Racial Identity and Its Impact on Job Applicants

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Across two experimental studies, the purpose of this research project was to examine how Whites evaluate African Americans with a strong racial identity. In Study 1, participants evaluated applicants for an athletic director position. Relative to their weakly identified counterparts, applicants believed to possess a strong racial identity were rated as a poorer fit for the job. Results from Study 2, which was also set within the context of hiring an athletic director, show that participant social dominance orientation moderates the relationship between racial identity and subsequent evaluations. The authors discuss theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and future directions.

**Keywords:** diversity, identity, race

How do the identities people hold influence associated attitudes and behaviors? A number of scholars have examined this issue, within the context of both sport marketing and intercollegiate athletes. For example, people who strongly identify with a particular sport team are more likely than their counterparts to purchase licensed merchandise (Kwon & Armstrong, 2002), have varied self-esteem responses following the team’s success or failure (Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2005), and attend the team’s games and events (Wann & Branscombe, 1993), among other outcomes. With respect to athletes, various identities are associated with academic and athletic experiences (Bimper & Harrison, 2011). Illustrative of this, among African American college athletes, athletic identity is negatively associated with racial identity centrality and perceptions that racial discrimination is still pervasive (Brown et al., 2003). Other inquiries of athletes show that lesbian athletes who strongly identify with their sexual orientation have more self-confidence and are more willing to engage in social activism than are their less strongly identified peers (Fink, Burton, Farrell, & Parker, 2012; Krane, Barber, & McClung, 2002). Collectively, this research demonstrates that the strength of one’s identity can have a meaningful influence on subsequent outcomes.

From a different perspective, it is also possible to examine how people perceive others’ identities and the consequent reactions. This shifts the focus from the individual’s identity and her or his subsequent behaviors to consideration of how others’ identities are associated with people’s attitudes and behaviors toward them. Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt (2009) considered this possibility across six experimental studies. They observed that Whites respond more negatively to racial minorities believed to hold a strong racial identity than they do toward weakly identified racial minorities. The effects held when both Latinos and African Americans were the target group. We only identified one study in the sport context to examine this topic, Cunningham and Regan’s (2012) investigation of athlete endorsers. Contrary to Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt, the authors observed that highly identified African Americans were viewed as more trustworthy product endorsers, particularly when they were also involved in socially acceptable forms of activism (e.g., antiobesity work). Cunningham and Regan suggested the findings might be due to expectations for African American sport stars to be highly identified with their race; absent such identification, questions of authenticity might arise.

In this research project, we draw from prejudice-distribution theory (Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009) to extend this research in several ways. Through two experimental studies, we (a) examine the influence of perceived racial identity on hiring recommendations, (b) include gender (Study 1) and social dominance orientation (Study 2) as potential moderating variables, and (c) consider the potential mediating role of attributions (Study 2). By considering different contexts, moderators, and mediators, our research project contributes to the understanding of how racial minorities’ identities influence others’ perceptions of them and their opportunities within the sport context.

**Theoretical Framework**

People’s identity has been the focus of a number of diversity-related inquiries (see Sartore & Cunningham, 2007a; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). For...
example, from a social categorization perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), people categorize themselves and others into social groups, using a host of different factors, such as their demographics, attitudes, beliefs, and so on. These characteristics are used to define the self and others in terms of a social identity. As people generally have more positive attitudes toward and prefer to interact with people similar to the self (in-group members) relative to those who are different (out-group members), intergroup bias can result. Illustrative of these dynamics, exercise class participants (Cunningham, 2006) and track-and-field coaches (Cunningham, 2007) who differ from others in their groups are likely to experience less satisfaction with and attachment to those entities.

