



A Positive Approach to Studying Diversity in Organizations

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A POSITIVE APPROACH TO STUDYING DIVERSITY IN ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

In this article, we distinguish between positive findings in diversity research and a positive approach to studying diversity. We first review and integrate research on diversity from organizational behavior, social psychology and sociology from 1998-2010 that has already documented positive findings in relation to diversity. We discuss this research using two broad categories: (1) What is positively affected by diversity? (*Positive for what*)? This category consists of research that has shown instances of intergroup equality, positive intergroup relations and the high performance of diverse groups. (2) When is diversity positive (*Positive when*)? This category describes organizational and individual level conditions under which intergroup outcomes, relations and group performance are positive. Second, we discuss a positive approach to studying diversity and describe some examples of organizational scholarship that has taken such an approach. We also discuss some of the limitations of taking a positive approach to diversity and propose some ways in which diversity scholars interested in taking a positive approach can overcome these limitations. By illuminating both positive findings in diversity research and a positive approach to studying diversity, we hope to spark more research that examines the beneficial and empowering aspects of difference for individuals and groups in organizations.

Keywords: Diversity, positive

Introduction

In a recent edited volume on diversity in organizations, Chugh and Brief (2008) noted that research on diversity in organizations is sparse -- only 5% of articles published in management journals from 2000-2008 included race or gender in their keywords. They further speculated that the low percentage of research on diversity reflected an assumption of whiteness and homogeneity in our workplaces. We had an additional concern: Could any of the scholarship on diversity be construed as positive?

We reflect on the term positive in relation to diversity scholarship in two ways: positive *findings* of diversity research and a positive *approach* to studying diversity. We consider positive findings of diversity research to be instances in which research on diverse teams, groups and organizations indicate evidence of intergroup equality, positive intergroup relations, or positive group outcomes. These outcomes exemplify the kinds of phenomena that diversity scholars are typically interested in. For instance, do minority group members have access to opportunities? What is the relationship between majority and minority group members? How does diversity impact group performance? We consider a positive approach to studying diversity to be a lens that helps us define the questions we ask. Positive organizational scholars have argued that positive scholarship highlights the mechanisms that “push beyond optimal functioning” (Roberts, 2006). In the case of diversity research, this would be when scholars examine phenomena that exemplify a just, equal and close society in which difference is empowering. Such a stance often transforms the questions we ask in diversity research and goes beyond establishing a positive finding in diverse contexts. For example, a positive finding would be that the top ranks of corporations are slowly becoming more diverse, but a positive approach would entail asking

“under what conditions do minority group members ‘break through’ and get to the top ranks of corporations?”

In this chapter, we first map the terrain of recent diversity research that has documented positive findings, specifically with regard to the three types of outcomes noted above: intergroup equality, positive intergroup relations and positive group outcomes. We also describe the contingent nature of these positive findings by reviewing evidence of the organizational and individual-level conditions under which diversity tends to be positive. Second, we describe a positive approach to studying diversity and how this has shaped our own research. We conclude by discussing some of the limitations of taking a positive approach to studying diversity and ways in which diversity scholars can overcome those limitations.

Highlighting both positive findings of diversity research and a positive approach to studying diversity is important for two reasons. First, for scholars who may not be studying diversity because of the idea that it is associated with prejudice, isolation and intergroup conflict (Roberts, 2006), this chapter offers a review and integration of evidence that diversity can be beneficial. Second, staying open to the positive can present opportunities for novel research in diversity. We highlight four tenets of a positive approach to studying diversity. By illuminating both positive findings of diversity research and a positive approach to studying diversity, we hope to spark more research that examines the beneficial and empowering aspects of difference for individuals and groups in organizations.

I. Positive Findings in Diversity Research

We define diversity as a characteristic of a group (of two or more people) which refers to demographic differences among group members in race, ethnicity, gender, social class, religion, nationality, sexual identity or other dimensions of social identity that are marked by a history of

intergroup prejudice, stigma, discrimination, or oppression (Ely & Roberts, 2008; Ely & Thomas, 2001).

To gather evidence of positive findings in diversity research, we began by conducting a search for research articles on diversity¹ published between January 1998 and April 2010 in widely read management, psychology and sociology journals². This search yielded 135 articles³. We then examined and discussed whether the articles provided evidence of any one of our three types of positive outcomes: a) *intergroup equality*, b) *positive intergroup relations* and c) *positive group outcomes*.

We defined *intergroup equality* as instances in which a stigmatized or disadvantaged group achieves a positive outcome. That is, evidence that members of stigmatized or disadvantaged group are receiving more equal outcomes than stigmatized groups have received traditionally. We defined *positive intergroup relations* as instances in which the relationships between members of stigmatized or disadvantaged groups and members of unstigmatized or advantaged groups are experienced as positive. We defined *positive group outcomes* as instances in which the diversity of a group is positive for the performance of the group as a whole. That is, evidence that diversity positively influenced outcomes for the larger group as a whole, i.e., members of stigmatized/disadvantaged groups and unstigmatized/disadvantaged groups perform well together as a group.

