Bias against Latina and African American women job applicants: a field experiment

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine bias among White raters against racial minority women seeking employment in fitness organizations.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors conducted a 2 (applicant perceived racial identity) × 2 (applicant race) × 2 (hiring directive) factorial design experiment, with participant rater gender serving as the within-subjects variable. Adults in the USA (n = 238) who had or were currently working in the fitness industry participated in the study.

Findings – Results indicate that applicant presumed racial identity and rater gender had direct effects, while applicant presumed racial identity, applicant race and rater gender had interactive effects, as well.

Originality/value – Results show that perceived racial identity affects raters’ view of job applicants, and the pattern of findings varies among racial groups.

Keywords Prejudice, Identity, Race, Fitness

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Despite shifts in social attitudes toward racial bias (Barry-Jester, 2015), prejudice and discrimination against racial minorities persist around the world (Adair, 2011; Adair et al., 2010; Hylton, 2005). The racism that has long been observed on the soccer pitches (Carrington, 2013) is also evident in sport organizations. Relative to Whites, racial minorities are under-represented as head coaches and assistant coaches in US college athletics and North American professional sport leagues (Cunningham, 2015b; Volz, 2013); under-represented in administrative posts across college and professional sport contexts (Cunningham, 2015b); frequently exploited as athletes (Hawkins, 2013); and experience poor treatment and limited opportunities as both athletes (Carter-Francique et al., 2013; Singer 2008) and employees (Demirel, 2014; Lawrence, 2005). When they do obtain access to jobs in the sport industry, racial minority administrators and coaches are routinely placed in peripheral positions based on racist stereotypes, such as the belief that racial minorities are better suited to recruit players than guide the strategic operations of a unit (e.g. recruiting of other racial minorities; Cunningham and Bopp, 2010; McDowell et al., 2009).

The pattern of bias is particularly insidious for racial minority women, who face a number of barriers because of their multiple marginalized identities (Bruening, 2005). The intersectionality of race and gender, as well as other characteristics, such as social class and sexual orientation (Crenshaw, 1991; Watson and Scraton, 2013), serve to highlight the “other” status held by racial minority women, limiting their participation in sport organizations and access to key leadership positions (Kluka, 2016; Walker and Melton, 2015). When racial minority women overcome barriers to organizational entry, they then must face the prospects of being marginalized or having few opportunities for work that would lead to meaningful advancement. Indeed, they are most likely to hold service positions, which typically correspond with less power, pay and prestige (see Cunningham, 2015b).

Scholars have offered a number of explanations for these patterns. These include a focus on macro-level factors, such as institutionalized forms of bias (Allen and Shaw, 2009; Hylton, 2009),
the political climate (Cunningham and Benavides-Espinoza, 2008) or stakeholder expectations for leaders who have certain demographic characteristics (Schull et al., 2013). Others have pursued organizational explanations, including the diversity climate within the workplace (Knoppers and Anthonissen, 2008; Spoor and Hoye, 2014) and biases in the selection process and in other personnel decisions (Hodge, 2014; Volz, 2013). Still other scholars have focused their efforts on individual factors, such as social networks (Day and McDonald, 2010; Walker and Bopp, 2011), rater demographics (Cheung et al., 2016) and self-limiting behaviors that result when people encounter continued discrimination (Cunningham et al., 2006; Tingle et al., 2014). These works collectively demonstrate that various factors, operating at multiple levels of analysis, can influence under-represented groups’ access to and experiences in sport organizations (Burton, 2015; Cunningham, 2008, 2010).

An overview of the extant research further suggests that, outside a few notable examples previously cited (e.g. Borland and Bruening, 2010; Carter-Francique et al., 2013; Kluka, 2016; Walker and Melton, 2015), most sport management researchers have focused on race or gender, but have not focused specifically on the experiences and opportunities of racial minority women. Furthermore, most of the sport management scholarship focusing on race and gender has been in the collegiate athletics or professional sport settings (for reviews, see Burton, 2015; Cunningham, 2010). Though these sport settings gain considerable popular press attention, other segments of sport – such as the fitness industry and, more broadly, the participant sport sector – constitute a substantially greater share of all sport participation and economic activity (Milano and Chelladurai, 2011). The size of the fitness industry, coupled with the lack of diversity and inclusion in that space (Forde et al., 2015; Stodolska, 2015) and its focus on appearance (Hutson, 2013; Sartore and Cunningham, 2007), signals the need for additional scholarly focus.

The purpose of the current study was to examine bias among Whites against racial minority women seeking employment in fitness organizations. We extend on the existing research in several meaningful ways. First, there is value in adopting a multilevel perspective when examining organizational phenomena. The multilevel approach is consistent with a systems perspective of organizing (see Chelladurai, 2014) and allows researchers to explicitly consider complex relationships among variables at multiple levels of analysis (Kozlowski and Klein, 2000). As Dixon and Cunningham (2006) argued, “it is through the integration of these perspectives and the formulation of multilevel perspectives and theories that we are able to gain a richer understanding of behavior” (pp. 87-88). While scholars have used multilevel theory to explain the under-representation of different groups in sport organizations (Burton, 2015; Cunningham, 2008, 2010, 2012), empirical work in this space is rare (Kozlowski and Klein, 2000). Drawing from this perspective, in the current study, we consider how factors at multiple levels of analysis – individual characteristics of applicants and raters, as well as organizational characteristics – collectively influence ratings of and suggested pay for the job applicants. Second, while sport management researchers commonly examine the experiences of racial minorities as a whole, we eschew this approach and instead consider how ratings of African American women and Latinas might vary. Third, in their review of the race and racism literature, Richeson and Sommers (2016) argued for more investigation of within-group factors that might affect employees’ experiences. Consistent with this recommendation, we examine raters’ perceptions of applicant racial identity, and how these estimates might influence subsequent job ratings. Finally, much of the experimental work on selection bias has drawn from student samples, and while such samples are efficacious in testing theory, field experiments allow researchers to determine whether laboratory findings are also observed in the work context, thereby enhancing external validity evidence. Our field experiment, which includes participants who have all worked in the fitness industry, allows for such examination.
Theoretical framework

