BACKLASH TOWARD DIVERSITY INITIATIVES: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF DIVERSITY PROGRAM JUSTIFICATION, PERSONAL AND GROUP OUTCOMES

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This study used a scenario design to examine whether there are different reactions among whites based on how a diversity program is justified by an organization. A reactive justification (affirmative action) was proposed to result in greater backlash than a competitive advantage justification (diversity management). In addition, this study examined the effects of personal and group outcomes on backlash and explored two individual difference variables, gender and orientation toward other ethnic groups, as potential moderators of the proposed relationships. Backlash was operationalized in four ways: an affect-based measure (negative emotions), two cognitive-based measures (attitude toward the diversity program, perceptions of unfairness of promotion procedures), and a behavioral-intentions-based measure (organizational commitment). Results indicated that the diversity management justification was associated with more favorable support of the diversity initiative, and that unfavorable personal and group outcomes adversely affected backlash reactions. There was no empirical support for the influence of the moderator variables on the proposed relationships, however, a main

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effect for gender was found. Implications of the study's findings and fu-ture research directions are discussed.

Keywords: Justice, Affirmative, Action, Diversity

Many organizations have recognized the value of a diverse workforce and the need for managing diversity (Fernandez, 1999). Recognizing the difficulties that minorities often face in the corporate world and the stereotypes and prejudices that still exist, organizations are implementing formally sanctioned diversity programs to help ensure more opportunity for non-traditional employees (Brief & Buttram, 1997; Cox, 1993). Managing diversity has been "portrayed as a product of enlight-ened corporate self-interest" (Yakura, 1996) and has become popular throughout corporate America (Gottfredson, 1992). The touted benefits of diversity manage-ment may include attracting and retaining the best available talent, enhanced mar-keting efforts, higher creativity and innovation, better problem solving, and more organizational flexibility (Cox & Blake, 1991).

Despite progress, the issue of diversity in organizational settings continues to be sensitive and controversial. There is evidence of backlash or resistance against affirmative action policies and other diversity initiatives on the part of whites, and especially white males (Kravitz & Klineberg, 2000; Mobley & Payne, 1992; Solo-mon, 1991). However, not all whites react negatively to diversity programs in all situations, nor do they all oppose the underlying principles behind valuing diversity in the workplace.

While there is a large body of research examining attitudes toward affirmative action (see Kravitz et al., 1997, for a review), there has been little empirical research exploring attitudes toward diversity management practices that companies pursue for competitive advantage. Linnehan and Konrad (1999) noted that con-trasting diversity management practices and affirmative action is a "common theme in the literature," but such contrasts have been largely descriptive rather than empirical. Richard and Kirby (1998) suggested that comparisons of diversity pro-grams (implemented for business reasons) versus affirmative action programs (implemented to avoid government sanctions and/or lawsuits) are an important area for research and theoretical development. The purpose of our study was to address this deficiency in the literature by examining whether the reason given for imple-menting a diversity program affected levels of backlash among whites.

Using a scenario study design, we examined differences between respondents' reactions to the justification for a diversity initiative for attracting and retaining minority employees. We argue that backlash may be more or less prevalent depending on how diversity efforts are justified or framed by the organization. We examine two ways of justifying diversity efforts, either for affirmative action goals or for competitive advantage goals. We first discuss the differences between these two justifications, then hypothesize that backlash may be more evident when diver-sity efforts are framed from the affirmative action perspective rather than from the competitive advantage perspective. We also propose that respondent's perceptions of personal and group outcomes may influence backlash reactions. Finally, we explore whether two individual characteristics, gender and orientation toward other ethnic groups, mitigate the effects of backlash and act as moderators of the rela-

tionships between diversity program justification, outcomes, and backlash reactions. In the first section, we discuss the concept of backlash and previous research examining backlash in the workplace. We then proceed to discuss the importance of justifications and outcomes, discuss our hypotheses, and then present our research design and results.

Backlash Towards Diversity Initiatives in the Workplace

Backlash is a negative response to a decision or policy that occurs when a person thinks that others have received undeserved benefits (Crosby & Gonzalez-Intal, 1984). In the context of diversity, we wish to examine backlash as negative reactions experienced by traditionally higher-status majority group members when they believe that traditionally lower-status minority group members have received preferential treatment. While backlash can occur in many situations for a variety of reasons, examining the responses of white majority members to perceived preferential treatment of minority members is in keeping with previous research, which focuses on negative reactions to diversity initiatives (e.g., McLean Parks & Banas, 1996). Backlash, as a negative reaction to change, can manifest itself both attitudinally as well as behaviorally (McLean Parks & Banas, 1996).

Backlash toward diversity initiatives thus differs from more general reactions to perceived unfair actions because of the focus on identity-group membership. Whites have traditionally held high status positions in the United States (Ridgeway, 1991), and diversity programs in the workplace may threaten group identity for whites as the status quo is challenged (Sidanius, Devereux, & Pratto, 2001). White backlash toward diversity efforts is problematic, because it can produce negative reactions to implementing organizational initiatives (Bond & Pyle, 1998; Society for Human Resource Management, 1993; Wheeler, 1994). Employee acceptance and support are important precursors to the success of any human resource initiative, including diversity. White males, who still hold the majority of powerful positions in organizations, have expressed concern about their future opportunities because of diversity programs that give preference to other groups (Galen & Palmer, 1994; Heilman, McCullough, & Gilbert, 1996; Lynch, 1989, 1997; Mobley & Payne, 1992). McLean Parks and Banas (1996) argued that "those in control may view themselves as a cohesive in-group by virtue of their positions, and therefore may tend to view actions by organizational out-groups and external parties as possible threats to their control and organizational well-being" (p. 5). According to a *Newsweek* article entitled "White Male Paranoia," over half of white males surveyed believed that they were unfairly losing advantages in the workplace (Gates & Cose, 1993). Because it is inevitable that powerful groups will react negatively to changes in the power distribution that threaten their advantageous position (Smith, 1982), white backlash is not surprising.