Of course, people who share a common social identity might differ in their personal identities. According to Brewer (1991), one’s personal identity represents “the individuated self—those characteristics that differentiate one individual from others in a social context” (p. 476). This identity represents how people see themselves and is a core component of their self-concept (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Randel & Jaussi, 2003). As an example, two African Americans might vary in their racial identity: For one African American, her race might represent a core element of how she defines herself as a person, while for another, her race might be secondary to other identities. These identities are important because of their association with subsequent outcomes. For example, personal and social identities interact to predict performance in work groups, such that when people are different from their coworkers based on a key personal identity, their performance is likely to suffer (Randel & Jaussi, 2003). In addition, racial minorities who strongly identify with their race report experiencing more prejudice and discrimination than do their counterparts (Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002).

Social and personal identities can also interact to predict how people respond to others. This is the crux of Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt’s (2009) prejudice-distribution theory. They suggest that not all racial minorities have the same likelihood of experiencing prejudice and discrimination, but instead, it is likely to vary based on the minority’s perceived racial identity. Whites are likely to presume that strongly identified racial minorities challenge status-legitimizing worldviews. That is, they are thought to reject philosophies that the world is just and fair, ideals related to the Protestant work ethic, and notions of meritocracy. As all of these worldviews challenge status-legitimizing worldviews, employees are likely to experience more prejudice toward racial minorities with strong racial identities than they toward weakly identified racial minorities. Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt demonstrated empirical support for these relationships across six experimental studies using a variety of methodological approaches and with varied targets (e.g., African Americans, Latinos).

Study 1

In the first study, we draw from prejudice-distribution theory (Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009) to examine attitudes toward potential job applicants. As outlined in greater detail in the Method section, participants reviewed a job application for an open athletic director position at a public university in the Southwest. All résumés contained a photo of an African American applicant, work history, educational achievements, and affiliations. We varied the gender of the job applicant as well as information in the affiliation section, the latter of which was done to signal the applicant’s racial identity.

Racial minorities who strongly identify with their race routinely report facing prejudice and discrimination (Major et al., 2002). Prejudice-distribution theory (Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009) offers a rationale for why this might occur, as a strong racial identity among racial minorities might also signal a rejection of status-legitimizing norms. Similar dynamics are likely to occur in the context of university athletics, a context with a history of racism and racial discrimination against players, coaches, and administrators (Singer, 2008). We expected highly identified racial minority job applicants would be viewed less positively (i.e., have poorer person–job fit) than their more weakly identified counterparts. More formally, we hypothesized the following:

**Hypothesis 1**: Weakly identified racial minority job applicants will have higher person–job fit ratings than will strongly identified racial minority job applicants.

We also expected applicant gender to interact with racial identity. Previous work in the area of prejudice distribution has only included men as targets of evaluation (Cunningham & Regan, 2012; Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009), leaving a gap in the understanding of how gender influences these dynamics. Some hold the notion that in general evaluations of people (e.g., Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009), highly identified men are viewed as more threatening than are women and, thus, will be rated more harshly (see also Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Others adopt a different perspective, though, suggesting racial minority women are likely to experience the most subjugation (Bruening, 2005; hooks, 1981).

Cortina’s (2008) selective incivility theory helps inform these potential differences. She suggested that given the decline in the expression of explicit forms of discrimination, employees are likely to experience differential treatment in subtle, nuanced ways. This is most likely manifested through acts of incivility, which represents a low-intensity form of conduct that is rude
and discourteous but nevertheless harmful. In drawing from the principles of intersectionality, Cortina further suggested that women, racial minorities, and in particular, women of color were most likely to experience incivility in the workplace. Subsequent research from Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Leskinen, Huerta, and Magley (2013) confirms these theoretical tenets, as they observed African American women were more likely than their peers to experience incivility, and incivility’s relationship with turnover intentions was strongest for this group, too.

