

## **UNEQUAL ATTENDANCE: THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RACE, ORGANIZATIONAL DIVERSITY CUES, AND ABSENTEEISM**

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Although prior evidence has demonstrated racial differences in employee absenteeism, no existing research explains this phenomenon. The present study examined the roles of 2 diversity cues related to workplace support—perceived organizational value of diversity and supervisor–subordinate racial/ethnic similarity—in explicating this demographic difference among 659 Black, White, and Hispanic employees of U.S. companies. Blacks reported significantly more absences than their White counterparts, but this difference was significantly more pronounced when employees believed their organizations placed little value on diversity. Moreover, in a form of expectancy violation, the Black–White difference was significant only when employees had racially similar supervisors (and thus would expect their companies to value diversity) and perceived that the organization placed little value on diversity.

There are a number of ways to estimate the financial impact of absenteeism on organizations. For instance, some analysts use the employees' daily wages whereas others also include the costs of replacement workers and lost revenue. No matter what the method of estimation, there is no denying absenteeism is costly. In fact, conservative estimates place the cost around \$200 dollars per employee per missed day (Anderson, 2005). More liberal estimates suggest costs may be closer to \$700 dollars per employee per missed day and that the resulting annual losses for some employers

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exceed \$1 million dollars (Armes, 2005). Accordingly, minimizing avoidable absence is a key concern among organizational administrators.

Despite a rich history of research examining absenteeism, it appears this trend has slowed of late. A recent review of topical coverage in scholastic human resource management (HRM) journals from 1994 to 2001 concluded that absenteeism articles were "quite scarce, despite the fact that Harrison and Martocchio (1998) have deemed absenteeism a 'vigorous area of scholarship'" (Hoobler & Johnson, 2004, p. 671). The existing literature on absenteeism has provided a wealth of knowledge regarding its causes and consequences, but the recent paucity of research has left some pressing questions regarding the topic unanswered.

One such question pertains to the origin of racial differences in absenteeism. For instance, Roth, Huffcutt, and Bobko (2003) conducted a meta-analysis examining racial and ethnic differences in measures of job performance. Among the performance measures they considered was absenteeism, finding evidence of Black-White differences in overall absence estimates ( $d = .19$ ,  $k = 11$ ,  $N = 2,379$ ). Similarly, McKay and McDaniel (2006) observed racial mean differences in overall absenteeism/lost time ( $d = .09$ ,  $k = 20$ ,  $N = 3,779$ ), but their estimate included a combination of absences and tardiness. These studies indicate, after accounting for between-study artifacts such as measurement error, Black employees are more likely to be absent from work than their White counterparts. Unfortunately, the data these authors examined offered little insight regarding this difference beyond merely illustrating its existence. Enhancing our understanding of such differences is of utmost importance if organizations are to capitalize on their investments in workforce diversity and obtain its prospective benefits.

This study attempts to shed some much-needed light in this regard. We examine the role of two diversity factors that employees, particularly minorities, may interpret as indicators of support: (a) employees' perceptions of how their organizations value diversity and (b) supervisor-subordinate racial and ethnic similarity. Understanding demographic differences in perceived support is important because employees who feel unsupported often respond by being absent more often (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). By valuing diversity, organizations provide an atmosphere of support and development that may be unavailable to minority employees in less diversity-friendly settings (Cox, 1994). Furthermore, those having dissimilar bosses often perceive less supervisory support and more discrimination than those with demographically similar bosses (Jeanquart-Barone, 1996; Kirby & Jackson, 1999). Consequently, variance in these factors may aid in explaining minorities' relatively higher absence rates. In the following sections, we develop the theoretical rationale underlying the study and propose research hypotheses.

*Theoretical Rationale*

There is no shortage of studies examining employee absenteeism. Researchers have invested a great deal of time and effort in determining its antecedents and outcomes (see Harrison & Martocchio, 1998 for a review of this literature). In doing so, they have answered a number of important questions concerning who is more likely to be absent and why. Unfortunately, questions remain regarding the origin of racial differences in the propensity to be absent from work. In fact, we could find almost no theoretical or empirical inquiry devoted to explaining this phenomenon.

What theory and research do suggest, however, is support received from the organization, and its members, is a primary determinant of employee attendance. Perceived organizational support is proposed to relate to organizational outcomes, such as attendance, through a social exchange mechanism (Blau, 1964; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Employees who perceive their organization as supportive, in turn, feel an obligation to reciprocate in the form of enhanced job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and reduced withdrawal in terms of turnover and absenteeism (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001). In addition, employees, particularly those in leadership, are perceived to personify the organization and its motives. A supportive supervisor, therefore, is equated with a firm caring for its employees, resulting in positive employee affect and reduced withdrawal (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002).

A number of studies underscore the role of organizational support in influencing absenteeism. For instance, Eisenberger et al. (2001) found perceived organizational support significantly predicted attendance, with those perceiving more support being absent less often. Consistent with social exchange theory, employees' "felt obligation" to reciprocate organizational goodwill mediated the perceived organizational support-withdrawal behavior relationship. In a subsequent investigation, Eisenberger et al. (2002) showed perceived supervisor support preceded perceived organizational support, suggesting employees view a supportive supervisor as a form of organizational support. Rhoades and Eisenberger's (2002) meta-analysis further demonstrated the significant relationship between perceived organizational support and a number of relevant outcomes, including supervisory support, work attitudes, and withdrawal behaviors. Thus, it appears supportive supervisors and work environments are associated with lower employee absenteeism.

Unfortunately, the support experienced by an employee often differs as a function of race and ethnicity. Elsass and Graves (1997) discuss how minorities commonly find themselves excluded and denied the same type of support available to White employees. For example, Black managers feel

less accepted by their organizations and are evaluated more harshly by their supervisors than comparable White managers (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990). More recent evidence indicates Black employees routinely experience more discrimination and less supportive work environments than their White counterparts (Deitch, Barsky, Butz, Chan, Brief, & Bradley, 2003). Although the literature on Black–White differences in organizational experiences far exceeds that on Hispanic–white differences, there is reason to believe Hispanics also receive differential treatment, which may affect their perceptions of support (e.g., Foley, Kidder, & Powell, 2002; James, Lovato, & Khoo, 1994; Sanchez & Brock, 1996). In fact, a recent study showed Hispanic professionals face more stress than their White peers, and much of this discrepancy is attributable to a lack of organizational support (Rodriguez-Calcagno & Brewer, 2005).

The preceding discussion suggests perceived support predicts absenteeism, and experiences of organizational support differ by race and ethnicity. Spence's (1973) work on market signaling provides a theoretical basis for understanding the manifestation of demographic differences in perceived support. Basically, he proposed that employees interpret cues in the workplace and assign meaning to them to represent unknown information. For instance, a supervisor providing mentoring for a subordinate could lead the subordinate to infer that the company values the development of its personnel. Highhouse and Hoffman (2001) further expanded on this process to include signals, cues, and heuristics. Signals are the messages organizations attempt to send, cues are the factors employees detect, and heuristics are the cognitive rules of thumb employees use to make sense of the cues.

