Case Report

Multicultural meritocracy: The synergistic benefits of valuing diversity *and* merit[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Many organizations employ diversity initiatives, such as diversity mission statements, in order to effectively recruit and manage a diverse workforce. One approach emphasizes multiculturalism, which focuses on the acknowledgement and celebration of racial diversity. Multiculturalism has been found to produce greater inclusion by racial majorities and increased psychological engagement of racial minorities, but has also been linked to negative outcomes among Whites, from feelings of exclusion to greater stereotyping to perceiving racial discrimination claims as less valid. Another approach—value-in-merit—emphasizes a commitment to equal opportunity and meritocratic outcomes. The value-in-merit approach has been found to alleviate majority members' fear about exclusion but could create a threatening environment for minorities. We propose a hybrid approach—multicultural meritocracy—which combines the value-in-diversity elements of multiculturalism with the equal opportunity components of a value-in-merit ideology. We hypothesized that this integrative presentation would be a more effective approach for organizations than its constituent parts. Five studies demonstrated that the hybrid ideology of multicultural meritocracy limits the negative effects while retaining the positive impacts of the separate approaches. Compared to traditional multiculturalism, multicultural meritocracy reduced stereotype activation and de-legitimization of racial discrimination claims for Whites. Multicultural meritocracy also increased the psychological engagement of *both* racial minorities and Whites. Furthermore, we found that this increased engagement was driven by multicultural meritocracy increasing feelings of inclusion for both groups. Multicultural meritocracy offers an approach to diversity that benefits all members, both majority and minority, of a group.

As organizations face increased racial diversity in their employee pools, they need to find the most effective ways to maximize the gains and minimize the pains associated with increased diversity (Galinsky et al., 2015). Increased racial diversity can produce higher levels of innovation, more novel perspectives and improved performance than racial homogeneity (Barta, Kleiner, & Neuman, 2012; Homan, Van Knippenberg, Van Kleef, & De Dreu, 2007; Page, 2007). However, increased diversity is also associated with increased conflict, less efficient coordination and can produce worse performance (Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999; Van Knippenberg, De Dreu, & Homan, 2004). Accordingly, companies employ diversity structures and initiatives both to attract racially diverse groups of people and to create organizational environments where employees of all different races and ethnicities can work together effectively.

Among the most frequently utilized initiatives are diversity ideologies (Apfelbaum, Stephens, & Reagans, 2016; Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2000). Often embedded in a mission statement, these ideologies represent organizations' approach to diversity and set the stage for the organizational norms and values around diversity. We conducted an exploratory analysis of the top 50 Fortune 500 companies and found that all, without an exception, had diversity initiatives or statements in place in 2016. Given this prevalence in organizations, it remains crucial to investigate how White and minority individuals respond to different types of diversity approaches.

Traditionally, two dominant diversity ideologies have been identified: *Multiculturalism,* with a focus on acknowledging and celebrating racial differences, and *colorblindness,* which focuses on deemphasizing racial differences. A more recently introduced alternative to these ideologies, which we label *value-in-merit,* emphasizes equal opportunity and how individuals can expect uniform treatment and rewards based

on competence regardless of their racial background (Apfelbaum et al., 2016). Interestingly, the existing literature indicates that all three diversity ideologies have clear downsides, which limit their effectiveness in capturing the benefits of diversity. In the current research, we set out to explore whether an integration of the multiculturalism and value-in-merit ideologies—multicultural meritocracy—could produce a more effective ideology for both minorities and Whites.

1. Diversity ideologies

Empirical work on diversity ideologies suggests that multiculturalism is a more effective ideology for intergroup relations than colorblindness (Rattan & Ambady, 2013). Under multiculturalism, Whites report more positive evaluations of out-groups (Verkuyten, 2005), have reduced levels of implicit bias (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004), and show reduced ingroup favoritism tendencies (Curtois & Herman, 2015) than under colorblindness. Minorities report increased psychological engagement in multicultural rather than colorblind organizational contexts (Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009). By creating a pro-diversity climate, multiculturalism can enhance minorities' leadership self-efficacy and goal-pursuits (Gündemir, Dovidio, Homan, & De Dreu, 2017).

Yet the multicultural ideology is not a panacea since it can produce its own negative outcomes. Multiculturalism can increase Whites' stereotype activation (Wolsko et al., 2000) and increase the desire for minorities to conform to existing stereotypes (Gutiérrez & Unzueta, 2010). Under a multicultural mindset, Whites perceive more intergroup differences with racial minorities (Wolsko et al., 2000) and can feel more excluded and threatened (Norton & Sommers, 2011; Plaut, Garnett, Buffardi, & Sanchez-Burks, 2011). Moreover, research shows that participants perceive the organizations endorsing multiculturalism as fundamentally more fair toward minorities than colorblindness, which can conceal racial discrimination within an organization and delegitimize claims of discrimination (Gündemir & Galinksy, 2017).