Selective incivility theory (Cortina, 2008) suggests women of color are most likely to experience prejudice and discrimination at work. There is also evidence from the sport industry supporting this position. As Cunningham (2011) notes, “the effects of gender and race are not merely additive: they are qualitative, in that women of color are likely to have experiences that differ from those of men of color or White women” (p. 120). To this point, data from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (DeHass, 2007) show that women of color are underrepresented in all key administrative positions, even beyond what would be expected based on their proportion in the U.S. population. As a result, women of color working in leadership roles are likely to be “solos,” or individuals who are the lone representative (or one of a few representatives) of a particular group (McDowell & Cunningham, 2009). Because they are in this vulnerable position, racial minority women leaders are likely to encounter heightened scrutiny, be stigmatized as incompetent, and have expectations of prototypical behaviors (Abney, 1988; see also Kanter, 1977). Given these effects, we predicted the following:

Hypothesis 2: Gender will moderate the effects of racial identity on person–job fit, such that racial minority women will receive the lowest ratings.

Method

Participants

We collected data from 101 White undergraduate students enrolled in physical activity classes at a large, public university in the southwestern United States. The restriction of the sample to White students is consistent with past research examining prejudice toward racial minorities (e.g., Cunningham & Regan, 2012; Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009). The sample included 42 women (41.6%) and 59 men (58.4%), with a mean age of 20.05 years (SD = 1.31).

Procedures

After agreeing to voluntarily participate in the study, participants took part in a 2 (applicant racial identity: low, high) × 2 (applicant gender: woman, man) experiment. They received a study packet containing a letter explaining the general purpose of the study (i.e., “to understand the factors that influence the hiring practices in Division I athletic departments”) and the experimental materials. We randomly distributed the materials so that each participant received one of the four packets.

Participants first read that an athletic department at a large, public university was hiring a new athletic director. They were then asked to read the dossier “as if you were on the university’s hiring committee.” The dossier contained a picture of the applicant (all of whom were African American), a personal statement, work history, educational attainment, and affiliations. We manipulated racial identity by altering the affiliations information. For highly identified applicants, the packet read “Black Coaches Association (on board of trustees from 2001–2005), Black Coaches and Administrators Association, a member of the NCAA Division I management council, National Honor Society, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity [for the men; “Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority” for the women], 2008 chair for local Obama campaign.” Among the weakly identified applicants, the affiliations information read: “National Honor Society, Intercollegiate Athletics Coaches Association (on board of trustees from 2001–2005), a member of the NCAA Division I management council, 2008 chair for local McCain campaign.” Finally, we manipulated applicant gender through the photograph. After reviewing the dossier, participants completed a postexperiment questionnaire.

Materials

The postexperiment questionnaire contained items to measure the effectiveness of the manipulation, person–job fit, and participant demographics. We embedded the manipulation check among several items designed to evaluate the applicant. The specific item read, “Based on the resume, I believe the applicant is strongly identified with their race,” and responses were made on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Filler items were included so as not to alert participants to the purpose of the study. They included questions about the degree to which the applicant was extraverted, agreeable, skilled, and honest.

We included three items from Sartore and Cunningham (2007b) to measure person–job fit. A sample item is “This person seems to have the characteristics necessary for the job,” and responses were made on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The alpha was acceptable (α = .84), and we took the item mean for the final score.

Results

Manipulation Check

The experimental manipulation was successful. Persons in the highly identified conditions perceived the applicant to have a higher racial identity (M = 6.27, SD = 1.09) than did persons in the weakly identified condition (M = 4.12, SD = 1.35), F(1, 97) = 75.24, p < .001.
Hypothesis Testing

We tested our hypotheses by way of a 2 (racial identity: low, high) × 2 (applicant gender: women, man) × 2 (participant gender: women, man) analysis of variance, with person–job fit serving as the dependent variable. While we did not hypothesize specific effects for participant gender, it is possible that people would have a preference for a person similar in gender to them (Tsui & Gutek, 1999). Thus, we included participant gender as a between-subjects variable. Results are presented in Table 1.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that weakly identified applicants would receive higher person–job fit ratings than would highly identified applicants. This hypothesis was supported, \( F(1, 93) = 6.36, p = .01, d = 0.53 \). Racial minorities who did not express a high racial identity were rated higher (\( M = 5.88, SD = 0.93 \)) than their peers (\( M = 5.31, SD = 1.22 \)), and the effect was moderate based on Cohen’s (1988) guidelines.