Arguably, organizations attempt to send signals of support to all of their employees. The interpretation of support-related cues, however, could vary across groups. For instance, cues indicating the organization's stance on diversity could precipitate racial or ethnic differences in interpretation because support for diversity is aligned more closely with identity affirmation for minorities than for White employees (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Accordingly, the former should be more apt to enlist positive heuristics for interpreting these cues, such as inferring that more support for diversity equals more support for me. Consistent with this notion, several investigations have shown organizational support for equal employment opportunity and diversity to be perceived more favorably among women and minorities, relative to their White male counterparts (e.g., Konrad & Linnehan, 1995b; Parker, Baltes, & Christiansen, 1997).

Taking this argument one step further, research has shown psychological contract expectations to differ for minority and majority employees. A psychological contract is the implicit set of reciprocal obligations

between an employee and the organization (Rousseau, 1990). Essentially, employees develop a sense of what is expected of them as well as a set of expectations concerning what the organization should provide for them in exchange. Though many elements of the psychological contract are consistent across racial and ethnic groups (e.g., performance-based pay, job security, career development), there appears to be an additional set of expectations unique to minorities (Chrobot-Mason, 2003). These include factors such as minority representation, elimination of systemic bias, support for unique minority issues, and equal valuation of diverse perspectives. Thus, cues pertaining to diversity should exert disproportionately more influence on employee perceptions of support among minority employees.

HRM practices and everyday organizational activities undoubtedly send strong signals to employees about the value an organization places on diversity. For instance, minorities appear to experience real employment benefits when HRM practices are identity conscious as opposed to identity blind (Konrad & Linnehan, 1995a). Identity-conscious practices take individual differences such as race and ethnicity into consideration during organizational decision making whereas identity-blind practices do not. This distinction is not lost on minorities, as Black applicants prefer identity-conscious to identity-blind practices when evaluating prospective employers (Highhouse, Stierwalt, Bachiochi, Elder, & Fisher, 1999). Not only were they more attracted to organizations advertising identity-conscious policies, but they also perceived such organizations as “being more favorably disposed towards minorities” (Highhouse et al., 1999, p. 465). In addition, expressed support for identity-conscious practices is stronger among minority than White employees (Konrad & Linnehan, 1995b). Because (a) support for diversity is a part of minorities’, but not necessarily part of White employees’ psychological contract expectations (Chrobot-Mason, 2003) and (b) violations of such expectations often increase absenteeism (Deery, Iverson, & Walsh, 2006), the impact of perceived organizational value of diversity on absenteeism probably is stronger among minorities. Such differential impact suggests this variable could either attenuate or magnify the size of racial differences in absenteeism depending on its level.

A second factor commonly related to support, supervisor–subordinate demographic similarity, also is likely to influence the magnitude of racial and ethnic differences in absenteeism. Research shows perceived similarity between individuals fosters interpersonal attraction and liking (Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 1998). This occurs because perceived similarity is associated with a notion of shared historical experiences, values, and compatibility between interaction partners, which fosters cohesion. Several studies (e.g., Tsui & O’Reilly, 1989; Wesolowski & Mossholder, 1997) show that

having a demographically similar supervisor corresponds to subordinates receiving more favorable responses and treatment. More pertinently, same-race supervisors often provide more support to their subordinates (Foley, Linnehan, Greenhaus, & Weer, 2006; Jeanquart-Barone, 1996; Winfield & Rushing, 2005). Because supervisors are seen as agents of the organization, an unsupportive supervisor may be viewed as a manifestation of a firm's ill will toward its employees. Moreover, because minority employees expect minority representation as part of their psychological contract (Chrobot-Mason, 2003), having a dissimilar supervisor could prove especially impactful on their perceptions. Not only might the dissimilar supervisor be seen as less supportive, but it also might increase the likelihood that minority employees perceive a psychological contract violation. Consequently, employees with dissimilar supervisors, particularly minorities, may reciprocate through increased negative workplace affect and absenteeism.

We believe these two factors could influence demographic differences in absenteeism. Perhaps, minorities are more prone to absence than White employees only when they perceive proper support to be lacking, as may be the case in many organizational settings. Thus, perceived organizational value of diversity and supervisor-subordinate similarity could influence the magnitude of racial and ethnic differences. If so, such a finding would help organizations minimize differences in absenteeism and assist researchers in better understanding why they exist. In the next section, we present our hypotheses linking these two variables to racial and ethnic differences in absenteeism.

### *Research Hypotheses*

#### *Racial and Ethnic Differences*

To shed light on racial differences in absenteeism, we first must replicate this effect. As mentioned previously, meta-analytic evidence (McKay & McDaniel, 2006; Roth et al., 2003) showed Black employees to be absent more than White employees. Given the literature demonstrating correspondence between the organizational experiences of Blacks and Hispanics (e.g., Foley et al., 2002; Greenhaus et al., 1990), one might expect a similar Hispanic-White ethnic difference. In short, perceptions of substandard treatment and support held by minorities would violate their psychological contract expectations. Thus, they are apt to withdraw from their organizations at disproportionately higher rates. Although some authors (e.g., Phinney, 1996) advocate using the term ethnicity to describe differences based on both race and culture of origin, here we differentiate the two. We begin, therefore, by proposing this replication and extension.

*Hypothesis 1:* After controlling for a number of determinants of absenteeism (e.g., age, income, tenure, satisfaction), Black and Hispanic employees will exhibit greater absenteeism than their White counterparts.

#### *Perceived Organizational Value of Diversity*

Moran (2006) and Avery and McKay (2006) described a number of cues employees and prospective employees use to ascertain the value an organization places on diversity. For instance, firms may engage in targeted efforts designed to recruit minorities, promote practices emphasizing equal employment opportunity, and make managers accountable for the success of diversity initiatives. Accordingly, minority employees should perceive these activities as a form of organizational goodwill. In exchange, they are expected to reciprocate through enhanced workplace affect and reduced withdrawal from the firm (Cox, 1994; Deery et al., 2006; Somers, 1995). Conversely, when organizations appear to place little value on diversity, minorities are apt to develop negative workplace affect and engage in increased withdrawal. Because diversity concerns tend to be less salient to White employees, and reactions among those to whom they are salient may be positive, negative, or neutral (e.g., Avery, 2003; McKay, Avery, Tonidandel, Morris, Hernandez, & Hebl, 2007), their absenteeism (as a group) is less likely to be affected by these perceptions. Consistent with this logic, majority–minority differences in absenteeism were smaller in an organization deemed (by the authors) to be multicultural compared to a firm considered plural (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2001). Whereas a plural organization contains and is tolerant of demographic diversity, a multicultural organization both contains and values it (for a more complete discussion of these organizational types, see Cox, 1994). Hence, demographic differences in absenteeism should be most pronounced (attenuated) when perceived organizational value of diversity is low (high).