Apfelbaum et al. (2016) recently identified an alternative approach that organizations take, which emphasizes the principle of meritocracy, i.e., individuals are hired and promoted based purely on competence. This value-in-merit ideology shows some parallels with the colorblind ideology, as both de-emphasize racial diversity. However, value-in-merit differs from conventional colorblindness by its explicit focus on equal opportunity rather than a tendency to overlook differences. Apfelbaum et al. (2016) found that this value-in-merit approach can, under some circumstances, overcome racial minorities' negative responses to traditional colorblind approaches.

However, solely meritocratic approaches are likely to carry a critical flaw that can undermine their effectiveness. Joshi (2014) proposed that a purely meritocratic approach ignores institutionalized barriers that impede underrepresented groups' career progress and can decrease inclusion of racial minorities in organizations. A fair meritocracy requires a level playing field and minorities could see a focus on meritocracy as ignoring societal bias.

Based on the prior literature, we propose that colorblindness does not serve as an effective strategy because its short-term benefits, like those of stereotype suppression (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Jetten, 1994; Todd & Galinsky, 2012), tend to reverse and rebound in the long-term, yielding higher levels of bias (Correll, Park, & Smith, 2008). Although the remaining two diversity approaches appear to be more promising, they each produce negative effects that can counteract their beneficial ones. The question then arises whether it is possible to integrate the best features of these ideologies.

2. Multicultural meritocracy

We propose that integrating multiculturalism with value-in-merit may be an effective way for organizations to approach diversity. We believe that this integrative approach can meet two core needs of individuals in organizational contexts: belongingness and inclusion needs, on the one hand, and the need for justice and fairness on the other.

First, individuals have a motivation for socially belonging to or being included in groups (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In organizational settings, minorities are especially sensitive to social inclusion issues (Shore et al., 2011). Multicultural meritocracy's explicit acknowledgement and celebration of diversity, can address minorities' needs for recognition of their identity, increasing their feelings of inclusion. However, a solely multiculturalist approach is associated with feelings of social exclusion in Whites (Plaut et al., 2011), as they may be concerned that "diversity" is only associated with minority and underrepresented groups (Unzueta & Binning, 2010). An explicit inclusion of a commitment to meritocracy into a multicultural approach could reduce Whites' experiences of exclusion and threat by broadening diversity statement's reach to include elements that more universally apply to a variety of employee groups.

Second, individuals have a need for fair treatment by their organizations. An unintended consequence of multicultural approaches is that the sole focus on promoting diversity may be viewed as undermining merit considerations (Walton, Spencer, & Erman, 2013), raising fairness concerns in White perceivers. Procedural fairness over the allocation of valued resources is especially crucial for employees' perceptions of and reactions toward their organizations (Martin & Bennett, 1996). Multicultural meritocracy can help reduce these fairness concerns of White perceivers by making merit an explicit consideration of a diversity framework. For minorities, multicultural meritocracy can be more effective than value-in-merit in addressing fairness needs, since a sole focus on merit may be perceived as ignoring bias and discrimination minority employees may face. Thus, integrating multicultural elements into a meritocracy message could create more favorable outcomes arise through increased fairness perceptions.

3. Overview

We conducted five experiments to investigate how multicultural meritocracy affects well-established effects from previous research. Our hypotheses focused on how the different ideologies address the inclusion and fairness concerns of Whites and of minorities. For Whites, we predicted that multicultural meritocracy would be more effective than multiculturalism because it addresses both their inclusion and fairness needs not met by multiculturalism. For minorities, we predicted that multicultural meritocracy would be more effective than value-in-merit by addressing the inclusion and fairness needs not met by value-in-merit. Thus, our main comparison for Whites was between multicultural meritocracy and multiculturalism, and our main comparison for minorities was between multicultural meritocracy and value-in-merit.

The first two studies focused on whether multicultural meritocracy can reduce some of the negative effects of multiculturalism for Whites by measuring stereotype activation (Experiment 1) and the delegitimization of racial discrimination claims (Experiment 2). Experiment 3 investigated whether multicultural meritocracy would the psychological engagement of minorities compared to the value-in-merit approach (Experiment 3). Studies 4a and 4b explored whether multicultural meritocracy would increase engagement for both Whites and minorities by increasing perceived inclusion and fairness.

We report all measures, manipulations, and exclusions in the main text or the supplementary materials. We determined the minimum number of participants per cell at 53–82 based on small to medium effect sizes $(f) = 0.20$–0.25, $\alpha = 0.05$, and power $= 0.80$ (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). Across studies, the sample size was not extended after initial analysis.

4. Experiment 1: Whites' stereotype activation and application

Experiment 1 tested the effect of diversity ideologies on stereotype activation in Whites. Pioneering work by Wolsko et al. (2000) found

Table 1
Means and standard deviations (in parentheses) per condition per dependent variable in all five studies.

