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Perceiving Ethnic Diversity on Campus: Group Differences in Attention to Hierarchical Representation

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Abstract

A field study tested whether Asian and White students use different criteria when judging the racial and ethnic diversity of their university. The university under study had roughly equal numbers of Asians and Whites, but Asians were heavily concentrated in the student body and had relatively low numbers in high-status university positions (the faculty and administration). Results showed that, as long as the student body was deemed diverse, the status asymmetry did not prevent Whites from regarding their university as diverse or from opposing efforts to increase racial and ethnic diversity on campus. Asians, by contrast, were attentive to the status asymmetry: they incorporated faculty/administrative diversity into their judgments of the university and saw diversity in the student body as a reason to increase diversity in high-status positions. The results suggest that people perceive and support diversity in ways that align with the interests of their ethnic in-groups.

Keywords

social identity, diversity initiatives, affirmative action, organizational hierarchy, faculty of color

Although much research has investigated the benefits and consequences of diversity on university campuses (e.g., Gottfredson et al., 2008; Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain, 2007; Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Diltmann, & Crosby, 2008; Sidanius, Levin, Van Laar, & Sears, 2008; Turner, Gonzàlez, & Wood, 2008), surprisingly little research has investigated what criteria people use when determining whether a campus or organization is diverse (see Plaut, Garnett, Buffardi, & Sanchez-Burks, 2011; Unzueta & Binning, 2010). Popular consensus seems to hold that diversity reflects a high proportional representation of members of traditionally underrepresented groups, but numerical diversity is only one source of information that can actually shape judgments of ethnic and racial diversity (see Unzueta & Binning, 2012; Unzueta, Knowles, & Ho, in press). In the present research, we address the question of how students within a given university construct their racial and ethnic diversity perceptions. What criteria do they use to determine whether their campus has attained diversity? And how are these perceptions linked to desires to see more (or less) diversity on campus?

The present research builds on recent insights into the bases of low- and high-status group members' diversity judgments (Unzueta & Binning, 2012). This work begins with the assumption that diversity and efforts to achieve it involve competition over both concrete and symbolic resources (in the present case, the status and prestige of university membership). Furthermore, we argue that although numerical representation factors heavily into diversity judgments, hierarchical representation—or the representation of minority group members across an organizational structure—is also an important dimension of diversity. In pursuit of a positive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), we suggest that minority group members generally want more members of their in-group in an organization (numerical representation). However, minority group members may also desire for these in-group members to be represented in the upper levels of the organizations (hierarchical representation) —the reason for this being that minority group members may strive to achieve higher status for their group as a whole by enhancing the number of their own group members at higher status positions within organizations. Specifically, the achievement of both numerical and hierarchical representation may confer concrete benefits like higher rank, wealth, and social position (Bobo, 1988), and symbolic benefits of higher respect and perceived value to the organization (for a review see Binning & Huo, 2012).

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A critical difference between Whites and minorities in the United States (e.g., African Americans, Asians, and Latinos), however, is that Whites already disproportionately hold high-status positions in valued social organizations across the country (e.g., Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). From a group-interest perspective, Whites should be adopting strategies to help maintain their group status, whereas minority group members should be adopting strategies to help move up in social status. Recent research illustrates how these strategies might manifest in people's perceptions of diversity (Unzueta & Binning, 2012). When deciding whether or not an organization was diverse, Whites did not require that "diverse" organizations be diverse at all levels. For instance, they deemed an organization equally diverse that concentrated minorities in the lower ranks as one that concentrated minorities in the higher ranks of the organization. By perceiving and endorsing diversity whenever it was present, Whites may be less inclined to support further diversity efforts (i.e., because it has already been achieved; Unzueta et al., in press). Minorities, by contrast, were closely attuned to hierarchical position, as they only saw the organization as diverse when minorities had high numerical representation across the hierarchical structure.