Hypothesis 2, which predicted that gender would moderate the relationship between racial identity and person–job fit, was not supported: \( F(1, 93) = 0.10, p = .75 \). Participants rated weakly identified women (\( M = 5.98, SD = 0.87 \)) and men (\( M = 5.79, SD = 1.00 \)) higher than their more strongly identified counterparts (\( M = 5.18, SD = 1.34, \) and \( M = 5.42, SD = 1.12 \), respectively).

Finally, while participant gender did have a main effect, \( F(1, 93) = 3.88, p = .05 \) (women offered higher ratings than did men), there were no interactive effects with applicant racial identity, applicant gender, or the combination thereof.

Discussion

The purpose of Study 1 was to examine how perceived racial identity influenced Whites’ ratings of racial minority job applicants. Results of the manipulation check

Table 1  Effects of Applicant Racial Identity, Applicant Gender, and Participant Gender on Person–Job Fit Ratings (Study 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Identity</th>
<th>Applicant Gender</th>
<th>Participant Gender</th>
<th>( M )</th>
<th>( SD )</th>
<th>( n )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low racial identity</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.98</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>6.03</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.79</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>6.09</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High racial identity</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>5.85</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>5.44</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
indicate that participants did take notice of the cues in the dossier: Participants believed that racial minority applicants who were active in African American–specific activities were strongly identified with their race. These cues were important, as Whites rated highly identified applicants as being a poorer fit for the job than their more weakly identified counterparts. Further, we observed racial identity effects consistently among both female and male applicants.

The results are consistent with prejudice-distribution theory (Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009) and suggest that Whites penalize racial minorities who strongly identify with their race. They are likely to do so because of the belief that highly identified racial minorities challenge the status quo and social structures privileging some (re: Whites) over others. In line with this reasoning, within the athletics setting, Whites are privileged and overrepresented, relative to their proportion in the U.S. population, in coaching and leadership positions (for an overview, see Cunningham, 2011). Further, racial stereotypes cast African Americans as suitable for diversity-related jobs but as lacking the knowledge and skills necessary for high-level positions (Cunningham & Bopp, 2010)—attributions likely to be more highly activated when racial identity is high. All of these factors potentially contribute to the negative evaluations of strongly identified racial minority candidates.

Interestingly, we did not observe moderating effects by applicant gender, as female and male applicants received similar evaluations, depending upon their perceived racial identity. It is possible that, at least within the context of rating job applicants, racial identity is more salient in the minds of the raters than is the applicant’s gender.

### Study 2

In Study 2, we sought to extend on our findings in Study 1 in several ways. First, we included a potential intervening variable—attributions of the applicant. From an attribution theory perspective (Weiner, 1995), people look for explanations and connections when seeking to understand different phenomena. They use these attributions to explain why certain activities occur or to justify different behaviors. For example, people frequently attribute obesity to laziness or lack of self-control on the part of the target (Paul & Townsend, 1995), and as these are negative characteristics, obese people are considered in a more negative light than are their thinner counterparts.

Attribution theory might also better help explain the relationship between high racial identity and poor person–job fit ratings. Specifically, we submit that prevailing racial stereotypes and attributions might be triggered when evaluating highly identified racial minority applicants. People are unlikely to consider African American employees as qualified for leadership positions, especially when compared with Whites (Rosette, Leonardelli, & Phillips, 2008). African Americans working in sport are also more likely to be praised for their diversity-related abilities than they are for their work experiences or their content-specific knowledge (Cunningham & Bopp, 2010). Thus, stereotypes and attributions concerning African American employees are likely to be poor—dynamics that are likely to only be heightened when the applicant’s racial identity is high (Cokley, Dreher, & Stockdale, 2004). Further, as Sartore and Cunningham (2007b) have demonstrated, applicant attributions are closely associated with perceptions of how well that person will fit with the job. As such, we hypothesized the following:

**Hypothesis 3:** Weakly identified racial minority job applicants will have higher attributions ratings than will strongly identified racial minority job applicants.