There is a significant amount of research indicating that whites oppose preferential treatment for minorities in the workplace, based on two assumptions: first, that preferential treatment leads to the hiring of unqualified minorities; and second, that workplace discrimination is no longer a problem in the United States (Kravitz & Klineberg, 2000). Research on attitudes towards affirmative action has shown

that negative reactions are not universal among whites, however. In the next section, we will discuss the importance of diversity program justification for initiatives that benefit minorities in the workplace.

Diversity Program Justification

Justifications, also called social accounts, consist of explanations given for an action taken in order to manage reactions from the individuals affected by the actions (Scott & Lyman, 1968). Research has shown that justifications help mitigate negative reactions to unfavorable outcomes and decrease the negative repercussions that often follow bad news in the workplace (e.g., Bies, 1987; Bies & Moag, 1986; Brockner, 1988; Shapiro, 1991). As cognitive tools, social accounts use impression management to help individuals make sense of what is happening to them (Cobb, Stephens, & Watson, 2001; Weick, 1995).

Affirmative action, based on federal legislation, is meant to increase employment opportunities for qualified women and minorities when they are underrepresented in the workplace. The underlying rationale for affirmative action is to remedy historical discrimination of disadvantaged groups. While affirmative action programs are still in place in many organizations, the entire notion of affirmative action has come under considerable social and political attack (Little, Murry, & Wimbush, 1998). In the late 1980's during President Reagan's second term in office, companies began a shift toward diversity management practices in response to the stigma associated with affirmative action (Bond & Pyle, 1998).

In contrast with affirmative action, which is essentially a "remedial program for implementing equal employment opportunity" (Yakura, 1996), diversity management focuses on business need and the view that there is value in diversity (Gilbert, Stead, & Ivancevich, 1999). The goal of diversity management is corporate efficiency and profitability (Bond & Pyle, 1998). Corporations promote diversity management as a strategic imperative that will improve workforce productivity and organizational effectiveness (Jackson & Alvarez, 1992).

In the current study, we examine reactions to the two different justifications (affirmative action versus diversity management) for a recruitment and retention program for minorities. White backlash toward diversity efforts may be largely confined to affirmative action programs. Whites may react more negatively to affirmative action programs because they, individually or as a group, stand to "lose"; whereas reactions to diversity management may be less negative or even positive because the company as a whole stands to "gain." Individuals tend to be more risk averse in the face of a loss, while being more risk-tolerant when presented with an opportunity for a gain (Kahneman & Tversky, 1988).

Research has documented that whites tend to have less favorable attitudes overall toward affirmative action than minorities (for a review, see Kravitz et al., 1997). Opposition to affirmative action on the part of whites is especially strong when they believe that affirmative action involves quotas and preferential treatment, i.e., "identity-conscious" activities (Konrad & Linnehan, 1995) leading to reverse discrimination. In contrast, diversity management efforts should be more palatable and accepted than affirmative action because it for the good of the company rather than simply to avoid lawsuits (Linnehan & Konrad, 1999). Business

necessity is viewed as a more legitimate justification than government mandates in the United States; this argument is in keeping with the U.S. value of individual freedom, and fits the perception of an employer in control rather than in the weaker position of being told what to do by the government. This assumption, however, has been largely untested in the empirical literature. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis* 1: Backlash reactions of white respondents toward a workplace initiative to recruit and retain minorities will be stronger if management offers a reactive justification (affirmative action) than if management offers a competitive business justification (diversity management).

Personal and Group Outcomes and Backlash Reactions

Research has demonstrated that concerns for justice and fairness influence people's attitudes in the workplace (Lind & Tyler, 1988). Whites tend to report more opposition to affirmative action programs when they perceive that procedures associated with the programs are unfair (e.g., Bobocel, Son Hing, Davey, Stanley, & Zanna, 1998; Kravitz, 1995), with the implication that unfair procedures will lead to unfair outcomes for whites. Less attention has been given to the influence of actual outcomes on reactions. In a series of studies, Bobocel and colleagues examined perceptions of affirmative action with regard to violating the merit principle, which they equate with unfair distributive justice (e.g., Bobocel et al., 1998). They found that non-prejudiced individuals often opposed affirmative action, because it violated the distributive justice norm of equal allocations.

Although not specifically related to backlash, there is extensive research supporting the relationship between perceptions of fairness and desired personal outcomes such as jobs and promotions (see for example, Cropanzano, 1993). In particular, distributive aspects of fairness must take into account whether or not a valued outcome for the perceiver is affected by the decision (Tornblom & Vermunt, 1999). We suggest that backlash reactions will be influenced by how white respondents are personally affected by an outcome (i.e., promotion received or not received).

> *Hypothesis* 2: Backlash reactions of white respondents toward a workplace initiative to recruit and maintain minorities will be stronger if the personal outcome is unfavorable.

Backlash is also likely to be influenced by outcomes at the group level. In addition to one's own personal outcomes, people notice, identify with, and react to the experiences of members of their identity group (Levine & Moreland, 1987; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In particular, employees pay attention to how resources are allocated among identity groups in their organization and whether these allocations are fair.

The group value model of justice suggests that an individual's positive identity is derived in part from how members of their group are treated (Lind & Tyler, 1988). Fair treatment satisfies a basic psychological need by signifying that the group enjoys a high quality relationship with and is valued by management (Cro-

panzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001). Often, people erect psychological boundaries of fairness, thus limiting their scope of justice to their own identity group (Opotow, 1996). Any perceived threat to the status of one's identity group may be viewed as a potential loss of one's individual status and identity (Tyler, 1989).