*Hypothesis 2:* Black–White and Hispanic–White differences in absenteeism will be larger when perceived organizational value of diversity is low and smaller when it is high.

#### *Supervisor–Subordinate Similarity*

Supervisors are perceived as representatives of a firm's motives toward its employees. Employees, therefore, should view a supportive supervisor as a signal of a firm's support for them, invoking felt obligation to repay this organizational goodwill by reducing their absenteeism. It appears,

however, that supervisor–subordinate demographic similarity commonly influences the supervisory support received by subordinates. For instance, racially dissimilar dyads have been associated with lower ratings of subordinates, less attraction, and greater role ambiguity and conflict (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). Furthermore, similar effects extend to different outcomes, such as procedural justice and job satisfaction (Vecchio & Bullis, 2001; Wesolowski & Mossholder, 1997).

There is reason to believe that having a racially or ethnically similar supervisor could help attenuate demographic differences in absenteeism. For example, we argued earlier that racial differences in absenteeism could be in response to discrepancies in perceived support received from the organization. Given that similar supervisors tend to provide more support and developmental opportunities to their subordinates (Jeanquart-Barone, 1996), such differences in perceived support should be attenuated when supervisors and subordinates are similar. In line with this argument, supervisor–subordinate sex similarity in Mexico related negatively to absenteeism among women (who, like minorities, often experience substandard treatment) but exhibited no significant relationship among men (Pelled & Xin, 1997). Consequently, racial and ethnic differences in absenteeism should be smaller when supervisors and subordinates are similar than when they are dissimilar.

*Hypothesis 3:* Black–White and Hispanic–White differences in absenteeism will be larger when supervisors and subordinates are racially or ethnically different and smaller when they are not.

#### *The Impact of Diversity Cue Inconsistency*

Although having a demographically similar supervisor generally should correspond to smaller between-group differences in absenteeism, there are probable exceptions to this rule. The presence of a similar supervisor probably leads minority employees to surmise that the organization values diversity. We believe this to be true for two reasons. First, organizations with minority managers, presumably, are more welcoming of diversity (Allen & Montgomery, 2001) and tend to be perceived as such (Avery, 2003). This is based on the notion that minorities would be unlikely to have obtained such an advanced position in an organization that does not value diversity. In fact, ethnic inequalities in pay tend to be smaller in units containing more minority managers (Joshi, Liao, & Jackson, 2006). Second, minority employees should expect their similar supervisors to represent the interests of their group at higher levels, thereby resulting in

the organization valuing diversity. Linnehan, Chrobot-Mason, and Konrad recently made a similar argument in claiming, "people of color in management positions may show leadership in the area of diversity by explicitly supporting organizational diversity related initiatives" (2006, p. 425). This could explain the recent finding that turnover among minority employees decreased as same-race representation in the job level above their own increased (Zatzick, Elvira, & Cohen, 2003).

If minorities' expectation that having a similar supervisor corresponds in greater organizational value of diversity is unmet, we anticipate a form of expectancy violation to occur. Expectancy violation theory (Jussim, Coleman, & Lerch, 1987) suggests that individuals violating observers' expectations of them are evaluated in extremes. Positive violations result in evaluations far more positive than merited, whereas negative violations produce the opposite result. For example, Geddes and Konrad (2003) found Black subordinates' reactions to be lower than expected; negative feedback and appraisals were significantly more negative when the supervisor also was Black. This is likely because the low appraisal or negative feedback was incongruent with what was expected from a racially similar supervisor.

In this study, violation of the expected positive link between having a similar supervisor and the organization placing a high degree of value on diversity should correspond in higher levels of absenteeism among minorities. Among White employees, a supervisor's race or ethnicity is unlikely to create important expectancies regarding the organization's position on diversity because a White employee would rarely have reason to presume that the interests of White employees would not be represented at higher hierarchical levels. Heightened absence levels among minority groups, in conjunction with unaffected levels among White employees, will produce greater demographic differences in absenteeism.

*Hypothesis 4:* Black–White and Hispanic–White differences in absenteeism will be greatest when employees perceive inconsistent diversity cues (i.e., having an ethnically similar supervisor but perceiving the organization to place little value on diversity).

### *Method*

#### *Participants and Survey*

The participants in this study were a part of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 40th Anniversary Civil Rights in the Workplace survey, conducted by the Gallup Organization from January through March

2005. A total of 1,252 individuals working in the United States took part in the telephone-administered survey. Eight hundred sixty-one respondents were full-time employees who were not self-employed. Because our focus is on racial and ethnic group differences, we included only data from the subgroups with large enough sample sizes to test the study hypotheses ( $N = 755$ ). Of the remaining participants with complete data ( $N = 659$ ), 301 (45.7%) were men and 358 (54.3%) were women. In terms of race and ethnicity: 294 were White, 172 Black, and 193 Hispanic.

Interviewers at Gallup contacted the randomly selected participants by phone and asked them a series of questions about their beliefs concerning discrimination, their workplace, and demographic information. The data were collected via a stratified sampling design—by race—so as to obtain a demographically diverse sample (response rate = 23%).<sup>1</sup> Respondents worked in an assortment of industries (e.g., science, wholesale, construction, finance, agriculture) in various capacities (e.g., manufacturing, service, professional, managerial). Thus, the results are apt to generalize well across industries and job titles.

### Measures

*Perceived organizational value of diversity.* We used five items similar to those in previous studies (e.g., Avery, Hernandez, & Hebl, 2004; Kim & Gelfand, 2003) to assess participants' perceptions of their organization's value of diversity. Responses were on a 5-point Likert-type scale with anchors ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The items were: "I am aware of my company's efforts to create diversity in the workplace," "The head of my company or organization is committed to diversity at my workplace," "I believe that my company is adequately striving for diversity in the workplace," "I trust senior management of my company or organization to deal with issues concerning equal treatment at my workplace," and "If I experienced discrimination at my workplace, I am confident that my employer would be able to resolve it in a fair and just manner, once I raised the issue." An exploratory factor analysis revealed a single factor accounting for 66.37% of the total variance. Each item produced a factor coefficient greater than .70. Thus, responses to the items were averaged to form a scale (coefficient  $\alpha = .89$ ).

These items overlap conceptually with many of the criteria used by a leading diversity publication, *Diversity Inc.*, to determine the "Top

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<sup>1</sup> The reported response rate is a multiplicative function of cooperation rate (i.e., respondents who cooperated by answering screening questions/number of respondents contacted)  $\times$  contact rate (i.e., number of working numbers/number of respondents contacted)  $\times$  completion rate (i.e., number of completes/number of eligible respondents).