**Hypothesis 4:** Attributions will be positively associated with person–job fit ratings.

We also examined a potential moderator: social dominance orientation. Sidanius and Pratto’s (1999) social dominance theory suggests that group-based hierarchies emerge in different societies, with people in dominant groups maintaining a disproportionate share of power and privilege over other people. A key element of this theory is the psychological construct social dominance orientation, or “the degree to which individuals desire and support group-based hierarchies and the domination of ‘inferior’ groups by ‘superior’ groups” (p. 48). People with high levels of social dominance orientation support hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myths that serve to promulgate status-based hierarchies. This psychological construct informs people’s views toward diversity-related issues as well, as it is related to support for social inequalities (Danso, Sedlovskaya, & Suanda, 2007); attraction to inclusive workplaces (Melton & Cunningham, 2012); and prejudice against lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals (Whitley, & Egisdottir, 2000), religious minorities (Guimond et al., 2013), and racial minorities (Kteily, Sidanius, & Levin, 2011). These effects are observed across countries (Guimond et al., 2013; Pratto et al., 2000), and there is some evidence that they are causal in nature (Kteily et al., 2011).

Social dominance likely moderates the relationship between perceived applicant racial identity and subsequent applicant ratings. From a prejudice-distribution theory perspective (Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009), highly identified racial minorities are believed to reject the racial status quo and current cultural arrangements that privilege Whites. Racial minorities believed to adopt this perspective would be viewed negatively among people with a high social dominance orientation. Indeed, Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt observed that people who endorsed status-legitimizing worldviews (which is conceptually similar to social dominance orientation) were likely to rate strongly identified racial minorities more harshly than their weakly identified counterparts. Given this possibility, and the aforementioned hypothesis related to attribution, we hypothesized as follows:
Hypothesis 5: Social dominance orientation will moderate the relationship between racial identity and job attributions.

Thus far, we have predicted that weakly identified racial minorities will receive more positive attributions ratings than will their strongly identified counterparts (H3) and that attributions will be positively associated with person–job fit ratings (H4). This pattern is suggestive of simple mediation. In addition, we proposed social dominance orientation is likely to moderate the relationship between racial identity and attributions (H5). Combined, these predictions suggest moderated mediation is possible. As Edwards and Lambert (2007) explain, moderated mediation occurs when “an interaction between an independent and moderator variable affects a mediator variable that in turn affects an outcome variable” (p. 7). Related to this is what Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007) refer to as conditional indirect effects, whereby the indirect effects of the mediating variable are conditional or dependent upon the strength of the moderating variable. These possibilities are present in the current study, as the relationship between attribution ratings and person–job fit evaluations might vary based on rater social dominance orientation. Consistent with this line of reasoning, we predicted the following:

Hypothesis 6: The indirect effects of racial identity on person–job fit, via attributions, will be moderated by social dominance orientation, such that the strength of mediation is stronger for people with high social dominance than for their counterparts.

Method

Participants

We collected data from 110 White students enrolled in physical activity classes at a large, public university in the southwestern United States. The sample consisted of 49 women (44.5%) and 61 men (55.5%). The mean age was 20.55 years (SD = 1.32), and all voluntarily consented to participate in the study.

Procedures

The procedures were nearly identical to those in Study 1, as we ran a 2 (applicant racial identity: low, high) × 2 (applicant gender: woman, man) experiment in which participants were told they were participating in a study to better understand the hiring practices in college athletics. The one difference was the postexperiment questionnaire, which we outline in the following section.