Despite the fact that positive processes and outcomes are not just the opposite of negative processes and outcomes (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988; Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994; Taylor, 1991), we deliberately included articles that showed a reduction or minimization of negative relationships and outcomes. For instance, if the outcome of a study was framed as reducing privilege or disadvantage instead of improving equality, it was still included in our sample. We

felt that this was appropriate because the underlying enterprise of much diversity research is often to understand negative relationships, such as prejudice, stigma and intergroup conflict, to transform them into positive relationships, even if the goal is not clearly stated as such (e.g., Allport, 1954). We found that only about 25% of the articles from our search fit our criteria. We then closely examined the articles we coded as indicating positive findings for the conditions under which intergroup equality, positive intergroup relations and high performance were most likely to occur.

We describe select articles and findings in detail for illustrative purposes, but we do not provide an exhaustive account of all the articles we examined. We occasionally draw upon chapters in edited volumes, books, special issues on positive psychology, annual reviews and working papers where relevant. Also, although we present work in sociology and psychology, where possible we describe research findings focused on diversity in organizational contexts.

In the following sections, we discuss this research using two broad categories: (1) What is positively affected by diversity? (*Positive for what*)? This category consists of research that has shown instances of intergroup equality, positive intergroup relations and the high performance of diverse groups. (2) When is diversity positive (*Positive when*)? This category describes organizational and individual level conditions under which intergroup outcomes, relations and group performance are positive. The findings reviewed here have implications for creating positive conditions in organizations.

A. Positive for what?

Intergroup equality. Compared to the 1960s and 1970s, members of stigmatized and disadvantaged groups have made progress achieving more equal outcomes in organizations in several realms. The primary outcome of interest has been the increase in diversity itself. This has

been measured largely through examining the proportion or representation of women and minorities, their advancement and their retention at all levels of the organization. For instance, in a study of over 800 organizations, Kalev (2009) reports that the proportion of white women, black men and black women has increased in the last twenty years as a result of the move in organizations to restructure jobs and do more team-based work. In an earlier study, Kalev and colleagues (2006) also showed that the proportion of white women, black men, and black women in firms increased the most due to programs that established organizational responsibility for diversity. In a study of women partners in law firms, Beckman & Phillips (2005) show that the percentage of female partners in law firms is growing and that this growth is related to the gender diversity of the firms' corporate clients.

Increased diversity in organizations is also the result of retaining and developing members of stigmatized or disadvantaged groups. Zatzick and colleagues (2003) documented that the turnover rates of members of a minority group decrease when there are greater numbers of representation at higher levels of the firm, and that for minority group members working with others of one's own race (or even with members of other minority groups) improves minority retention and hence the diversity of the organization itself. These articles highlight the fact that diversity both within and outside the organization can have a positive impact on increasing the representation of members of stigmatized and disadvantage groups in the workplace. However, measuring representation alone does not offer a complete picture of intergroup equality. One avenue for future work could be documenting additional dimensions such as power or career trajectories. For instance, in a study of minority board members, Westphal & Milton (2000) showed that minority directors could exert even more influence than majority directors on

corporate boards the more they have prior experience as a minority on majority boards and the more they have social ties to majority board members through other boards.

Positive intergroup relations. Positive intergroup relations are likely to be antecedents to equality in the outcomes we describe above. Furthermore, they are important in and of themselves as they capture the daily cognitive and emotional experiences of both the majority and minority members of a diverse group or organization. Creating positive relationships between members of stigmatized or disadvantaged groups and their more socially and materially well-situated counterparts has been a core part of social psychological research for many years.

Allport's (1954) seminal work on prejudice suggested that interaction and contact between members of majority and minority groups could lead to positive relations, but only under particular circumstances, such as equal status between groups, and support from authorities for contact among others. Research on intergroup contact is still flourishing (Dovidio, Kawakami & Gaertner, 2002; Shelton & Richeson, 2005; Richeson & Shelton, 2003; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005; Pittinsky & Simon, 2007). For instance, Pettigrew & Tropp's (2006) meta-analysis of the contact hypothesis conclusively showed that the basic contact hypothesis itself can be supported. Establishing the conditions that Allport suggested simply enhance the basic effect of intergroup contact, and this seems to be true for both experimental laboratory groups and real ethnopolitical conflict situations (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Furthermore, recent work shows that these reductions in prejudice seem to extend beyond just the immediate contact situation; that is, individuals seem to generalize beyond the immediate person they are in contact with and exhibit positive attitudes towards that person's whole group after the contact situation (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Although actually making contact across group boundaries may be difficult, intergroup contact research has also shown that individuals of both majority and minority groups *desire* to have contact with members of other groups (Shelton & Richeson, 2005). This is a critical finding for positive intergroup relations, because contact is fundamentally inhibited when group members assume that members of other groups do not wish to interact with them (Shelton & Richeson, 2005; Turner et al., 2008). Thus, an Asian individual may desire to be friends with non-Asians, but may believe that non-Asians are not interested in close relationships with him. To the extent that these positive intentions towards interacting with members of other groups can be shared or communicated, they may spur reciprocity and eventually positive perceptions and relationships across group lines. For instance, research shows that an ingroup member who is aware that other ingroup members have friendships with members of an outgroup is likely to perceive outgroup members positively, and this effect is partially mediated by a positive perception that the outgroup is interested in cross-group interactions (Turner et al., 2008). Thus, an Asian individual who is aware that other Asian people have friendships with African-Americans may perceive African-Americans positively because he may come to believe that African-Americans are not opposed to forming friendships with Asians.