Prejudice-distribution theory

We primarily ground our work in prejudice-distribution theory (Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt, 2009), a perspective that draws from the broader literature surrounding identity. From a social categorization perspective (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987), people classify themselves and others into social groups based on a myriad of characteristics. These might include demographics, affiliations, values and so on. They can then use these categorizations to develop attitudes toward people who are similar to the self, known as in-group members, and those who are different, known as out-group members. All else equal, attitudes toward in-group members are generally more positive than are those directed toward out-group members, resulting in inter-group bias. These are the underlying processes undergirding the social strain that sometimes accompanies heterogeneous groups (van Knippenberg and Schippers, 2007).

Even people who share a social identity and seemingly share in-group member status can differ in other ways, such as their personal identities. Brewer (1991) explained that personal identities represent the “individuated self – those characteristics that differentiate one individual from others in a social context” (p. 476). People’s personal identities represent how they see themselves and also constitute a principal component of their self-concept (Luhtanen and Crocker, 1992; Randel and Jaussi, 2003). As one example, two people who share a common in-group identity (e.g. Latinas) could vary in the degree to which their race represented a key part of their personal identity, with race being central to one person’s personal identity and quite peripheral to another’s. Personal identities are important because, among other reasons, they are associated with subsequent outcomes for the individual. Researchers have shown, for example, that those who differ from their work colleagues on a diversity dimension central to their identity had poorer work performance than do their less-identified peers (see Randel and Jaussi, 2003, for a discussion of functional diversity). In a separate study, college athletes with strong racial identities were more likely to perceive they were racially different than racial minority athletes who more weakly identify with their race, and these differences were associated with subsequent person-team fit and team satisfaction (Cunningham et al., 2008). Finally, relative to their less-identified counterparts, Major et al. (2002) observed that racial minorities who strongly identify with their race were more likely to report incidences of prejudice and discrimination.

According to prejudice-distribution theory (Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt, 2009), one’s racial identity also influences how others react to them. Racial minorities who are believed to have a strong racial identity are also thought to challenge the status quo, not oblige to dominant world views, and disrupt social hierarchies – all of which are likely a threat to the power and status Whites hold in society. On the other hand, racial minorities who are perceived to not hold a strong racial identity might be expected to support existing systems, and endorse notions of meritocracy and other status-legitimizing world views. These differences then correspond with Whites’ reactions, as they are likely to respond more negatively to racial minorities who they believe hold a strong racial identity than they are to weakly identified racial minorities (Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt, 2009).

There is growing empirical support for prejudice-distribution theory. In their articulation of the theory, Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt (2009) conducted six studies, all of which included undergraduate psychology students, to show support for the aforementioned patterns, and they did so using varied methodologies and for ratings of both African American and Latino targets. We do note that a male served as a target in each of their studies – a change we make in our current research. In a similar set of experimental studies, Yogeewaran et al. (2012) observed that ethnic minorities were perceived as less American when the rater believed the minorities were strongly identified with their ethnicity. Consistent with prejudice-distribution theory predictions, the negative appraisals arose out of a perceived...
threat to American distinctiveness. Other researchers have found that raters evaluate potential product endorsers differently, based on the endorser’s perceived racial identity and type of social activities engaged (Cunningham and Regan, 2012).

Particularly germane to the current study, recent researchers have focused on the effects of perceived racial identity on employment decisions, with equivocal results. In a field experiment, Barron et al. (2011) manipulated ethnic identity by the hats and shirts people wore (e.g. Hispanic Student Association) when applying for jobs at a shopping mall. They found study participants had improved job seeking interactions when they wore such ethnic identifying clothing, relative to when they did not. The authors noted that while Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt (2009) observed that perceived racial identity of a target could influence internal prejudicial beliefs, the findings might not translate into behaviors. On the other hand, Steward and Cunningham (2015) conducted a series of experimental studies set in the sport and fitness context, and college students served as participants. The authors observed that job applicants who signaled a strong racial identity on their resume received less favorable job ratings, especially when the rater supported social inequalities. These conflicting results point to the need for additional research, particularly in a field setting (the setting of Barron et al.’s research). We address this in our current research through a field-based experiment set in the sport and fitness industry – the same industry as Steward and Cunningham’s (2015) study, but with a sample of working professionals.

**Moderators**

In addition to examining the influence of perceived racial identity on racial minorities’ job prospects, we consider the influence of three potential moderators: applicant race, rater gender and diversity hiring directives.

**Applicant race.** Most of the aforementioned researchers focusing on racial discrimination in the hiring process have considered the experiences of racial minorities as a whole, or considered the experiences of one group in particular. The same trend emerges when reviewing empirical work related to prejudice-distribution theory. Largely missing from these analyses are empirical examinations of whether people respond differently to perceived high racial identity among members of various racial groups. Recognizing this limitation, Richeson and Sommers (2016), in their review of the psychology research, concluded that such analyses were needed.

