

## Dismantling Bias Conference Series

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### When is more actually better?: Increased diversity and the need for inclusion

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### *When is more actually better?: Increased diversity and the need for inclusion*

Being in the numeric minority can be isolating (Jackson, Thoits, & Taylor, 1995). Thus, one motivation underlying calls for increased diversity in the workplace is the expectation that the experience of numeric minorities will be improved simply through the presence of similar others. But this fails to consider the actions of those who are most prevalent in the group (i.e., majority group members). We contend that simply increasing diversity is not sufficient to overcome social exclusion of the minority by majority group members. Rather, diversity and inclusion are both needed to reduce feelings of social isolation and increase a sense of belonging for numeric minorities.

We explore whether a small difference in increased diversity (i.e., moving from having one numeric minority to two in a small group) interacts with the social exclusion (vs. inclusion) behavior of majority group members to affect the minority group members feelings of isolation and belonging. Because the need to belong with others is a fundamental human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and interpersonal relationships are an important quality of small groups, we predict that increasing diversity will only alleviate feelings of isolation for minority group members when done in socially inclusive environments.

#### **Method**

We recruited women through Prolific Academic, an online paid participant panel. We randomly assigned participants to a 2 (social exclusion: included vs. excluded) X 2 (numeric representation: solo vs. duo) between-subjects design ( $N = 271$ ). To manipulate social exclusion, participants played Cyberball—an online game that involves being interpersonally ignored and excluded by others (Gruter & Masters, 1986; Williams, 1997; Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000). Women in the excluded condition received the ball significantly less than the male group members while those in the included condition received the ball a similar amount as the male group members. To manipulate numeric representation, participants were either the only woman or one of two women in the nine-person group.

Manipulation check. We included two items (“I was ignored” and “I was excluded”, 1 = not at all to 7 = completely,  $\alpha = .96$ ) to determine whether during the ball toss game participants felt excluded.

Dependent variables. Two items measured feelings of isolation (How “lonely” and “isolated” participants felt during the game, 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*,  $\alpha = .95$ ) and twenty items assessed having participants belonging needs satisfied (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*,  $\alpha = .91$ ).

#### **Preliminary results**

For the manipulation check, participants in the excluded condition ( $M = 5.49$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ) reported being significantly more ignored and excluded than those in the included condition ( $M = 2.74$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ),  $F(1, 267) = 230.09$ ,  $p < .001$ .

For our first dependent variable, a 2 x 2 ANOVA revealed a significant interaction between the social inclusion and numeric representation manipulations,  $F(1, 267) = 10.14$ ,  $p = .002$ . In a socially inclusive environment, duos ( $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ) felt significantly less isolated than solos ( $M = 3.86$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ),  $F(1, 141) = 6.16$ ,  $p = .010$ . When socially excluded, however, duos

( $M = 5.50$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) no longer held an advantage over solos ( $M = 5.32$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ),  $F(1, 126) = .50$ ,  $p = .480$ . There was no significant main effect of numeric representation, however, demonstrating that only increasing diversity from solos ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ) to duos ( $M = 4.43$ ,  $SD = 1.84$ ) was not enough to significantly change how isolated minority group members felt,  $F(1, 267) = 1.68$ ,  $p = .200$ .

Further, these patterns replicated for feelings of having one's belonging needs satisfied, demonstrating convergent evidence. In sum, only when socially included (vs. excluded), did duos feel less lonely and isolated compared to solos.

### **Implications**

Our results suggest that increased diversity is not sufficient to overcome the effects of an environment involving social exclusion from the majority group members. Instead, having majority group members create a socially inclusive environment is one important factor allowing for increasing diversity to lead to a significantly better experience for minority group members.

### **Future directions**

With a similar social inclusion paradigm, Study 2 utilizes a different social category (i.e., company division) and measures different attributions minority group members make for their inclusion or exclusion. In addition to replicating Study 1's findings, we expect that greater attributions of exclusion due to one's social category will be associated with increased feelings of isolation and lack of belongingness.