Condition	Experiment 1		Experiment 2		Experiment 3		Experiment 4a			Experiment 4b		
	Stereotype activation	Estimated score	Claim validity	Punish	Psych. engage.	Psych. engage.	Inclusion	Fairness	Psych. engage.	Inclusion	Fairness
Multicultural	12.94	82.68	4.20	− 0.21	6.48	6.36	6.11	5.93	6.67	6.40	6.20
Meritocracy	(14.37)	(23.53)	(1.56)	(0.85)	(0.70)	(0.74)	(0.98)	(0.97)	(0.53)	(0.80)	(0.74)
Multiculturalism	17.17	80.80	3.66	0.07	6.15	6.27	6.29	5.89	6.11	5.83	5.73
	(16.61)	(21.02)	(1.60)	(1.06)	(0.95)	(0.87)	(0.94)	(1.17)	(1.03)	(1.30)	(1.23)
Value-in-merit	12.53	87.60	3.86	− 0.02	6.06	6.02	5.52	5.59	6.14	5.65	5.43
	(12.61)	(16.23)	(1.62)	(0.99)	(1.15)	(1.01)	(1.51)	(1.41)	(0.90)	(1.22)	(1.33)

Note. Samples of Experiment 1, Experiment 2, and Experiment 4b are Whites, samples of Experiments 3 and 4a are racial-ethnic minorities. In Experiment 1, we measured stereotype activation and estimated performance score of a new minority hire. In Experiment 2, the measures were perceived validity of a racial discrimination claim and the willingness to punish plaintiffs, in Experiment 3 we measured participants' psychological engagement. Experiment 4a and 4b involved measures of psychological engagement, social inclusion at the organization and perceived organizational fairness.

that multiculturalism increased stereotype activation compared to colorblindness. Because Wolsko et al. (2000) observed both positive and negative stereotype activation, we included both of these measures. Additionally, because celebrating diversity could be seen as a cue for lowering merit considerations (Walton et al., 2013), we also included a measure of performance estimations.

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Participants and design
We initially recruited 463 self-reported White adults online through MTurk (221 male, $M_{age} = 36.04$, $SD_{age} = 10.74$), who participated in exchange for a small payment.

The experiment had three conditions: multiculturalism vs. value-in-merit vs. multicultural meritocracy.

4.1.2. Ideology manipulation
Participants read information about a fictitious company called Livens, which included the company's diversity mission statement. Depending on the condition the information was framed differently (based on Apfelbaum et al., 2016). In the *multiculturalism condition* it read: "At Livens […] we foster an inclusive and open-minded workplace that values differences, which, in turn, benefits our employees, clientele, and the industry at large." In the *value-in-merit condition* it read: "At Livens […] we seek the most qualified individuals to join our team and reach their potential, which, in turn, benefits our employees, clientele, and the industry at large." In the *multicultural meritocracy condition* it read: "At Livens […] we foster an inclusive and open-minded workplace that values differences *and* seek the most qualified individuals to join our team, which, in turn, benefits our employees, clientele, and the industry at large." (see Supplementary materials for the integral texts).

4.1.3. Stereotype activation
Participants indicated the percentage of Black employees at Livens that possessed each of the 24 stereotypical attributes that are associated with Black people in the U.S. These characteristics were used in prior work (Wolsko et al., 2000; Study 1); 12 were positive (e.g., athletic; $\alpha_{Positive} = 0.88$) and 12 were negative (e.g., lazy; $\alpha_{Negative} = 0.96$).

4.1.4. Performance score estimation
Participants estimated the performance of a new Black hire, named Lamar, at the company (text based on Sy et al., 2010). Participants indicated the hire's estimated score on an assessment ranging from 0 to 120.

4.1.5. Manipulation and instructional checks
In this, and the following studies, participants answered a forced choice manipulation check, an open-ended manipulation check (i.e.,

provided a one sentence summary of the diversity mission statement), and an instructional attention check item (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009).

4.2. Results

4.2.1. Manipulation and instructional checks
In all studies, before conducting analyses, we excluded participants based on the following pre-determined criteria: Participants who provided an incorrect answer to the manipulation or the instructional checks. In Experiment 1, 367 (173 male) participants remained. Means and standard deviations can be found in Table 1.

4.2.2. Stereotype activation
The experimental condition had a significant effect on the negative stereotype activation, $F(2, 364) = 4.01$, $p = 0.019$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.022$. Negative stereotypes were more strongly activated in the multiculturalism condition than in the value-in-merit ($F[1, 364] = 6.51$, $p = 0.011$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.018$) and multicultural meritocracy ($F[1, 364] = 4.92$, $p = 0.027$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.013$) conditions. Value-in-merit and multicultural meritocracy did not differ ($F[1, 364] = 0.04$, $p = 0.837$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.000$). Positive stereotype activation was not affected by the experimental manipulation, $F(2, 364) = 0.09$, $p = 0.919$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.000$.