While there is comparatively little research comparing the work experiences of different racial minority groups (e.g. Latinas relative to African Americans), this does not mean that no such work exists. Pew Research Center data from 2010 show that Americans believe Latinos are more likely to face discrimination than any other group, including African Americans (Hispanics, 2010). National US data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics showed that, while racial minority women earned less than White women, Latinas also earned 84 percent of what African American women did. However, other researchers have shown that African Americans are more likely than are Latinas to report being subjected to incivility and bullying in the workplace (50 and 37 percent, respectively; Fox and Stallworth, 2005). Still other authors have observed null effects. Hagelskamp and Hughes (2014) collected data from working mothers and did not find any differences in racism experienced at work, while Barron et al. (2011) observed that people responded similarly to Irish, Hispanic and African American job applicants who seemingly expressed a strong ethnic identity. These ostensibly equivocal results suggest there is need for additional inquiry, and that perhaps other factors, such as those described in the subsequent sections, influence the relationship between racial group membership and discrimination.

**Rater gender.** We also considered the effects of rater gender. There is considerable evidence of gender biases in the selection process, such that men are likely to favor other
men over women when it comes to performance ratings and selection. The positive sentiments afforded to other whose gender is similar to the self takes place across a variety of contexts, including board members of national sport organizations (Claringbould and Knoppers, 2007), community college and four-year college coaches (Acosta and Carpenter, 2016; Regan and Cunningham, 2012), public high schools (Stangl and Kane, 1991) and sport media settings (Whisenant and Mullane, 2007). The findings have occurred over decades.

There are a number of theoretical possibilities for this pattern. Role congruity theory (Eagly and Karau, 2002) suggests that people are likely to associate men with leadership positions, to the disadvantage of women. It is possible that men might endorse these associations more so than women, in which case, men would prefer other men in the selection process. From the social categorization perspective articulated in the previous sections (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987), people express more positive attitudes and behaviors toward others who share in-group membership. Applied to the employment context, this theory suggests people are likely to offer favorable evaluations of and ultimately select job applicants who are similar to the self. Researchers have also drawn from homologous reproduction theory (Kanter, 1977) to make similar predictions (see Regan and Cunningham, 2012; Stangl and Kane, 1991). This is the case for both women and men, and Acosta and Carpenter’s (2016) longitudinal analysis of college coaches has continually offered empirical support for this theory, such that women tend to appoint other women, just as men are apt to appoint other men. In the current study, where applicants are women, both role congruity theory and the social categorization perspective suggest that, ceteris paribus, women are likely to offer more favorably evaluations of the applicants than are men.

Hiring directives. Finally, we considered the influence of hiring directives. There is considerable research suggesting that managers can influence the diversity and inclusion within their workplace through a number of mechanisms, including the hiring directives (Brief et al., 2000; Ferdman 2014; Umphress et al., 2008). When they emphasize diversity and inclusion in the selection process, managers signal the importance of searching for a diverse applicant pool and ensuring opportunities for a wide range of people. Early theoretical articulations of diverse sport organizations also pointed to the importance of inclusive selection processes (DeSensi, 1995; Doherty and Chelladurai, 1999; Fink and Pastore, 1999).

There is some cross-sectional and qualitative work to support these perspectives. For instance, Fink et al. (2003) observed that sport organizations emphasizing inclusive practices also attracted and retained a diverse workforce. Singer and Cunningham (2012) observed that diverse university athletic departments had athletic directors who emphasized having diversity in the recruitment and selection of new employees. In a collective case study of athletic departments focusing on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender inclusion, Cunningham (2015a) also observed that athletic directors emphasized diversity and inclusion across a number of areas, including hiring. This work collectively suggests that people are likely to attune to diversity and inclusion directives when making personnel decisions.

Study overview and hypotheses
The purpose of the current study was to examine bias among Whites toward African American women and Latinas (the largest group of racial minority women in the USA) seeking employment in fitness organizations. As outlined in greater depth in the following section, we conducted an experiment, where people who had or currently were working in the fitness industry reviewed applications of people who were ostensibly applying for a manager job opening. After reviewing the dossiers, participants offered feedback along three employment domains: work attributions, hiring recommendations and suggested salary. We selected these outcomes because all of which can be influenced by racial bias, and they are
theoretically relevant to the current work (Cortina et al., 2013; Triana et al., 2015). Attribution theory suggests people seek to explain and assign causality to certain behaviors or norms (Weiner, 1985). Applied to the current study, people might assign more positive work attributions to people they believe are honest, capable or skilled; furthermore, work attributions are likely to influence other ratings, such as job recommendations (Sartore and Cunningham, 2007). Hiring recommendations are important because they signal the esteem in which the rater holds the application and can help inform the person making the final hiring decision. Finally, the pervasive wage discrepancies among African American women and Latinas, relative to their peers, signal the importance of considering suggested salary. We drew from the Bureau of Labor Statistics data to inform raters of the average salary for fitness club managers ($44,000) and then asked what salary they would recommend for the applicant. As seen in the following space, given that attributions, hiring recommendations and suggested salary are all outcomes of the personnel selection process, are conceptually and empirically related to one another (Heilman and Saruwatari, 1979; Kricheli-Katz, 2013; Thompson et al., 2015) and are potential outcomes of bias in decision-making tasks (Cortina et al., 2013; Triana et al., 2015), we make similar directional hypotheses for each.

