1 *Introduction: Where the sweet spot is: Studying diversity in organizations*

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Since 2000, 19% and 14% of the work published in peer-reviewed psychology and sociology journals (respectively) dealt with race or gender or diversity.[1] Much of this work is based on a deep theoretical foundation and demonstrates innovative social science methods. It is rigorous, empirical, and exciting.

Having established that these topics were receiving significant research attention in the social sciences, we did a similar search in the *Academy of Management* journals. Since 2000, only 5% of organizational research tackled these topics. What does this small percentage imply about the other 95% of organizational scholarship? What assumptions rest in most organizational work about the composition of the workforce, particularly the racial composition?

In fact, most of organizational scholarship looks as if no people of color work in organizations, else we would see more attention paid to research topics such as race and racism, as well as those often entwined with race – social class, immigration status, and coping with discrimination. As of now, all of these topics remain neglected in the management literature. In this chapter, we introduce this volume about diversity at work with a focused look at the topic we see most lacking in organizational research: race. We believe this narrow focus is required, given the infrequent attention the topic is receiving in our top journals and the serious racial inequalities that exist in organizations. In the United States, the group most persistently affected by issues of race has been African-Americans, so much of our discussion will focus on this group. Based on the underrepresentation of race as a research topic, we fear that much of organizational scholarship unwittingly assumes a workplace characterized by whiteness, homogeneity, and equality.

[1] Based on a keyword search in CSA Illumina on-line search databases conducted in December 2006.

We believe these assumptions of whiteness, homogeneity, and equality are (a) inaccurate, (b) shortsighted, and/or (c) immoral. Consider these projections, based on census data trends. In 2000, 19% of the US resident population was non-white; in 2020, 22.4% is expected to be non-white; by 2050, 27.9% of the population is expected to be non-white. Additionally, by 2050, non-Hispanic whites are expected to make up 50.1% of the US populations, thus making the term "minority" short-lived and shortsighted (US Bureau of the Census, 2004).

Within this rapidly changing workforce, there is little evidence that equality is the norm. White workers have an unemployment rate of 4.1% versus 9.4% for black workers (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006a). Blacks earn an average of $0.79 on every dollar earned by white employees (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006a). Blacks make up only 11% of management and executive positions, but 16% of service occupations (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006b). Similar statistics could be cited for Hispanics versus non-Hispanics. Many scholars have analyzed these gaps, searched for explanatory variables, and controlled for potential confounds, but the gaps still persist in the data. In light of statistics like these, any assumption of equality in our research needs to be seriously examined, and justified, in order for the research to be truly meaningful.

With these inequalities in mind, it is awkward to recall that the United States was founded with a declaration that "all men are created equal," and furthermore, like other nations, the United States enacted laws to help ensure equal opportunity for people of all colors (188 years after its founding). And, of course, not dependent on such legalities is the idea that equal opportunity is a moral imperative. Rawls (1971), for example, argued that "fair equality of opportunity" is a principle of justice, indeed, he defined injustice in terms of "inequalities that are not to the benefit of all" (p. 62). If there is almost no dimension along which blacks and whites, or Hispanics and non-Hispanics, are on an equal footing, then assumptions of whiteness, homogeneity, and equality in our work beg for moral re-examination.

This extraordinary speed of change on an issue of such moral import requires a parallel response from our field, and yet, it seems like what we are producing is an extraordinarily slow response. The need for a speedy response becomes particularly urgent in light of what we know so far about the potentially negative effects of diversity in the workplace. Williams and O'Reilly's (1998) excellent and systematic review

of eighty studies on organizational demography and diversity notes that a number of field studies find that heterogeneity in race and gender lead to negative group process and performance outcomes, while laboratory studies tend to produce positive outcomes. Milliken and Martins (1996) review the literature and find that "diversity appears to be a double-edged sword, increasing the opportunity for creativity as well as the likelihood that group members will be dissatisfied and fail to identify with the group." Mannix and Neale (2005) explore the "diversity-process-performance linkage" in trying to understand the lack of a consistent main effect in the literature and conclude that surface-level differences (race/ethnicity, gender, age) are more likely to lead to negative group functioning than underlying differences (education, personality).