Therefore, whether or not whites are personally disadvantaged by the promotion outcomes, they may nonetheless be sensitive to the outcomes of their identity group as a whole in comparison with other identity groups. High-status groups are most likely to exhibit out-group biases i.e., backlash, towards preferential treatment, as they are most likely to perceive it as a threat to group-based esteem (James, 1993). Accordingly, we posit the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3:   Backlash reactions of white respondents toward a workplace initiative to recruit and maintain minorities will be stronger when the group outcome is unfavorable.

While we expect that, in general, white respondents will react more negatively to an unfavorable personal outcome and unfavorable group outcome as hypothesized above, we believe that the extent of backlash will be greater for the affirmative action justification than the diversity management justification. Since the business case for diversity is based on the notion that racial diversity provides opportunities for an organization to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (Richard, 2000), individuals presented with a diversity management justification may be more likely to perceive the diversity initiative as an important strategic policy and, therefore, be more tolerant of unfavorable personal and group-identity outcomes. We suggest the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4a: Backlash reactions of white respondents to an unfavorable personal outcome will be stronger for the affirmative action justification than the diversity management justification.

Hypothesis 4b: Backlash reactions of white respondents to an unfavorable group outcome will be stronger for the affirmative action justification than the diversity management justification.

Individual Characteristics as Moderators

Orientation toward Other Ethnic Groups. According to Phinney (1996), achieving a psychologically healthy ethnic identity involves a developmental process in which individuals develop a positive sense of their own identity through exploration and increased awareness, together with greater understanding and acceptance of other identity groups. This identity development process often involves greater awareness of differences between one's identity group and other groups, and how other groups relate to one's own identity group. This higher level of awareness and understanding may occur through positive interactions with members of other ethnic groups. The "contact hypothesis" suggests that positive inter-group interaction *should* enhance personalization and that common social categorization processes that occur among members of different social groups decrease over time as members attend more to individuating information (Allport, 1954; Brewer & Brown, 1998). The more individuals interact in a positive way

with members of other identity groups, stereotypes become less prevalent, feelings of fear and uncertainty may be reduced, and positive feelings towards others increase (Linnehan & Konrad, 1999). In addition, white employees with increased contact with minorities may be more likely to develop an awareness of the issues that minorities face in the workplace. This increased awareness may also sensitize white employees to the salience of their own membership in a majority status group and the privileges associated with that status. Swim and Miller (1999) found that individuals who believed that whites were privileged in U.S. society were more likely to hold positive attitudes towards affirmative action.

We suggest that a positive orientation toward people of other ethnic groups may diminish whites' negative reactions toward initiatives for minorities and unfavorable outcomes due to their greater understanding of the challenges faced by minority groups for upward mobility in organizations. We propose that white respondents' orientation toward other ethnic groups may moderate the relationship between diversity program justification, personal and group outcomes, and backlash reactions.

Hypothesis 5:   Backlash reactions of white respondents to a workplace initiative to recruit and maintain minorities will be moderated by the respondent's orientation towards other ethnic groups. Specifically, backlash will be lower among whites receiving either a reactive program justification or an unfavorable outcome, who have a positive orientation towards other ethnic groups than those who have a negative orientation towards other ethnic groups.

Gender. Previous research has found gender differences in attitudes towards affirmative action as well as gender differences in perceptions of organizational justice (e.g., Graves & Powell, 1994; Kravitz & Platania, 1993; Lee & Farh, 1999; Little et al., 1998; Parker, Baltes & Christiansen, 1997; Tata, 2000). Women are considered to be other-oriented and more benevolent at work than men (Major, Bylsma, & Cozzarelli, 1989). In addition, research has shown that females are more likely to be concerned with procedural justice, while males are more focused on distributive justice (Tata & Bowes-Sperry, 1996; Sweeney & McFarlin, 1997). Social identity theory suggests that individuals tend to classify themselves in terms of their membership in salient identity groups (Tajfel, 1982). Classifications have hierarchical levels and are prompted by the social context. From a historical perspective, women have traditionally experienced membership in the minority or low-status group within organizations and have been the beneficiaries of affirmative action programs. Women may be likely to classify themselves as minority group members and therefore feel a sense of solidarity with members of other minority groups. Hence, we suggest that gender may moderate the relationship between program justification, personal and group outcomes, and backlash reactions.

Hypothesis 6:   Backlash reactions of white respondents to a workplace initiative to recruit and maintain minorities will be moderated by the respondent's gender. Specifically, when whites receive

either a reactive justification or an unfavorable outcome, backlash will be lower among females in comparison with males.

Method

Sample

Pre-test Samples. The survey for this study was refined based on the results of three pre-tests. The purpose of the pre-tests was to examine whether the manipulations were accurately perceived by the participants as well as to shorten the survey by removing scales that did not show significant effects on the dependent variables. The format of the survey for the pre-tests was the same as the one described below for the full study. The three pre-tests included, in order, a sample of 89 executives attending executive training programs at four universities across the United States, 146 psychology undergraduates at a fifth university, and an additional 122 graduate students from two of the original four universities. A complete list of items used in the pre-tests is available from the authors.

Current Study Sample. Our sample consisted of white male and female working professionals and managers who were recruited from the evening and executive MBA programs of four business schools located within the eastern United States. While both minorities and whites participated in the study, we are reporting only the data from participants who identified their race as white ($N = 166$), as our study focuses on backlash among white respondents. Participants were on average about 31 years old, and had an average of nine years of work experience. Seventy-one percent were male and 78% had supervisory responsibilities at the time they completed the survey.