Prejudice-distribution theory (Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt, 2009) suggests that people who are believed to hold a strong racial identity are penalized for doing so. This stems from the belief that such applicants reject the status quo and social norms. While there are exceptions (Barron et al., 2011), there is experimental work in the sport context, largely with student samples, empirically demonstrating these relationships in the selection process (Steward and Cunningham, 2015). In seeking to extend this work, we focus on industry professionals’ attitudes toward job applicants with presumed varying degrees of racial identity. We hypothesized that:

*H1.* Relative to their weakly identified counterparts, job applicants who are presumed to have a strong racial identity will receive lower work attributions (a), lower hiring recommendations (b) and lower suggested salary (c).

We also considered the role of the three moderating variables, the first of which was applicant race. As previously noted, recent work on race and race relations points to the need for considering the potentially varying experiences and expectations of different racial minority groups (Richeson and Sommers, 2016). While the limited experimental work in this area offers equivocal results (Barron et al., 2011; Fox and Stallworth, 2005; Hagelskamp and Hughes, 2014), nationally representative data from the Pew Research Center and the US Bureau of Labor Statistics suggest Latinas, relative to African American women, are more likely to experience discrimination and to earn less (Hispanics, 2010). As such, we predicted that:

*H2.* Applicant race would moderate the relationship between presumed racial identity of the job applicant and work attributions (a), hiring recommendations (b) and suggested salary (c), such that the effects would be more negative for Latinas than they would for African American women.

Rater gender represents the second moderator considered. Scholars who have previously examined the effects of rater gender on the evaluations of women have reliably observed that women offer more favorable personnel evaluations than do men (Burton, 2015; Eagly and Karau, 2002). These differences correspond into differences in staff composition (Acosta and Carpenter, 2016; Regan and Cunningham, 2012; Stangl and Kane, 1991). Drawing from this work, we predicted that:

*H3.* Rater gender would moderate the relationship between the presumed racial identity of the job applicant and work attributions (a), hiring recommendations (b) and suggested salary (c), such that the effects would be more negative when the rater was a man than when the rater was a woman.
Finally, we consider the role of hiring directives. Hiring directives that emphasize diversity and inclusion frequently result in a more diverse applicant pool and greater diversity in the workforce (Brief et al., 2000; Ferdman 2014; Umphress et al., 2008). Such directives signal the importance top leadership places on diversity and inclusion (Cunningham, 2015a; Singer and Cunningham, 2012), and allow sport organizations to attract and retain diverse employees (Fink et al., 2003). When a diversity focus is not made explicit, persons involved in the hiring process are less likely to consider diversity or its important contribution to the workplace. Consistent with this line of thinking, we predicted that:

**H4.** Hiring directives would moderate the relationship between the presumed racial identity of the job applicant and work attributions (a), hiring recommendations (b) and suggested salary (c), such that the effects would be buffered when the rater received hiring directives emphasizing diversity and inclusion, relative to when such directives were absent.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were 238 White individuals in living throughout USA and who were currently or had previously worked in the fitness industry. We focused on responses from White individuals since we were focusing on the bias expressed toward racial minorities. Our approach is consistent with previous researchers who examined similar topics (Cunningham and Regan, 2012; Cunningham and Steward, 2015; Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt, 2009). The sample included 133 men (55.9 percent) and 105 women (44.1 percent), with a mean age of 33.64 years (SD = 9.11). Approximately one in five participants had served as a facility manager (n = 45, 18.9 percent), while the remaining participants worked in customer service or as an instructor (n = 193, 81.1 percent). The average tenure in the fitness industry was 4.91 years (SD = 4.31), with a range from 1 to 33 years.

**Procedures and measures**

Data were collected in 2015 using Mechanical Turk (MTurk)[1], an online participant database powered by Amazon that is increasingly used among organizational scientists (Smith et al., 2015). Sport management have also employed this technique, examining job applicants’ reactions to social responsibility (Hayduk and Walker, 2018), word-of-mouth communications (Asada and Ko, 2016), the effects of advertising on baseball consumption (Brown et al., 2016), the effects of athlete transgressions on consumers (Lee et al., 2015), among many others. Collecting data from MTurk allow researchers to draw from working adults and to generate samples that are more diverse and representative than student samples or samples collected from a single site (Buhrmester et al., 2011; Casler et al., 2013; Landers and Behrend, 2015). Consistent with recommendations from Peer et al. (2014), we limited the sample to MTurk users who had high ratings in the system, as measured by a high approval rating (95 percent) over at least 100 tasks. Participation was limited to persons who were currently or had worked in the fitness industry, and each individual received $1 for completing the experiment.

We designed a 2 (applicant perceived racial identity: low, high; low, high) × 2 (race: African American, Latina) × 2 (hiring directive: neutral, diversity focused) factorial designed experiment, with participant gender serving as the within-subjects variable. Participants were randomly assigned to view one of the eight dossiers (e.g. the dossier of a highly identified Latina, where the club owner explicitly stated a diversity-related hiring directive), with the following directions: “Please review the job information below – including background, the owner’s hiring mandates, and the applicant resume and mission statement. After you have read the material thoroughly, please respond to the questions on the following page.”
Each dossier included background information explaining the position (managerial position at Elite Fitness in Houston) and the activities that person would perform; a hiring directive from the club owner; a summary of the applicant’s interest statement, work history, education and affiliations; and a photo of the applicant. The applicants had a graduate degree (in sport management), had 15 years of experience as a personal trainer and 8 years of experience as a manager at two fitness facilities. The applicants were certified personal trainers and were members of national strength and conditioning associations.

