



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Experimental Social Psychology

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jesp

One size may not fit all: Exploring how the intersection of race and gender and stigma consciousness predict effective identity-safe cues for Black women

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Gender
Group processes
STEM
Intersectionality
Identity-safe cues

ABSTRACT

Black women are underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. Consequently, developing efficacious techniques to attract Black women to STEM companies is critical. Featuring successful scientists, who share an identity with Black women, on science companies' websites may be one way to signal to Black women they will be valued at that company. In two experiments, we explored who acts as an effective identity-safe cue for Black women at a fictitious science and technology company. Experiment 1 found Black women predicted they would feel more trust and belonging at a STEM company with a website featuring a Black woman or Black man scientist compared to a White woman scientist or no scientist. In Experiment 2, we found relative to viewing no scientist, Black women predicted they would feel more trust and belonging when a STEM company highlighted a Black woman scientist, or White woman scientist who expressed allyship with Black women (i.e., stating Black women bring important perspectives to science). Interestingly, across both experiments we found stigma consciousness (i.e., sensitivity to the possibility of experiencing discrimination) moderated these results, and had important implications for Black women's reported feelings of trust and belonging. Specifically, participants with higher stigma consciousness anticipated they would feel less trust and belonging at a company unless they viewed the profile featuring a Black woman scientist.

There is a well-documented disparity of Black women in science, technology, mathematics, and technology (STEM) (NSF, 2015), and Black women face unique challenges in STEM disciplines. For example, Black women make-up only 2% of the STEM USA workforce (NSF, 2015), and also report having to work harder to be perceived as legitimate and competent compared to White women scientists (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Williams, Phillips, & Hall, 2014). By not recruiting and creating an inclusive environment for Black women, STEM companies lose talented workers who would promote innovation (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Thus, it is critical to develop efficacious techniques to recruit and create welcoming surroundings for Black women in STEM.

In the current research, we suggest featuring a scientist, who shares an identity with Black women, in science company recruitment materials or websites may be one way to attract Black women to STEM. However, as of yet, little research has explored whether the race and/or gender of a scientist is most critical for suggesting to Black women their identity will be valued in STEM organizations. The goal of the current research was to fill this gap and examine who signals to Black women

that they will feel welcome and belong at a STEM company.

One potential challenge to the recruitment of Black women in STEM is *social identity threat*, which occurs when individuals worry they will be devalued because of identifying with a stigmatized group (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). Harmful stereotypes about women in STEM and Black individuals' academic ability may make Black women particularly vulnerable to social identity threat in STEM companies (Cohen & Garcia, 2005; Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham, & Handelsman, 2012), and this apprehension can ultimately lead to a variety of harmful consequences (Murphy & Taylor, 2012). For example, social identity threat can elicit decreased predicted *belonging* (beliefs that one will not be accepted at a company) and lowered predicted *trust and comfort* (the fear that one cannot trust colleagues or expect to be treated fairly at a company) (Murphy, Steele, & Gross, 2007; Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Diltmann, & Crosby, 2008). Consequently, developing efficacious techniques to alleviate social identity threat may be critical for attracting Black women to STEM companies (Avery & McKay, 2006).

One way to help assuage social identity threat concerns is to include

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2017.06.021>

Received 20 July 2016; Received in revised form 15 June 2017; Accepted 30 June 2017
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identity-safe cues (i.e., suggesting an identity will be valued) in recruitment materials to signal that Black women will be respected and appreciated in a STEM company (Avery et al., 2013; Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005; Walton, Murphy, & Ryan, 2015). Companies may advertise a variety of identity-safe cues in their organizations. For example, having a high representation of women or underrepresented minorities in recruitment materials or a statement describing how the company values diversity have been found to function as beneficial identity-safe cues for women and underrepresented minorities (Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008; Windscheid et al., 2016). Likewise, featuring a successful Black employee or female employee on a company website may be a particularly beneficial identity-safe cue for Black women. Indeed, past research has found that even brief exposure to a counterstereotypical exemplar (e.g., a successful female scientist) can help alleviate social identity threat for women in STEM (Dasgupta, 2011; Stout, Dasgupta, Hunsinger, & McManus, 2011).

However, like much of psychological research, previous experiments testing the effectiveness of identity-safe cues has focused on women or Black individuals generally, without examining the intersection of race and gender (see Mohr & Purdie-Vaughns, 2015 and Remedios & Snyder, 2015 for discussions). This scarcity in research presents a problem when attempting to develop effective identity-safe cues for Black women because it is possible that Black women will not easily identify with scientists or employees sharing only their gender or racial identity. Critically, past work exploring the positive impact of counterstereotypic exemplars suggests that for these exemplars to act as identity-safe cues, it is imperative that individuals feel similar to the exemplars. For example, a successful women leader who is portrayed as unique and the exception to the rule can inadvertently decrease women's identification with leadership (Asgari, Dasgupta, & Stout, 2012). Furthermore, when female students interact with a female computer scientist, who fits the "scientist stereotype" (i.e. is socially awkward and nerdy), these students cannot relate to the scientist and, in turn, report lower career aspirations in computer science (Cheryan, Drury, & Vichayapai, 2012; Cheryan, Siy, Vichayapai, Drury, & Kim, 2011). Taken together, this past work suggests that identifying scientists with whom Black women feel similar is imperative for developing efficacious identity-safe cues for Black women on STEM company websites.