Such findings are consistent with the idea that when minority group members (e.g., African Americans, Asians, and Latinos) are underrepresented in high-status positions, they are relatively attuned to, and psychologically affected by, the status afforded their ethnic subgroups by the broader organization (Huo, Binning, & Molina, 2010; Huo, Molina, Binning, & Funge, 2010). An important implication is that if minorities have more specific conceptions of diversity than Whites (Unzueta & Binning, 2012), then there may be more circumstances in which minorities but not Whites believe that actions directed toward achieving diversity (however they define it) are necessary (or simply desired).

The present research sought to extend these insights to understand students' perceptions of, and attitudes toward, diversity at their university. By examining the bases of diversity judgments within a single, real-world organization, we aim for an in-depth understanding of how people incorporate hierarchal representation into their diversity judgments. The university in focus—a large, urban, public university in California—presents a compelling venue in which to study how hierarchical representation shapes diversity judgments. At the university, White and Asian students have a similar numerical representation, thus allowing us to treat numerical representation as a constant. In the year the present data were collected, the student body (undergraduates and graduates) was composed of 36,000 students, and approximately 40% of the student body was of Asian descent, 36% was White, 15% was Latino, and 3% was African American.

Although Asians slightly outnumber Whites in the student body, this is far from the case as one looks up the university hierarchy. Echoing national trends at the time of this study (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 2007–2008), publically available data indicate that the university's faculty, administrators, and senior managers are disproportionately White: 76% of the faculty was White, 14% was Asian, 6% was Hispanic, and 3% was African American. Eighty-four percent of the senior managers among the career staff were Whites, as was at least 75% of the University Board of Regents (based on an analysis of their website). The campus president, chancellor, and executive vice chancellor in the current year were all Whites. Thus, although Asians and Whites are roughly equal in terms of numerical representation at the student level, they are vastly unequal in terms of hierarchical representation.

Following Unzueta and Binning (2012), we expected that because the campus has a high level of numerical diversity in the student body, Whites may be especially inclined to rely on this information when evaluating whether the university is diverse. We tested the idea that Whites' diversity judgments would be informed by where diversity is present (the student body), but they would essentially ignore where it is absent (the faculty and administration). We expected Asians, by contrast, to incorporate where diversity is absent into their overall assessment of the university's level of diversity. For Asians, the lack of hierarchical representation on campus may not go unnoticed and may factor into their diversity judgments. Asians' perceptions and diversity preferences should reflect their attention to hierarchical representation, and their diversity policy preferences may seek to remedy their low hierarchical representation. Below we report the results of a study testing the hypotheses that (1) Asians but not Whites incorporate hierarchical representation into their judgments of diversity and (2) their beliefs about when diversity is needed and not needed should correspondingly differ.

Method

Participants

Participants were 197 students (134 women and 63 men; $M_{\text{Age}} =$ 21.34 years, $SD = 4.66$) recruited from a university-maintained listserv and compensated with a $5 dollar gift card to an online retailer. The sample was composed of members of the campus community (primarily undergraduates and graduates) who had signed up to participate in a paid research pool. The ethnic composition of the sample closely resembled the ethnic composition of the student body as a whole, as 46% of the sample was Asian/Asian American, 35% was White, 11% was Latino, 4% was African American, and 5% was from other categories. This distribution did not differ significantly from the distribution of the student body as reflected in publically available university data, Pearson $\chi^2(16) = 2.00$, $p = .220$. Twenty-four percent of the sample was not born in the United States. Because only Whites and Asians had samples large enough to analyze reliably, and because these two groups hold a similar amount of numerical status in the student body, we limited our analyses below to students from these two ethnic groups.

Procedure

Participants were introduced to a university-sponsored study of campus impressions and university campus climate. They

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Table 1. Correlations, Means, Standard Deviations, and α Reliabilities for the Constructs Under Study.