Consistent with previously published work (Cunningham and Regan, 2012; Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt, 2009, Study 3; Steward and Cunningham, 2015), we manipulated the applicants’ presumed racial identity through the listing of the relevant affiliations (e.g. presumed high racial identity: Latino Fitness Instructors Association; presumed low racial identity: Intercollegiate Athletics Coaches Association) and community engagement (e.g. presumed high racial identity: Obama campaign local chair; presumed low racial identity: Romney campaign local chair). In the USA, political affiliations and attitudes frequently overlay with race (Sobolewska, 2016), making it an optimal cue for one’s presumed racial identity. Given that 93 percent of African Americans and 71 percent of Latinos voted for Obama in the 2012 US Presidential election (Merica, 2013), supporting Romney (his opponent) would signal a weak racial identity.

We manipulated applicant race though the photos of a Latina or African American woman, both of which showed a head shot of a woman in a business suit. Hiring directive was manipulated through the owner statement. The diversity-focused hiring directive read: “the diversity of our staff is among the most important assets of our company. We need to hire people from diverse backgrounds and with varied perspectives, all of whom can help Elite Fitness Center.” The neutral hiring directive read: “People are among the most important assets of our company. We need to hire the best people who can help Elite Fitness Center.”

After reviewing the materials, participants responded to a questionnaire that requested they provide their demographic information (race, gender and age) and fitness club work history (tenure and position in fitness industry), and to respond to items measuring work attributions, hiring recommendations and suggested salary. We used a seven-point semantic differential scale to measure work attributions, where participants rated the applicant as “untested-experienced,” “novice-expert” and “uninformed-knowledgeable” ($\alpha = 0.93$). This is consistent with both Steward and Cunningham (2015) and Sartore and Cunningham (2007), both of whom used semantic differential scales to measure work attributions. These researchers also found the scales to be reliable and to demonstrate factor-validity evidence.

We also used the three items from Sartore and Cunningham’s (2007) study to measure hiring recommendations. Response options ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), and a sample item is: “hiring this individual would be the wrong decision” (reverse scored: $\alpha = 0.83$). Sartore and Cunningham demonstrated the reliability and validity evidence for this measure.

We drew from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics to provide participants with the mean salary for fitness club managers ($44,000) and then asked what salary they believed the applicant should receive if hired. Finally, in addition to examining demographic variables as potential controls, we included Lucas et al.’s (2007) four-item belief in a distributive just world measure (e.g. “people usually receive the outcomes they deserve,” $\alpha = 0.94$). Across two samples, Lucas et al. demonstrated the scale to be reliable and have evidence of validity. Original articulations of prejudice-distribution theory (Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt, 2009) and subsequent empirical work in the area of prejudice (Lucas et al., 2011) indicate that such beliefs have the potential to influence reactions to strongly identified racial minorities; hence, its inclusion as a control variable.
**Results**

**Manipulation check**

We first computed a number of checks to ensure the efficacy of the manipulations. Each manipulation check item was embedded in a larger set of items, so as not to prompt the participants to respond in a particular way. Response options ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Participants assigned to the high presumed applicant racial identity conditions rated the following item – “Based on the information provided, I believe the applicant is strongly identified with her race” – significantly higher ($M = 5.55, SD = 1.26$) than those assigned to the low presumed applicant racial identity condition ($M = 4.46, SD = 1.26$), $F(1, 236) = 43.98, p < 0.001$. We note that the scores for the low racial identity group are still above the mean, and we return to this point in the Discussion. We also asked participants to respond to the following item: “The owner emphasizes diversity in the Elite Fitness Center’s hiring process.” Participants assigned to the diversity-focused directives rated this item higher ($M = 5.93, SD = 1.19$) than did persons in the neutral hiring directives condition ($M = 4.28, SD = 1.62$), $F(1, 236) = 80.62, p < 0.001$. Finally, 89 percent of the participants correctly identified the applicant’s race, $\chi^2(1) = 15.40, p < 0.001$, and the pattern of findings did not differ when removing the responses from those who incorrectly noted the applicant race. Collectively, these findings point to the efficacy of the manipulations.

**Descriptive statistics**

Means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations are presented in Table I. Results show the mean scores for work attributions and hiring recommendations were both high and significantly greater than the midpoint of the scale (4): $t(237) = 31.44, p < 0.001$, and $t(237) = 26.28, p < 0.001$, respectively. Similarly, the mean suggested salary was $45,603 (SD = 6,082.93)$, which is significantly greater than the national average of $44,000, t(237) = 4.07, p < 0.001$.

**Hypothesis testing**

We tested the hypotheses through a four-way multivariate analysis of covariance, with presumed applicant racial identity, applicant race, hiring directives and rater gender serving

