Few words in contemporary American culture are bandied about as much as “diversity.” Racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity is extolled by many organizations as being one of their key sources of strength (Bunn & LaCour, 2009; Richard, 2000). Businesses and universities that endorse multiculturalism go out of their way to advertise the value they place on creating and maintaining diversity within their organizations (Kidder, Lankau, Chrobot-Mason, Mollica, & Friedman, 2004; Kochan et al., 2003; Linnehan & Konrad, 1999). But despite the plethora of attention that diversity receives, recent research suggests that diversity is a concept that is neither clearly defined nor well understood by the general public (Banks, 2009; Bell & Hartmann, 2007; Peterson, 1999; Unzueta & Binning, 2009).

This article contributes to the clarification of this concept by exploring which racial and ethnic groups people associate with the concept of diversity. Results indicate that regardless of perceivers’ racial in-group, minorities (Asians, Blacks, and Latinos) tend to be more associated with diversity than do Whites. In addition, members of minority racial groups were found to associate their respective in-groups more strongly with the concept of diversity relative to minority out-groups. Consequences for addressing issues of racial equity and representation through the pursuit of diversity are discussed.

Keywords: Diversity, Race, Ethnicity, Identity, Comfort, Trust.
as a group could be thought of as qualitatively different from traditional minority racial groups (Ho & Jackson, 2001; Wong, Lai, Nagasawa, & Lin, 1998; Petersen, 1966). However, a closer examination of this assumption suggests that even though Asian Americans have attained success in some notable contexts (e.g., higher education; Egan, 2007), their outcomes in other contexts (e.g., the corporate world; Dugger, 1992) are more similar to outcomes experienced by traditional minority groups (see also Narasaki, 1995; Borja, 2004; Fernandez, 1998; Wang & Wu, 1996). Of course, it could be that Asians, more so than African Americans and Latinos, are more aware of the similarities between Asians and traditional minority groups. If this is the case, then we may find that Asian American and Latino participants tend to associate African Americans and Latinos more so than Asians with diversity. However, in line with the idea that minorities may tend to associate their respective in-groups most strongly with the concept of diversity, Asian participants may associate diversity with their racial in-group more so than they associate diversity with traditional minority groups.

Method

Participants

Participants were 109 students (66 women; 43 men) from a private, West Coast university who participated in a mass testing session, lasting approximately 30 min, in exchange for $10. Mean age was 19.69 years ($SD = 2.61$). The self-identified racial make-up of the sample was as follows: 46 White participants, 34 Asian participants, 14 African American participants, 11 Latino/a participants, and 4 participants who indicated multiple racial categories. Because of a small sample size, this latter group of 4 participants was excluded from the analyses reported below.

Procedure and Measures

Participants received the study materials as part of a larger packet of unrelated surveys. Participants were asked, “When you think about the concept of ‘diversity,’ to what extent do you think about the following groups?” Below this question was a list of four target groups: Whites, Blacks, Asians, and Latinos. Participants indicated their response for each group on a 7-point scale (1 = Don’t think about at all, 7 = Think about a great deal).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant race</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>Blacks</th>
<th>Latinos</th>
<th>Asians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2.99, (1.41)</td>
<td>5.69, (1.15)</td>
<td>5.69, (1.16)</td>
<td>5.13, (1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>2.10, (1.35)</td>
<td>6.25, (1.10)</td>
<td>6.00, (1.11)</td>
<td>4.65, (0.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>3.38, (1.33)</td>
<td>5.68, (1.08)</td>
<td>6.03, (1.09)</td>
<td>4.77, (0.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>3.28, (1.41)</td>
<td>5.19, (1.15)</td>
<td>5.28, (1.16)</td>
<td>5.56, (1.01)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Across rows, means with different subscripts (a, b, c) are significantly different from one another ($p < .05$). Within columns, means with different subscripts (x, y, z) are significantly different from one another.

Results and Discussion

To test the hypothesis that minority racial groups, compared to Whites, are more strongly associated with diversity, we conducted a 2 (participant gender: female vs. male) × 4 (participant race: White vs. Black vs. Asian vs. Latino/a) mixed-model analysis of variance (ANOVA), with repeated measures on target group race. No main effect of target group race was found, $F(3, 291) = 124.25, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .56$. However, this main effect was qualified by a significant Participant Race × Target Group Race interaction, $F(9, 291) = 4.71, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .13$. The cell means for each target group, broken down by participant race, are displayed in Table 1.

Simple effects tests conducted on the marginal means revealed a large number of significant pairwise comparisons (see subscripts in Table 1). Given the large number of significant pairwise comparisons, we provide a summary of overall mean patterns here (Figure 1). In general, the mean patterns for the main effect of target group race held across participant groups. Namely, Whites were consistently less associated with diversity ($M = 2.94, SD = 1.43$) than Blacks ($M = 5.70, SD = 1.17$), $F(1, 291) = 192.99, p < .001, d = 1.65$; Latinos ($M = 5.75, SD = 1.04$), $F(1, 291) = 179.29, p < .001, d = 1.59$; and Asians ($M = 5.02, SD = 1.17$), $F(1, 291) = 113.15, p < .001, d = 1.30$.

