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Think Your Organization is Diverse? Think Again
New Study Reveals Diversity Means Different Things to Different People

Irvine, CA (August 8, 2014) – Over the past few decades, many companies have sought to make their workforce more diverse in an effort to attract and keep top talent. But, how successful is their strategy? In a new study, released today by *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, researchers explore the complexities of diversity and what causes people to feel that a team or an organization is diverse. Key findings indicate that a particular team or organization can look quite different to people depending upon their backgrounds and racial identity.

In the three-part study, Christopher W. Bauman (UC Irvine’s Paul Merage School of Business), Sophie Trawalter (University of Virginia), and Miguel M. Unzueta (UCLA) report that people can disagree about how much racial diversity a team includes. One major reason why is that people tend to judge diversity based on whether members of their own racial group are represented. Seeing people like themselves on the team eases concerns about discrimination.

Imagine, for example, a team of six people that includes four Whites and two Asians. This team will seem reasonably diverse to Whites and Asians, but it will not appear diverse to African Americans. At the same time, another team that includes four Whites and two African Americans will seem fairly diverse to Whites and African Americans, but it will not appear diverse to Asians. Importantly, these two teams are equally diverse in terms of number of races and number of racial minority group members they include. Whites tend to see them as equally diverse as well. But, they feel quite different to people whose race is left out.

“Our research shows that a lack of diversity may simultaneously trouble some people but not be apparent to others. We believe many leaders of organizations may underappreciate how much of a concern diversity is for their employees and job candidates,” said Bauman.
“Achieving diversity can mean different things to different people, and there’s no one-size-fits-all solution. People must be willing to have candid conversations about specific types of representation rather than use ‘diversity’ as a catch-all phrase.” In other words, leaders and their organizations must focus on all relevant groups if they wish to attract and retain people from a variety of backgrounds.

The paper notes that conversations about race in the United States historically have focused on relations between Whites and racial minority groups—especially African Americans—rather than on relations between racial minority groups. “As society becomes more racially diverse, it is increasingly important to understand how people from different racial groups evaluate diversity and form attitudes about teams and organizations,” Bauman continued. In today’s world and in the future, leaders will need to understand diversity from many perspectives rather than assume that others are likely to share their opinions.

About Professor Christopher W. Bauman
Christopher W. Bauman, PhD, is an assistant professor of Organization and Management at UC Irvine’s Paul Merage School of Business. Much of Bauman’s research focuses on how individuals evaluate and respond to issues of morality, ethics, and fairness. His work aims to better understand when and how people view specific situations in terms of general principles and social rules. Another line of his research explores negotiation strategies and tactics.

About The Paul Merage School of Business at UC Irvine
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To request a copy of the manuscript, please email Jennifer Santisi, SPSP Communication Director, at press@spsp.org.