4.2.3. Performance score estimation
Experimental condition had an effect on performance estimations, $F(2, 364) = 3.80$, $p = 0.023$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.020$. Participants estimated Lamar's performance to be lower in the multiculturalism than the value-in-merit condition ($F[1, 364] = 7.34$, $p = 0.007$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.020$). They estimated his performance as marginally lower in multicultural meritocracy than value-in-merit ($F[1, 364] = 3.23$, $p = 0.073$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.009$), while multiculturalism and multicultural meritocracy did not differ ($F[1, 364] = 0.51$, $p = 0.476$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.001$). Supplementary meditational analyses (see Supplement) found that multiculturalism reduced the estimated performance of a Black target by increasing negative stereotype activation. However, this indirect effect of ideology on estimated performance of a Black target did not for the value-in-merit and multicultural meritocracy comparison.

Consistent with past research (Wolsko et al., 2000), multiculturalism produced the highest levels of stereotype activation. Stereotype activation was significantly lower in the multicultural meritocracy and value-in-merit conditions. Experiment 2 tested whether multicultural meritocracy would also help individuals be more effective at identifying discrimination than multiculturalism.

5. Experiment 2: Whites' perceptions of racial discrimination

Research on diversity initiatives has found that organizations that emphasize multiculturalism are seen as fair and just organizations,

which can blind people to evidence of discrimination in those organizations (Gündemir & Galinksy, 2017; Kaiser et al., 2013). In Experiment 2 we investigated whether multicultural meritocracy would reduce this concealment of discrimination from multiculturalism.

5.1. Method

5.1.1. Participants and design

We initially recruited 395 self-reported White adults online through MTurk (199 male, M_{age} = 36.77, SD_{age} = 12.16), who participated in exchange for a small payment.

The experiment had three conditions: multiculturalism vs. value-in-merit vs. multicultural meritocracy.

5.1.2. Ideology manipulation

The ideology manipulation was identical to Experiment 1.

5.1.3. Claim validity of discrimination lawsuit

After this manipulation, participants read a short newspaper article about a racial discrimination lawsuit that a number of former employees filed against the company (see Supplement). Participants answered three questions that measured their perceived level of validity of the lawsuit (e.g., How legitimate is the former employees' lawsuit against Livens Company?; 1 = not at all, 7 = very; α = 0.93).

5.1.4. Punishing the plaintiffs

Participants indicated how much money they thought Livens should demand from the plaintiffs in a counter lawsuit (up to $100,000).

5.2. Results

5.2.1. Manipulation and instructional checks

After removing individuals who answered the manipulation or instructional checks incorrectly (see Experiment 1), 345 (173 male) participants were included in the analyses. Means and standard deviations can be found in Table 1.

5.2.2. Claim validity

The experimental condition had a significant effect on claim validity, $F(2, 342)$ = 3.33, p = 0.037, η_p^2 = 0.019. Participants perceived the lawsuit as less valid in the multiculturalism than in the multicultural meritocracy condition ($F[1, 342]$ = 6.55, p = 0.011, η_p^2 = 0.019). Multiculturalism and value-in-merit ($F[1, 342]$ = 0.92, p = 0.338, η_p^2 = 0.003), and multicultural meritocracy and value-in-merit ($F[1, 342]$ = 2.54, p = 0.112, η_p^2 = 0.007) did not differ.

5.2.3. Punishing the plaintiffs

There was a marginal effect of experimental condition on punishment (z-transformed [countersue amount + 1]), $F(2, 342)$ = 2.55, p = 0.080, η_p^2 = 0.015. Participants punished the plaintiffs more in the multiculturalism condition than in the multicultural meritocracy condition ($F[1, 342]$ = 4.97, p = 0.026, η_p^2 = 0.014). Multiculturalism and value-in-merit ($F[1, 342]$ = 0.60, p = 0.439, η_p^2 = 0.002), and multicultural meritocracy and value-in-merit ($F[1, 342]$ = 2.10, p = 0.148, η_p^2 = 0.006) did not differ from each other.

Participants in the multiculturalism condition delegitimized discrimination and countersued for a higher amount compared to those in the multicultural meritocracy condition. These results suggest that multicultural meritocracy can reduce the concealment and delegitimizing impact of multiculturalism on racial discrimination claims.

6. Experiment 3: Minorities' psychological engagement

Experiments 1 and 2 revealed that multicultural meritocracy can reduce some of the negative outcomes of multiculturalism for White perceivers. However, multiculturalism is also associated with important

positive outcomes for minority group members. One influential study revealed that racial minorities report increased psychological engagement in environments characterized by multiculturalism (Plaut et al., 2009). In contrast, value-in-merit approaches may suggest that organizations ignore institutional barriers faced by minority members. Experiment 3 investigated whether multicultural meritocracy retained or gave an additional boost to the minorities' psychological engagement at work compared to value-in-merit.

6.1. Method

6.1.1. Participants and design

We initially recruited 293 self-reported Black and Hispanic adults online through MTurk (148 male, M_{age} = 32.58, SD_{age} = 10.11), who received a small payment.