Measures

Participants complete a postexperiment questionnaire in which they provided their demographic information (age, gender, and race) and responded to items designed to measure the efficacy of the manipulation, participant social dominance orientation, the attributions concerning the job applicant, and the applicant’s person–job fit. The manipulation check and person–job fit items (α = .87) were the same as those used in Study 1. As with Study 1, we embedded the manipulation check among several items designed to evaluate the applicant. This was done so as not to alert participants to the purpose of the study.

We used an abbreviated, 9-item version of Sidanius and Pratto’s (1999) original scale. Others have also effectively used an abbreviated version of the scale (e.g., Louis, Duck, Terry, Schuller, & LaLonde, 2007). Sample items include “Inferior groups should stay in their place” and “I think no one group should dominate society” (reverse scored). The items were anchored by a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scale had acceptable reliability (α = .84), and we used the item mean for the final score.

Finally, we measured attributions with four items preceded by the phrase “In general, I would rate the applicant being considered for the athletic director position as...” We then used semantic differential word pairs: “undependable–dependable,” “not an expert–expert,” “unskilled–skilled,” and “dishonest–honest.” Sartore and Cunningham (2007b) used a similar approach. The reliability was high (α = .90), and we used the item mean for the final score.

Results

Manipulation Check

Results indicate the experimental manipulation was successful, F(1, 108) = 65.66, p < .001. Participants in the high identity conditions perceived the job applicants were more highly identified with their race (M = 5.97, SD = 1.05) than did persons in the low identity conditions (M = 4.04, SD = 1.44).

Hypothesis Testing

Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations are presented in Table 2. As we hypothesized mediating and moderating effects, we analyzed the data through moderated mediation using the macros developed by Preacher et al. (2007). Given that applicant gender did not serve as a moderator in Study 1, we did not include it as an independent variable in this study. We did, however, want to statistically control for gender’s possible influence, so we included both applicant gender and participant gender as controls in this analysis. Finally, given the difficulty in detecting moderating variables through regression analysis (McClelland & Judd, 1993), we increased the alpha level to .10 for the tests of moderation, a technique prescribed by statisticians (Aguinis, 1995) and followed by other scholars (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998). We present the results in Table 3. Hypotheses 1 and 3 predicted that highly identified job applicants would be rated poorer than their less identified peers. These hypotheses were not supported for either person–job fit ratings (B = −0.14, SE = 0.16, p = .36) or attribu-
Table 2  Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations (Study 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applicant gender</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant gender</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant racial identity</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social dominance orientation</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Attributions</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person–job fit</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(M(\%)\)  
- 1.46  
- 1.46  
- 1.55  
- 2.68  
- 5.40  
- 5.86  

\(SD\)  
- —  
- —  
- —  
- 1.06  
- 1.27  
- 5.86  

Notes. Applicant gender coded as 0 = man, 1 = woman; participant gender coded as 0 = man, 1 = woman; applicant racial identity coded as 0 = low racial identity, 1 = high racial identity. *\(p < .05\). **\(p < .001\).

Table 3  Results of Moderated Mediation Analysis (Study 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Mediator Variable (Attributions) Model</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>22.04***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant gender</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>1.92†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant gender</td>
<td></td>
<td>−0.34</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>−1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant racial identity (ARI)</td>
<td></td>
<td>−0.16</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>−0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social dominance orientation (SDO)</td>
<td></td>
<td>−0.51</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>−3.02**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARI × SDO</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>1.79†</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Dependent Variable (Person–Job Fit) Model</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>12.01***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant gender</td>
<td></td>
<td>−0.01</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>−.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant gender</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant racial identity (ARI)</td>
<td></td>
<td>−0.14</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>−.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social dominance orientation (SDO)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARI × SDO</td>
<td></td>
<td>−0.30</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>−1.89†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributions</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>3.51***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conditional Effects at SDO = −1 SD, mean, and +1 SD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indirect Effect</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>z</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low SDO</td>
<td>−0.12</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean SDO</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High SDO</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. Applicant gender coded as 0 = man, 1 = woman; participant gender coded as 0 = man, 1 = woman; applicant racial identity coded as 0 = low racial identity, 1 = high racial identity. †\(p < .10\). **\(p < .01\). ***\(p < .001\).