50 companies for diversity” (Moran, 2006). This suggests a high degree of face validity. Moreover, we conducted some tests of construct validity because our items differ somewhat from previously used instruments. The Gallup survey described here also contained items assessing perceived workplace discrimination (yes/no), coworker racial composition (mostly similar/mostly different), and coworker sex composition (mostly men/mostly women/sex balanced). Those perceiving that they have been victims of discrimination in their workplace should report lower organizational value of diversity than those perceiving no discrimination. Employees with more racially and ethnically dissimilar coworkers should perceive greater organizational value of diversity than those in settings where most of their coworkers are similar to them. Moreover, sex balance should result in greater perceptions of organizational value of diversity than either mostly male or mostly female workplaces.

As expected, participants who perceived discrimination within the last year reported significantly less organizational value of diversity than those who did not (2.92 vs. 4.04;  $F(1, 655) = 131.31, p < .001, \eta^2 = .17$ ). Those working with racially dissimilar coworkers reported more value of diversity than those working with racially similar coworkers (3.94 vs. 3.70;  $F(1, 635) = 8.15, p = .004, \eta^2 = .01$ ). Those working in sex-balanced workplaces reported greater value of diversity than those in mostly male or mostly female settings (4.11 vs. 3.61 and 3.78, respectively;  $F(2, 654) = 8.49, p < .001, \eta^2 = .03$ ). Thus, we can have some measure of confidence in the validity of scores on this scale.

*Supervisor-subordinate similarity.* In addition to providing self-descriptive information, the participants were asked to indicate the race and ethnicity of their supervisor. Similar to prior research (e.g., Tsui & O’Reilly, 1989; Tsui, Porter, & Egan, 2002), we used dummy coding to account for supervisor-subordinate similarity, with those in dissimilar dyads coded as 0 and those in similar dyads coded as 1. In total, there were 387 same-race/ethnicity and 272 cross-race/ethnicity pairings.

*Absences.* Absences were the self-reported number of days of work (excluding vacation days) that the participant had missed during the last year. It should be noted that such self-reports tend to be quite valid. For instance, Dalton and Mesch (1991) found the difference between actual and self-reported absences was statistically nonsignificant. Johns (1994) reported an average validity coefficient for self-reports in 11 studies of .68. In addition, self-reports correlated highly ( $r = .69$ ) with observations in another series of seven studies (Harrison & Schaffer, 1994). More recently, Sagie (1998) observed only a small mean difference (5.56 vs. 6.10) and a nearly perfect correlation ( $r = .91$ ) between self-reported absences and company records.

Because absence data are truncated at zero and tend to be highly positively skewed, we removed one extreme outlier (120 absences) and performed a square-root transformation (Johns, 1994). If the values of the variable in question are close to zero (i.e., less than 10), scholars (e.g., Cohen, Cohen, Aiken, & West, 2003; Howell, 1997) recommend using the following formula to perform the transformation:

$$Absence_{transformed} = \sqrt{Absence} + \sqrt{Absence + 1}.$$

Given that more than 90% of our respondents reported fewer than 10 absences for the prior year, we elected to use this transformation. Conducting our analysis with transformed data helps to reduce the impact of skew and outliers, but also has another effect. Because we are examining grouped data (by race and ethnicity), our tests of mean differences actually examine differences between the group medians in the raw data (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). We should note, however, that analyses using the raw data produced highly similar results. In addition, though the inferential statistics presented involve the transformed variable, the means and figures involve the raw data for maximal interpretability.

*Control variables.* Prior research has shown that age, company size, income, tenure, union membership, satisfaction, education level, and family status influence absenteeism (Allen, 1984; Harrison & Martocchio, 1998; Winkelmann, 1999). Thus, these variables were included in the analyses as covariates to control for their effects on absenteeism. Age was recorded in years. Company size was coded: 1 = *less than 15*; 2 = 15–49; 3 = 50–99; 4 = 100–499; 5 = 500–999; 6 = 1,000–4,999; 7 = 5,000–9,999; and 8 = 10,000 or more employees. Due to a large number of missing responses ( $N = 104$ ), we used series mean imputation for this variable (Little & Rubin, 1987). Income was coded: 1 = *under \$15K*; 2 = \$15,000–24,999; 3 = \$25,000–34,999; 4 = \$35,000–44,999; 5 = \$45,000–\$54,999; 6 = \$55,000–74,999; 7 = \$75,000–99,999; and 8 = \$100,000 or more. Tenure was coded: 1 = *less than 1 year*; 2 = 1–less than 3 years; 3 = 3–less than 7 years; 4 = 7–less than 10 years; 5 = 10–less than 15 years; 6 = 15–less than 20 years; 7 = 20–less than 25 years; 8 = 25–less than 30 years; and 9 = *more than 30 years*. Union membership was dummy coded (1 = *union*). Employee satisfaction was assessed with an item from Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002); “How satisfied are you with your place of employment as a place to work.” Education level was coded: 1 = *less than high school graduate*; 2 = *high school graduate*; 3 = *some college*; 4 = *trade/technical/vocational training*; 5 = *college graduate*; 6 = *postgraduate work/degree*. Two dummy variables were used to capture some degree of family status: the number of adults in the household

that were working (number of working adults) and the number in the household that were not working (number of dependent adults).

In addition, because our data set included individuals in different work settings, occupations, and industries, we included two categorical controls. First, participants indicated the type of company they worked for as being agriculture/forestry/fishing, mining or oil and gas extraction, utilities, construction, manufacturing, wholesale or retail trade, transportation, information industries (e.g., publishing, broadcasting, telecommunications, or information processing such as data processing), finance or insurance, real estate, professional/scientific/technical services, waste management, education, health care, the arts, accommodation and food services, state or local agency, the federal government, or other. Second, participants indicated what kind of work they did, which interviewers categorized as one of the following: professional (e.g., lawyer, doctor, teacher), manager, business director, clerical or office worker, sales worker, manufacturer's representative, service worker (e.g., police, firefighter, barber), skilled trades worker (e.g., printer, baker, electrician), semi-skilled worker (e.g., machine operator, taxi driver), laborer (e.g., sanitation worker, plumber's helper), or technology professional.

### *Results*

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for the study variables are presented in Table 1. Of note, there were racial and ethnic differences in the likelihood that one's supervisor was of the same background, with White participants being significantly more likely than Black ( $r = -.42, p < .01$ ) or Hispanic ( $r = -.41, p < .01$ ) employees to have similar supervisors. Furthermore, Black and Hispanic respondents perceived their organizations to place less value on diversity than did their White counterparts ( $r = -.12$  and  $-.10, p < .01$ , respectively).