The experiment had three conditions: multiculturalism vs. value-in-merit vs. multicultural meritocracy

6.1.2. Ideology manipulation

The ideology manipulation was identical to Experiment 1.

6.1.3. Psychological engagement

After the ideology manipulation, participants imagined working for this company and completed a five-item psychological engagement measure (Plaut et al., 2009; Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001). A sample item is "As an employee of Livens Company, doing well in my job tasks and duties would be very important to me." (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree; α = 0.82).

6.2. Results

6.2.1. Manipulation and instructional checks

After removing individuals who answered manipulation or instructional checks incorrectly, 203 (100 male) participants remained. Means and standard deviations can be found in Table 1.

6.2.2. Psychological engagement

The experimental manipulation impacted minorities' engagement, F (2, 200) = 2.93, p = 0.055, η_p^2 = 0.029. Minority participants expressed increased psychological engagement in the multicultural meritocracy condition, compared to both the value-in-merit condition ($F[1, 200]$ = 5.30, p = 0.022 η_p^2 = 0.026), and compared to multiculturalism ($F[1, 200]$ = 3.81, p = 0.052 η_p^2 = 0.019). Multiculturalism and value-in-merit did not differ from each other ($F[1, 200]$ = 0.28, p = 0.599, η_p^2 = 0.001).

Multicultural meritocracy increased the psychological engagement of minorities compared to both value-in-merit and multiculturalism.

7. Experiments 4a and 4b: Psychological engagement and inclusion and fairness for Whites and minorities

The goal of Experiments 4a and 4b was threefold. First, we conducted identical studies for minorities (4a) and Whites (4b) to test whether multicultural meritocracy would increase psychological engagement for both groups. Second, we included measures of perceived social inclusion and fairness in order to investigate whether our proposed underlying mechanisms explain the positive effects of multicultural meritocracy on participants' psychological engagement. Third, we created shorter diversity ideology manipulation texts that were more symmetrical to one another than the ones used in our previous experiments.

Experiments 4a and 4b were conducted simultaneously, and an eligibility screening determined whether potential participants were assigned to participate in Experiment 4a or Experiment 4b. Within the studies, minority and White participants were randomly assigned to one of the three experimental conditions.

7.1. Method Experiment 4a

7.1.1. Participants and design

We initially recruited 260 self-reported Black and Hispanic adults online through MTurk (111 male, M_{age} = 32.09, SD_{age} = 9.86), who received a small payment.

The experiment had three conditions: multiculturalism vs. value-in-merit vs. multicultural meritocracy.

7.1.2. Ideology manipulation

The ideology manipulation was similar to previous studies, yet we adapted the texts in order to create more symmetrical prompts in different conditions, which differed in terms of their message but were highly similar in terms of wording (see Appendix A for the verbatim texts).

7.1.3. Psychological engagement

After the ideology manipulation, participants imagined working for this company and completed the same psychological engagement measure as in Experiment 3 (Plaut et al., 2009; α = 0.80).

7.1.4. Perceived inclusion

Participants completed a three-item perceived social inclusion measure (Pearce & Randel, 2004). A sample item is "I think I would feel included in most activities at work at this company." (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree; α = 0.84).

7.1.5. Perceived fairness

Participants completed a four-item perceived organizational fairness measure (McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992). A sample item is "To what extent would you expect the general procedures used to communicate performance feedback to be fair at this company?" (1 = not at all, 7 = completely; α = 0.92).

7.2. Results

7.2.1. Manipulation and instructional checks

After removing individuals who answered manipulation or instructional checks incorrectly, 182 (80 male) participants remained. Means and standard deviations can be found in Table 1.

7.2.2. Psychological engagement

There was a marginally significant effect of our experimental manipulation on minorities' engagement, $F(2, 179)$ = 2.38, p = 0.096, η_p^2 = 0.026. In line with our core prediction that minorities would respond more favorably to multicultural meritocracy than value-in-merit, we found that minority participants expressed greater psychological engagement in the multicultural meritocracy condition, compared to the value-in-merit condition, $F(1, 179)$ = 4.40, p = 0.037, η_p^2 = 0.024. Multicultural meritocracy did not differ from the multiculturalism, $F(1, 179)$ = 0.34, p = 0.559, η_p^2 = 0.002. Interestingly, multiculturalism and value-in-merit also did not differ from each other, $F(1, 179)$ = 2.54, p = 0.113, η_p^2 = 0.014.

7.2.3. Perceived inclusion

The experimental manipulation impacted minorities' perceived inclusion, $F(2, 179)$ = 7.19, p = 0.001, η_p^2 = 0.074. Supporting our prediction, minority participants expressed increased inclusion perceptions in the multicultural meritocracy condition, compared to the value-in-merit condition, $F(1, 179)$ = 7.23, p = 0.008, η_p^2 = 0.039, and the multicultural meritocracy condition did not differ from the multiculturalism condition, $F(1, 179)$ = 0.77, p = 0.382 η_p^2 = 0.004. Moreover, participants reported higher perceived inclusion in the multiculturalism condition than the value-in-merit condition, $F(1, 179)$ = 13.51, p < 0.001, η_p^2 = 0.070.