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<th>Variable</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1. Fitness club role</td>
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<td>2. Fitness tenure</td>
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<td>3. Distributive just world</td>
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<td>4. Presumed applicant racial identity</td>
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<td>5. Applicant race</td>
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<td>–0.04</td>
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<td>6. Hiring directive</td>
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<td>0.07</td>
<td>–0.06</td>
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<td>–0.05</td>
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<td>–</td>
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<td>8. Attributions</td>
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<td>–0.08</td>
<td>–0.07</td>
<td>–0.03</td>
<td>0.23</td>
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<td>9. Hiring recommendation</td>
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<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>–0.15</td>
<td>–0.15</td>
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<td>0.70</td>
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<td>10. Suggested salary</td>
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<td>0.07</td>
<td>–0.14</td>
<td>–0.09</td>
<td>–0.08</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$M$ (%)$^a$</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>4.91</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>6.18</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>45,603.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>6,082.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes: Percentages listed for dichotomous variables. Fitness club role coded as 0 = manager, 1 = customer service or trainer. Presumed applicant racial identity coded as 0 = weak, 1 = high. Applicant race coded as 0 = African American, 1 = Latina. Hiring directive coded as 0 = neutral, 1 = diversity-focused. Rater gender coded as 0 = male, 1 = female. $r \geq 0.141, p < 0.05$. $^a$Percentages offered for dichotomous variables.
as the independent variables; fitness club role (manager or other), fitness industry tenure and distributive just world serving as the covariates; and work attributions, hiring recommendations and suggested salary serving as the dependent variables. A summary of the results is presented in Table II. In this following space, we report the hypothesis testing and the corresponding means and standard errors, accounting for the effects of the controls.

With our first set of hypotheses, we predicted that job applicants who are presumed to have a high racial identity would receive lower work attributions, lower hiring recommendations and lower salary recommendations than would their less-identified counterparts. The multivariate effects were significant, $F(3, 217) = 2.72, p = 0.04, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.04$. Examination of the univariate effects indicated no differences in attributions, $F(1, 219) = 3.00, p = 0.09$, and thus, $H1a$ was rejected. On the other hand, $H1b$ and $H1c$ were supported for hiring recommendations, $F(1, 219) = 5.78, p = 0.01, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.03$; and suggested salary, $F(1, 219) = 6.12, p = 0.01, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.03$, respectively.

Relative to applicants who were believed to be weakly identified with their race, applicants thought to have a strong racial identity received lower hiring recommendations ($M = 6.09, SE = 0.10, M = 5.73, SE = 0.11$, respectively) and lower recommended salaries ($M = 46,662.59, SE = 549.88, and M = 44,626.04, SE = 580.79$, respectively).

None of the hypothesized two-way interaction terms were significant. Thus, the hypothesized moderating effects of applicant race ($H2a$–$H2c$) were not supported, $F(3, 217) = 0.87, p = 0.46$, nor were the hypothesized moderating effects of rater gender ($H3a$–$H3c$), $F(3, 217) = 0.35, p = 0.79$, or the hypothesized moderating effects of hiring directives ($H4a$–$H4c$), $F(3, 217) = 0.33, p = 0.81$.

### Additional findings
As seen in Table II, we did observe two additional findings not specifically hypothesized. First, we found a significant multivariate effect for rater gender, $F(3, 217) = 4.50, p = 0.004, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.06$. Examination of the univariate effects showed that, relative to women, men provided lower ratings for work attributions ($M = 6.47, SE = 0.11, and M = 5.96, SE = 0.09$, respectively), $F(1, 219) = 12.86, p < 0.001, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.06$. For hiring recommendations, men offered lower evaluations ($M = 5.75, SE = 0.10$) than did women ($M = 6.08, SE = 0.11$), $F(1, 219) = 4.83, p = 0.03, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.02$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$F(3, 217)$</th>
<th>$p$-value</th>
<th>Partial $\eta^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fitness club role</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness tenure</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributive just world</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presumed applicant racial identity (PARI)</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant race (AR)</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring directive (HD)</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rater gender (RG)</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARI × AR</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARI × HD</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARI × RG</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR × HD</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR × RG</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HD × RG</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARI × AR × HD</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARI × AR × RG</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARI × HD × RG</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR × HD × RG</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARI × AR × HD × RG</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II. Multivariate effects of the four-way multivariate analysis of covariance predicting work attributions, hiring recommendations and suggested salary.
Second, while we did not observe significant two-way interactions, we did observe a significant presumed applicant racial identity × applicant race × rater gender interaction, $F(3, 217) = 2.33, p = 0.07, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.03$. Given the loss of power in detecting complex interactions, we relaxed the $\alpha$ to 0.10, an approach recommended by statisticians (Aguinis, 1995) and endeavored by other researchers (Harrison et al., 1998). Examination of univariate results shows significant findings for work attributions, $F(1, 219) = 4.70, p = 0.03, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.02$. As seen in Figure 1, women rated African American applicants they believed strongly identified with their race more poorly than their African Americans they believed were weakly race identified, while ratings for Latinas were not influenced by presumed applicant racial identity. For men, applicants believed to hold a weak racial identity received the most favorable ratings, but Latinas thought to be strongly identified were more harshly evaluate than were African Americans thought to be strongly identified with their race.

The univariate results also revealed a significant presumed applicant racial identity × applicant race × rater gender interaction for suggested salary, $F(1, 219) = 2.97, p = 0.08, \eta^2_{\text{partial}} = 0.01$. Results are shown in Figure 2. Among women, presumed weakly identified applicants received higher suggested salaries, and the pattern held for both Latinas and African American applicants. For men, presumed weakly identified job applicants received the same suggested salary, but Latinas believed to be strongly race-identified received less money ($M = $41,773.57, SE = 1,036.75) than did African American job applicants who were believed to be strongly identified with their race ($M = $46,897.35, SE = 1,224.38). Latinas believed to be strongly race-identified and rated by men were the only persons suggested to receive less than the national average.

