 also included SDO, PMP, and Diversity policy.

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Results

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Participant flow

186 individuals started the survey, and 136 went through the whole survey. Three individuals did not answer any of the questions regarding the dependent variables and were therefore excluded from the dataset. Since the study aimed to investigate White individuals' reactions to diversity initiatives, all participants who described themselves as not solely having a Caucasian ethnic background were excluded from the analysis. Lastly, all

participants who did not answer the control question correctly were excluded from the study, leaving the final number of participants at 87. Of these remaining participants, 40 were randomly assigned to the multicultural meritocracy condition, while 47 were randomly assigned to the multiculturalism condition.

Missing data

Two of the remaining participants missed two, and a third missed one of the questions measuring Agreement with lawsuit. This probably happened because of the layout of these questions compared to the rest of the survey. I decided to use the answers to the questions the participants had answered for the missing cells. I used the average of the other two questions for the participant that missed one.

Descriptive results

The mean, standard deviation, and range for all variables are presented in Table 1. The correlations between all the variables are presented in Table 2. The correlations reveal a significant negative association between social dominance orientation and all the dependent variables; Support for lawsuit, Belief in anti-Black discrimination and Belief in White privilege. In addition, Preference for the merit principle has a significant negative relationship with Support for Lawsuit.

Regression analysis

Support for discrimination lawsuit

Two multiple regression analyses were conducted on two different but nested models to test the variables' relationship or effect on the outcome variable Support for lawsuit. The results are presented in Table 3. The predictors in the first model were Preference for the merit principle (PMP), Social dominance orientation, and the dummy coded experimental variable Diversity policy with two levels (Multiculturalism vs multicultural meritocracy). The second model included the same predictors and an interaction term between PMP and Diversity policy.

Model 1 was overall statistically significant, $F(3, 83) = 9.28$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .25$, indicating an explained variance of 25 % on the outcome variable. PMP ($\beta = -0.47$, $SE = 0.22$, $t = -2.16$, $p = .034$) and SDO ($\beta = -0.70$, $SE = 0.15$, $t = -4.75$, $p < .001$) both had a significant contribution to the model. Diversity policy had no significant effect on the outcome variable.

Model 2 was also statistically significant, $F(4, 82) = 6.95$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .25$). It explained 25% of the variance in the outcome variable.

Table 1

Demographics of participants

Demographic	n	%
Gender		
Female	45	51.7
Male	41	47.1
Other	1	1.1
Age		
18-24	5	5.7
25-34	38	43.7
35-44	26	29.9
45-54	16	18.4
55-64	2	2.3
Country		
Denmark	2	2.3
Latvia	1	1.1
Lithuania	1	1.1
Poland	1	1.1
Romania	1	1.1
Sweden	74	85.1
United Kingdom	1	1.1
United States	6	6.9
Occupation		
Working	71	81.6
Studying	13	14.9
Other	3	3.4

Unlike model 1, only SDO had a significant contribution to the model (β = -0.71, SE = 0.15, t = -4.75, $p < .001$). The interaction term had no significant effect on the outcome variable.

Comparing the two models revealed that there was no significant difference between the models ($F (1,82) = 0.23$, $p = .636$).

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between PMP and Lawsuit split by the two experimental conditions with no interaction effect.

The assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were examined and met regarding both models. Multicollinearity was detected for Diversity policy and the interaction term in model 2, as indicated by a lower tolerance value than 0.1 and higher VIF values than 10.

Belief in anti-Black discrimination

A similar multiple regression was conducted with Belief in anti-Black discrimination as a dependent variable. The results are presented in Table 3. Model 1 was comprised of Preference for the merit principle, Social dominance orientation (SDO), and Diversity policy. Model 2 had the same variables but with the interaction between Diversity policy and PMP as an additional variable.

Model 1 significantly explained the variance on the outcome variable, $F (3,83) = 3.39$, $p = .022$, $R^2 = .11$. SDO was the only variable with a significant contribution (β = -0.41, SE = 0.13, t = -3.14, $p = .002$).