In other words, change is coming, and coming fast, and we are not ready. What should be a positive trend, consistent with the value of equality and the promise of performance benefits is, in fact, on track to be a social and economic debacle. The issue is no longer one of business necessity (or not), or of moral imperatives (or not). And, we assert, the debate is no longer whether (or not) diversity's benefits outweigh its costs (a rather unseemly debate we are happy to abandon). We are a diverse nation, by design, and the issue that faces us is how to draw the most from the benefits of diversity and how to use organizations as a tool for enacting justice, despite a national history of mixed results on both fronts.

Ten years ago, Brief and Hayes (1997) wrote that "workplace race relations are an enduring problem" and that "organizational scientists have not adequately fulfilled their responsibility for informing discussions of how this problem might be resolved." Recently, significant progress has been made in the social sciences which has contributed greatly to our understanding of the issues. We have tools and theories that help us distinguish intentional forms of racism and sexism from unintentional forms. We are aware of many of the practices (e.g., relying on current employees' social networks for recruiting) that maintain occupational segregation. And, organizational researchers, whose focus is on the workplace and the management of it, are uniquely positioned to contribute knowledge on this issue, using the work of social scientists as a base.

The organization is not only the breeding ground for many of these problems, but also a potential instrument of change. Pfeffer (1998)

observed that more than 90 percent of Americans will earn their livelihoods working for an organization. Almost thirty years ago, Baron and Bielby (1980)) encouraged us to "bring the firm back in," because "firms . . . link the 'macro' and 'micro' dimensions of work organization and inequality" (p. 738). Similarly, Henry Mintzberg (1975) expressed a parallel thought about managers: "No job is more vital to our society than that of the manager. It is the manager who determines whether our social institutions serve us well or whether they squander our talents and resources" (p. 61). Organizations and managers can either facilitate social inequality, or facilitate social equality. As researchers, we can help shape which outcome emerges.

Recently, Brief, Colella, and Smith (unpublished) drafted an appeal to social psychologists to "think organizationally" because the organization is "where the action is." Here, we launch a mirror image of that campaign, appealing to organizational researchers to think about diversity, particularly race, because that is where the *impact* is. In fact, we see diversity research as falling into a unique "sweet spot." Imagine a graph with one axis representing the degree to which research is theoretically motivated and rich, and the other axis representing the degree to which research is relevant and important for practitioners. Diversity research is, or at least should be, in the top right quadrant: theoretically deep and deeply relevant. It is a privileged place for an academic to situate his or her research. So, why, we wonder, isn't more being done by all of us?

We offer four possible explanations for our collective failure to produce meaningful amounts of diversity research, particularly regarding race. First, we acknowledge the extreme sensitivity of the topic; it is a *touchy* topic. Second, we describe the unique challenges of doing this research; it is *difficult*. Third, we consider the role of personal values in shaping our research agendas; to some, it is *less important*. And fourth, we argue strongly that the lack of underrepresented minorities in our own workplaces is not only morally appalling, but also sabotaging our capacity to view the organizational realities of today's workplace as concrete; it is *abstract*. All of these factors contribute to what we believe is an explainable, but inexcusable, dearth of organizational research on diversity.

Touchy: We all know that race is a charged topic. In the United States, very few people feel comfortable in public discussions about diversity, particularly in terms of race. The topic is difficult and complex. When

the conversations go sour, people's feelings get hurt. People are often misheard, misunderstood, and misread. There is usually a group that finds the conversation unnecessary while at the same time, another group that finds the conversation insufficient. And, somehow, everyone involved ends up feeling falsely accused of something.

For researchers, the touchiness of the topic is a challenge. Some findings are uncomfortable to present and unpopular to defend. Presenting and defending socially controversial research requires unusual oratory and social skills, coupled with deep reserves of personal resilience, beyond what is usually required for most research topics. So, just as most Americans play it safe, treating conversations about race like land mines, best buried and remote, where no one will get hurt, our field does the same.