![Figure 1](image-url)

**Figure 1.** Interactive effects of presumed applicant racial identity, applicant race and rater gender on work attributions.
Discussion

Prejudice against racial minorities and women persists in sport contexts around the world (Adair, 2011; Adair et al., 2010; Burton, 2015; Hylton, 2005). The effects of such biases are particularly harmful for racial minority women—individuals who encounter prejudice and discrimination based on multiple identities (Bruening, 2005). As a result, racial minority women face truncated opportunities to actively participate in sport organizations or advance to leadership ranks (Kluka, 2016; Walker and Melton, 2015). In seeking to better understand these trends, we examined factors at multiple levels of analysis—individual characteristics of applicants and raters, as well as organizational characteristics—collectively influence ratings of and suggested pay for the job applicants. Despite the value of the approach in theorizing about organizations and organizational phenomena (Chelladurai, 2014; Dixon and Cunningham, 2006), empirical work in this space is rare (Kozlowski and Klein, 2000). We grounded the work in prejudice-distribution theory (Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt, 2009), suggesting that racial minorities who are presumed to strongly identify with their race are penalized in the job search process for doing so. Recognizing the value of examining potential moderators in further developing theory (Colquitt and Zapata-Phelan, 2007), we also examined the interactive effects of applicant race, rater gender and hiring directives. Results of our field experiment suggest presumed racial identity does affect how people rate job applicants, and this relationship is influenced by the applicant’s race and the rater’s gender. In the following space, we discuss the major findings that emerged from the study, managerial implications, limitations and future directions.

Results indicate that people develop assumptions about an applicant’s racial identity based on her dossier. Interestingly, we also found that, even absent specific race-related information on the dossier, raters still presumed some levels of racial identification among the applicants, as those in weak identity category still had ratings about the midpoint of the

Figure 2. Interactive effects of presumed applicant identity, applicant race and rater gender on suggested salary.
scale (but significantly below the strong identity condition). Steward and Cunningham (2015) observed similar findings in their two experiments; however, in similar examinations outside of sport, researchers did not find such effects (Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt, 2009). It is possible that people expect racial minorities working in sport to identify with their race – at least somewhat. That is, even absent such information, the default stereotype of an African American or Latina working in sport is that of someone who is identified with her race. Such presumptions might differ for other races, as Whites, for example, frequently take their race for-granted (McIntosh, 1990). Future researchers should examine this possibility further. Importantly, even with this mindset, our results show that raters interpret additional race-related information on a dossier as a signal of an even stronger racial identity.

We also found that raters drew from the racial identity-related assumptions to evaluate the applicant. Presumed strongly identified job applicants received lower hiring recommendations and lower suggested salaries. Though the effect size was small, the implications are nevertheless meaningful. Assuming a 3 percent inflation growth rate, the $2,036 initial difference in suggested salary would compound to over $39,000 over a 15-year span. In drawing from prejudice-distribution theory (Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt, 2009), these differences likely stem from the underlying assumptions that accompany beliefs about a strong racial identity; that is, Whites are likely to maintain that presumed strongly identified racial minorities push against the status quo, reject notions of meritocracy and ultimately seek to disrupt existing social hierarchies. These assumed world views are disruptive to the power and privilege Whites hold, and thus, they are likely to penalize racial minorities who maintain them (Steward and Cunningham, 2015; Yogeeswaran et al., 2012). In this case, the penalty comes in the form of differential salary – a penalty that can accumulate to thousands of dollars over a 15-year span.

We also observed gender differences in applicant ratings, as men rated the applicants more negatively than did women. These findings are consistent with the considerable evidence in sport (Burton, 2015) and in other settings (Cheung et al., 2016; Eagly and Karau, 2002) showing that women are likely to offer more positive evaluations of other women than are men. These findings suggest that, in addition to changing organizational cultures and discourses that privilege men (Knoppers and Anthonissen, 2008), including more women in the personnel decision-making process could help sport organizations increase their gender diversity.

Results did not demonstrate support for any of hypothesized moderating effects; however, we did find that three of our proposed moderators – applicant racial identity, applicant race and rater gender – did interact with one another. Women raters generally penalized presumed strongly identified job applicants, relative to their counterparts thought to be more weakly identified with their race. The one exception was for work attribution ratings of Latinas, where ratings were consistent irrespective of the applicant’s presumed racial identity. On the other hand, men offered consistent ratings and suggested salaries for African American applicants irrespective of their presumed racial identity, while they penalized presumed strongly identified Latinas. The pattern was perhaps most striking in suggested salary, where the difference between Latinas believed to be weakly or strongly identified with their race was $5035. Assuming a 3 percent inflation growth rate, the initial difference in suggested salary would compound to over $96,468.50 over a 15-year span. Thus, even though the effect sizes were small, over time, the differences can have a meaningful impact.

The significant three-way interactions observed in our experimental field study shed light on what have otherwise been equivocal research findings on the topic. Consider, for instance, that national polling data in the USA suggested that Latinas were paid less and experienced more discrimination than African Americans (Hispanics, 2010). Other large-scale studies offered different results, such that African Americans experienced more bias in the workplace (Fox and Stallworth, 2005). Still other work signaled no differences
among the groups (Hagelskamp and Hughes, 2014). When seemingly conflicting results such as these arise in the literature, it is possible a third variable that might not otherwise be articulated – that is, a moderator – is influencing the pattern of findings. Results from our research point to two moderating factors: the presumed racial identity of the applicant and the gender of the rater. It is only by examining the three-way interaction that such patterns emerged. And, while our effect size ranged from 1 to 3 percent variance explained, this is consistent with research focusing on moderation, and in fact, greater than most of the work related to personnel decision making (Aguinis et al., 2005).