7.2.4. Perceived fairness

The experimental manipulation did not directly influence minorities' perceived fairness, $F(2, 179)$ = 1.34, p = 0.264, η_p^2 = 0.015.

7.2.5. Indirect effects

We investigated whether perceived inclusion and fairness mediated the relationship between ideology and psychological engagement (Hayes, 2013). We created two mediation models, separately comparing dummy-coded multiculturalism and value-in-merit (coded as 1) to multicultural meritocracy (coded as 0), including the mediators simultaneously.

The indirect effect of value-in-merit versus multicultural meritocracy on psychological engagement through inclusion was significant, indirect effect = − 0.20, SE = 0.09, 95% CI [− 0.413, − 0.057], while this indirect effect was non-significant for fairness, indirect effect = − 0.06, SE = 0.05, 95% CI [− 0.234, 0.004]. The indirect effect of multiculturalism versus multicultural meritocracy on psychological engagement was non-significant through both inclusion, indirect effect = 0.06, SE = 0.07, 95% CI [− 0.047, 0.217], and fairness, indirect effect = − 0.01, SE = 0.04, 95% CI [− 0.104, 0.059]. Enhanced perceptions of inclusion but not fairness explained why multicultural-meritocracy increases psychological engagement by minorities compared to a value-in-merit approach to diversity.

This experiment replicated the key finding from Experiment 3: an expression of multicultural meritocracy by an organization increased psychological engagement among minorities compared to a value-in-merit approach to diversity. Unlike Experiment 3, multicultural meritocracy did not differ from multiculturalism; this is not particularly surprising since past research has found that multiculturalism increases the psychological engagement of minorities (Plaut et al., 2009). The current experiment extended the previous experiment by exploring the psychological processes that underlie this increased engagement. Compared to value-in-merit, multicultural meritocracy increased a sense of inclusion among minorities.

7.3. Method Experiment 4b

7.3.1. Participants and design

We initially recruited 273 self-reported White adults online through MTurk (125 male, M_{age} = 37.38, SD_{age} = 12.07), who received a small payment.

The experiment had three conditions: multiculturalism vs. value-in-merit vs. multicultural meritocracy.

7.3.2. Ideology manipulation

The ideology manipulation was identical to Experiment 4a.

7.3.3. Psychological engagement

The psychological engagement measure was identical to the measure in Experiment 3 (α = 0.87).

7.3.4. Perceived inclusion

The perceived inclusion measure was identical to the measure in Experiment 4a (α = 0.86).

7.3.5. Perceived fairness

The perceived fairness measure was identical to the measure in Experiment 4a (α = 0.96).

7.4. Results

7.4.1. Manipulation and instructional checks

After removing individuals who answered manipulation or instructional checks incorrectly, 222 (97 male) participants remained. Means and standard deviations can be found in Table 1.

7.4.2. Psychological engagement

The experimental manipulation influenced Whites' engagement, F (2, 219) = 9.81, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.082$. In line with our core prediction that Whites would respond more favorably to multicultural meritocracy than multiculturalism, White participants expressed increased psychological engagement in the multicultural meritocracy condition, compared to the multiculturalism condition, $F(1, 219)$ = 16.13, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.069$. Their engagement was also higher in the multicultural meritocracy condition compared to the value-in-merit condition, $F(1, 219) = 13.67$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.059$. Multiculturalism and value-in-merit did not differ from each other, $F(1, 219) = 0.05$, $p = 0.829$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.000$.

7.4.3. Perceived inclusion

The experimental manipulation impacted Whites' perceived inclusion, $F(2, 219) = 8.23$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.070$. As predicted, White participants expressed increased perceived inclusion in the multicultural meritocracy condition, compared to the multiculturalism condition, $F(1, 219) = 9.31$, $p = 0.003$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.041$. They also reported higher inclusion in multicultural meritocracy condition compared to the value-in-merit condition, $F(1, 219) = 15.03$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.064$. Multiculturalism and value-in-merit conditions did not differ from each other, $F(1, 219) = 0.90$, $p = 0.345$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.004$.

7.4.4. Perceived fairness

The experimental manipulation impacted Whites' perceived fairness, $F(2, 219) = 8.06$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.069$. As predicted, White participants expressed increased perceived fairness in the multicultural meritocracy condition, compared to the multiculturalism condition, $F(1, 219) = 6.20$, $p = 0.014$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.028$. They also reported higher perceived fairness in the multicultural meritocracy condition compared to the value-in-merit condition, $F(1, 219) = 15.90$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.068$. Multiculturalism and value-in-merit did not differ from each other, $F(1, 219) = 2.65$, $p = 0.105$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.012$.