Table 2

Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. PMP	4.72	0.61	.67	—	.735	.422	.181	.245	.617	.469	.261	**.043**	.716	.151
2. SDO	2.32	0.90	.62	.04	—	**.041**	**.033**	.139	**.035**	**<.001**	.912	**.002**	**<.001**	**<.001**
3. SI	4.27	0.94	.75	-.09	.04	—	.648	.309	.107	.092	**.024**	.614	.266	.579
4. Openness	5.63	0.87	.73	-.15	-.23	-.05	—	.118	**.029**	**<.001**	**.041**	.837	.740	.410
5. Conscientiousness	5.17	0.95	.80	.13	-.16	.11	.17	—	.156	**.007**	**<.001**	.394	.776	.604
6. Extraversion	4.72	1.17	.84	-.05	-.23	.17	.23	.15	—	**.011**	**<.001**	.118	**.046**	**.032**
7. Agreeableness	5.70	0.75	.73	-.08	-.37	-.18	.40	.29	.27	—	.082	.073	.478	.131
8. Neuroticism	2.96	1.16	.83	.12	-.01	-.24	-.22	-.38	-.41	-.19	—	.209	.180	.216
9. Lawsuit	4.80	1.40	.89	-.22	-.46	-.06	.02	-.09	0.17	.19	.14	—	**<.001**	**<.001**
10. BD	4.33	1.13	.83	-.04	-.32	.12	.04	-.03	.22	.08	.15	.67	—	**<.001**
11. WP	4.67	1.35	.93	-.16	-.41	.06	.09	-.06	.23	.16	.13	-.75	.84	—

Note. $N = 87$. Values below the diagonal represent correlation coefficients (r). Values above the diagonal represent P-values. P-values in bold indicate statistical significance ($p < .05$). PMP = Preference for the merit principle. SDO = Social dominance orientation. SI = Ethnic social identity. Lawsuit = Support for discrimination lawsuit. BD = Belief in anti-Black discrimination. WP = Belief in White privilege.

Table 3

Regression Analysis of Individual Characteristics and Diversity Policies on Belief in Anti-Black Discrimination.

| Variable | Support for Lawsuit | | | | | | Belief in Anti-Black Discrimination | | | | | |
| | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | |
	β	SE	p	β	SE	p	β	SE	p	β	SE	p
Intercept	8.42	1.12	**<.001**	9.84	3.20	**.003**	5.35	0.99	**<.001**	10.71	2.76	**<.001**
SDO	-0.70	0.15	**<.001**	-0.71	0.15	**<.001**	-0.41	0.13	**.002**	-0.43	0.13	**.001**
PMP	-0.47	0.22	**.034**	-0.77	0.67	.251	-0.06	0.19	.753	-1.19	0.58	**.042**
DP	0.16	0.27	.554	-0.85	2.14	.694	0.15	0.24	.516	-3.65	1.85	.051
DP x PMP				0.21	0.45	.636				0.81	0.39	**.041**
R^2	.25			.25			.11			.15		
adj. R^2	.22			.22			.08			.11		

Note. $n = 87$ (All participants identified as White ethnicity). SDO = Social dominance orientation. PMP = Preference for the merit principle. DP = Experimental variable Diversity Policy, 0 = Multicultural Policy, 1 = Multicultural Meritocracy Policy. P-values in bold indicate statistical significance ($p < .05$).