Our next hypothesis, that attributions would hold a positive association with person–job fit (H4), was supported. As seen in Table 3, the relationship between attributions and person–job fit ratings were significant and positive (\(B = 0.23, SE = 0.06, p < .001\)).

With the fifth hypothesis, we predicted that social dominance orientation would moderate the relationship between identity and attributions. As seen in Table 3,

tions ratings (\(B = −0.16, SE = 0.24, p = .51\)). Thus, both hypotheses were rejected.
social dominance orientation was negatively associated with attributions ($B = -0.51, SE = 0.17, p = .003$), and it also served to moderate the relationship between identity and attributions ($B = 0.43, SE = 0.24, p = .08$), supporting Hypothesis 5. Interestingly, social dominance orientation also moderated the relationship between identity and person–job fit ratings ($B = -0.30, SE = 0.16, p = .06$), a finding we did not hypothesize. We follow Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aikin’s (2003) guidelines for plotting the nature of these interactions. For attributions, participants with a low social dominance orientation had higher attributions ratings for weakly identified applicants than did their high social dominance orientation counterparts; however, there were no differences for ratings of highly identified individuals (see Figure 1). A slightly different pattern emerged for person–job fit. In this case, there were no differences in the ratings of weakly identified candidates. For ratings of candidates with a strong racial identity, people with a low social dominance orientation offered more positive ratings than did persons with low social dominance orientation (see Figure 2).

Finally, we predicted mediated moderation, such that the mediating effects of attributions would be conditional upon participant social dominance orientation (H6). As seen in Table 3, this hypothesis was not supported for any level (mean, low, or high) of social dominance orientation. Thus, Hypothesis 6 was rejected.

**Discussion**

The purpose of Study 2 was to expand on our first investigation by exploring two additional factors that could influence the effects of one’s racial identity on subsequent personnel decisions: attributions made toward the applicant and rater social dominance orientation. As

![Figure 1](image1.png)

**Figure 1** — Effects of applicant identity and social dominance orientation (SDO) on attributions.

![Figure 2](image2.png)

**Figure 2** — Effects of applicant identity and social dominance orientation (SDO) on person–job fit ratings.
with Study 1, we again found that participants made assumptions of the applicant’s racial identity based on the material presented in her or his dossier (per the manipulation check). Furthermore, perceptions of one’s racial identity interacted with participant social dominance orientation to predict both attributions and person–job fit. Where differences occurred in the ratings, persons with a low social dominance orientation offered more positive evaluations than did their high social dominance orientation counterparts. These findings are consistent with and complement previous investigations, such that high social dominance orientation is associated with less positive views of racial minorities and diversity-related topics (Danso et al., 2007; Kteily et al., 2011; Melton & Cunningham, 2012).

Applicant racial identity and participant social dominance orientation interacted to predict attributions, and in line with previous research related to personnel evaluations in sport organizations (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007b), this construct was positively associated with person–job fit ratings. However, contrary to our expectations, the conditional indirect effects of attributions on person–job fit were not significant; thus, the effects of attributions on person–job fit do not appear to be dependent upon the social dominance orientation of the rater.

**General Discussion**

In drawing from prejudice-attribute theory (Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009), the purpose of this research project was to examine the role of perceived racial identity in the evaluation of African Americans. In doing so, we considered personnel decisions within college athletics, the influence of two moderators (gender of the job applicant and social dominance orientation of the rater), and the role of one mediator (attributions). Our work offers an interesting pattern that, when combined with other research in the area, begins to paint a picture of how Whites respond to racial minorities in sport who they believe strongly identify with their race. In the following discussion, we offer an overview of the contributions, acknowledge study limitations, and suggest areas for future research.