1. Intersectional identity

Although past research has not specifically explored how intersectional identities influence the effectiveness of counterstereotypic exemplars, two perspectives in the intersectionality literature shed light on whom may serve as a helpful identity-safe cue for Black women - the *ethnic-prominence* and *double jeopardy* perspectives. The ethnic-prominence viewpoint asserts that due to ethnicity being both a historically and contemporary basis for discrimination in the United States, Black women are more likely to anticipate and attribute experiences of discrimination to their ethnicity than to their gender (King, 2003; Levin, Sinclair, Veniegas, & Taylor, 2002; Remedios, Chasteen, & Paek, 2012). For example, researchers have found that Latina and Black women do not differ from their male counterparts in expectations of general discrimination. This finding indicates female respondents' expectations were likely more affected by the women's perceptions of ethnic discrimination, which they share with men of color, than by their gender (Levin et al., 2002). Similarly, Black female college students report more distress and lower state self-esteem when they imagine being rejected due to their race than their gender (King, 2003). Thus, this previous research demonstrates Black women generally are more aware of racial than gender bias, which suggests a Black woman or Black man scientist would be more relatable and better identity-safe cues for Black women than a White woman scientist.

In contrast to ethnic-prominence, the double jeopardy perspective

asserts women of color face compounding challenges because of their dual stigmatized identities and focusing on one primary identity paints too simplistic a picture (Klonoff, Landrine, & Scott, 1995). For instance, Black women report facing more challenges in the workplace than White women or Black men (Settles, 2006; Williams et al., 2014). Supporting these perceptions of unfair treatment, researchers found individuals punish Black women leaders more harshly for failures than White women or Black men leaders (Rosette & Livingston, 2012). Additionally, because Black women are not representative of the prototypical Black person (a Black man) or women (a White woman), they often also experience discrimination in the form of invisibility or going unnoticed (Mohr & Purdie-Vaughns, 2015; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Sesko & Biernat, 2010). Indeed, White participants were less likely to remember statements made by and pictures of Black women compared to Black men and White women (Sesko & Biernat, 2010). Given the distinctive adversities faced by Black women, it seems plausible Black women may relate and feel more similar to a Black woman than a Black man or White woman scientist, and only a Black woman will function as an efficacious identity safe cue for Black women.

Because both viewpoints from the intersectionality research suggest a White woman would not be a good identity-safe cue for Black women, an additional aim of the current research was to examine ways to bolster the usefulness of White women scientists as identity-safe cues for Black women. One means to augment the success of a White woman scientist identity-safe cue may be for the scientist to emphasize the importance of diversity in her laboratory. For example, researchers have found ethnic minorities feel more welcomed in a company when the company and their employees acknowledge the value of diverse perspectives and respect differences between groups (Plaut et al., 2009). Thus, by endorsing the importance of diversity, a White woman may better function as an identity-safe cue for Black women. Expressing allyship may also enhance the effectiveness of a White woman scientist. Research in education has found that Black women student leaders' have more positive experiences when they perceive more allyship from their White counterparts (Domingue, 2015). Previous research also suggests White individuals can make the transition from "friend" to "ally" by acknowledging the impact of racial discrimination and prejudice, and actively working to combat these injustices (Brown & Ostrove, 2013; Dace, 2012; Droogendyk, Wright, Lubensky, & Louis, 2016). Thus, a White woman scientist, who acknowledges Black women bring interesting perspectives to science and also face unique challenges and difficulties may be a particularly efficacious identity-safe cue for Black women. However, it is important to note that Black women still may not feel similar to the White woman ally because the ally will not necessarily decrease Black women's greater sensitivity to racial than gender bias. Rather, the White woman ally may be beneficial because Black women view her as ally and someone who cares about promoting the success of Black women.

2. The role of stigma consciousness

Beyond the characteristics of a successful scientist, important individual differences may also influence whether a specific scientist is an effective identity-safe cue for Black women, and whether the ethnic prominence or double jeopardy perspective is most relevant for identity-safe cues. For example, women and ethnic minorities can vary in their level of stigma consciousness or sensitivity to the possibility of experiencing discrimination because of their race and/or gender (Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002; Pinel, 1999). Generally, high levels of stigma consciousness can increase vulnerability to social identity threat because individuals who are higher in stigma consciousness have heightened vigilance for cues suggesting their group will be devalued in a given environment (Inzlicht, Kaiser, & Major, 2008). Black women's differing levels of race or gender stigma consciousness may also determine which scientist

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