Figure 1

The Relationship Between Support for Lawsuit and Preference for the Merit Principle, split by Diversity Policy
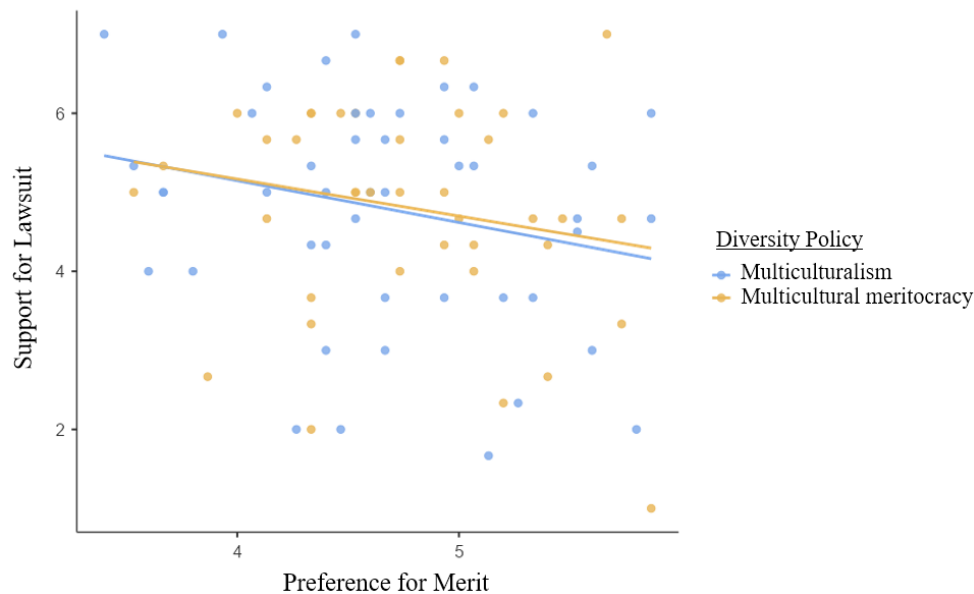
Note. Support for Lawsuit = Support for discrimination lawsuit against Revian Consulting. Preference for Merit = Preference for the merit principle.

Model 2 was also significant, $F(4, 82) = 3.72$, $p = .008$. Both Preference for merit ($\beta = -1.19$, $SE = 0.58$, $t = -2.07$, $p = .042$) and SDO ($\beta = -0.43$, $SE = 0.13$, $t = -.3.34$, $p = .001$.) had a significant contribution to the model. Diversity policy was marginally significant ($\beta = -3.65$, $SE = 1.85$, $t = -1.98$, $p = .051$). The interaction term between Diversity policy and PMP significantly contributed to the model, which supports hypothesis 1 ($\beta = 0.81$, $SE = 0.39$, $t = 2.08$, $p = .041$).

The model comparison revealed a significant difference between Model 1 and Model 2 ($F(1,82) = 4.32$, $p = .041$), where Model 2 had a stronger model fit than Model 1 (adj. $R^2 = .11$ and adj. $R^2 = .08$)

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between the outcome variable and Preference for merit, split by the different conditions. The scatterplot shows that in the multiculturalism condition, Preference for merit had a negative relationship with Belief in anti-Black discrimination. Conversely, this relationship was positive in the multicultural merit condition. All assumptions regarding normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were examined and met for both models. However, multicollinearity was observed regarding Diversity policy and the interaction term, indicated by a lower tolerance value than 0.1 and a VIF value above 10.

Figure 2

The Relationship Between Belief in Anti-Black Discrimination and Preference for Merit, split by Diversity Policy
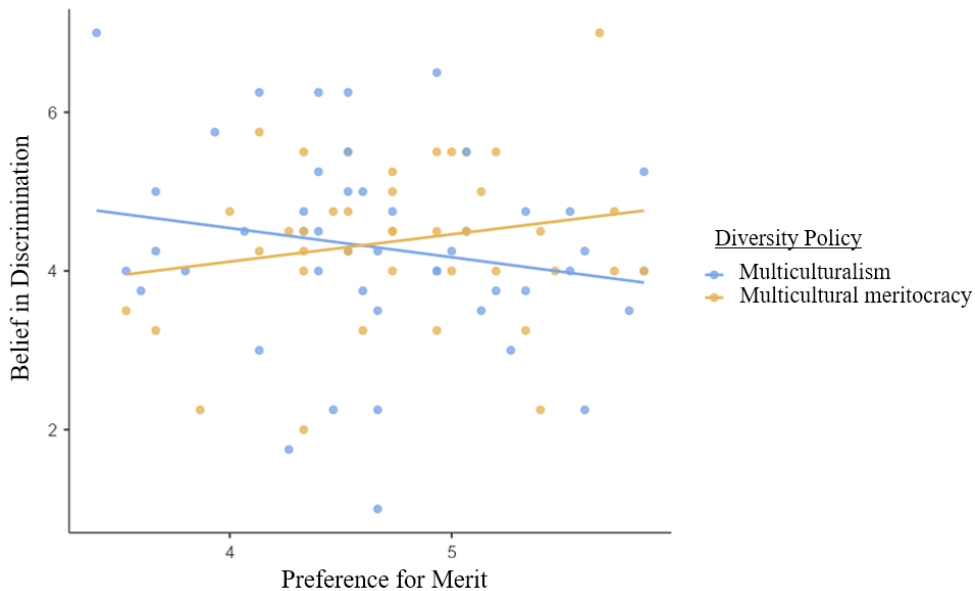
Note. Belief in Discrimination = Belief in discrimination against Black individuals at Revian Consulting. Preference for Merit = Preference for the merit principle.