Difficult: Other reasons may be related to the difficulty of this kind of research. The data can be difficult to obtain. Organizational researchers often are inclined towards field-based research, but field-based diversity research is particularly challenging. Organizations are extremely wary of any measurement related to race, gender, or any other bias-related topic, fearful of creating evidence for a lawsuit against them, as well as evidence that they were aware of cultural deficits that they did not, or did not know how to, address.

Even among those who study race for a living, the topic borders on the overwhelming. The literatures on stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination are numerous, deep, and complex, and no one is a master of it all. Differences in terminology and assumption challenge those who attempt to wade into related literatures. These challenges leave researchers struggling for a shared vocabulary to discuss an already sensitive topic.

Another factor might be that organizational researchers are more inclined towards prescription than description (Bazerman, 2003), yet diversity research is still very shallow in the prescriptive end of the pool. Regrettably, we know very little about how to learn from diversity in ways that enhance how organizations function. Consistent with simple-minded (and we believe wrong-headed) notions that race matching customers/clients and sales/service personnel will boost revenues, most advice to managers appears to rest more on untested, intuitively appealing, relatively low-effort strategies and tactics, rather than scientific evidence. It seems we have failed the managers we seek to service as well as those striving for their rightly organizational place.

Less important: This avoidance is unlike, for instance, our peers in social psychology and sociology, where the study of such topics as prejudice and inequality are more bread-and-butter issues. Moreover, it may be that organizational researchers suffer from a managerial bias (Brief *et al.*, 2000) that contributes to their relative silence on the subject of race. That is, we previously noted that managers shy away from confronting the possibility of racism within their organizations and it may be the case that organizational researchers have adopted this same aversion in the zeal to attend to what managers deem important.

We also wonder about the role of personal values as a determinant of one's occupation, and for those who choose academia, of one's research program. The Rokeach Value Survey (Rokeach, 1973) surveyed academics in five different fields (business, biological science, physical science, social science, arts), as well as non-academic adult Americans, and found that social scientists ranked "equality" as their third most important value (out of eighteen values), while business academics ranked equality as seventh. Similarly, adult Americans ranked equality as seventh.

Abstract: Our fourth explanation for the scarcity of diversity research requires an examination of our own workplace. We propose that we, as individuals working in organizations, are not experiencing the realities of the changing American workforce in our daily work lives. Business schools have an embarrassingly small number of African-American and Hispanic faculty. We found the statistics to be shocking. Out of approximately 22,000 faculty in AACSB-accredited business schools,[2] 834 are African-American, Hispanic, or Native American, or less than 4% (PhD Project, 2006). We did our own review of the faculty of *Business Week*'s top thirty business schools ("2006 Full-Time MBA Program Rankings," 2006); only 56, or 1.76%, of the tenure-track faculty are African-American.[3]

Furthermore, we are both embarrassed and puzzled to report that at the business schools in which we work (University of Utah and New York University), we have a total of (based on our own personal,

[2] The appropriate denominator is not obvious for this statistic as the AACSB only reports the number of faculty at schools that respond to their survey. The actual denominator is probably higher than 22,000, and thus, the 4% is likely overstated.

[3] We recognize the imperfection of making an external assessment of how an individual self-identifies his or her race, so present this data as estimated rather

unofficial counts, at the time of this writing) approximately two African-American and three Hispanic-American tenure-track colleagues (out of a combined total of approximately 260 tenure-track colleagues).

Some might rightfully respond that our faculties are not homogenous at all. We tend to have good representation from foreign-born academics, and also, growing representation from US-born Asian-Americans. Still, this response is not convincing. The positive stereotype – smart and hard-working – that accompany members of most of these groups is supportive of a career path in academia. African-Americans and Hispanic Americans do not enjoy the luxury of such positive stereotypes, but rather, must contend with the burden of implicit and explicit negative stereotypes (e.g., dumb, lazy). So, the issues of a diverse workforce composed of individuals whose stereotyped qualities are positive is not the same as when the diverse workforce is characterized by negatively stereotyped qualities.