### *Tests of Hypotheses*

We used hierarchical moderated multiple regression to test the hypotheses. Prior to conducting the analyses, we had to select coding schemes for our categorical variables. For industry, we elected to use "other" as the referent category. Thus, we created a dummy variable for each of the alternative categories wherein those working in that particular industry were assigned a value of 1 and all those who did not were assigned a value of 0. The partial coefficient for each variable in the regression analyses represents the comparison between individuals in that particular industry and those who selected the "other" category (Cohen et al., 2003). Similarly, we opted to dummy code work type (referent = professional),

TABLE 1  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1 Age	41.65	11.54														
2 Satisfaction	3.91	1.08	.09*													
3 Education	3.77	1.70	.18**	.10**												
4 Organizational tenure	3.88	2.15	.51**	.09*	.07											
5 Income	5.00	2.24	.23**	.14**	.48**	.22**										
6 Number of working adults	1.74	.87	-.11**	-.08	-.11**	-.07	.09*									
7 Number of dependent adults	.31	.65	-.01	.04	-.17**	.03	-.15**	-.18**								
8 Organizational size	4.56	2.17	.12**	.03	.13**	.19**	.24**	-.10*	.04							
9 Union	.22	.41	.07	.02	.06	.21**	.08*	-.01	.04	.15**						
10 Black-white	-.19	.82	-.11**	-.08*	-.19**	.01	-.32**	-.04	.09*	.03	.14**					
11 Hispanic-white	-.15	.85	-.24**	-.03	-.39**	-.12**	-.37**	.13**	.20**	-.06	.00	—				
12 Female	.54	.50	.03	-.05	.06	-.02	-.10*	.02	-.07	-.04	.04	.16**	.04			
13 Organizational value of diversity	3.84	1.07	.07	.46**	.08*	.07	.11**	-.07	-.10*	.04	-.07	-.12**	-.10**	-.10**		
14 Supervisor racial similarity	.59	.49	.09*	.04	.10*	.09*	.14**	-.02	-.13**	-.04	-.03	-.42**	-.41**	-.06	.12**	
15 Absenteeism	4.77	11.00	-.01	-.14**	.01	-.00	.00	.10**	-.02	.03	.04	.15**	.04	.12**	-.10**	-.05

Note.  $N = 659$ . Race/ethnicity is contrast coded (Black and Hispanic = 1; White = -1) and female, supervisor-subordinate similarity, and union are dummy coded.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

sex (referent = male), race/ethnicity (referent = white), and supervisor–subordinate racial similarity (referent = dissimilar). The partial coefficient of each of these variables, therefore, compares the category for which the variable is named to those in the referent group. In a model predicting the transformed absence variable, the control and demographic dummy variables were entered in Step 1. We entered perceived organizational value of diversity and supervisor–subordinate similarity in Step 2. In Step 3, the two-way interactions between race/ethnicity, value of diversity, and supervisor–subordinate similarity were added, followed by the three-way interactions in step 4 (see Table 2).

Hypotheses 1 predicted Black–White and Hispanic–White differences in absenteeism. As anticipated, Blacks were absent significantly more often than White employees after accounting for the effects of the control variables (6.19 vs. 2.90 days,  $B = .33$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, no significant Hispanic–White difference emerged (2.82 vs. 2.90 days,  $B = -.03$ , *ns*). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported for Black–White, but not for Hispanic–White comparisons.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that Black–White and Hispanic–White differences would be larger when perceived organizational value of diversity was lower and smaller when it was higher. Similarly, Hypothesis 3 predicted that these differences would be smaller when supervisors and subordinates were similar and larger when they were dissimilar. One of the anticipated two-way interactions testing these hypotheses was significant. The Black  $\times$  perceived value of diversity interaction was statistically significant ( $B = -.30$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Using the procedures suggested by Cohen et al. (2003), we created a graphic illustration of this interaction (see Figure 1). As predicted, the Black–White difference in absenteeism was significantly higher when employees perceived their organization placed relatively less value on diversity. To further probe this interaction, we computed simple slopes (Aiken & West, 1991) assessing the effects of race/ethnicity and perceived organizational value of diversity. Concerning the former, the results show that the only significant between-group difference was between Black and White employees who perceived the organizational value of diversity to be low ( $B = .70$ ,  $p = .01$ ). Regarding the latter, the effect of perceived organizational value of diversity was significant for Black ( $B = -.22$ ,  $p = .02$ ) but not White ( $B = .08$ ,  $p = .45$ ) or Hispanic ( $B = .09$ ,  $p = .37$ ) employees. The interaction between ethnicity and supervisor–subordinate similarity was not significant for either comparison. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported for the Black–White comparison, and Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that Black–White and Hispanic–White differences in absenteeism would be greatest when employees had similar supervisors yet perceived their organizations to place little value on diversity. Of

TABLE 2  
*Hierarchical Moderated Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Absenteeism*