Moderation analysis

A moderation analysis was conducted to investigate if any personality traits moderate the relationship between PMP and Belief in anti-Black discrimination. None of the analyses had significant results but showed patterns. However, several patterns were found where the relationship between PMP and Belief in anti-Black discrimination were different depending on the level of certain personality traits of the participants.

Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between PMP and Belief in anti-Black discrimination in the multicultural meritocracy condition when moderated through Conscientiousness. The analysis showed that neither PMP ($\beta = 0.45$, $SE = 0.29$, $p = .116$), Conscientiousness ($\beta = 0.13$, $SE = 0.16$, $p = .398$) or the moderation ($\beta = -0.52$, SE = 0.33, $p = .115$) were significant. However, the pattern shows that the positive relationship between PMP and Belief in anti-Black discrimination is only present for individuals with average levels or below in Conscientiousness and that the relationship is stronger for individuals with over one standard deviation below the mean in Conscientiousness.

Figure 4 presents the relationship between PMP and Belief in anti-Black discrimination in the multicultural meritocracy condition when moderate through Openness.
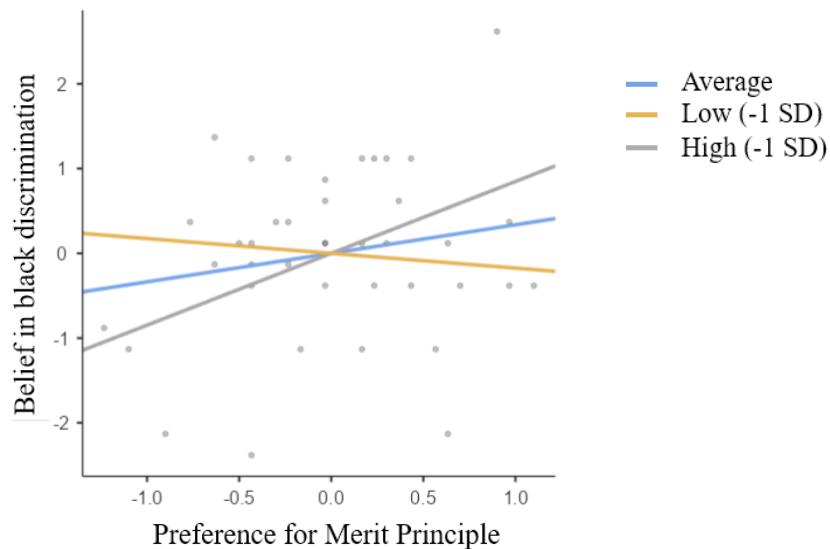
Figure 3

