RACIAL DISSIMILARITY AFFECTS PEOPLE OF COLOR'S PARTICIPATION IN GROUPS

Tamara Calzado Real (Ariel Blair, Elizabeth Tenney)
Department of Management

Introduction

In order for people of color to contribute to groups in meaningful and innovative ways, having the confidence to express new ideas is crucial. The purpose of this study is to understand how racial dissimilarity affects an individual's intentions to express themselves, voice, in a group. Previous dissimilarity literature shows that individuals derive self-esteem from socially identifying with groups and, in return, are more motivated to maximize their potential (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Individuals perceive demographically similar others as having similar values to their own which leads them to trust, like, and have more positive behavior towards demographically similar individuals than demographically dissimilar individuals (Chattopadhyay, 1999). Displaying more positive behavior to individuals who are similar to you creates an "us" and "them" dynamic among groups which suggests that people of color, who are racially underrepresented in groups, might feel that they lack a value congruence with the group as a whole.

In environments with little racial diversity, people of color are often underrepresented in groups. In groups where a person's social category is underrepresented, they become more aware of that social identity and are more likely to attach psychological meanings to the social identity that differentiates them (Riordan, 2000). In turn, an increased awareness of an underrepresented social identity can shape a person's attitudes and beliefs in a group (Cunningham, Choi, & Sagas, 2008). Other findings in group dissimilarity research are that dissimilarity is related to low affective reactions to the group (Cunningham, 2006), low satisfaction with the group, and an increased likelihood of leaving that group (O'Reilly, Caldwell, & Barnett, 1989). If underrepresented members of groups are likely to have fewer positive experiences in groups than members in the majority in the group, it is crucial to see how racial dissimilarity directly affects an individual's confidence to contribute to the group by verbally expressing themselves.

The study employs the following constructs:
- Employee voice refers to the "discretionary verbal communication of ideas or opinions about work-related issues with intent to improve unit-functioning" (Morrison, 2011).
- Racial dissimilarity refers to differences in racial background of group members (Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992).
- Racial personal identity measures how critical racial identity is to an individual's self-concept (Cunningham et. al, 2008; Randel & Jaussi, 2003).

Hypotheses Include

1. For people of color when in a group that's primarily White, voice behavior will be negatively related to racial personal identity.
2. When people of color are the majority in a group, they will be willing to voice more than when people of color are minority.
3. Willingness to voice will not be significantly different when White people are majority or minority.
4. The difference in willingness to voice for people of color who are in groups racially similar or different to themselves will be greater than the difference in willingness to voice for people who are white who are in groups racially similar or different to themselves.

Methods

- Experiment: Participants imagine being part of an online group chat. The experiment places them in a group that is racially similar or dissimilar to themselves.
- Independent Variables: Racial personal identity and perceived racial dissimilarity
- Key Dependent Variable: Employee Voice
- Statistical Models: Independent-samples t-test

Results

One pilot study was conducted which found that people of color assigned to racially similar groups were more willing to voice in those groups than in groups with a majority of people of European descent. In this pilot study, even with an ally in the group, people of color reduced their willingness to voice when in a group of people who were racially dissimilar. The full study is currently in the data collection phase.

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