		1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Student diversity	—					
2.	Faculty diversity	.41***	—				
3.	Campus diversity	.64***	.46***	—			
4.	Remedial student div.	−.35***	−.15+	−.55***	—		
5.	Remedial faculty div.	−.11	−.37***	−.39***	.60***	—	
6.	Remedial campus div.	−.30***	−.22***	−.57***	.78***	.60***	—
	M	4.78	4.19	4.10	4.29	4.58	4.73
	SD	1.21	1.16	1.05	1.29	1.23	1.40
	α	.87	.80	.90	.84	.77	—

***$p < .001$. **$p < .01$. *$p < .05$. +$p < .10$.

completed measures assessing the diversity of various campus groups, a measure assessing the diversity of the campus as a whole, and measures assessing whether they thought more diversity was needed among the student body, faculty/administration, and campus as a whole.

Predictor Variables

Ethnic diversity of the student body. Participants were asked to complete 4 items to assess the perceived racial and ethnic diversity of the student body, each of which was anchored with 1 (*Strongly disagree*) and 7 (*Strongly agree*). Two of these items assessed the diversity of undergraduates "The undergraduate population at [campus name] . . ." "Has a high level of racial/ethnic diversity," and "Is not ethnically/racially diverse" (reverse scored). Two parallel items assessed the diversity of "The graduate student population at [campus name] . . ."

Ethnic diversity of the faculty/administration. Analogously to the items that assessed diversity of the student body, participants completed 4 items that assessed diversity of the faculty/administration (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 7 = *Strongly agree*), "The faculty (e.g., professors) at [campus name] . . ." "Have a high level of ethnic/racial diversity," and "Are not ethnically/racially diverse" (reverse scored). Two parallel items assessed the diversity of the administration, "The administration (e.g., deans, chancellors, presidents) at [campus name] . . ."

All eight of these measures were presented on the page simultaneously, in a random order, to help prevent order effects in the measurement of our main independent variables.

Factor analysis.. We sought to determine whether participants made meaningful distinctions between the student and faculty/administrative levels. A principal components analysis with oblique rotation on all 8 items found that the items separated into two factors with eigenvalues greater than one. One factor contained the 4 items assessing diversity of the student body (graduate and undergraduate students), and the other factor contained the 4 items assessing the diversity of the faculty/administration. The 4 student body items had rotated loadings of .88, .87, .87, and .85 on Factor 1 and explained 57% of the total item variance (eigenvalue = 4.60). The 4 faculty/administration items had rotated loadings of .91, .89, .74, and .73 on Factor 2 and explained 16% of the total item variance (eigenvalue = 1.28). For all 8 items, in no case did an item load on a second factor with a loading greater than |.15|, thus revealing a simple two-factor structure. We therefore calculated measures of student and faculty/administrative diversity as the mean of each set of items (see Table 1 for means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's α reliabilities for all constructs investigated).

Finally, we examined the mean differences in these independent variables between Asians and Whites. We conducted a 2 (Asian vs. White) × 2(faculty diversity vs. student diversity) analysis of variance, with repeated measures on diversity perceptions. The analysis confirmed there was a significant difference in the levels of student diversity ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.21$) and faculty diversity ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 1.15$), $F(1, 161) = 34.36$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = .50$. However, there was no main effect of participant ethnicity, $F < 1.0$, $p = .705$, nor was there a two-way interaction, $F < 1.0$, $p = .500$. The results suggest that Whites and Asians generally agreed on the size of the diversity advantage for students over faculty. Our analyses below examine whether Whites and Asians draw different conclusions from these same representational data, particularly with regard to their university as a whole and whether (and where) diversity should be promoted on campus.

Outcome Variables

Perceived ethnic diversity of campus as a whole. Participants responded to 4 items assessing campus-wide diversity, "In your opinion, how diverse is [campus name] as a whole?" (1 = *Not diverse at all*; 7 = *Very diverse*), "When it comes down to it, [campus name] is really not that diverse at all" (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 7 = *Strongly agree*; reverse scored), "Overall, [campus name] has a high level of ethnic/racial diversity" (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 7 = *Strongly agree*), and, "Overall, [campus name] is not ethnically/racially diverse" (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 7 = *Strongly agree*; reverse scored).