As might seem apparent from the studies above, positive intergroup relations in social psychology have largely been seen as a reduction in prejudice and negative attitudes towards outgroups. However, researchers have recently also introduced the construct of allophilia, or outgroup liking (Pittinsky & Montoya, 2009; Pittinsky & Simon, 2007). Drawing on research that suggests positive and negative phenomena, such as emotions and motivations, are independent (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988; Caccioppo & Berntson, 1994; Taylor, 1991), these researchers argue that decreasing negative attitudes towards outgroup members is

independent of increasing positive attitudes, and the two can act in distinctive ways. For example, they argue that allophilia, or positive intergroup attitudes, distinctively predicts proactive support for outgroups, while reduced prejudice or low levels of negative intergroup attitudes do not (Pittinsky, 2010). Furthermore, perceptions that outgroup members desire to interact with one's own group are posited to be antecedents of allophilia (Pittinsky & Simon, 2007).

Organizational scholars of diversity have also used constructs and terms that distinctively denote the presence of positive aspects of relationships between members of different groups, as opposed to the absence or decrease of negative aspects. Terms used in research on positive relationships such as resilience, respect, openness, and inclusion among others (Dutton & Ragins, 2007; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Carmeli & Gittell, 2009) have been transported to diversity research. For example, Ely and Roberts (2008) have argued that changing the emphasis of diversity research from differences to relationships focuses scholars on positive aspects of diversity, such as resilience and generativity. Similarly, Brickson (2000) argues that a relational identity-orientation, an orientation towards meaningful interpersonal relationships in which minority members feel integrated in the organization and majority members see the minority member as a unique individual with social identity characteristics, is likely to be the most beneficial for intergroup relations.

Positive Group Performance. One major thrust of diversity research in organizations has been to support the “value-in-diversity” hypothesis (Williams & O’Reilly, 1998). That is, diversity brings value to the group as a whole -- diverse groups perform better and have greater value than homogenous groups. This has been documented in two ways. The first conceptualizes the value in diversity arising from the direct contributions of members, based on each members’

unique attributes. Much research on the benefits of diversity refers to diversity as bringing multiple, diverse perspectives to the group that allow the group to excel (Jehn et al., 1999; Pelled et al., 1999; Polzer, Milton & Swann, 2002). Research by van Knippenberg and colleagues (2007, 2004; Homan et al., 2007) on diversity mindsets and the information-elaboration model has suggested that groups that value diversity pay more attention to the different perspectives of members; thus the value in diversity comes from differences in information that each member uniquely holds and is exchanged under the right conditions.

While this perspective has continued over the last 20 years, recent research has also exposed other relational and motivational processes that occur in diverse groups which lead to better group performance. For instance, Sommers (2006) conducted a study of group decision making in mock juries in which he showed that diverse jury groups made better decisions than homogenous groups due to better information, but the information was driven by motivated majority group members who pay more attention to information in the presence of a minority or out-group member than by the minority group member. This finding challenges the notion that in diverse groups it is minority members who bring unique information to the table that leads to improved performance (see also Phillips & Loyd, 2006). In this case, mere membership in a diverse group is sufficient to motivate enhanced information sharing and processing and thereby improve group performance.

Discussion. The three types of positive outcomes of diversity - intergroup equality, positive intergroup relations and group performance - are independent of one another. They can be decoupled or interact with one another. For instance, one of the most consistent arguments made in diversity research since Williams & O'Reilly's (1998) review is that work group diversity may lead to positive group performance, but that it is often undermined by negative

intergroup relationships and processes. However, some of the research discussed above shows that demographically heterogeneous groups may have positive intergroup relations, positive group processes and performance under the right conditions, which we elaborate on more in the following section. In contrast, some research shows that even when there are positive intergroup emotions, such as liking, there may not be respect for minority members' competence, for instance, in the case of housewives or the elderly and disabled, (Cuddy, Fiske, Glick, 2004; 2007), which can potentially result in unequal intergroup outcomes and low group performance.