While we did observe main and interactive effects for most of the variables under consideration, this was not the case for hiring directives. The manipulation check confirmed that participants were aware of the owner’s diversity-focused hiring directives, and theory (Ferdman, 2014), empirical research (Umphress et al., 2008), and qualitative work (Cunningham, 2015a; Singer and Cunningham, 2012) focusing on inclusive organizations all point to the importance of such emphases. Nevertheless, the hiring directives had no direct or interactive effects. It is possible that participants equated the hiring directives more with demographic characteristics than the applicants’ presumed beliefs. In this case, the focus would be on applicant race instead of her presumed racial identity, and as a result, the influence of diversity-focused hiring directives would not emerge in this study.

### Implications, limitations and future directions

The findings from this study have several implications for managers of sport and physical activity organizations. First, our work, when coupled with Steward and Cunningham’s (2015), shows that people draw from dossiers to inform their impressions of the applicant’s racial identity, and when this presumed racial identity is high, the raters are likely to penalize the applicant with poor evaluations and low suggested salaries. This is particularly the case when men are rating women, and it varies based on the race of the applicant. Armed with this information, managers can take several steps to alleviate this bias. One step is to offer training related to biases people have when making personnel decisions. Biases are reduced and workforces are diversified when such training is offered, particularly when it is focused and prolonged in nature (Devine et al., 2012). Another option is to remove identifying information on the resumes, with the notion that a blind resume will allow people to focus on more task-relevant information (Budden et al., 2008; Raymond, 2013). Finally, and perhaps in concert with the aforementioned recommendations, hiring managers can conduct structured interviews, which allow for a standardization of procedures and questions across applicants and also affords companies with the ability to then retroactively examine the association among interview questions and job performance (Bohnet, 2016; Levashina et al., 2014).

The findings also offer theoretical implications. Previous researchers have shown that prejudice and discrimination can negatively influence the work experiences and opportunities for racial minorities (Cheung et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2016; Triana et al., 2015). We extend this work in the sport context in several ways. First, as previously noted, we show that raters seemingly expect racial minorities working in sport to express a strong racial identity, and the ratings are even higher when race-related activities are included on the dossier (see also Steward and Cunningham, 2015). As previous researchers have not observed similar effects (Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt, 2009), the pattern appears to be unique to the sport context. In addition, we show the value for researchers to consider differences among members of different racial minority groups. Only considering the ratings of the women applicants, without factoring in their race, would have led to different conclusions. Similarly, Richeson and Sommers (2016) argued for more investigation of within-group factors that might affect employees’ experiences. We found value in doing so, as presumed racial identity influenced ratings of the applicant. Collectively, we show the value of more nuanced, fine-grained theorizing and research endeavors.
While our research makes many contributions and has clear managerial implications, there are potential limitations. First, because of the full factorial design, participants reviewed a single file instead of the many applications they would normally analyze for a posted position. Second, and related to the first point, the hypothetical nature of the study could be a limitation, as participants might have responded differently if hiring for the organization in which they were employed. Concerns over both of these limitations are allayed when considering that the pattern of findings in diversity-related research is consistent, whether the design is experimental or an analysis of organizational data (Jawahar and Mattsson, 2005; Paluck and Green, 2009). Third, the study was limited to participants in the USA, and it is possible that people in other contexts might exhibit more inclusive views in the selection process. Of course, racial prejudice is not limited to the USA (Adair, 2011; Hylton, 2009), so our findings are unlikely to be specific to our particular context. We make similar arguments for our theoretical underpinnings, as although we apply prejudice-distribution theory to the US setting, the underlying dynamics and subsequent outcomes are applicable in other contexts (e.g. Nawata and Yamaguchi, 2014). Finally, using MTurk to collect the data offers a number of potential benefits (Buhrmester et al., 2011; Casler et al., 2013; Landers and Behrend, 2015), but there are also potential limitations, including not being able to assess a response rate. As a result, we do not know how many fitness club employees were privy to the study and decided not to participate. The use of mailed or electronic surveys might help allay these potential concerns.

Finally, there are several avenues for future research. First, we know that people negatively rate and suggest a lower salary for applicants who they presume to have a strong racial identity. There is also a need, though, to examine this from the employee perspective, examining whether persons who do strongly identify experience work more poorly or receive a lower salary than their more weakly identified counterparts. Second, we and others have focused on Whites’ attitudes toward racial minorities, but it is also possible that Whites are evaluated differently based on their presumed racial identity. Whites presumed to have a strong racial identity might be associated with fringe movements in the USA, such as the Alt-Right and other White supremacist organizations. Raters would likely view these individuals negatively, albeit for different underlying reasons. Examination of these possibilities would likely yield novel theoretical and empirical insights. Finally, much of the work related to identity and presumed identity has focused on race, and it is also possible that a similar relationship would occur for other identity dimensions, such as religious beliefs, gender, political affiliation and so on. Future research is needed to explore these possibilities, particularly given the prevalence of bias in sport and physical activity.

Note
1. MTurk is a data collection platform offered by Amazon. As Buhrmester et al. (2011) explained, individuals can sign up for the service as a requestor (i.e. one who develops tasks to be completed) or a worker (i.e. one who receives compensation for completing tasks). Requestors can develop any task they wish, including an experiment like ours. Workers browse opportunities and complete the tasks they deem fit. Landers and Behrend (2015) showed that using MTurk has a number of advantages over other data collection techniques, including the use of college students or convenience samples of professionals.

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