Remedial diversity of student body. Participants responded to 2 items that measured whether they thought the student body should be more diverse than it currently is, (1 = *Strongly disagree;* 7 = *Strongly agree*): "At [campus name], efforts should

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Table 2. Unstandardized Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors (in Parentheses), and Standardized Regression Coefficients From Step 3 of Multiple Regression Analyses on Each Outcome Variable.

	Perceived campus diversity			Remedial student diversity			Remedial faculty diversity			Remedial campus diversity		
	B	Std. Error	β	*B*	Std. Error	β	*B*	Std. Error	β	*B*	Std. Error	β
(Constant)	4.50	(.29)		5.06	(.46)		4.55	(.43)		5.12	(.50)	
Female (0) vs. male (1)	−.30	(.13)	−.14*	−.03	(.20)	−.01	.11	(.18)	.04	.09	(.21)	.03
US born (0) vs. foreign born (1)	.06	(.15)	.03	−.36	(.23)	−.12	.09	(.22)	.03	−.19	(.25)	−.06
Asian (0) vs. White (1)	.08	(.12)	.04	−.67	(.19)	−.26***	−.69	(.18)	−.28***	−.70	(.20)	−.25***
Perceived student diversity	.27	(.08)	.31***	−.09	(.12)	−.08	.20	(.11)	.20+	.05	(.13)	.05
Perceived faculty diversity	.36	(.08)	.40***	−.16	(.13)	−.15	−.44	(.12)	−.41***	−.34	(.14)	−.29*
Ethnicity × Student Diversity	.37	(.11)	.28***	−.52	(.17)	−.32**	−.32	(.16)	−.21*	−.67	(.18)	−.39***
Ethnicity × Faculty Diversity	−.25	(.11)	−.19*	.23	(.18)	.14	−.03	(.17)	−.02	.30	(.19)	.17
Student diversity × Faculty Diversity	−.01	(.04)	−.02	.00	(.06)	.00	.06	(.06)	.08	−.01	(.06)	−.01

***$p < .001$. **$p < .01$. *$p < .05$. +$p < .10$.

be undertaken to increase the diversity of the graduate students," "At [campus name], efforts should be undertaken to increase the diversity of the undergraduate students."

Remedial diversity of faculty/administration. Two items were used to measure whether more diversity was needed among the faculty and administration (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 7 = *Strongly agree*): "At [campus name], efforts should be undertaken to increase the diversity of the administration (e.g., Deans, Presidents, Chancellors)," "At [campus name], efforts should be undertaken to increase the diversity of the faculty (e.g., professors, instructors)."

Remedial diversity of campus as a whole. Support for increasing diversity on campus was assessed with one item (1 = *Strongly disagree*; 7 = *Strongly agree*): "At [campus name], efforts should be undertaken to increase the diversity of the university as a whole."

Results

Perceived ethnic diversity on campus. We subjected participants' perceptions of the current level of campus diversity to a Ethnicity × Student Diversity × Faculty Diversity multiple regression analysis, following the procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1992). This testing procedure was repeated for each of the four outcome variables reported below, and all reported analyses were conducted using a two-tailed α level of .05. In Step 1, to control for background differences that might affect the specific diversity judgments under study, we entered demographic controls for male gender (Female = 0, Male = 1) and foreign birth (US born = 0; Foreign born = 1). In Step 2, we entered main effect terms for participant ethnicity (0 = Asian, 1 = White), perceived student diversity (centered at its mean), and perceived faculty diversity (centered at its mean). In Step 3, we entered the three two-way interaction terms (Ethnicity × Student Diversity; Ethnicity × Faculty Diversity; Student Diversity × Faculty Diversity), and in Step 4, we entered the three-way interaction term (Ethnicity × Student Diversity × Faculty Diversity). In this and all subsequent analyses, the three-way interaction term did not reach significance and thus we focus our attention on Step 3. The unstandardized coefficients, standard errors, and standardized coefficients from Step 3 are presented in Table 2.