The opposite is also true. Negative intergroup relations in the short-term can improve unequal intergroup outcomes and help create long-term social change (Boen & Vanbeselaere, 2001). For instance, if a minority group member confronts a majority group member who displays bias, this can induce negative emotions for the majority group member, leading to negative intergroup relations in the short-term. However, in the long-term, this confrontation can influence more positive intergroup attitudes and less bias by the majority group member (Czopp, Monteith & Mark, 2006). One need only think about the civil rights movement or the women's movement, which were based on short-term confrontation but influenced long-term social change, to understand the importance of looking at these three dimensions of positive findings independently.

One interesting pattern apparent from our review is that the attention to intergroup equality seems to be concentrated at the macro-organizational and institutional level of analysis, while many intergroup relations and group performance outcomes have been studied at the individual and group level. Research that crosses levels, for instance, bringing higher levels of analysis to understanding performance at the group level and examining intergroup equality at the more micro-level have received little attention. Research by Joshi and colleagues has taken such a

direction, showing that demographic diversity at the occupation-level moderates the effects of group diversity on group-level performance (Joshi & Roh, 2009) and that diversity at the group-level influences intergroup equality in the form of reducing earnings inequalities for members of disadvantaged groups (Joshi, Hui & Jackson, 2006).

B. Positive when?

Given the prevailing image of diversity as a problem to manage, our first objective was to review and integrate research that showed diversity could be positive for individuals and organizations. As the review above indicates, diversity research has documented instances of intergroup equality, positive intergroup relations and positive group performance. However, we did not systematically focus our attention on the contingent nature of these findings, nor the processes by which these outcomes arise. A careful examination of the research we review above will indicate that many of these positive findings occur under particular conditions. Scholars have paid close attention to many moderators (see Jackson, Joshi & Erhardt, 2003 for a review). In this section, we review organizational research that has closely examined the conditions under which organizations can positively influence intergroup equality, intergroup relations and group performance. We organized the conditions covered by existing research into three broad themes: a) organizational or group-level conditions, b) individual-level conditions, and c) work or task-level conditions.

Organizational or group-level moderators. One of the dominant threads in recent diversity research deals with the need for organizations and groups to establish the right approach to diversity in order to realize positive intergroup outcomes, relations and performance. For example, research at the firm-level shows that diversity initiatives focused on organizational responsibilities for diversity are best able to exhibit increases in intergroup equality (i.e., see the

greatest proportion of women and minorities in managerial positions) (Kalev, Dobbin & Kelly, 2006). Organizational responsibilities for diversity include affirmative action plans, diversity committees, and diversity staff positions. Such approaches are distinguished from diversity training, education and feedback, which have no noticeable effect on intergroup equality, and from approaches such as mentoring and networking programs that address the social connections of women and minorities as ways of managing diversity, which have a modest effect on intergroup equality (Kalev, Dobbin & Kelly, 2006).

At the group level, Ely and Thomas (2001) describe three types of perspectives that groups may hold regarding diversity: discrimination-and-fairness, access-and-legitimacy and integration-and-learning. In the discrimination-and-fairness perspective, groups operate under the belief that diversity is a moral imperative and as a result attempt to ensure justice and fair treatment for all. Groups with the access-and-legitimacy perspective believe that diversity is a means to gain access to and legitimacy for the organization among culturally diverse market segments. Groups with an integration-and-learning perspective recognize that diversity can be a resource for learning and adaptive change. Their study finds that the integration-and-learning perspective is most associated with sustainable positive intergroup relations and group performance (Ely & Thomas, 2001).

Diversity research has also examined other group-level constructs closely related to an integration-and-learning perspective that capture the beliefs and attitudes regarding diversity and moderate the influence of diversity on group performance. For instance, van Knippenberg and colleagues investigate constructs such as a diversity mindset, and beliefs about the value-in-diversity (van Knippenberg et al., 2004; 2007; Homan et al., 2007). They show that each of these

constructs are important conditions under which diverse groups experience positive intergroup processes, such as sharing and elaborating on information, and hence achieve high performance.

Researchers have also examined moderators that broadly capture how groups vary in their openness and acceptance of group members' differences. Some of these include groups that have a climate for inclusion (Nishii, 2010) (defined as environments in which members of all identity groups perceive they are fairly treated, valued for who they are, and included in core decision-making), exhibit interpersonal congruence (the extent to which a group verifies each members' self-view) (Polzer et al., 2002), and are high in "openness to experience" (a Big Five personality trait associated with openness to learning, novel experiences and exploring difference) (Homan et al., 2008). In such situations, diverse groups are more likely to experience positive intergroup relations which enhance group performance. For example, Nishii (2010) shows that organizational units that have high gender diversity experience lower conflict and greater satisfaction (more positive intergroup relations) and less turnover when they also have a climate for inclusion. In groups of MBA students Polzer and colleagues (2002) find that when diverse groups also have high interpersonal congruence, that is, group members see each individual the way the individual sees him or herself, they show both positive intergroup relations and performance on creative tasks. Again, while each of these are distinct constructs, they highlight how openness and acceptance of group members' differences is an important moderating condition for high performance by diverse groups.