The Relationship Between PMP and Belief in Anti-Black Discrimination Moderated Through Conscientiousness.
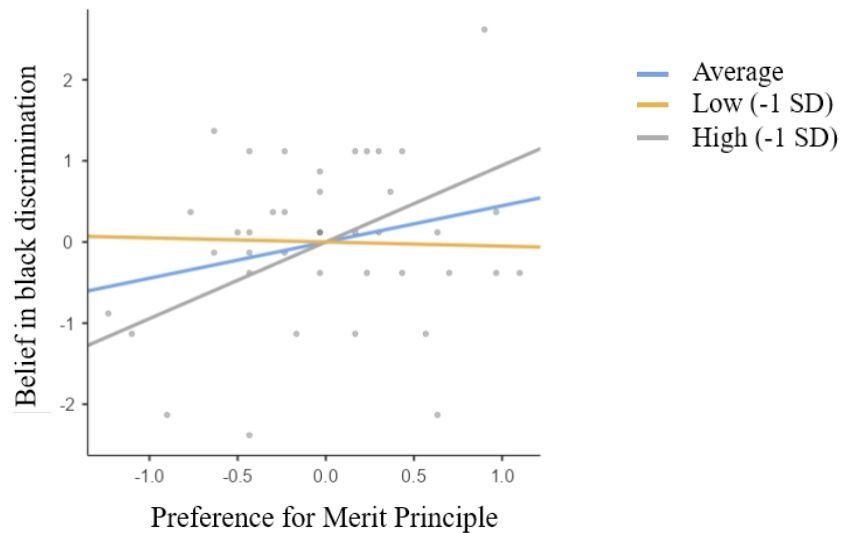
Note. Belief in Black discrimination = Belief in discrimination against Black individuals at Revian Consulting. Preference for Merit = Preference for the merit principle.

Figure 4

The Relationship Between PMP and Belief in Anti-Black Discrimination Moderated Through Openness.

Note. Belief in Black discrimination = Belief in discrimination against Black individuals at Revian Consulting. Preference for Merit = Preference for the merit principle.

While PMP ($\beta = 0.34$, $SE = 0.26$, $p = .203$) and Openness ($\beta = 0.05$, $SE = 0.19$, $p = .81$) were not close to being significant, the moderation was almost significant ($\beta = -0.64$, $SE = 0.34$, $p = .060$). The analysis shows that the relationship between PMP and Belief in anti-Black discrimination is not positive but instead slightly negative for individuals with one standard deviation below the mean in Openness.

For individuals with an average score on Openness the relationship between PMP and Belief in anti-Black discrimination was still slightly positive. At the same time, participants with one Standard deviation above the mean or more have a stronger positive relationship. None of these patterns were observed in the multiculturalism condition, where the direction of the relationship between PMP and Belief in anti-Black discrimination remained the same direction regardless of personality traits analyzed in the moderation analysis.

Discussion

This study has used diversity policies as a tool to create two different conceptions for the participants about how much an organization focuses on diversity. The first policy expressed the importance of multiculturalism, while the second focused on multiculturism and meritocracy. Participants from both conditions were subsequently led to believe that a discrimination lawsuit was filed against the organization. After reading both the company diversity policy and the newsletter about the lawsuit, the participants were asked to express to what extent they agreed with the lawsuit and to what extent they believed that discrimination occurs at the company.

Diversity Initiatives effect on Belief in anti-Black discrimination

The first hypothesis of this study posited that the multicultural policy has a negative main effect on participants' belief in discrimination against Black employees. Two models were created to test this hypothesis. Model 1 included Preference for the merit principle (PMP), Social dominance orientation (SDO), and the experimental variable Diversity policy. Model 2 comprised the same variables and an interaction term between PMP and Diversity policy. The regression analysis results on Belief in anti-Black discrimination showed that diversity policy had a marginally significant main effect ($p = .051$). This was only the case in Model 2, where the interaction between PMP and Diversity policy was included. Thus, the results of this study only partly support the first hypothesis.

As previous studies have shown, the results from this study show an indication that individuals' belief in discrimination against ethnic minorities in a particular organization is dependent on whether the organizations express that they have focused on diversity initiatives. Specifically, individuals tend to believe less that discrimination occurs if the

organization focuses on multiculturalism instead of merit. For instance, a study by Kaiser et al. (2013) showed in a series of experiments that the presence of diversity policies, diversity training, and diversity awards made individuals from high-status groups (White men) less sensitive to discrimination against minorities and reacted more harshly to individuals from a low-status group claiming that discrimination occurs. This was the case even when participants were presented with clear information that minorities had been mistreated at the company.