The analysis on diversity perceptions revealed a significant main effect of gender, such that women reported significantly more campus diversity than did men ($B = -.30$, $SE = .13$, $\beta = -.14$, $p = .02$). There were also significant main effects for perceived student diversity and perceived faculty diversity. However, consistent with the hypothesis that Whites and Asians use different criteria to judge diversity, these main effects were each qualified by participant race (see Figure 1). Simple slopes analyses of the Ethnicity × Student Diversity interaction ($B = .37$, $SE = .11$, $\beta = .28$, $p < .001$) revealed that Whites relied heavily on diversity at the student level to judge diversity of the campus as a whole, as the relationship between student and campus diversity was significantly stronger among Whites ($B = .63$, $SE = .08$, $\beta = .74$, $p < .001$) than it was among Asians ($B = .27$, $SE = .08$, $\beta = .31$, $p < .001$).

Simple slopes analyses of the Ethnicity × Faculty Diversity interaction ($B = -.25$, $SE = .11$, $\beta = -.19$, $p = .03$) revealed that only Asians used the diversity at the faculty/administrative level as a basis for their judgments of campus diversity ($B = .36$, $SE = .08$, $\beta = .40$, $p < .001$). Whites' judgments of campus diversity were unrelated to diversity at the faculty/administrative level ($B = .11$, $SE = .08$, $\beta = .12$, *ns*).

In sum, although both Asians and Whites relied on student diversity to form their judgments of the university's diversity, this tendency was significantly stronger among Whites. Moreover, Asians but not Whites incorporated the diversity at the faculty level to inform their judgments of campus diversity. These findings are consistent with the idea that Whites' assessments of diversity relied on where diversity is present (the student level), whereas Asians also incorporated where diversity was absent (the faculty and administration level).

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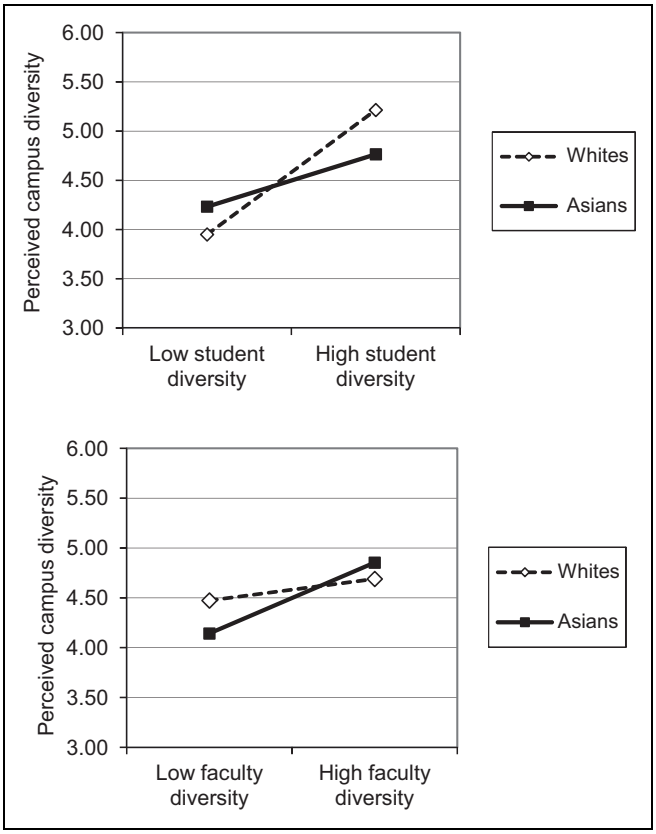

Figure 1. Perceptions of campus diversity as functions of participant ethnicity and perceived student diversity (top) and of participant ethnicity and perceived faculty diversity (bottom). Figures are plotted at ± 1 *SD* of perceived student and faculty diversity means.