A third type of condition under which diversity has been shown to result in intergroup equality and positive intergroup relations is the diversity of the larger context or environment in which groups and organizations are embedded. For example, in Phillips et al's (2009) study of promotion rates of female law partners, the demographic composition of the firm's clients was

an important factor that contributed to intergroup equality; law firms with clients that had female executives were more likely to have female partners themselves. At the group level, recent work by Williams (2008) indicates that demographically diverse dyads develop more interpersonal trust than demographically similar dyads when they are embedded in a larger group that is diverse rather than homogenous.

Individual-level moderators. In addition to organizations and groups fostering the right set of conditions for diversity to be positive, individuals may also be able to positively influence the conditions under which they interact. Specifically, when in a diverse setting, one critical issue for members of stigmatized and disadvantaged groups is influencing how they are perceived by members of other groups. For example, both positive and negative stereotypes of women and minorities can limit the equality of their outcomes, the quality of their relationships, and their personal performance. While these effects of diversity are measured at the individual level, it is likely that they also have implications for the ways in which intergroup dynamics play out in organizations (Alderfer & Smith, 1982).

Research suggests that the personality characteristics and identity management strategies of members of minority groups can be important moderators of these effects. For example, people form positive impressions of demographically distinct individuals in organizations who are high in the personality traits of extraversion (characterized by positive emotions, social interaction, and engagement with others) and self-monitoring (i.e., individuals who can observe their own and others reactions and regulate their behavior to adapt to the circumstance) (Flynn & Chatman, 2001; Flynn & Ames, 2006).

Along with personality, impression management strategies, targeted specifically around one's distinct social identity, can also positively moderate the influence of diversity on

intergroup relations in organizations. For instance, while much research shows that concealing important aspects of oneself can have negative implications for minority group members' personal well-being (Clair et al., 2005; Hewlin, 2003; 2009), Phillips and colleagues argue that this is not uniformly the case; for example, concealing negative information about one's distinct social identity may close status distance, bringing high and low-status individuals together and leading to close relationships (Phillips, Rothbard & Dumas, 2009). Disclosing positive information can also contribute to forming close relationships (Phillips, Rothbard & Dumas, 2009); for instance, Roberts and colleagues (2009) note that for women and minorities who may be expected to conform or assimilate to the culture of dominant groups, displaying important aspects of oneself can lead to an experience of alignment or consistency between one's internal feelings and external expression that positively influences high quality relationships (see also Roberts, 2005).

Despite these potential positive consequences of managing one's image around a distinct social identity for positive intergroup relations (Roberts, 2005; Roberts et al., 2005; Phillips et al., 2009), Ely & Meyerson (2010) suggest that proving a particular image (whether highlighting positive aspects or concealing negative aspects) around one's distinct social identity can be detrimental for the work of the group as a whole. They argue that in traditionally masculine organizational cultures in which men are doing dangerous work and are oriented toward proving a gendered image of themselves as "tough," "macho" and "heroic," work suffers. In contrast, in their study of an offshore oil platform that created an organizational culture of safety and contribution to the organization, they argue that men were oriented away from maintaining a traditional masculine image. Instead, they were oriented towards one another and the organization as a whole, which enabled a safer and more efficient work environment.

In addition to managing impressions regarding their distinct social identity, minority group members also vary in how their social identities relate to other identities they hold. For instance, how does identifying with a gender role, or with one's cultural background, such as being African-American or Asian, relate to one's work role? And how could this impact our interactions across group lines?

Recent research suggests that positive relationships between identities, i.e., when identities are experienced as compatible and/or enhancing one another (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Rothbard & Ramarajan, 2009; Dutton et al., 2010), can lead to intergroup tolerance and openness (Ramarajan, 2009), more diverse social networks (Dutton et al., 2010), and also influence a diverse team's innovative performance (Cheng, Sanchez-Burks & Lee, 2008). Thus, individuals' management of multiple identities may also be an important aspect of understanding how individual level identity factors may moderate the relationship between diversity and positive outcomes.

Work and Task-level conditions. Last, in diverse groups, the work or task characteristics themselves can be important moderating conditions of the relationship between diversity and intergroup equality, as well as intergroup relations and group performance. In terms of work characteristics, Kalev (2009) indicates that changes in the structure of work, with less job segregation and more teamwork, increases the visibility of women and minorities, and hence leads to a greater proportion of women and minorities in managerial positions. Group size is another element of the work environment that could moderate the effects of diversity on group performance. For example, Wegge and colleagues (2008) argue that gender diversity has a more positive influence on performance in larger groups than in smaller groups because the diversity of gender-based behaviors that contribute to positive performance is amplified in large groups.

