

## Divergent Perceptions of Diversity: An Investigation of Moderating Factors on the Relationship between Actual and Perceived Diversity

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Diversity is "the distribution of differences among the members of a unit with respect to a common attribute, X, such as tenure, ethnicity, conscientiousness, task attitude, or pay" (Harrison & Klein, forthcoming 2007, p. 1). Researchers have employed the use of actual and perceived measures of diversity in explaining organizational outcomes, and both diversity measurements have been found to be related to various outcome variables (see Riordan, 2000 for a review). Harrison and Klein contend that perceived diversity may in fact have distinctive and more proximal explanatory power than actual diversity, but they caution that the use of perceived diversity measurements may elicit biased results. This contention and the correlation between actual and perceived diversity, however has been scantily researched (Harrison, Price, Gavin, and Florey, 2002; Riordan, 2000). Moreover, studies that have empirically investigated the relationship between actual and perceived diversity have found conflicting results. For instance, Riordan (1997) posited that a weak or nonexistent relationship existed between actual and perceived dissimilarity; whereas, Harrison, Price, Gavin, and Florey's (2002) study established that actual group diversity in age, race, and martial status was significantly correlated to overall perceived surface level differences. Similar findings were also found by Cunningham's (in press) study, in that actual race and age dissimilarity were positively associated with perceived race and age dissimilarity.

The presence of conflicting results among various studies suggests that other factors (i.e., moderators) might influence the relationship between actual and perceived diversity. The purpose of the current study was to examine this possibility by considering the effects of actual coaching staff diversity on subsequent perceptions of the staff's diversity. In general, it was expected that actual staff diversity would be positively correlated to perceptions of staff diversity. However, we further expected that the relationship might be influenced by the perceiver's demographic characteristics. According to the non-symmetrical hypothesis, the effects of being different from others in a group is stronger for persons not accustomed to being the minority in a group setting (e.g., Whites, males) than it is for persons who are normally the numerical minority (e.g., racial minorities, women) (see Chatman & O'Reilly, 2004; Cunningham & Sagas, 2004; Riordan & Shore, 1997). We drew from this research to develop predictions concerning the relationship between actual and perceived staff diversity. Specifically, expected that demographic characteristics would moderate the relationship between a group's actual diversity and the perceptions of such heterogeneity.

Data were gathered from 277 head and assistant coaches and graduate and volunteer assistants of men's football and men's and women's basketball and track teams. The sample consisted of 203 men and 55 women (19 participants did not provide their sex). Further, the sample consisted of 189 Caucasian (68.2%) and 63 African Americans (22.7%). The average mean of the sample was 40.55 (SD = 10.67) years, and the average organizational tenure was 5.15 years (SD = 6.09).

Data were collected via questionnaire. Following Harrison et al. (2002), the perceived diversity items were preceded by the phrase, "In general, how similar to one another are the members of your coaching staff with respect to.." Participants then responded to three items, "age," "race," and "tenure with team" using a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (very different) to 7 (very similar). We then calculated the actual race, age, and tenure diversity of the group by using Blau's index (1977), with higher scores indicating greater staff diversity. Following previous research (Chatman & Spataro, 2005) we computed an aggregate measure of the group's actual and perceived diversity.

Next, moderated regression was used to examine potential age, tenure, or race differences in the relationship between actual staff diversity and perceived staff diversity. Cohen, West, and Aiken's (2003) guidelines were followed in this analysis. The first order effects (i.e. actual staff diversity, race, tenure, and age) accounted for 26.4% ( $p = .001$ ) of the variance in perceived staff diversity. The second step, which contained the interaction term, explained an additional 5.2% ( $p < .05$ ) of variance in perceived staff diversity, supporting the presence of a moderating effect. Results indicate that only the race x actual diversity interaction term was significant ( $f = 3.330, p = .001$ ). To illustrate the race interaction, a simple regression equation for perceived dissimilarity was plotted at low (i.e., 1 standard deviation below the mean) versus high (i.e., 1 standard deviation above the mean) levels of actual staff diversity. Simple slope analysis revealed that the positive association between actual and perceived diversity was stronger for Caucasians than it was for African Americans.

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The study makes several contributions to the extant literature. First, results further demonstrate the existence of asymmetrical effects in perceptions of diversity amongst Caucasians and racial minorities. Moreover, although associations between actual diversity and perceptions of diversity have been found, it is important to note that an individual's demographic characteristics - in this case race - can bias these results. When assessing organizational outcomes based on perceptions of diversity it is important to consider the demographic characteristic of the sample, and consider how participants' inherent biases may influence their perceptions, thus influencing the internal and external validity of findings.