Remedial diversity of student body. We next sought to understand the implications of participants' diversity perceptions for their attitudes toward increasing diversity on campus. Following the same testing procedure as above, we subjected participants' preferences for increased diversity of the student body to a *Ethnicity x Student Diversity x Faculty Diversity* regression analysis. The results of this analysis are displayed in Table 2. A main effect of participant ethnicity was revealed, indicating that Whites were more opposed to increased diversity of the student body than were Asians ($B = -.67$, $SE = .19$, $\beta = -.26$, $p < .001$). No other main effects were significant, however, there was a significant Ethnicity × Student Diversity interaction ($B = -.52$, $SE = .17$ $\beta = -.32$, $p = .003$). Simple slopes analyses revealed that among Whites, opposition to increased student diversity was particularly strong when student diversity was already deemed high ($B = -.61$, $SE = .12$, $\beta = -.57$, $p < .001$). Among Asians, by contrast, support for enhanced student diversity was unrelated to the current level of perceived student diversity ($B = -.09$, $SE = .12$, $\beta = -.08$, *ns*). We return to the interpretation of this finding below.

Remedial diversity of faculty/administration. Following the procedure above, we also tested how perceived diversity of the student body and faculty shaped preferences for increased diversity

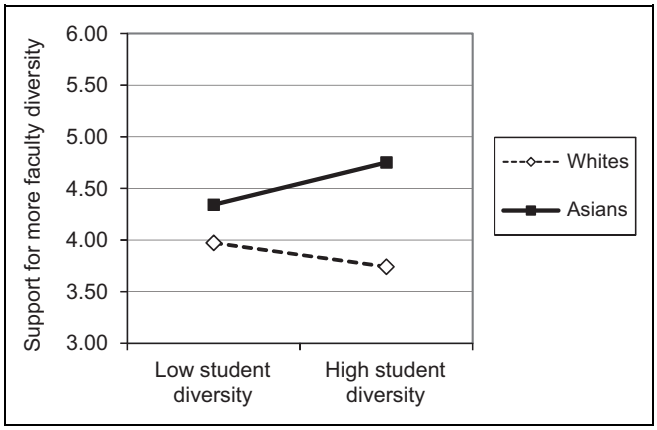

Figure 2. Support for increased faculty diversity as a function of participant ethnicity and perceived student diversity. Figures are plotted at ± 1 *SD* of perceived student diversity mean.

at the faculty/administrative level. The analysis yielded two significant main effects. There was a main effect for ethnicity ($B = -.69$, $SE = .18$, $\beta = -.28$, $p < .001$), indicating that Whites were significantly more opposed to increasing faculty diversity than were Asians. There was also a main effect for perceived faculty diversity, indicating that as perceived faculty diversity increased, support for more faculty diversity decreased ($B = -.44$, $SE = .12$, $\beta = -.41$, $p < .001$). This main effect was not moderated by participant ethnicity, indicating that Whites and Asians used faculty diversity to roughly the same degree to determine whether more faculty diversity was needed. There was, however, a significant Ethnicity × Student Diversity interaction ($B = -.32$, $SE = .16$, $\beta = -.21$, $p = .05$; see Figure 2). Simple slopes analyses revealed that for Whites there was no connection between student diversity and the need for more diversity at the faculty level ($B = -.12$, $SE = .11$, $-.11$, *ns*). For Asians, however, perceived student diversity was positively associated with support for faculty diversity, and this relationship approached significance ($B = .20$, $SE = .11$, $\beta = .20$, $p = .07$). This indicates that the more diversity Asians perceived at the student level, the more they endorsed increased diversity at the faculty level.