Characteristics of the group's task may also influence diverse group performance. In their study of MBA teams, Polzer et al (2002) find that diversity has a positive impact on group performance under conditions of interpersonal congruence only for creative tasks, but not necessarily for computational tasks. Similarly, other research shows that for routine tasks, the impact of diversity on performance is negative, but for complex tasks the link between diversity and performance is positive (Wegge et al, 2008). However, Pelled et al. (1999) show that the negative effects of racial diversity on group conflict were minimized during routine tasks. Last, time has been examined as a moderator, particularly in terms of decreasing the negative effects of demographic diversity on group processes (e.g., Pelled et al., 1999; Chatman & Flynn, 2001) and occasionally in showing the positive effects of demographic diversity over time (Earley & Mosakowski, 2000), but more longitudinal research is still needed. In general, research on the moderating effects of work and task characteristics is very limited (Joshi & Roh, 2009) and only a small fragment of this work emphasizes the positive aspects of diversity for intergroup outcomes, relations or performance.

Discussion. Recent research has examined a number of different moderators at the group and organizational level including the demography of units at different levels in the organization as well as the context in which the organization or group is embedded, how organizations take responsibility for diversity, how groups may value differences, and the degree to which organizations embrace “the whole person.” One potential avenue for future work could be investigating the antecedents of organizational conditions that are positive for diversity. Questions to explore include: What are the characteristics of organizations that strongly promote taking responsibility for diversity or an integration-and-learning perspective? And how have successful diverse groups learned pro-diversity attitudes over time?

At the individual level, research suggests that there are complex identity and impression management processes that members of stigmatized groups may enact in order to transform negative intergroup relations to positive ones. One could examine how minority group members' management of their distinct social identity or their multiple identities is perceived by majority group members. For instance, in the case of stigmatized group memberships, it could be that conflict among one's identities could have an important positive influence on creating social change or high quality relationships.

Another avenue for research would be to examine how dominant group members enact identity processes that positively influence the link between demographic diversity and intergroup relations. Research that has examined dominant group members' identities and attitudes, such as White racial identity salience, has often linked it to intolerance (Ziegert & Hanges, 2005) and motivations to maintain privilege (Unzueta, Lowery & Knowles, 2008; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). In contrast, Flynn (2005) shows that for Whites the personality trait of "Openness to Experience" is positively associated with attitudes of racial tolerance. In Sommers' (2006) study on jury decision making, better decision making outcomes of diverse juries were due to the White members, who were motivated to investigate the situation rather than from Black participants bringing in a distinct point of view. Thus, research could examine how majority group members construct and enact identities that lead to more positive relations with minorities and better group performance; for example, how do people construct a 'best white self'? This is crucial in understanding the potential for social change. For many minority groups, alliances with supportive members of the majority group are critical. What are the situational conditions, identity and personality processes of majority group members that compel them to act in ways that promote positive intergroup outcomes and relations?

Some of the research we reviewed also shows that the magnitude of the positive findings varied by the actual minority group category (e.g., US/non-US; Black/Hispanic/Asian; women/ethnic minorities) (e.g., Zatzick et al., 2003). In two papers that examine the proportion of women and minorities in managerial positions across hundreds of firms, Kalev showed that intergroup equality differed by three different groups, white women (least unequal), black men, and black women (most unequal) (2009; Kalev, Dobbin & Kelly, 2006). Castilla (2008) also shows that salary increases in a large US organization differ by race, gender, and nationality, with women experiencing the least bias and non-US citizens experiencing the most bias in rewards for their performance compared to white men. In a study on school friendship, research shows that cross-race friendships between Whites and members other groups were more likely to occur when the other group members were Asian or Hispanic than when they were Black (Quillian & Campbell, 2003). Despite research suggesting that there are important differences in identities, attitudes and outcomes among different minority groups and interactions among multiple minority status categories (cf., Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Berdahl & Moore, 2006), very few diversity studies in organizations closely examine these differences. To fully understand the contingent nature of positive findings, future work should also try to take these distinctions into account.

II. A Positive Approach to Diversity Research

Our work writing this chapter has been a process of review and reflection. We initially focused on reviewing the diversity research literature for the presence of positive findings. While most of the studies in this literature are focused on examining the problematic nature of identity group dynamics in organizations, we did indeed find a number of studies whose findings highlight positive influences of diversity on individual and organizational outcomes and the

conditions under which these positive results are likely to appear. We completed the review of this literature quite conscious of the fact that a positive approach to diversity research is distinct from positive findings that may arise from diversity research.

Taking a “positive approach to diversity” may seem ironic, idealistic or perhaps even misguided to many organizational scholars on diversity. Here, we would like to acknowledge the concerns with such an approach and suggest some ways in which researchers can move forward while holding them in mind.