**Contributions**

Results from the two experimental studies show that Whites are attuned to various cues and use them to develop perceptions of African Americans’ racial identity. Job applicants involved in African American–related organizations, such as the Black Coaches and Administrators, were considered to be strongly identified. Note that perceptions were not formed as a result of conversations with the target, nor from psychological information provided by the target (such as in Cunningham & Regan’s, 2012, work). Given these findings, we submit that Whites might seek out information to form inferences of racial minorities’ racial identity.

In addition, our work offers several theoretical extensions. First, when coupled with the research from Cunningham and Regan (2012), results from our investigations suggest the effects of racial identity are likely to vary based on context. In some situations, Whites represent the norm among leaders (Rosette et al., 2008), and people are generally expected to accept the status quo and historically driven norms. College athletics represents one such traditional, conservative context (Fink et al., 2001). In this case, raters are likely to prefer weakly identified racial minorities (see Study 1)—people who are thought to endorse (or at least not challenge) status-legitimizing worldviews. This relationship is likely to be particularly robust among raters who have a high social dominance orientation (see Study 2).

This stands in contrast to the other study set in the sport context, whereby Cunningham and Regan (2012) argued that when evaluating athletics, Whites might expect racial minorities to strongly identify with their race. We recognize that when compared with African American athletes from the Civil Rights era, today’s athletes are less likely to hold or express a strong racial identity (Powell, 2008). Nevertheless, it is still possible that consumers perceive African American athletes as being strongly identified and expect them to maintain that identity more so than they do for sport administrators. If this is the case, then a strong racial identity will actually be rewarded, not penalized, among African American athlete endorsers.

Second, our identification of key process variables offers another extension of prejudice-attribute theory (Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009). The influence of racial identity is likely to be influenced by various factors, such as rater social dominance orientation and the attributions made of the target. On the other hand, results from Study 1 suggest the gender of the target is less salient to raters than is the target’s race. Thus, our research provides important information related to when and under what conditions effects are likely to take place—key elements of theory building (Bacharach, 1989; Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan, 2007).

Finally, the research also has implications for practice. From a personnel selection standpoint, it is clear that (a) raters used cues from the dossier to form perceptions of the applicant’s racial identity, and (b) racial identity should not be used as a factor influencing who is or is not selected for a position. As such, raters should be trained such that they are aware of the potential biases and are educated on steps to reduce them. Standardizing the search process, including using multiple raters, and educating search committees about the value of having a diverse workforce are all potential strategies (see also Raymond, 2013).

**Limitations**

While the research makes several contributions to theory and practice, there are also potential limitations. First, college students comprised the sample in both studies, and some might question how well their views are representative of other, older adults. There are several reasons,
though, why such concerns are likely unfounded. Social psychologists have long relied on college student samples to examine the nature of prejudice, and field-based work mirrors that in the laboratory setting (Pulucak & Green, 2009). In addition, personnel decisions among college students mirror those of practicing human resources managers (Jawahar & Mattsson, 2005). A second limitation is the location of the research, as all data were collected from people in the southwestern United States. It is possible that people in other, more inclusive regions of the world would offer different perspectives. We should note, though, that racial prejudice and discrimination is observed in sport across the world (Adair, 2011; Hylton, 2009); thus, the effects are likely not specific to college students in the southwestern United States.

**Future Directions**

Finally, we highlight several avenues for future research. First, our work suggests that context moderates the influence of racial identity. Future research is needed to further explore these possibilities, including the identification of other contextual boundaries. In addition, we focused on African Americans in our experiments, but future research is needed to further explore if and how Whites express bias toward other racial minorities who they believe strongly identify with their race. Finally, we see avenues for other areas, too, as prejudice-distribution theory could potentially be expanded to focus on other diversity dimensions, such as religion, sexual orientation, and the like. For instance, do Christians evaluate strongly identified Muslims more negatively than their weakly identified counterparts? Would these evaluations differ based on context, as we have observed with race? Given the prevalence of prejudice and discrimination in sport, these are questions worth exploring.

**References**