We think that this current portrait of our own workplaces is critically important. Let us be very, very clear about our point here. We are *not* arguing that we need more black and Hispanic business school colleagues so that they will go study diversity; quite the contrary, in fact. It is not our goal to add to the challenges that underrepresented group members already face, nor is studying diversity any more the responsibility of minority academics than it is of anyone else. Rather, we believe that part of our unusually slow pace at recognizing a critical trend in the workforce stems in part from a lack of personal experience with the issue. Bring diversity into the scholarly workplace, and suddenly, the benefits and challenges will emerge, in our own lives, and subsequently, in our own research programs. In the absence of the firsthand experience of a diverse workplace, the topic remains an abstraction.

This "firsthand experience effect" is unlikely to lead to a wholesale change in research programs, but it is likely to provoke empirically-testable questions that might otherwise not occur to the researcher. As examples, an innovation researcher might consider how in-group bias contributes or detracts from idea generation, or a leadership researcher might examine how ambiguous leadership signals about diversity

than precise. Many thanks to Modupe Akinola and Amanda Lee Willis for their assistance in conducting this quick study.

contribute to unchanging workforce demographics. Organizational researchers would, of course, maintain their primary research focus, but with a mind open to the range of issues, including issues related to diversity, that intersect with that focus. They would also check and test the underlying assumptions of whiteness or homogeneity in the workforce. The sweet spot of theoretical richness and practical relevance would become accessible to a wide range of organizational researchers.

Akinola and Thomas (2006) note the importance of senior leadership in ensuring that diversity remains on the "radar screen" of corporations. While the same claim might be made for academic institutions, particularly when it comes to hiring, there is one important difference when it comes to the setting of research agendas. The agenda of managers in corporations is typically set from above. However, the research agenda of academics in universities is typically set from within; autonomy rules. So, if we are to see diversity on the research radar screen, it will likely emerge "bottom-up," rather than "top-down," thus increasing the importance of the firsthand experience effect we noted earlier.

We are optimistic that the burden of our homogenous workplaces can be relieved, and that the firsthand experience effect can be unleashed, thus freeing our research programs to become richer and more relevant. While the number of minority business school faculty today is 834, amazingly, eleven years ago, this number was only 294 (personal correspondence with Tara Perino, December 2006). In that year, an organization called the PhD Project (www.phdproject.org) was created with the far-sighted and innovative purpose of increasing the number of minorities in corporate America ... by increasing the number of minority MBA students ... by increasing the number of minority faculty at business schools ... by increasing the number of minority doctoral students in business school PhD programs. Through the facilitation of social networks and connectedness, the dissemination of accurate information about academic careers, and the recruiting of potential doctoral students, the PhD Project has contributed to a growing pipeline of talent in a remarkably short amount of time. Furthermore, the PhD Project reports that their students have a lower doctoral program dropout rate (7%) than the national norm (35%), and are more likely to take academic positions (98%) than the national norm (60–70%) (personal correspondence with Tara Perino, December 2006). We hear a fairly clear message in this story: the talent

is there and can be cultivated, so it is time for business schools to seize the opportunity to do so.

Similarly, we are optimistic that diversity will not be an underrepresented research topic for long. We are behind, but we can recover, and in doing so, have meaningful impact on a critical issue in society and organizations today. For all of these reasons, this book is about diversity at work. Generally, this volume focuses on the dimensions of diversity that are highly salient and highly stable – race and gender. While diversity can exist along many dimensions – "any attribute that another person may use to detect individual differences" (Williams and O'Reilly, 1998) – our focus here is deliberately narrow because these are the dimensions: (1) where the benefits seem most difficult to attain, (2) undergoing rapid change in the workforce, (3) which put bedrock American values ("American Dream") most in conflict with the reality, (4) most confounded by historical, societal, and local events, all occurring outside of organizational boundaries.

Readers will find a fascinating assortment of research from psychologists, sociologists, and organizational scholars. May you feel as inspired as we are by the excellent work in this volume. These scholars are converging on that sweet spot of research – theoretically deep and deeply relevant – and their passion shows in the rigor of their thinking and the innovation of their models. We hope you will feel encouraged to join this privileged group of scholars.

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