Study Design

We used a scenario study to test our hypotheses. Nemetz and Christensen (1996) suggested the use of scenarios for assessing people's reactions to different viewpoints toward diversity. Scenarios allow difficult manipulations to be more easily operationalized, provide control over potentially unmanageable variables, and allow for summarizing events that might otherwise take weeks to occur, such as the time between the implementation of a diversity initiative and the announcement of promotions (McCollaugh, Berry, & Yadav, 2000).

Participants, who each read one scenario, were asked to imagine they were a mid-level manager at a fictitious company. Participants responded to a series of questions designed to assess their reactions to the situation described in the scenario. The scenarios were based on a 2 x 2 x 2 experimental design in which we asked participants to respond to one of eight fictitious scenarios that manipulated three conditions: (1) the company has an affirmative action or diversity management program in place (referred to hereafter as "*diversity program justification*"), (2) the subject is personally (dis)advantaged by promotion decisions (referred to hereafter as "*personal outcome*"), and (3) promotion decisions appear to be more favorable to minorities as a group or not (referred to hereafter as "*group outcome*"). The eight cells had on average 21 respondents in each.

In the diversity management condition of our study, management was described as having a business priority to hire good people and to retain employees who reflect the diversity of their customer base (see Appendix A for complete scenario). In the affirmative action condition, management at the company was described as being concerned with meeting affirmative action goals to adhere to EEOC guidelines for minority representation, and the company had an affirmative action program to actively seek, hire, and promote minorities.

The second manipulation concerned personal outcome. The participant (again, who was asked to assume the role of a mid-level manager in the company), was told that promotion decisions were recently made. We manipulated whether or not the participant read that s/he received (favorable condition) or did not receive (unfavorable condition) a promotion.

Finally, we manipulated the type of group outcome in the scenario. The promotions resulted in either a proportionate (favorable condition) or disproportionately high number (unfavorable condition) of minorities promoted. Minorities represented 10% of the company's workforce. The favorable condition indicated that 10% of the promotions went to minorities, while the unfavorable condition indicated that 40% of the promotions went to minorities.

Measures

Manipulation Checks. To evaluate the effectiveness of the manipulations, we included three scales, one for each manipulation. First, for the diversity program justification manipulation, we included four items ($\alpha = .75$); for example, "Employees at Nixell are hired under an affirmative action program," and "Nixell recently implemented a diversity initiative to hire and promote minorities (R)." A high score on this scale supported the affirmative action manipulation whereas a low score supported the diversity management manipulation. Second, for the personal outcome manipulation, we included two items ($\alpha = .84$); for example, "At Nixell, I was one of 10 managers who got promoted." A high score supported the favorable condition, in which the subject was promoted. Finally, we included three items ($\alpha = .84$) to check the group outcome manipulation, e.g., "It appears that minorities were promoted disproportionately more than whites." A high score supported the unfavorable condition, in which a disproportionately high number of minorities were promoted. The t-test results are shown in Table 1. All t-test results were significant, which provided support that the manipulations of the independent variables among the scenarios were correctly perceived by the respondents.

Backlash Reactions. Backlash can be viewed as an affective response, a cognitive response, and/or a behavioral intentions response (McLean Parks & Banas, 1996). Due to the lack of existing measures in the literature, we modified two scales as well as designed two new scales to assess each of these three responses. With the exception of the emotion items, the remaining items on the survey were measured on a scale from 1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree." In an exploratory principal-axis factor analysis with varimax rotation, all the items used in this study loaded on their expected factors with no cross-loadings above .40. A complete list of the items used in this study plus their factor loadings can be found in Appendix B.

First, we measured the participants' emotional reactions to the scenario. These items were drawn from the Watson, Clark and Tellegen (1988) article describing the development of their affect scale. The list of emotions included the following: "distressed," "upset," "hostile," and "irritable." Unlike the other backlash indicators in the study, emotion was measured as a continuous variable, using the thermometer scale technique. Previous research suggests that thermometer scales provide more detailed options for responses, which creates a variable that is more continuous than traditional Likert-type scales (Russell & Bobko, 1992). Each item anchored the left end of a 5–inch line. The top of the scale listed responses from "Not at all" to "Extremely" spaced evenly apart. The variable was coded between 0 and 5, with gradations measured in 1/8 inch increments. A ruler was used to measure the distance from the left edge to the slash mark. We created one variable by averaging the items (α = .90). A high score for emotions indicated a strong negative emotional reaction, or high backlash.

Table 1
T-tests on Manipulation Check Items

	Justification t	Group Outcome t	Personal Outcome t
Nixell uses an affirmative action program.	7.77**		
Employees at Nixell are hired under an affirmative action program.	3.54**		
Nixell recently implemented a diversity initiative to hire and promote minorities.	–9.82**		
At Nixell, increasing diversity is seen as important for the bottom line.	–6.56**		
A significant number of promotions went to minorities.		–14.87**	
It appears that minorities were promoted disproportionately more than whites.		–14.3**	
Almost all of the promotions went to white managers.		17.32**	
At Nixell, I was one of 10 managers who got promoted.			16.45**
I was not one of 10 managers who got promoted.			–32.46**

Note: df=166.

**p < .01.

Another way of viewing backlash is in terms of cognitive attitudinal responses about the specific program (i.e., affirmative action or diversity management) and perceptions of unfairness of the promotion procedures. Attitude toward the program was measured by the average score of three items created for this study (α = .80). Lower scores represented less favorable attitudes toward the type of program indicating greater backlash. Fairness perceptions of the promotion procedures are considered to be more cognitive in nature than affective emotions, based on rational calculations of costs and benefits. Four items were created for this study. We averaged the items into one scale (α = .87). Items were recoded such that a high value indicated a perception of unfairness of promotion procedures or high backlash.

