Minorities' Perceptions of Majority Member Participation in Minority Spaces

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This work investigates how minority observers perceive majority members' participation in what I term *minority spaces*, which are groups or spaces geared toward minorities (e.g., minority affinity groups). Motivating this work is a proposed solution to advancing organizational diversity & inclusion efforts: engaging majority members, such as White men. The inherent assumption in the literature and in practice is that majority members' participation is helpful and received positively by minorities. However, I argue that majority members' participation has the potential to backfire and ironically perpetuate inequality. I draw from theories on social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), inclusion (Jansen et al., 2014), and authenticity (Schamder & Sedikides, 2018) to test this idea (see Figure 1). Across four experiments, I show how different levels of Whites' / men's participation (conceptualized as numerical presence and/or passive to active involvement) in racial & gender affinity groups affect how racial minorities and women perceive these groups. Study 1 manipulates presence (low, high) and finds that when there is a high number of Whites / men in a racial or gender affinity group, racial minorities and women perceive more invasiveness, anticipate less inclusion & feeling of a safe space, and are less willing to join the affinity group and organization. Study 2 builds upon this by manipulating the percentage of majority members in the affinity group (10-50%) and shows a significant linear trend, such that the higher the percentage of Whites / men in the group, the more perceived invasiveness and lower anticipated inclusion, and the lower affinity group and organizational attraction. In fact, having less than 30% Whites or men in the group is when the negative effects of majority member participation are attenuated. In Study 3, I manipulate the number of White men in a Women's affinity group leadership team. Results again demonstrate a significant linear trend: the more White men on the leadership team, the more perceived invasiveness White

women feel, along with less anticipated inclusion & safe space and less attraction to the group and organization. Finally, Study 4 contends with majority members' involvement in affinity groups—specifically White people in an Black/African American affinity group—and demonstrates that passive involvement elicits the most negative effects in Black observers' perceptions. The current results suggest that finding a balance in majority member participation in minority affinity groups is crucial to prevent diversity & inclusion efforts from backfiring. Indeed, this research has clear practical implications in evaluating how certain efforts from majority members are perceived and determining subsequent actions that minority observers may take based on their reactions to this. Considering the benefits that minority spaces in organizations (e.g., minority affinity groups) may have for minorities—such as providing networking opportunities, mentoring, and support—it is crucial to determine what factors may help or hinder minorities' participation in these groups.
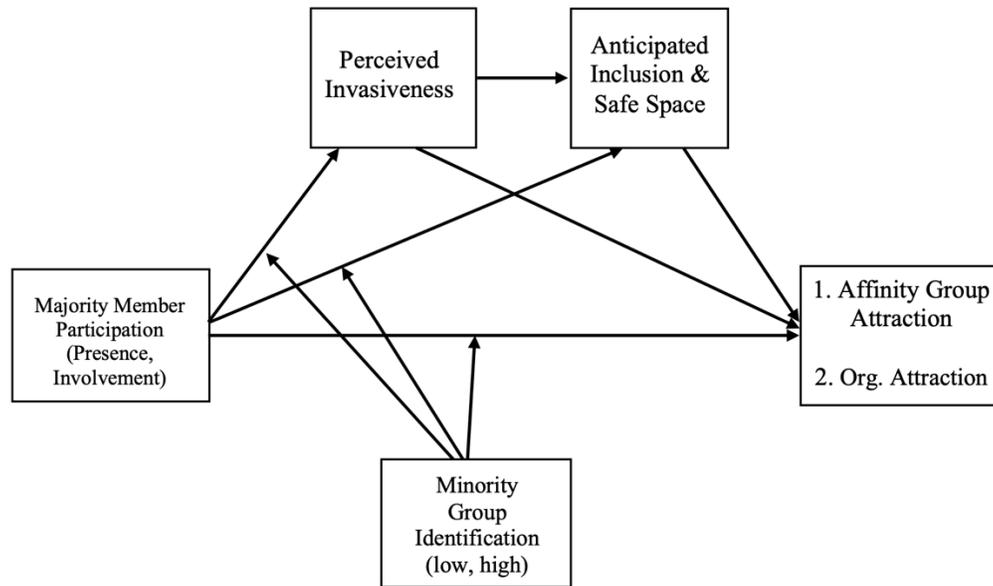
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Figure 1. Theoretical Model.