Remedial diversity of campus as a whole. Finally, regression analyses examined participants' support for increased campus-wide diversity. The results largely replicated the results for remedial student diversity. Once again, there was a significant main effect of ethnicity, such that Whites were generally more opposed to increased campus diversity than were Asians ($B = -.70$, $SE = .20$, $\beta = -.25$, $p < .001$). There was also a significant main effect for perceived faculty diversity, such that the more faculty diversity was perceived, the lower the need for campus diversity ($B = -.34$, $SE = .14$, $\beta = -.29$, $p = .05$). However, the ethnicity main effect was qualified by a significant Ethnicity × Student Diversity interaction ($B = -.67$, $SE = .18$, $\beta = -.39$, $p < .001$; see Figure 3). Simple slopes analyses revealed that among Whites, higher perceived student diversity was associated with opposition to

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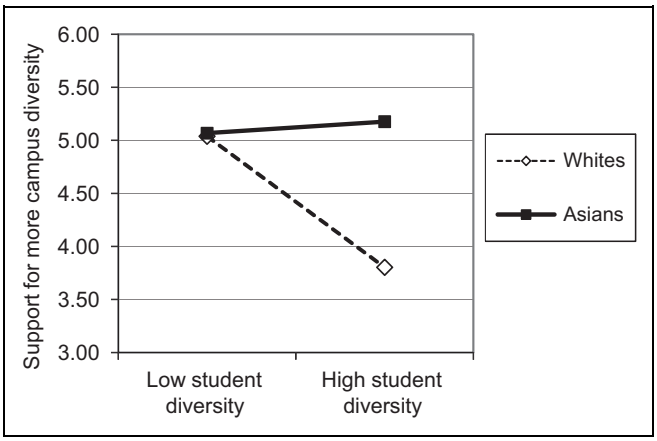

Figure 3. Support for increased campus diversity as a function of participant ethnicity and perceived student diversity. Figures are plotted at ± 1 *SD* of perceived student diversity mean.

increased campus diversity ($B = -.62$, $SE = .13$, $\beta = .54$, $p = .001$). Among Asians, by contrast, current levels of student diversity were unrelated to preferences for increased campus diversity ($B = .05$, $SE = .13$, $\beta = .05$, *ns*). Thus, it appeared that Whites were generally more opposed to diversification of the campus, particularly when the student body was already deemed diverse.

General Discussion

Although ethnic diversity in higher education continues to attract considerable attention in policy debates and academic research, very little is currently understood about how people actually go about determining whether a university, or any other organization, has attained diversity. In the present research, we investigated people's perceptions of ethnic diversity at their university, which most outsiders regard as diverse but whose diversity is unequally distributed across the organizational hierarchy. Although Whites and Asians are close in numbers on campus, Whites have a far greater representation among the upper ranks, the faculty and administration. Our results suggest that when Asians and Whites look at the diversity of their university, they understand this student–faculty discrepancy in different ways and, as a result, draw different conclusions about what makes a university diverse.

Whites' diversity judgments were closely dependent on the perceived diversity of the student body. As seen in Unzueta and Binning (2012), Whites seemed to believe that to be considered "diverse," organizations need not be racially/ethnically diverse across their entire hierarchy. To this end, Whites did not incorporate faculty diversity into their judgments of the university, and when it came to supporting ethnic diversity, they withheld support if they judged the student body as already diverse. Asians, by contrast, gave significant weight to diversity at the faculty/administrative level. They were more supportive of diversity overall, and, rather than using student diversity as a reason to oppose diversity, they seemed to regard it as reason for supporting *more* diversity at the faculty/administrative level. As such, Asians attended to where diversity was absent and where it was present, and its presence in the student body was associated with support for more diversity at the faculty level. Taken together, these findings support the hypothesis that, despite the fact that Asians and Whites had roughly equivalent numbers on campus, they each perceived and promoted diversity in ways that may serve to protect and enhance the status of their respective in-groups (e.g., their positive social identity and material standing in the organization).