Finally, backlash may be manifested in organizationally-related attitudes, specifically *organizational commitment*. We included three organizational commitment items from O'Reilly & Chatman (1986). The average of the three items was used as one scale (α = .82). A high score on this scale indicates high commitment or low backlash.

Independent Variables. Gender was measured as a categorical variable, with males coded as 0, and females coded as 1. To assess orientation toward other ethnic groups, we used four items that comprise the Other Group Orientation subscale from Phinney's (1992) Multi-group Ethnic Identity Measure. These items were averaged to form one scale (α = .77).

Results

Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations among the study variables are shown in Table 2. To test the hypotheses, we ran separate hierarchical multiple OLS regressions for each backlash indicator (emotional reactions, attitude toward program, perceptions of unfairness of the promotion procedures, and organizational commitment). The three main manipulations (diversity program justification, personal outcome, and group outcome) were entered in the first step of the analyses. In the second step, the two moderator variables, orientation toward other ethnic groups and gender, were entered. The third step added all two-way interactions to test the moderator hypotheses. Although we did not hypothesize three-way interactions, we added these in a fourth step to examine whether more complicated effects were present. The regression results are shown in Table 3. Results from the fourth step are not shown, as none of the three-way interactions were significant. For each step, the change in R-square and F statistic were examined for significance.

For hypothesis 1, we predicted that there would be a main effect for the diversity program justification of a workplace recruitment and retention initiative for minorities (affirmative action versus diversity management) on perceptions of backlash. Specifically, subjects presented with an affirmative action scenario should report higher backlash than subjects presented with a diversity management scenario. This hypothesis was supported for only one of the backlash indicators (see Table 3). Specifically, respondents who received the scenario with the diversity program justification of diversity management reported significantly more positive attitudes toward the program, compared to respondents who received

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. (Manipulation) Program justification	.48	.50								
2. (Manipulation) Personal outcome favorability	.49	.50	.01							
3. (Manipulation) Group outcome favorability	.49	.50	-.02	.01						
4. (DV) Negative emotion	1.53	1.26	.04	.67**	.21**					
5. (DV) Attitude toward program	3.00	1.02	.28**	-.15*	-.01	-.32**				
6. (DV) Perceived unfairness	3.25	.76	-.05	.24**	.32**	.44**	-.48**			
7. (DV) Organizational commitment	3.05	.85	-.03	-.44**	-.08	-.52**	.43**	-.55**		
8. (IV) Other group orientation (centered)	.00	.69	.03	-.10	.04	-.10	.11	.08	.07	
9. (IV) Gender	.29	.45	-.06	-.01	.03	-.06	.21**	-.08	.14	.18*

*p < .05. **p < .01.

the affirmative action scenario. There was no support for the relationship between diversity program justification and emotional reactions, perceptions of unfairness of the promotion procedures, and organizational commitment.

Table 3
Hierarchical Regression Results

Variables	Negative Emotions	Attitude toward Program	Perceptions of Unfairness	Organizational Commitment
Step 1	β	β	β	β
Program justification[2]	.04	.28**	.02	−.02
Personal outcome Favorability (POF)[3]	.66**	−.15*	.20**	−.44**
Group outcome Favorability (GOF)[3]	.20**	−.01	.28**	−.07
R^2	.48**	.10**	.12**	.20**
F	51.12**	6.23**	7.68**	14.02**
Step 2				
Other group orientation(OGO)	−.03	.05	.12	.01
Gender[4]	−.06	.22**	−.08	.14*
ΔR^2	.01	.05*	.02	.02
ΔF	.72	5.23*	1.76	2.05
Step 3				
Program x OGO	−.15	.04	.02	.07
POF x OGO	−.07	.00	−.02	.14
GOF x OGO	−.01	−.02	−.12	.01
Program x Gender	−.01	−.06	.08	−.05
POF x Gender	−.02	.09	.13	.18
GOF x Gender	−.02	−.03	.08	−.03
Program x POF	.19	−.29*	.16	−.09
Program x GOF	−.05	−.09	.13	−.10
POF x GOF	−.02	−.01	.05	.07
ΔR^2	.03	.04	.03	.04
ΔF	1.02	.85	.70	.89

Note: $N = 166$, standardized betas reported; [2]Justification (0 = aff. action, 1 = div. mgmt); [3]Group & Personal (0 = pos. outcome, 1 = neg. outcome); [4]Gender (0 = Male, 1 = Female)
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

For hypothesis 2, we proposed that personal outcomes would have a direct effect on backlash. This hypothesis was supported for all four indicators of backlash reactions. Individuals who read that they did not receive a promotion reported higher negative emotions, less favorable attitudes toward the type of program, greater perceptions of unfairness, and lower levels of organizational commitment than those respondents who received the scenario where they did receive a promotion.

Hypothesis 3 posited a direct effect of group outcomes on reported backlash. It was predicted that subjects who were informed that a disproportionately high number of minorities received promotions relative to their percentage of the employee population would experience greater levels of negative reactions than subjects who were informed that minorities were promoted in equal pioportion to the number of minorities in the company. This hypothesis was supported for two of the four backlash indicators (See Table 3). Participants who were informed that a disproportionately high number of minorities received promotions reported higher negative emotions and higher perceptions of unfairness of the promotion procedures than those informed that a proportionate number of minorities received promotions. Group outcomes did not have a significant effect on respondents' attitudes toward the program nor their level of organizational commitment.