Variable	Step 1			Step 2		
	B	SE	95% CI	B	SE	95% CI
Agriculture	-.64	.53	(-1.69, .41)	-.64	.54	(-1.69, .41)
Mining	-1.00	.69	(-2.36, .36)	-.98	.69	(-2.34, .38)
Utilities	-.54	.45	(-1.43, .35)	-.53	.46	(-1.42, .37)
Construction	-.53	.46	(-1.44, .38)	-.52	.47	(-1.43, .39)
Manufacturing	-.61	.38	(-1.36, .14)	-.59	.38	(-1.34, .16)
Wholesale	-.76	.39	(-1.53, .02)	-.74	.40	(-1.51, .04)
Transportation	-.36	.42	(-1.19, .47)	-.34	.43	(-1.17, .50)
Information	-.50	.44	(-1.36, .37)	-.48	.44	(-1.35, .39)
Finance/insurance	-.57	.41	(-1.37, .24)	-.55	.41	(-1.36, .26)
Real estate	.77	.76	(-.71, 2.25)	.77	.76	(-.72, 2.26)
Professional/science/technical	-.26	.40	(-1.05, .52)	-.25	.40	(-1.04, .54)
Waste Management	-2.04	1.38	(-4.74, .67)	-2.03	1.38	(-4.74, .68)
Education (industry)	-.67	.39	(-1.45, .10)	-.66	.40	(-1.44, .11)
Health care	-.79*	.38	(-1.53, -.05)	-.77*	.38	(-1.52, -.02)
Arts	-.49	1.00	(-2.45, 1.46)	-.47	1.00	(-2.43, 1.49)
Accommodation/food	-.64	.43	(-1.49, .21)	-.63	.44	(-1.48, .23)
State or local agency	-.07	.41	(-.86, .73)	-.05	.41	(-.85, .75)
Federal government	-.26	.40	(-1.04, .52)	-.24	.40	(-1.03, .54)
Services	-.55	.42	(-1.37, .27)	-.53	.42	(-1.36, .29)
Nonprofit	-.28	.51	(-1.27, .71)	-.27	.51	(-1.26, .73)
Management	-.15	.17	(-.49, .19)	-.15	.17	(-.49, .19)
Clerical	-.18	.19	(-.56, .21)	-.18	.19	(-.56, .20)
Sales	-.56*	.27	(-1.09, -.03)	-.57*	.27	(-1.11, -.04)
Service worker	-.14	.21	(-.56, .28)	-.14	.21	(-.56, .28)
Skilled	-.06	.24	(-.53, .41)	-.06	.24	(-.53, .41)
Semi-skilled	-.31	.31	(-.92, .29)	-.32	.31	(-.93, .29)
Laborer	-.07	.25	(-.56, .43)	-.06	.25	(-.56, .43)
Technology	-.50	.28	(-1.06, .06)	-.51	.28	(-1.06, .05)
Other	-.02	.68	(-1.36, 1.32)	-.00	.68	(-1.35, 1.34)
Age	-.00	.01	(-.01, .01)	-.00	.01	(-.01, .01)
Satisfaction	-.18**	.05	(-.28, -.08)	-.17**	.06	(-.28, -.06)
Educational attainment	-.03	.04	(-.11, .06)	-.03	.04	(-.11, .06)
Educational attainment <sup>2</sup>	.05*	.03	(.00, .10)	.05*	.03	(.00, .10)
Organizational tenure	.02	.03	(-.05, .08)	.01	.03	(-.05, .08)
Organizational tenure <sup>2</sup>	-.03**	.01	(-.05, -.01)	-.03**	.01	(-.05, -.01)
Income	.01	.03	(-.05, .08)	.01	.03	(-.05, .08)
Income <sup>2</sup>	-.03**	.01	(-.06, -.01)	-.03**	.01	(-.06, -.01)
Number of working adults	.12	.07	(-.01, .25)	.12	.07	(-.01, .25)
Number of dependent adults	.02	.09	(-.15, .19)	.02	.09	(-.16, .19)
Organizational size	.29**	.11	(.08, .51)	.29**	.11	(.08, .50)
Organizational size <sup>2</sup>	-.03**	.01	(-.05, -.01)	-.03**	.01	(-.05, -.01)
Union	.01	.14	(-.27, .29)	.00	.14	(-.28, .28)
Female	.44**	.12	(.21, .67)	.44**	.12	(.20, .67)
Black (B)	.33*	.14	(.05, .61)	.35*	.15	(.05, .65)
Hispanic (H)	-.03	.15	(-.32, .25)	-.02	.16	(-.33, .29)
Organizational value of diversity (VD)				-.03	.06	(-.14, .08)
Supervisor race similarity (SRS)				.04	.12	(-.20, .28)
B × VD						
H × VD						
B × SRS						
H × SRS						
SRS × VD						
SRS × VD × B						
SRS × VD × H						
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		.156**			.000	
R <sup>2</sup>		.156			.156	

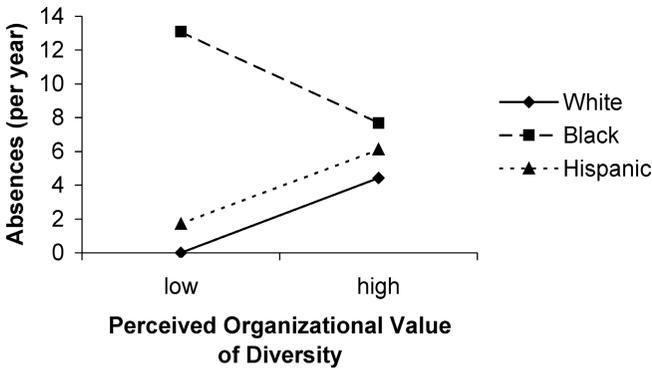
(Continued)

TABLE 2  
(Continued)

Variable	Step 3			Step 4		
	B	SE	95% CI	B	SE	95% CI
Agriculture	-.72	.54	(-1.77, .33)	-.69	.53	(-1.74, .36)
Mining	-1.00	.69	(-2.36, .37)	-1.00	.69	(-2.35, .36)
Utilities	-.56	.46	(-1.46, .33)	-.54	.45	(-1.43, .35)
Construction	-.54	.47	(-1.45, .38)	-.52	.46	(-1.43, .39)
Manufacturing	-.61	.38	(-1.36, .15)	-.59	.38	(-1.34, .16)
Wholesale	-.74	.40	(-1.52, .04)	-.73	.39	(-1.50, .04)
Transportation	-.38	.43	(-1.21, .46)	-.37	.43	(-1.21, .46)
Information	-.52	.44	(-1.39, .35)	-.53	.44	(-1.39, .34)
Finance/insurance	-.50	.41	(-1.31, .31)	-.49	.41	(-1.30, .32)
Real estate	.67	.76	(-.82, 2.16)	.73	.75	(-.75, 2.21)
Professional/science/technical	-.27	.40	(-1.06, .52)	-.27	.40	(-1.06, .51)
Waste management	-2.26	1.38	(-4.97, .46)	-2.08	1.37	(-4.78, .62)
Education (industry)	-.64	.40	(-1.41, .14)	-.64	.39	(-1.42, .13)
Health care	-.72	.38	(-1.47, .03)	-.68	.38	(-1.43, .06)
Arts	-.30	1.00	(-2.27, 1.66)	-.33	.99	(-2.28, 1.62)
Accommodation/food	-.62	.44	(-1.48, .24)	-.59	.43	(-1.44, .27)
State or local agency	-.05	.41	(-.85, .75)	-.02	.40	(-.82, .77)
Federal government	-.23	.40	(-1.02, .55)	-.21	.40	(-.99, .57)
Services	-.54	.42	(-1.37, .29)	-.55	.42	(-1.37, .27)
Nonprofit	-.27	.51	(-1.26, .72)	-.19	.50	(-1.18, .79)
Management	-.14	.17	(-.48, .21)	-.13	.17	(-.47, .21)
Clerical	-.17	.19	(-.56, .21)	-.17	.19	(-.55, .21)
Sales	-.53	.27	(-1.07, .00)	-.53	.27	(-1.06, .00)
Service worker	-.10	.22	(-.52, .32)	-.12	.21	(-.54, .31)
Skilled	-.03	.24	(-.50, .45)	-.03	.24	(-.50, .44)
Semi-skilled	-.26	.31	(-.88, .35)	-.28	.31	(-.89, .33)
Laborer	.01	.25	(-.49, .50)	.01	.25	(-.49, .50)
Technology	-.46	.29	(-1.02, .10)	-.38	.29	(-.94, .18)
Other	-.04	.68	(-1.38, 1.31)	.04	.68	(-1.30, 1.38)
Age	-.00	.01	(-.01, .01)	-.00	.01	(-.02, .01)
Satisfaction	-.18**	.06	(-.29, -.07)	-.18**	.06	(-.29, -.07)
Educational attainment	-.02	.04	(-.11, .07)	-.02	.04	(-.11, .06)
Educational attainment <sup>2</sup>	.05*	.03	(.00, .11)	.05*	.03	(.00, .10)
Organizational tenure	.02	.03	(-.05, .09)	.02	.03	(-.05, .08)
Organizational tenure <sup>2</sup>	-.03**	.01	(-.05, -.01)	-.03**	.01	(-.05, -.01)
Income	.01	.03	(-.06, .07)	.01	.03	(-.05, .07)
Income <sup>2</sup>	-.03**	.01	(-.06, -.01)	-.04**	.01	(-.06, -.01)
Number of working adults	.12	.07	(-.01, .25)	.12	.06	(-.01, .24)
Number of dependent adults	.02	.09	(-.15, .19)	.02	.09	(-.15, .19)
Organizational size	.30**	.11	(.08, .51)	.31**	.11	(.10, .52)
Organizational size <sup>2</sup>	-.03**	.01	(-.05, -.01)	-.03**	.01	(-.05, -.01)
Union	.01	.14	(-.27, .29)	.02	.14	(-.26, .30)
Female	.44**	.12	(.20, .68)	.44**	.12	(.21, .68)
Black (B)	.38	.24	(-.09, .86)	.39	.24	(-.08, .87)
Hispanic (H)	.02	.24	(-.45, .50)	-.01	.24	(-.48, .46)
Organizational value of diversity (VD)	.08	.10	(-.13, .28)	-.18	.15	(-.47, .10)
Supervisor race similarity (SRS)	.09	.22	(-.34, .52)	.05	.22	(-.37, .48)
B × VD	-.30*	.13	(-.56, -.04)	.22	.22	(-.21, .65)
H × VD	.01	.13	(-.24, .26)	.37	.22	(-.07, .81)
B × SRS	-.11	.32	(-.74, .51)	-.11	.32	(-.73, .51)
H × SRS	-.02	.30	(-.60, .57)	.02	.30	(-.56, .60)
SRS × VD	-.10	.25	(-.59, .39)	.94*	.47	(.02, 1.87)
SRS × VD × B				-.87**	.28	(-1.42, -.33)
SRS × VD × H				-.43	.28	(-.98, .11)
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		.011*			.013**	
R <sup>2</sup>		.167			.180	