7.4.5. Indirect effects

We investigated whether perceived inclusion and fairness mediated the relationship between ideology and psychological engagement (Hayes, 2013). We created two mediation models, separately comparing dummy-coded multiculturalism and value-in-merit (coded as 1) to multicultural meritocracy (coded as 0), including the mediators simultaneously.

There was an indirect effect of multicultural meritocracy versus value-in-merit on psychological engagement through inclusion, indirect effect = -0.33, $SE = 0.10$, 95% CI $[-0.559, -0.175]$, but not through fairness, indirect effect = -0.06, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI $[-0.193, 0.077]$.

The indirect effect of multicultural meritocracy versus multiculturalism on psychological engagement was significant through inclusion, indirect effect = -0.25, $SE = 0.10$, 95% CI $[-0.507, -0.107]$, but not through fairness, indirect effect = -0.04, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI $[-0.135, 0.041]$.

For Whites, multicultural meritocracy enhanced perceptions of inclusion, which then led these participants to feel more psychologically engaged in companies characterized by a multicultural-meritocracy approach rather than a value-in-merit or multiculturalism approach to diversity. Although multicultural-meritocracy increased fairness perceptions compared to the other two approaches, fairness did not explain its positive effects on psychological engagement.

7.5. Comparisons between Experiments 4a and 4b

Because Experiments 4a and 4b were run simultaneously, we pooled the data from these experiments to test whether multicultural meritocracy differentially affected majority and minority group members. In particular, we were interested in whether this diversity approach would produce inclusion or fairness gaps between these groups ($N = 404$). For fairness, the predicted main effect of experimental condition was significant, $F(2, 398) = 7.02$, $p = 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.034$. In addition, there was no main effect of racial group membership, $F(1, 398) = 0.01$, $p = 0.908$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.000$ and there was no interaction, $F(2, 398) = 1.47$, $p = 0.232$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.007$. For inclusion, the predicted main effect of experimental condition was significant, $F(2, 398) = 11.27$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.054$. Although there was no main effect of racial group membership, $F(1, 398) = 0.01$, $p = 0.906$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.000$, there was an interaction, $F(2, 398) = 4.11$, $p = 0.017$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.020$. Disentangling this interaction revealed that minorities and majorities did not differ in terms of inclusion in the multicultural meritocracy condition ($p = 0.158$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.005$), and in the value-in-merit condition ($p = 0.522$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.001$), but minorities' perceived inclusion was higher than majorities in the multiculturalism condition ($p = 0.015$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.015$). This differential effect of multiculturalism is consistent with previous research (Plaut et al., 2011). Importantly, these results provide support for the notion that multicultural meritocracy does not create inclusion or fairness gaps between minority and majority perceivers.

8. Discussion

Five experiments tested the effects of a hybrid diversity ideology—multicultural meritocracy—that combined elements from the multiculturalism and value-in-merit ideology. Our multicultural meritocracy ideology simultaneously emphasized the importance of racial diversity and an equal opportunity meritocracy. We examined whether this integrative approach affected how Whites perceived minorities (Experiment 1), how Whites responded to racial discrimination claims (Experiment 2), and how engaged minorities and Whites felt (Experiments 3–4).

The results revealed the overall benefits of multicultural meritocracy compared to multiculturalism or value-in-merit. For White perceivers, multicultural meritocracy eliminated the downsides of multiculturalism, reducing the activation of negative racial stereotypes (Experiment 1), reducing de-legitimization of racial discrimination (Experiment 2), and increasing their engagement at work (Experiment 4b). For racial minorities, multicultural meritocracy increased psychological engagement in comparison with value-in-merit (Experiments 3 and 4a). For both Whites and minorities, multicultural meritocracy increased psychological engagement through heightened feelings of inclusion.

Overall, our results suggest that multicultural meritocracy combines the benefits of multiculturalism and value-in-merit, while limiting their downsides. That is, this synergistic approach to organizational diversity is more effective than either of the more traditional components from which it was created. Moreover, the psychological mechanisms that underlie the observed effectiveness of multicultural meritocracy—inclusion—open new venues for theory development around diversity ideologies.

We experimentally created an ideology that combined elements of multiculturalism and value-in-merit. As it turns out, recent research has found that merit-related themes can emerge as components of multiculturalist statements (Apfelbaum et al., 2016). This suggests that some organizations may already be utilizing multicultural meritocracy. Thus, the current work offers a first test of this hybrid approach to diversity.

Our work offers clear practical implications: By emphasizing an explicit commitment to *both* racial diversity and merit in their diversity policies and mission statements, rather than a singular focus on one of these, organizations can engage both its White and minority employees. Past work has suggested that multiculturalism and value-in-merit can each be effective for different underrepresented groups and under different conditions (Apfelbaum et al., 2016), that using these different ideologies depends on the levels of representation and threat. However, multicultural meritocracy may offer a more efficient approach because it works for both minorities and Whites.