First, researchers may not believe that positive and diversity can be studied together. Summarizing 40 years of diversity research in 1998, Williams and O’Reilly famously concluded that results for the value-in-diversity hypothesis were inconsistent -- it was not clear that there were positive findings for diversity (at least with regard to group performance). Ten years later, diversity scholars acknowledged that their conclusion was still largely true (Chugh & Brief, 2008). In this chapter, we highlight the studies of diversity that have shown some positive outcomes, such as intergroup equality, positive intergroup relations and group performance and the conditions under which these happen as a way to generate ideas and enthusiasm for paying attention to positive findings when studying diversity in organizations.

Second, given that scholars do not yet fully understand or include diversity in general in organizational studies, some may wonder if it is premature to take an approach that is explicitly positive. Just as improving representation of women and minorities in organizations is in and of itself an instance of positive intergroup outcomes, one suggestion is that creating more scholarship on diversity in and of itself could be a positive outcome for organizational scholarship. Perhaps rather than a call for more scholarship utilizing a positive approach to diversity, our field simply needs a call for more research on diversity?

Third, an emphasis on discussing the positives of diversity may seem too idealistic when societies and organizations still have much work to do in order to eliminate inequalities along the lines of race, gender and other major categories (Chugh & Brief, 2008). We stated at the start of this chapter that one quarter of the articles we coded showed a positive finding for diversity based on our admittedly broad categorization of research that showed instances of positive (and less negative) intergroup equality, intergroup relations or group performance. One could ask at what level would diversity scholars consider diversity research to be “blinded” by documenting the positive (Roberts, 2006)? Perhaps as long as diversity research continues to take a mixed and contingent approach, examining the positive without ignoring or eliding the negatives we can navigate this line.

What would a positive approach to diversity research entail? What would be the tenets or heuristics of such an approach? Is it possible to take a positive approach and not fall into an idealistic trap that distorts the reality of identity group dynamics in organizations? An observation by Roberts (2006) forced us to reflect on these questions in a more personal manner. In an article articulating the “value add” of taking a positive organizational studies approach she noted the limited attention that diversity research has received in positive organizational studies literature. She also cited five diversity studies as noteworthy for their emphasis on and illumination of positive dynamics and organizational outcomes (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Polzer, Milton & Swann, 2002; Richard, 2000; Thomas, 2004; Thomas & Gabarro, 1999). The Thomas noted in these citations is one of the authors of this chapter, David Thomas. The studies cited refer to his work on the influence of cultural diversity on individual and organizational performance (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Thomas & Ely, 1996, Thomas, 2004), the influence of race

on developmental relationships (Thomas, 1990; 1993; 2001) and minority executive development and advancement (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999).

Upon reflection, we began to consider how consistent these studies were with the tenets of positive organizational scholarship. According to Roberts (2006) the motivating idea of positive organizational studies is “to identify and understand the generative mechanisms that create positive deviance in people, groups and organizations.” Against that criterion we found that much of David’s work could be seen as having a positive orientation.

His work with Robin Ely began with a focus on understanding the influence of racial diversity on organizations that transformed themselves from very homogeneous, predominantly white organizations, to being racially diverse across all levels of the hierarchy. The condition of racial diversity across all levels of the hierarchy was assumed to be positive and definitely was atypical or deviant for the industries in which these focal organizations existed. The theoretical contribution of this work was to identify that racial diversity alone did not lead to better organizational performance or individual outcomes. This occurred when diversity was accompanied by an integration-and-learning perspective about diversity and the relevance of diversity to the organization’s work (Ely & Thomas, 2001).

Thomas (1993) examines the conditions under which cross-race developmental relationships evolve into intimate and positive mentor-protégé relationships that provide both significant instrumental career support (i.e., coaching, advocacy, exposure) and psychosocial support (i.e., trust, counseling, role modeling) rather than becoming only an instrumentally supportive but psychosocially distant sponsor-protégé relationship. A prior study in the same organization revealed that these cross-race mentor-protégé relationships were indeed rare (Thomas, 1990). The theoretical contribution of this work was identifying the complementarity

between the perspectives of the mentor and the protégé regarding how to manage racial difference as the key mechanism that determined whether the cross-race dyad would evolve into a full-blown mentor-protégé relationship.

In a third stream of research Thomas and Gabarro (1999) set out to identify the individual and organizational factors that corresponded with racial minorities achieving C-suite level executive positions in large predominantly white organizations. The study was comparative as it included minority executives (positive deviants), white executives, minorities who plateaued in middle management and whites who plateaued middle management. At the time, this was the first study to focus on the population of minorities in executive jobs with a comparative research design. A central contribution of the book was to isolate the unique pathway of mobility and the pattern of career experiences that differentiated minority executives from minorities who plateaued and from white executives who achieved comparable positions. During the design phase of the project some scholars of race relations and inequality criticized it for focusing too much on an aberrant positive condition since race so over-determined the fact that on average minorities will not reach executive level positions regardless of their human and social capital assets in their early careers. The criticism is reminiscent of some of the reasons Roberts (2006) cites for why some scholars and in particular diversity researchers might be skeptical of a positive approach to studying diversity. The ultimate product of the research was an award-winning book, Breaking Through: The Making of Minority Executives in Corporate America, that in reviews did not receive criticism of this sort from the same scholars who were initially skeptical.