Note.  $N = 659$ . Coefficients are unstandardized. Dependent variable is square root transformed. Industry (i.e., agriculture – nonprofit), work type (i.e., management – other), race/ethnicity, female, supervisor–subordinate similarity, and union are dummy coded.

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

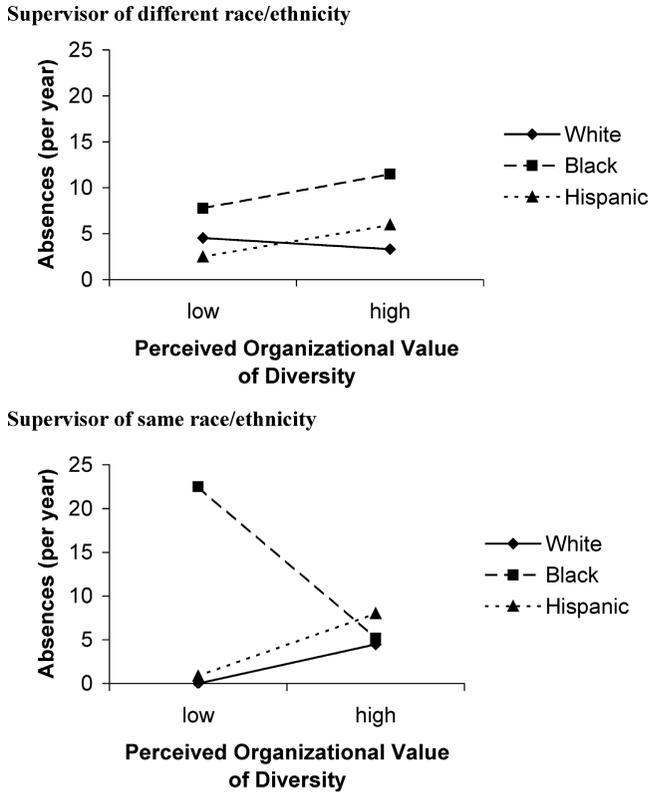


**Figure 1: Racial/Ethnic Differences in Absenteeism as a Function of Perceived Organizational Value of Diversity.**

*Note.* This plot involves untransformed absences. Only significant between-group difference is Black–White when perceived value of diversity is low.

the two 3-way interactions, only the Black  $\times$  perceived value of diversity  $\times$  supervisor–subordinate racial similarity term produced a statistically significant effect in Step 4 ( $B = -.87, p < .01$ ). A graphic depiction of this interaction shows that Black–White differences in absenteeism were most pronounced when the organization was perceived as not highly valuing diversity and the employee had a racially similar supervisor (see Figure 2). Furthermore, an examination of the simple slopes indicated two findings. First, the only significant between-group difference was between Black and White employees who perceived a low value placed on diversity and had supervisors of the same race ( $B = 1.01, p < .01$ ). Second, the effect of perceived organizational value of diversity was statistically significant only for Blacks with same-race ( $B = -.52, p < .01$ ) and cross-race supervisors ( $B = -.18, p = .05$ ). No significant effects were detected for White or Hispanic employees (all  $p$  values  $> .15$ ). Hence, Hypothesis 4 was supported for the Black–White comparison.

Finally, in interpreting the sizes of the interactive effects reported here, it is useful to consider the recent findings of Aguinis, Beaty, Boik, and Pierce (2005). Their review of articles in *Personnel Psychology*, the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, and the *Academy of Management Journal* (spanning 1969–1998), examining categorical moderators using hierarchical moderated multiple regression, revealed that the mean and median effect sizes for ethnicity were .002 and .001, respectively. Thus, our effect sizes appear considerably larger than most of the comparable research reported in these prestigious outlets.



**Figure 2: Racial/Ethnic Differences in Absenteeism as a Function of Supervisor–Subordinate Similarity and Perceived Organizational Value of Diversity.**

*Note.* Plots involve untransformed absences. Only significant between-group difference is Black–White when supervisor is of same race and perceived value of diversity is low.

### *Discussion*

The purpose of this study was to shed light on previously detected yet largely unexplained racial differences in absenteeism. Although not all of the hypotheses received support, the results have considerable utility in this regard. For instance, we replicated the previously reported Black–White difference in absenteeism (McKay & McDaniel, 2006; Roth et al., 2003). This main effect, however, was contingent upon perceived organizational value of diversity and supervisor–subordinate similarity. Moreover, the Black–White difference in absenteeism, or at least the one observed

in this study, appears limited to instances when employees, particularly Blacks, perceive their organizations to place less value on diversity than suggested by other cues, such as racially similar supervisors. The results, therefore, demonstrate previously unknown boundary conditions for this racial difference in employee absenteeism.