Hypotheses 4a and 4b proposed that backlash reactions would be stronger for unfavorable personal and group outcomes in the scenarios with an affirmative action justification than those with a diversity management justification. Although the addition of the two-way interactions (Justification x Personal outcome and Justification x Group outcome) did not explain significant variance, the beta was significant for a Justification x Personal outcome interaction on attitudes toward the program. The lack of a significant change in R^2 may have been due to the sample size and the number of two-way interactions included in the regression analyses. To assess this possibility, we conducted a simple MANOVA with program justification and personal outcome as factors, and found that the interaction was significant with attitude toward program as the dependent variable ($F = 5.33, p < .05$). An examination of the means revealed that for the affirmative action scenarios, all respondents held a rather negative attitude towards the diversity program: respondents who did not get the promotion ($M = 2.73$) did not differ in attitude toward program from respondents who did get the promotion ($M = 2.71$). However, respondents who received the diversity management justification and the promotion reported significantly more favorable attitudes toward the program ($M = 3.63$) than the respondents who received the diversity management justification but who did not receive the promotion ($M = 2.95$).

Lastly, we examined whether there were differences in attitudes toward the program for respondents who received the promotion, but members of their ethnic group appeared to lose promotion opportunities (disproportionate group outcome). A t-test revealed significantly less favorable attitudes toward program in the affirmative action scenarios when the individual was promoted but members of his/her ethnic group were not proportionately promoted ($M = 2.70$) compared to respondents in the diversity management scenarios that received promotions but members of his/her ethnic group were not proportionately promoted ($M = 3.70$).

Overall, these additional analyses indicate that respondents were not simply react-ing to their personal outcome, but were also affected by the type of justification presented for the diversity program and whether members of their ethnic group were also promoted.

Finally, hypotheses 5 and 6 predicted that gender and orientation toward other ethnic groups would moderate the relationships between program justification, personal and group outcomes, and backlash reactions. These two hypotheses were not supported for all four dependent variables. However, the main effect of gender was significant for the backlash indicator of attitude toward the type of program. Overall, female participants in the study reported more positive attitudes toward the specific diversity program, regardless of whether the program justification was presented as affirmative action or diversity management.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to extend our understanding of whites' back-lash reactions to diversity efforts in organizations and examine how the diversity program justification for a recruitment and retention program for minorities may influence the extent of backlash. In addition, we examined how personal and group outcome favorability affected backlash, as well as the potential moderator effects of gender and orientation toward other ethnic groups on these predicted relation-ships.

The results of our study demonstrated that the type of justification for a workplace initiative for minorities did influence the extent of white backlash reported by respondents. Backlash in the form of less favorable attitudes toward the diversity program were stronger for an affirmative action justification than a diver-sity management justification. However, the affirmative action justification did not engender stronger backlash reactions in the form of emotional reactions, justice perceptions, and organizational commitment. Examinations of the mean level of negative emotions for the two types of justification indicate relatively low levels (1.48 for affirmative action and 1.58 for diversity management) reported by respondents in the study. The brevity of the description of the program and the hypothetical nature of a scenario study may have contributed to a lack of signifi-cant findings for emotional reactions. We suggest that future studies on reactions to diversity initiatives in organizational settings consider the measurement of emo-tional reactions as an indicator of backlash, as previous work has acknowledged the existence of "white rage" (Friedman & Davidson, 2001; Skitka, Winquist, & Hut-chinson, 2003). With regard to the non-significant findings for perceptions of unfairness and organizational commitment, it may be that these types of backlash reactions are not as close in psychological proximity as attitudes specifically tar-geted at the program described in our scenarios. Program justification may be more proximally related to perceptions of fairness of the program itself, not broader selection procedures. Similarly, the focus of commitment we chose to measure may have been too distal of a dependent variable. Becker (1992) has shown that indi-viduals have multiple foci of commitment and suggested that researchers attempt to match the focus of their independent variable with the focus of their dependent variable. Future studies that examine diversity program justification may want to

consider identification with top management or commitment to supervisor as possible measures of backlash reactions rather than the more global organizational commitment.

The results of our study confirmed the importance of examining outcome favorability when studying backlash reactions. Individuals that did not receive a promotion reported significantly more negative emotions, less favorable attitudes toward the diversity program, greater perceptions of unfairness of selection procedures, and less organizational commitment.

While prior research in the justice literature has shown that outcomes shape people's perceptions of procedural fairness (Skitka et al., 2003), our study demonstrates that there are other important affective and cognitive attitudinal responses. In the diversity literature, most studies examine respondents' racial group and gender as predictors of their opposition to diversity programs (Kravitz & Klineberg, 2000), but the results of our study highlight the importance of examining personal outcomes. Future research on backlash in organizational settings may want to ask respondents about their promotion history or their beliefs about their ability to receive a promotion in light of diversity programs being implemented in their organizations.

Our study also showed that group-level outcomes affected backlash reactions. Specifically, when minorities received a disproportionately high number of promotions, the subjects in our study indicated an affect-based emotional response and a cognitive-based fairness response in the predicted direction. As McLean Parks and Banas (1996) point out, threats to group identity may affect individuals both emotionally as well as in terms of rational, equity calculations. It was surprising that group-level outcomes did not significantly affect the respondents' specific attitude toward the diversity–related program or reports of organizational commitment. While the subjects in our study may be concerned over group-level outcomes, this concern does not seem to manifest itself into specific backlash reactions toward the diversity initiative or more global reactions of attachment to an organization.