Discussion. Looking across these studies we see threads consistent with positive organizational scholarship. Some prominent elements of these studies also suggest four tenets or

heuristics that might form the basis for a positive approach to diversity research that is consistent with positive organizational studies without negating the importance of examining the normative and problematic aspects of identity group dynamics in positive diversity research. First, a positive approach to diversity begins by examining a phenomenon in which identity group-based differences are thought to matter. The research must therefore be informed by the relevant diversity research regardless of its emphasis on the positive or problematic. While this may seem too obvious to state as the first tenet it is important so that positive diversity scholarship does not get divorced from the literature on social identity group dynamics. For example, David's work on mentoring is very much informed by the literature on the tortured nature of cross-race relationships even stemming from the legacy of slavery in the US (Thomas, 1989).

Second, the motivating question guiding the ultimate design of the study must focus on an established condition of positive deviance. For example, David's work on mentoring evolved out of his statistical observation that cross-race developmental relationships did form but that the mentor-protégé variety characterized by high degrees of both instrumental career and psychosocial support were rare. It was also clear that relationships that provided high degrees of both career and psychosocial support were longer lasting and seen as having a greater impact on positive career outcomes.

Third, a positive approach to diversity research requires that where possible empirical studies must include the non-positive deviant or average condition for purposes of comparison. This ensures that unique identity group related dynamics are not lost. The advantage of this was evident in David's studies of both cross-mentoring relationships and minority career advancement. Without the presence of the more common cross-race sponsor protégé condition in the mentoring study, the significance of complementarity in racial perspective would not have

emerged because what was important was not the content of the perspective, but whether it was congruent with the dyad partner's perspective with regard to whether race was a positive issue to acknowledge and explore in the relationship or one deemed problematic and best left out of the relationship. Similarly, without the presence of white executives and plateaued minority managers in the study of minority executives much of the race related dynamics identified in the book would not have emerged.

Fourth, the researchers must treat the targeted positive deviance as a hypothesis rather than a fact. In other words there must be openness to discovering the shadow side of positive deviance and modifying our understanding of the condition. The work by Ely and Thomas (1996; 2001) illustrates the importance of this tenet. The research originally began with the assumption that racial diversity across the organizational hierarchy was a condition of positive deviance. As the research progressed it was discovered that while deviant, the condition of racial diversity alone did not lead to the most positive outcomes or experience of being diverse. Those outcomes were dependent on a moderating condition, the integration-and-learning diversity perspective. Thus the researchers had to refine their initial understanding of what constituted the positive deviance.

Conclusion

Our narrative review and integration of positive findings on diversity and our discussion on a positive approach to diversity scholarship reveal some complementary directions for future diversity research in general and also research within positive organizational scholarship. A positive approach to diversity research can yield theory that more powerfully facilitates individual and collective agency in making diversity a resource for positive outcomes in organizations as well as the mitigation of barriers. Even research designed to influence organizational policy could benefit. Today most of the laws and policies governing issues related to areas such race, gender and sexual orientation come out of studies of discrimination. While these have helped open up institutions to broader participation, they also sometimes have unintended negative consequences. A prime example is managers refraining from giving constructive and honest feedback to minorities in a timely manner for fear of lawsuits. We wonder whether policies developed from positive diversity research might be more helpful in shaping the kinds of relationships across difference with the potential of enhancing people's ability to connect in more authentic ways.

The heuristics for a positive approach to diversity research we articulate may also be relevant for the general paradigm of positive organizational studies that is still evolving. Two dimensions are particularly obvious to us. First, just as we argue in tenet three of our positive diversity research approach, we believe there is a need for positive organizational scholarship to be clearer about how studies should take into account the problematic or non-positive conditions that motivate most research on diversity. Second, our positive approach to diversity research calls for an explicit openness to learning about and refining one's understanding of the presumed positive

deviant condition and even acknowledging its shadow side. Such a learning stance would likely benefit all manner of positive organizational research.

Endnotes

¹ Our own keyword search from 2008-2010 on diversity more generally (not only race and gender) yielded very similar percentages as Chugh and Brief (2008): 5% in management journals and 14% when we included psychology and sociology journals. We started our search in 1998, because this encompasses the years since William and O'Reilly's (1998) review of the diversity literature in organizational scholarship.

² We searched the following journals: Administrative Science Quarterly, Organization Science, Academy of Management Journal, Academy of Management Review, Journal of Applied Psychology, Journal of Organizational Behavior, American Journal of Sociology, American Sociological Review, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Psychological Science, Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes.

³ A list of these articles can be provided by the authors upon request

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