Furthermore, this study supports the findings made by Gündemir et al. (2017), which shows that contrary to a policy that only focuses on multiculturalism, including multiculturalism and meritocracy in a diversity policy does not negatively affect belief in discrimination. While both this and the study by Gündemir et al. (2017) only tested the effect of diversity policies, it is an indication that companies that express both the importance of multiculturalism and meritocracy, might still keep the positive effects like inclusion for minorities, while not creating a backlash effect from majority group members.

Meritocratic threat

The main aim of the current study was to investigate further reasons for diversity initiatives' unintended effect on White individuals and, more precisely, why the Multicultural Meritocracy policy in the study by Gündemir et al. (2017) causes them to believe more in racial discrimination compared to a policy which only expresses multicultural values. This was the purpose behind the second hypothesis, which suggested that the variable Preference for the Merit Principle (PMP) interacts with the effect of Diversity policy on participants' Belief in anti-Black discrimination. The results of Model 2, with Belief in anti-Black discrimination as a dependent variable, showed that the interaction term between Diversity policy and PMP had a significant effect on the model. However, the same analysis with Support for Lawsuit as a dependent variable had no significant interaction between the Belief in anti-Black discrimination and PMP. Thus, the second hypothesis was partly supported.

This study investigates this phenomenon through the lens of what Knowles et al. (2014) call the Meritocratic threat, which describes the threat majority group members experience when presented with the fact that they have privileges other groups do not have. One consequence of White individuals experiencing this threat is that they tend to believe in racial inequity to a lesser degree. When viewing the current study from the Meritocratic threat framework, exposure to diversity initiatives may cause the same threat since focusing on diversity in a company indirectly means that in the company's current state, majority group members have benefits that minority group members do not have. However, vital to

interpreting this study's results, White individuals' experience of meritocratic threat depends on their meritocratic values (Knowles & Lowery, 2012; Knowles et al., 2014).

These patterns in Meritocratic threats are also visible in the current research results. Figure 1 illustrates the significant interaction discovered between PMP and Belief in anti-Black discrimination, split by Diversity policy conditions. The pattern shows a negative relationship between PMP and Belief in discrimination against Black individuals in the condition with multiculturalism diversity policy. If viewed from the meritocratic threat perspective, one interpretation of this relationship is that diversity initiatives that focus solely on multiculturalism create a threat to the self-image of White individuals. A company stating that they want a more inclusive workplace indirectly says that they have not been inclusive enough, which has benefited White individuals. However, as shown in a study by Knowles and Lowery (2012), this threat depends on White individuals' meritocratic values. If a person does not value merit high enough, worldviews that challenge them as meritorious do not create a self-image threat. Therefore, these individuals are more inclined to agree that discrimination occurs since diversity messages do not threaten their self-image. This could explain why, in a condition with only diversity and multicultural values shown, the higher the Preference for merit an individual has, the more inclined they are to not believe in discrimination against Black individuals.

Furthermore, Figure 2 demonstrates that the same pattern is not present in the multicultural meritocracy condition, suggesting that the threat White individuals might experience in the multiculturalism condition does not occur within a company that endorses both meritocratic and multicultural values. The findings point to the meritocratic threat as a potential factor affecting responses to diversity policies, suggesting that personal values around meritocracy significantly shape perceptions of racial bias and discrimination.

This research contributes valuable insights into the complexities of implementing diversity initiatives in organizations, emphasizing the importance of considering unintended effects. Furthermore, the false fairness effect explains how whole organizations become less perceptive of racial discrimination after implementing diversity initiatives (Gündemir & Galinsky, 2018). This study calls for organizations not to fall victim to these misleading perceptions and, instead, make conscious and responsible choices when implementing diversity policies. The findings of this study might contribute to a new solution for mitigating White individuals' negative reactions to diversity initiatives. The study by Knowles and Lowery (2012) found that bolstering White participants' self-image reduced the meritocratic threat, making them more perceptive of racial inequity. Thus, if meritocratic threats are the

underlying reason White individuals have negative responses to diversity initiatives, then increasing the positive feedback in an organization might level out that effect.