In our study, we suggested that a positive orientation toward other ethnic groups would mitigate the effects of diversity program justification, personal, and group-level outcome favorability on reports of backlash. What we found instead was that the subjects in our study who differed with respect to their comfort level and interaction with people from other ethnic groups reported similar levels of emotions, attitudes toward the diversity program, perceptions of unfairness of selection procedures, and organizational commitment, regardless of program justification, outcome favorability, and group distributive justice. Although individuals may be motivated to learn and interact with other ethnic groups, it may not prevent them from reacting with self-interest when it comes to organizational initiatives favoring other identity groups. Our choice of measure may have also influenced the results in the study. Perhaps employees' specific experience with diversity in their work groups (e.g., extent of work experience in heterogeneous versus homogeneous groups and the quality of that experience) rather than a general orientation toward other ethnic groups would be a better individual-level variable to examine as a moderator of these relationships. Future research may also want to consider an

individual's own ethnic identity as a potential moderator since recent research has found that individuals with strong ethnic identity respond more favorably to organizations that value diversity (Kim & Gelfand, 2003). Our findings with respect to personal and group outcome favorability also suggest that future work on attitudes toward diversity programs should examine the extent of individuals' self- and group-interest as explanatory variables (Bobocel et al., 2001).

Our study did not provide support for gender differences in backlash reactions based on type of justification for a diversity program, nor personal and group outcome favorability. In general, however, females reported more positive attitudes than males toward the diversity-related programs for minorities. This finding confirms previous research with regard to reactions toward affirmative action (Beaton & Tougas, 2001; Kravtiz & Plantania, 1993) and extends the finding to programs framed under a diversity management justification. While white women may appreciate the importance of initiatives that help create a more diverse workforce, they may react similarly to white males in terms of potential backlash reactions when diversity programs exclude them as participants or when they do not receive promotions or members of their ethnic group do not receive promotions. Fernandez (1999) proposed that over the last decade, white women have realized that they are competing against people of color for promotion opportunities and may identify more with the perspective of white males than minority group members.

In sum, our study contributed to the diversity literature by examining a broader set of variables as predictors of backlash reactions and also exploring multiple types of reactions as manifestations of backlash. We found that outcome favorability had the largest impact on negative emotions, program justification had the most significant effect on attitude toward the program, group-level outcome favorability had the greatest influence on perceptions of unfairness of the selection procedures, and personal outcome favorability had the most significant effect on organizational commitment.

Implications

We offer several implications for managers confronting issues of potential backlash reactions to diversity efforts in the workplace. In general, providing a pro-business justification appears to result in more favorable support of a program for recruitment and retention of minorities than an affirmative action justification. Organizations that can effectively communicate the business advantages of a diverse workforce may be able to ameliorate the development of unfavorable attitudes toward diversity initiatives among white employees. However, putting a new "spin" on the need for programs for minorities will not necessarily be enough to avoid some types of backlash in the workplace. According to cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), individuals feel discomfort when their actions violate their values. In this case, if an individual does not believe in the value of diversity initiatives that are being espoused by his/her top management, then this discomfort may manifest itself in the form of backlash. This finding emphasizes the importance of assessing employees' attitudes toward workplace diversity before any initiative is implemented. Understanding whether employees hold positive or negative attitudes about the value of diversity for organizational effectiveness would help in

the design of potential diversity awareness training programs and the formulation of education and communication plans associated with diversity initiatives (Roberson, Kulik, & Pepper, 2003). For example, Ely and Thomas (2001) emphasize the importance of understanding a group's "diversity perspective", which is group members' "normative beliefs and expectations about cultural diversity and its role in their work group" (p. 234). Diversity training that emphasizes an integration-and-learning perspective to diversity where diversity is thought of as a resource for learning and adaptive change may help all employees feel valued and respected, and enhance group functioning (Ely & Thomas, 2001). In addition, even if employees value diversity, they may not necessarily know how to manage a team of diverse individuals well. Training should incorporate strategies on how to utilize diverse perspectives among group members to produce more effective solutions (Arnold, 1997).

In addition, managers should take into consideration the fact that personal and group outcome favorability influence important workplace reactions. Organizations that plan to increase their identity-conscious practices in an effort to promote a positive diversity climate should ensure that standards for performance and qualifications for promotions are clearly communicated in the organization. When diversity policies are introduced, uncertainty may increase about the impact of those policies on the evaluation of personnel. Members of the majority culture may feel that they are being evaluated differently from those participating in a diversity-related program or benefiting from a diversity-related policy (Swanson, 2002). In addition, supervisors may be able to play a critical role in alleviating backlash reactions if they hold honest feedback sessions with employees about promotion decisions so that external and often inaccurate attributions are not placed upon diversity initiatives as reasons why white employees do not receive promotions.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study is not without limitations. Most importantly, while scenarios are useful tools for transmitting complex problems in a controllable way, they are role-playing situations rather than actual experiences. It is possible that the subjects in our study may react differently to the justification of diversity initiatives, and personal and group-level outcome favorability, if it were to happen in their actual workplace rather than in a hypothetical scenario. Future research should examine the prevalence of backlash and the factors that may influence levels of backlash within organizations that have a variety of diversity initiatives. For example, the methods of communication about the diversity initiative (e.g., supervisor, organizational newsletter, e-mail from HR director, etc.) may influence how employees respond. Also, perceptions of the amount of resources allocated to the initiative and level of top management support may affect attitudes toward a particular program.

Another limitation of our scenario study may have been the descriptions used in the scenarios. While we did conduct numerous pre-tests and manipulation checks to ensure the scenarios effectively captured the independent variables, it is still possible that the wording of the scenarios may have been unparallel in an area that we did not measure such as positive or negative tone of the scenario. This lack

of parallelism may have contributed to the error in measurement of our variables, which reduced the possibility for significant findings.