Exploring Alternatives

Although the findings are consistent with the idea that diversity attitudes are shaped by symbolic and material group interest, alternative explanations should be explored. One possibility is that because Whites and Asians have different cultural backgrounds and social orientations, they attended to different features of their social context (e.g., Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001). For instance, Whites' perceptual field may have been dominated by the exceptionally high level of student diversity, whereas Asians' perceptual field may have been more holistic and focused on the broader university community. While not ruling out this possibility, previous research suggests the important role of group interest on diversity perceptions, regardless of one's cultural background. In research that examined conditions under which organizations are deemed diverse, Whites who identified weakly with their racial in-group and African Americans who identified strongly with their racial in-group both tended to incorporate hierarchical representation into their judgments of diversity (whereas their low identification counterparts did not; Unzueta & Binning, 2012). Thus, attention to hierarchical representation is not limited to those with an Asian cultural background and, instead, seems to be partly driven by identification with one's racial group.

Another alternative explanation gets at a hidden assumption of the present research. Namely, it is possible that group interest is not so important and the critical variable is, instead, where in the organization one's subgroup is a numerical minority. Whites were a minority among the student body but a majority among the faculty and administration. Asians, as a member of a coalition of traditional "minority" groups (see Unzueta & Binning, 2010), can be construed as a majority in the student body, but they are clear minorities among the faculty/administration. An alternative explanation is that people's diversity judgments rely on areas where they happen to be minorities, so Whites use the student body and Asians use the faculty administration.

Although this explanation does not contradict the present findings, we stress that it is necessary to consider the present results with regard to the status and power differences that exist in the social context. Asians were a minority in high-status positions, whereas Whites were a minority in low-status positions. We found that Asians were more supportive of all efforts

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to increase campus diversity, and this was true regardless of how diverse they perceived the student body to be. This pattern fits with our previous research showing that "diversity" is not applied equally across groups: all participants, Whites included, understood diversity to be relevant to African Americans, Latinos, and Asians, but not to Whites (Unzueta & Binning, 2010). Thus, even if participants are attuned to areas where they are minorities, the implications of this attention play out with respect to what diversity means and whether achieving it is a good or bad thing for the status of the in-group.

Finally, the survey methodology we employed should be considered. In the study, all participants were first asked about the diversity in segments of their university, they were then asked about the diversity of the campus as a whole, and at the end of the study, they were asked what they would like to see done about the levels of diversity on campus. Viewing the survey as a conversation (Schwarz & Sudman, 1996), it can be assumed that as the survey (conversation) progressed, participants answered new questions with knowledge that their previous answers were "given" in the conversational context (Clark & Schober, 1992). The important implication is that if the survey had been given in another order—say, for example, in the exact opposite order—then participants may have answered differently because different information would be "given" when new questions were asked. Nevertheless, this critique would still point to the conclusion—supported by the moderating role of ethnicity reported above—that Whites and Asians understood the diversity conversation differently. They attended to and emphasized different aspects of the university when judging the whole, and they proceeded to come to different conclusions about when and where diversity was needed. Experimental studies that orthogonally manipulate dimensions of diversity (e.g., Unzueta & Binning, 2012; Unzueta et al., in press), while offering precise scientific control of the conversation, may lack the richness of investigating how people think, and converse, about meaningful organizations to which they belong.

Conclusion

Although many universities officially have a favorable disposition toward diversity and continue to strive for it, all people may not share the same understanding about what constitutes a diverse university. As student bodies and workforces continue to become more ethnically diverse, it is important to recognize that an increase in simple numerical diversity does not carry the same implications for all the ethnic groups involved. Failing to recognize that different groups use different criteria for judging diversity can lead to disagreement and disharmony instead of the unity and understanding that diversity initiatives may seek to achieve.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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