Limitations

One limitation of the study is the external validity due to the sample. 85 % of participants were living in Sweden. Countries vary in the number of diversity initiatives implemented, which could lead to White individuals from different countries having systematically different experiences with diversity initiatives. Previous personal exposure to diversity initiatives in one's work-life could affect how an individual reacts to diversity initiatives, which could affect the study's generalizability to other geographic contexts.

Another limitation in connection to the sample is that all participants, independent of country of residence, were answering questions about the prevalence of discrimination at a company they were informed about in Sweden. Asking individuals about a company in their own country compared to another might generate different responses in participants.

The operationalization of key constructs is another potential limitation. Preference for the Merit Principle is a construct not as established and used in research as the other measures in the study. This raises concerns regarding the robustness and reliability of this construct as a tool for measuring what it is supposed to measure. In addition, the reliability of this scale had a Cronbach's alpha (α) at .67, indicating a low internal consistency. Further research regarding the scales is needed to establish the validity and reliability of Preference for the merit principle to ensure that it accurately reflects and measures individuals' attitudes toward merit-based decision-making within the contexts explored by the research.

The experimental condition created also has some limitations. There are some indications that the manipulation strength was low. Diversity policy only had a significant main effect on Belief in anti-Black discrimination when the interaction between that variable and PMP was included. Furthermore, neither Model 1 nor 2, with Support for lawsuit as a dependent variable, had significant effects on the diversity policy. This is not congruent with previous research (Gündemir et al., 2019; Kaiser et al., 2013;)

A reason for this could be that the manipulation was weak, where the artificial setting might have limited participants' emotional and cognitive engagement with the scenarios, potentially affecting the authenticity of their responses.

Only minor adjustments were made to the original text Gündemir et al. (2019) used to create different diversity policy conditions, where the results were more convincing than the current study. However, the sample in this study deviates from the previous one. Most participants in the current study did not have English as their first language, which could have

led to the priming being interpreted systematically differently or the manipulation not being strong enough due to participants not understanding the text entirely. In addition, the questions participants answered before reading the manipulation were also different from the original study. For instance, participants in this study answered questions about one's personality. This might have an unintended effect on self-image, which could have affected the Meritocratic threat. A manipulation check was used to detect at least the interpretation of the manipulation texts. However, due to errors in how the manipulation check questions were asked, the answers were not fitted to interpret the success of the manipulation.

Conclusion

This study takes a first step toward a new perspective on how diversity initiatives, particularly those emphasizing multiculturalism and meritocracy, influence White individuals' perceptions of racial discrimination. Through the framework of meritocratic threat and examining the interaction between meritocratic values and response to organizational diversity policies, significant insights have been discovered.

By creating two distinct experimental conditions, exposing participants to different diversity initiatives, this study gives additional support for findings made by Gündemir et al. (2017), that the type of diversity initiative (multiculturalism vs. multicultural meritocracy) can distinctly affect perceptions of racial discrimination among White individuals. Specifically, individuals exposed to a diversity policy emphasizing solely multiculturalism (vs. multicultural meritocracy) are less perceptive of discrimination against minorities.

Furthermore, this study also sheds new light on White individuals' responses to diversity initiatives by revealing that this effect is contingent on their meritocratic values. The pattern discovered shows that the stronger White individuals' meritocratic values are, the less likely they are to perceive discrimination. In addition, this pattern was only visible in the multiculturalism condition. This differential response aligns with the concept of meritocratic threat, suggesting that diversity initiatives can threaten White individuals' self-image as meritorious, which influences their perceptions of racial discrimination significantly.

These findings not only give a unique contribution to academic discourse but also offer practical insights for organizations striving to navigate the challenges of implementing effective diversity initiatives. By understanding and taking both minority and majority group members' perspectives and recognizing potential pitfalls, organizations can make more conscious decisions when implementing, creating an organizational environment that fosters diversity while simultaneously minimizing the risk of unintended backlash from majority group members.

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