In this study, backlash was measured through assessments of emotional reactions, attitude toward the diversity-related program, perceptions of unfairness of promotion procedures, and commitment to an organization. More research is needed on the operationalization of the construct of backlash and whether these negative reactions have adverse consequences for the diversity climate of an organization. For example, is white backlash toward diversity initiatives in an organization more likely to manifest itself in heterogeneous versus homogeneous work groups (e.g., greater group conflict, less cohesiveness)? Future studies should also explore other indicators of backlash such as heightened levels of discriminatory behavior. For example, white backlash could present itself in the form of biases in performance evaluations of minorities, negative opinions of participants in diversity programs, and less respectful treatment (interactional justice) of minorities (Yoder, 1991). In addition, organizational commitment is a measure of behavioral intentions rather than actual behavior. Individuals may feel or express attitudes and emotions towards diversity initiatives and state they would alter their behaviors, while in reality their behaviors may not in fact change. Future research measuring actual behaviors following the implementation of a diversity program in an organization would help address this concern. Examining turnover, decreases in work quality, and organizational citizenship behaviors may be fruitful areas for investigation (Skitka et al., 2003). Finally, our analysis was intentionally limited to whites only. Future work should include members of other ethnic groups as Kravitz and Klineberg (2000) have found that there are important differences in predictors of attitudes toward various types of affirmative action programs for different ethnic groups.

Conclusion

Backlash toward diversity initiatives in the workplace is a potentially destructive reaction to workplace experiences of diversity and represents second-order diversity conflict. While discrimination represents first-order conflict, second-order conflict refers to disputes over remedies designed to eliminate discrimination (Friedman & Davidson, 2001). Second-order diversity conflicts are less understood and may escalate conflict between people of different identity groups. Framing diversity programs in terms of a business necessity may not be enough to mitigate the negative conflict associated with identity groups in organizations. In addition, knowing that individuals are concerned with personal and identity-group outcomes is helpful in understanding the conflict that can occur when diversity initiatives are introduced in the workplace. As more organizations contemplate the implementation of organizational practices for minorities and historically lower status identity groups, it is important to understand the various reactions that may occur from historically higher status identity groups. It is hoped that this study will spark future research in this area.

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APPENDIX A
Scenario Manipulations
(Note: Text that varied by scenario is in *italics*)

Please read the following scenario, then respond to the questions that follow.

For the past six years, you have been a mid-level manager at Nixell Corporation, a computer software company employing about 1,200 people across the United States. Nixell Corporation was founded in the mid-1980's by Chris Johnson and Sandy Thomas, both graduates of your MBA program. Nixell Corporation's headquarters are located in Chicago. Last year, Nixell reported 8.4 billion dollars in revenue and 1.2 billion in net income. The company enjoys consistently strong consumer demand and projects reaching 15% of the US market share by the year 2001. Nixell common stock (NXL) was first listed on the New York Stock Exchange in 1985 and is also traded on the Chicago, Boston, and Philadelphia exchanges. During its history, the company has been awarded over 800 patents and is considered to be a leader in environmental responsibility.

Affirmative-action justification	Diversity management justification
Co-founders Chris and Sandy are concerned about meeting affirmative action goals to meet Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) guidelines for minority representation in upper management. Because of this, they have implemented an affirmative action program to actively seek, hire and promote minority group members.	*Because the company's customer base has become increasingly diverse, co-founders Chris and Sandy feel that it is important to have employees who reflect this diversity and know and understand this customer base. Although Nixell does not have an affirmative action program, they have voluntarily implemented a diversity initiative to actively seek, hire and promote minority group members.*

Last month you found out that you are in line for one of a number of regional manager positions to be filled. Many new positions were created due to a recent expansion into the Western U.S.

Positive personal outcome favorability manipulation:	Negative personal outcome favorability manipulation:
This morning, you were happy to find out that you received one of the 10 regional manager positions.	*This morning, you were disappointed to find out that you did not receive one of the 10 regional manager positions.*

About 10% of managers in the company are minorities.

Positive group outcome favorability manipulation:	Negative group outcome favorability manipulation:
You noticed that 90% of the positions went to a white manager and 10% went to minority managers.	*You noticed that only 60% of the positions went to white managers, while 40% of the positions went to minority managers.*

Positive personal outcome favorability manipulation, continued:	Negative personal outcome favorability manipulation, continued:
You're glad to see that your hard work was appreciated, and look forward to your new assignment in Portland, Oregon.	*You wish that your hard work had been more appreciated, as you were looking forward to moving out West.*

APPENDIX B
Principal Axis Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation

Variable Items	Factor Loadings[1]				
	1	2	3	4	5
Negative Emotions ($\alpha = .90$)					
Distressed	.69				
Upset	.90				
Hostile	.74				
Irritable	.77				
Attitude toward Program ($\alpha = .80$)					
The affirmative action/diversity management program at this program is a good policy.				.73	
I would not like to work for a company with such an affirmative action/diversity management program. (R)				.71	
All in all, I oppose affirmative action/diversity management programs in industry for minorities. (R)				.69	

Appendix B cont.

Perceived Unfairness of Promotion Procedures ($\alpha = .87$)		
The regional manager promotion decisions in this company were fair. (R)	.67	
The way Nixell decides who gets promoted is unfair.	.59	
The procedures used to decide who gets promoted in this company are fair. (R)	.84	
Nixell's promotion decisions were unfair.	.78	
Organizational Commitment ($\alpha = .82$)		
I would feel a sense of "ownership" for this company.		.68
I would be proud to tell others that I work for Nixell.		.69
I would talk up Nixell to my friends as a great organization to work for.		.62
Other Group Orientation ($\alpha = .77$)		
I like meeting and getting to know people from ethnic groups other than my own.	.73	
I often spend time with people from ethnic groups other than my own.	.66	
I am involved in activities with people from other ethnic groups.	.61	
I enjoy being with people from ethnic groups other than my own.	.77	

[1]Factor loadings under .40 not reported. (R) = Scales for these items were reverse coded.