

Beyond Demographic Effects: The Influence of Religious Dissimilarity on Subsequent Group Outcomes

George B. Cunningham, Texas A&M University

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Diversity is a significant issue for sport managers and academics. The interest stems from several factors, including legal mandates, social pressures, changing workforce demographics, and the realization that diversity can bring tangible benefits to the organization (Cunningham & Fink, 2006). Not surprisingly then, there has been considerable research in this area, with the studies generally supporting the notion that women and racial minorities face discriminatory workplaces in the sport context (Acosta & Carpenter, 2006; Daddario & Wigley, 2006; Shaw & Frisby, 2006).

An emerging research stream has moved beyond examining categorical effects (i.e., examining the experiences of one social group relative to another) and has started to investigate relational effects. A relational diversity approach suggests that people's work experiences will be influenced by their demographics in relation to others in that social setting (Tsui & Gutek, 1999). For example, a woman in a group of all women might have better work experiences than a woman in a group of all men. This perspective draws from the social categorization framework (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987), which suggests that people will classify themselves and others into social groups based on the similarity, or lack thereof, to the self. People similar to the self are considered in-group members and are afforded greater trust and more positive affect than are people dissimilar to the self (i.e., out-group members). Thus, there exists an intergroup bias, whereby people have a preference to be in groups of similar others (see also Tsui et al., 1992; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). Research in the sport setting has generally supported these tenets, as people who are demographically different from others in the dyad or group have less positive evaluations of the organization's diversity strategy (Fink et al., 2001), experience less commitment (Cunningham & Sagas, 2004), and have less affective reactions to the group (Cunningham, 2006).

More recently, researchers have moved beyond considering only demographic dissimilarity to also investigate the effects of deep-level dissimilarity-being different from others based on values, attitudes, and beliefs (Harrison et al., 1998, 2002; Riordan, 2000). This research has shown that deep-level differences have predictive validity beyond demographic characteristics.

Interestingly, deep-level diversity researchers have failed to identify potential variations in the deep-level characteristics. This is unfortunate oversight, as some deep-level characteristics are more important to the individual than are others. Specifically, an individual's religious affiliation (or lack thereof) might be more central to the self and one's personal identity than other characteristics, such as personality or attitudes (Cash & Gray, 2000; Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2004; Kriger & Seng, 2005). If this is the case, then being different from others based on religious affiliation might predict subsequent outcomes, even beyond demographic and other forms of deep-level dissimilarity. The purpose of this investigation was to investigate this possibility. Specifically, it was hypothesized that religious dissimilarity would predict person-organization fit beyond the effects of simple demographics, perceived demographic dissimilarity, and perceived attitudinal and personality dissimilarity.

To test this hypothesis, data were collected from 260 NCAA Division I athletic administrators. The sample consisted of 163 males and 96 females (1 missing variable) and 205 Whites and 55 racial minorities. Participant age was evenly distributed: 18-30 (8.1%), 31-40 (27.3%), 41-50 (29.2%), 51-60 (30.4%), and over 61 (5%). Participants completed a questionnaire which asked them to provide demographic information and to respond to items concerning their perceived dissimilarity from others in the department (see Harrison et al., 2002) and person-organization fit (Cable & DeRue, 2002).

Results from the hierarchical regression analysis supported the hypothesis. The simple demographics explained 3% ($p = .06$) of the variance, and the perceived demographic dissimilarity variables explained an additional 2% of the variance ($p = .11$). Perceived attitudinal and personality dissimilarity together accounted for 33% unique variance ($p < .001$), with perceived attitudinal dissimilarity holding the only significant effect ($b = -.53$, $p < .001$). Finally, after accounting for these effects, perceived religious dissimilarity still contributed 3% unique variance ($p < .01$). The direction of the beta coefficient ($b = -.17$) suggests that the more religiously dissimilar people perceive they are from others, the less likely they believe they fit in that athletic department.

The findings have several implications. From a theoretical standpoint, the results highlight the importance of differentiating between the different forms of diversity. Not all ways in which people differ have similar influences on the individual. The

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findings also have implications for sport management practice. That people who believe they religiously differ from others in the department are negatively affected suggests that better diversity management practices are needed within the departments. People in departments with proactive strategies, for example, might be less affected than those in departments adopting a compliance strategy (see Fink et al., 2001). Additional research is needed to further investigate this possibility.