Black and Latino targets were seen as equally associated with diversity by all participants, regardless of participant race, $F < 1.0, ns$. We found divergence among participants regarding Asian targets’ association to diversity. Specifically, White, Black, and Latino participants tended to perceive Asians (combined $M = 4.97, SD = 0.99$) as less associated with diversity than Blacks (combined $M = 5.79, SD = 1.12$), $F(1, 291) > 5.86, ps < .02$, $d > 0.29$, or Latinos (combined $M = 5.80, SD = 1.13$), $F(1, 291) > 14.28, ps < .001, d > 0.45$. Asian participants, on the other hand, tended to see no difference in the association to diversity between Asians ($M = 5.56, SD = 1.01$), and Blacks ($M = 5.19, SD = 1.15$), $F < 1.0, ns$, or between Asians ($M = 5.56, SD = 1.01$) and Latinos ($M = 5.28, SD = 1.16$), $F < 1.0, ns$.

Having demonstrated that White participants do not see the in-group as relevant to the concept of diversity, we next investigated whether minorities associate their in-groups most strongly with diversity. Data for Black, Asian, and Latino participants were coded into in-group and out-group perceptions. Thus, these participants had two scores, one for how relevant they perceived the...
in-group to the concept of diversity, and one representing the average of how relevant they perceived the two other minority out-groups to the concept of diversity. These two scores were treated as a within-subjects factor in a 2 (Perception type: in-group vs. out-groups) × 3 (Participant race: Black vs. Asian vs. Latino) ANOVA.

Consistent with the idea that racial minorities associate their in-groups most strongly with diversity, there was a significant main effect of perception type, which indicated that participants were more likely to think of the in-group ($M = 6.05, SD = 0.82$) than they were to think of minority out-groups with respect to diversity ($M = 5.36, SD = 1.02$) $F(1, 53) = 21.37, p < .001, d = 1.22$. The interaction term was not significant, $F = 1.69, p = .193$, indicating that the tendency to associate the in-group more so than minority out-groups with the concept of diversity was similar for all three minority groups.

**General Discussion**

Aside from some variation in how participants tended to view out-groups, these results suggest that each minority group tended to regard itself as being highly associated with the concept of diversity. In contrast, all participants, Whites included, generally did not associate Whites with the concept of diversity. Moreover, while the data suggest that, for Whites, diversity is a concept relevant to “them,” each minority group tended to see diversity as highly relevant to “us”—that is, their respective racial in-group.

An important implication of these findings pertains to when individuals are likely to consider an organization to be diverse. For Whites, “diversity” is most closely associated with the presence of Blacks and Latinos, followed by Asians. Thus, for Whites it may matter little which particular groups are needed to achieve diversity. Conversely, for minorities diversity may be best achieved when their particular in-group is represented within the organization. This may engender a number of significant consequences. For example, if Blacks and Latinos do not closely associate Asians with diversity, then Blacks and Latinos may feel uncomfortable in an organization composed primarily of Asians and Whites, even though Asians (and possibly Whites) may not see there being a diversity problem because of the representation Asians in the given environment. For Latinos and Blacks, the presence of Asians may contribute only weakly to the perceived diversity of the organization and thus the organization may be a less attractive and welcoming place for them to work.

Moreover, if diversity excludes Whites as a group, then it might behoove organizations to change the way racial equity is talked about so as to include Whites in the discussion. By changing the way organizations talk about issues of group fairness it might be possible to frame the lack of racial minorities in a given organization as underscoring the existence of White privilege in the given environment. For example, if an organization is using recruitment procedures that tend to yield an overwhelmingly White applicant pool, then instead of talking about a lack of diversity in the applicant pool, an organization may refer to an overrepresentation of Whites in the applicant pool. Such a frame may highlight the presence of potentially unfair advantages bestowed to Whites by the recruitment procedures. Previous research has found that when racial inequities are convincingly framed in terms of White advantage, Whites become motivated to support affirmative action policies as a way to mitigate such unearned advantage (Lowery, Chow, Knowles, & Unzueta, 2009; Lowery, Knowles, & Unzueta, 2007). Thus, to the extent that the concept of diversity can be used to highlight White privilege when and where it exists, then the pursuit of diversity may be an effective approach to minimize racial inequity in organizations.

**Conclusion**

This article contributes to the clarification of the concept of “diversity” by exploring which racial groups people associate with the concept of diversity. Results suggest that minorities are more associated with diversity than Whites. Moreover minority groups tend to associate their respective in-groups with diversity more so than they associate minority out-groups. It is our hope that by clarifying what diversity represents in the minds of individuals, diversity’s benefits may stand a better chance of being realized.

**References**