8.1. Limitations and future directions

An intriguing finding in Experiment 1 was that participants estimated a minority hire's performance as marginally lower in multicultural meritocracy condition than in value-in-merit condition; it suggests that a pro-diversity message, even when it is integrated with a meritocratic ideal, can still be interpreted as reducing a focus on merit (Walton et al., 2013). Thus, the effectiveness of multicultural meritocracy may not be universally positive. Nevertheless, the supplementary analyses showed that multicultural meritocracy had the same indirect effects on performance estimations through stereotype activation as value-in-merit, suggesting its promise within the performance domain.

Although our findings were in line with our core predictions with respect to the contrast between multicultural meritocracy and value-in-merit for minorities and between multicultural meritocracy and multiculturalism for Whites, the lack of differences between multiculturalism and value-in-merit was unexpected in multiple of our studies. For instance, in Experiment 2's evaluation of discrimination claims we had expected Whites to respond differently to value-in-merit than to multiculturalism. Because participants in both conditions were presented with a diversity approach rather than no approach, they may have inferred fair treatment of minority employees (see Kaiser et al., 2013). Additionally, while previous research showed that Whites associate multiculturalism with feelings of exclusion compared to colorblindness, in Experiment 4b we found no differences between multiculturalism and value-in-merit conditions. Moreover, although Experiment 4a suggests that multicultural meritocracy may not be consistently better for minority engagement than multiculturalism (see Study 4b), the broader effectiveness of multicultural meritocracy (also for Whites) could make it a more efficient approach for organizations to apply. Finally, even though Whites perceived multicultural meritocracy as fairer than multiculturalism alone, fairness did not predict their consequent engagement. Future research can continue to explore the role of fairness in the effects of diversity ideologies on other dependent measures.

Although using scenarios in an experimental setting has the advantage of establishing causality between variables of interest, it would be valuable in future work to (conceptually) replicate and extend our findings in organizational settings. Additionally, future work could include performance measures, allowing- to explore the utility of multicultural meritocracy for performance outcomes in diverse organizations.

Another interesting new direction for future research would be to examine the link between multicultural meritocracy and polyculturalism (i.e., an approach focusing on interactions and mutual influence between groups; Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). One possibility is that multicultural meritocracy puts individuals in polycultural mindsets, which may have implications for intergroup communication and contact.

9. Conclusion

The current research tested the effects of multicultural meritocracy, a hybrid approach to diversity that combined the celebration of diversity in multiculturalism with the equal opportunity elements of value-in-merit. This synergistic ideology captured the separate benefits of each original ideology without producing their downsides. We believe that a multicultural meritocracy approach to diversity has the potential to be an effective management of diversity in organizations for all its members.

Appendix A. Ideology manipulations Studies 4a and 4b

Value-in-merit condition

Our company has strong norms and beliefs around racial diversity and the racial-ethnic composition of our employees. These norms and beliefs are clearly stated in our company's diversity mission statement stated below:

At Livens, we believe that our clients receive the highest quality consulting services when our workforce is comprised of the most qualified individuals in the field. Livens is actively committed to recruiting, retaining, and promoting the most qualified employees. Our employees also benefit from our dedication to this merit-focused policy: they have equal opportunities to succeed and are rewarded for their accomplishments.

At Livens, our commitment to merit contributes to our success as a company. We seek the most qualified individuals to join our company and reach their potential, which, in turn, benefits our employees, clientele, and the industry at large.

Multiculturalism condition

Our company has strong norms and beliefs around racial diversity and the racial-ethnic composition of our employees. These norms and beliefs are clearly stated in our company's diversity mission statement stated below:

At Livens, we believe that our clients receive the highest quality consulting services when our workforce mirrors the increasingly diverse marketplace. Livens is actively committed to recruiting, retaining, and promoting employees from diverse backgrounds and experiences. Our employees benefit from our dedication to this diversity-focused policy: their own diverse backgrounds are recognized and celebrated through our many diversity initiatives and programs.

At Livens, our commitment to diversity contributes to our success as a company. We foster an inclusive and open-minded workplace that values diverse backgrounds and experiences, which, in turn, benefits our employees, clientele, and the industry at large.

Multicultural meritocracy condition

Our company has strong norms and beliefs around racial diversity and the racial-ethnic composition of our employees. These norms and beliefs are clearly stated in our company's diversity mission statement stated below:

At Livens, we believe that our clients receive the highest quality consulting services when our workforce is comprised of the most qualified individuals in the field who also mirror the increasingly diverse marketplace. Livens is actively committed to recruiting, retaining, and promoting the most qualified employees from diverse backgrounds and experiences. Our employees benefit from our dedication to this merit & diversity focused policy: Our employees have equal opportunities to succeed and are rewarded for their accomplishments, while their own diverse backgrounds are recognized and celebrated through our many diversity initiatives and programs.

At Livens, our commitment to the combination of merit & diversity contributes to our success as a company. We seek the most qualified individuals to join our company and reach their potential and foster an inclusive and open-minded workplace that values differences, which, in turn, benefits our employees, clientele, and the industry at large.

Appendix B. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2017.06.002.

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