In some respects, the failure to detect significant Hispanic–White differences is not altogether surprising. We could find no previous study documenting a significant Hispanic–White difference in absenteeism, and there was none present in our data. Furthermore, prior research reporting Black–White differences in person–organization fit perceptions observed no differences between the perceptions of Hispanic and White managers (Lovelace & Rosen, 1996). Although some evidence has shown disparities in the workplace support perceived by Hispanic and White employees (Rodriguez-Calcagno & Brewer, 2005), other inquiry has not (Amason & Allen, 1999). Given the apparent similarity in perceived support between Whites and Hispanics observed in some prior studies, it seems as though Hispanic employees experience a smaller lack of support than Black employees. Thus, one would expect the hypothesized Hispanic–white differences to be smaller in magnitude than the hypothesized Black–White differences, which indeed was the case.

### *Implications*

These findings are important for a number of reasons. For organizations, it appears that demonstrating the company's commitment to diversity may help to reduce racial discrepancies in absenteeism. This may be particularly true when other organizational cues (e.g., minority managers) suggest to minority employees that the company is committed to diversity, which is likely because organizations tend to match the race of supervisors and subordinates (Elliot & Smith, 2001). Avery and Johnson (2007) describe how this inconsistency can send mixed messages that may undermine the success of organizational diversity initiatives. Unfortunately, less than a third of employees in a recent survey thought their organizations were doing a good job of managing diversity (Fisher, 2004). This percentage is only slightly higher among executives (47%), many of whom concede that their own lack of involvement is at the heart of the problem. To eliminate the Black–White gap in absenteeism, this must change.

To truly capitalize on the potential returns on racial and ethnic heterogeneity, firms must commit resources to manage diversity more effectively (McKay & Avery, 2005). Establishing organizational systems of accountability for diversity and ensuring equal access to mentoring and networking appear to be key drivers of successful diversity management

(Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006). The existence of racial differences in absenteeism, as illustrated in this study, may signal Black employees' psychological withdrawal from firms. Previous research has identified absenteeism as a significant precursor to withdrawal cognitions (Hom & Kinicki, 2001) and eventual voluntary employee exit from firms (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2001). In fact, recent research showed that perceiving a firm to value diversity related negatively to turnover intentions for all racial groups (McKay et al., 2007). Given potential financial investments in diversity recruitment and attendant lost productivity and replacement costs, the disproportionate loss of minority employees could have considerable negative ramifications for organizations. For instance, negative spillover effects could occur against firms (Barber, 1998), such that departed employees communicate their discontent with the firm to others. The result is a negative organizational image in the community with adverse effects on the quality of future labor markets (Collins & Han, 2004). To avoid costly absenteeism and possible turnover, we encourage firms to conduct diversity audits and provide high-quality diversity training, by competent trainers, to eliminate potential sources of bias. These actions may help to increase employees' perceptions of organizational value for diversity and reduce employee withdrawal.

For researchers, the results help address a previously unanswered question and identify potential areas of future research. If perceptions of organizational value of diversity are key to understanding racial differences in absenteeism, scholars should devote more attention to discovering the antecedents of these perceptions. Some research indicates that they may be predicted by HRM policies (Konrad & Linnehan, 1995a). What is less certain, however, is the impact of various structural components. For instance, how does structural integration, the distribution of diverse employees at various hierarchical levels, influence these perceptions? It also could be interesting to extend Friedman and his colleagues' (e.g., Friedman, 1996; Friedman & Holtom, 2002) work on minority network groups to determine how these affect perceived organizational value of diversity among both minority and majority employees.

Unexpectedly, supervisor-subordinate racial similarity alone failed to moderate the effect of race on employee absenteeism. We anticipated the heightened support often associated with these relationships (e.g., Jeanquart-Barone, 1996) would correspond in lower propensity of minority absence, thereby attenuating racial differences. Perhaps support among minorities was not higher in the similar than in the dissimilar dyads in our study, which could result from a type of "queen bee" effect, wherein similarity produces animosity instead of liking. For instance, some research has shown women reporting to men indicated significantly greater trust in their supervisor and communication quality than women reporting

to women (Adebayo & Udegbe, 2004; Callan, 1993; Jeanquart-Barone, 1993).

Another more intriguing possibility, however, is that the enhanced support in these dyads produced offsetting results. For some employees, the heightened support from similar supervisors may have led them to be absent less often, in the manner we hypothesized based on social exchange theory. Conversely, others may have utilized the supportive relationships to make arrangements to be absent on occasions in which they otherwise would have gone to work. For instance, racial similarity in the supervisor–subordinate dyad corresponds to higher levels of supervisory support for work–family balance (Foley et al., 2006; Winfield & Rushing, 2005). This support could entail some Black supervisors being more lenient and understanding of their Black subordinates' needs to take time off from work to handle family responsibilities, such as child or elder care, which would correspond in more absenteeism and potentially larger Black–White differences. Future inquiry should further examine the relationship between supervisor–subordinate similarity and various types of social support.

### *Limitations and Conclusion*

It is important to acknowledge the presence of research limitations. Most notably, all of our data were self-reported, which introduces the possibility that common method variance influenced our results (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Although we cannot conclusively rule out this alternative explanation, several factors suggest it to be unlikely. First, the results were collected via telephone survey, thereby considerably reducing consistency bias because participants could not access previous responses to either change them or align their current answers (Schwab, 1999). Second, small correlations among the perceptual variables and self-reported absenteeism further suggest that percept–percept inflation was minimal. Third, an examination of self-report measures of absenteeism concluded that, “little evidence for method variance as a biasing problem was found with these measures” (Spector, 1987, p. 438). Finally, the main effect of race was consistent with previous research.

A couple of more substantive limitations were that our data set did not include (a) enough members of other racial and ethnic groups to include them in the analyses and (b) clusters of individuals from the same organizations to examine group-level effects. It would have been interesting to see if Asian Americans responded in a manner similar to Blacks or to Whites and Hispanics. Future research might explore this topic. In addition, prior evidence demonstrated how group-level variables affect individual absenteeism (Markham & McKee, 1995; Mathieu & Kohler, 1990). Subsequent

studies should be designed to examine the simultaneous effects of group- and individual-level variables on racial differences in absenteeism.

Finally, as with any survey, there is a limit to the questions that can be asked, and we were unable to account for potentially important variables. For instance, we did not measure the number or age of any children living with respondents, which could influence absenteeism. Erickson, Nichols, and Ritter (2000) recently concluded, however, "family responsibilities (i.e., number of children, having young children, having childcare difficulties) do not directly affect absenteeism" (p. 266). Another study actually found employees with more children were absent significantly *less* often (Baba, 1990). More importantly, the results of the only study we could find involving antecedents of absenteeism among minority (Black) workers, indicated, "none of the situation-related variables (having a second job, distance to work, *number of children at home*) was significant in any of the absence models" (Popp & Belohlav, 1982, p. 682). These findings, in conjunction with prior research suggesting family variables do not seem to account for gender differences in absenteeism (Johns, 2003), lead us to suspect their impact on racial differences may be minimal as well. It also would have been valuable if the survey had included measures of satisfaction with supervision, supervisory support, or perceived organizational support to allow for a more fine-grained empirical examination of the theoretical mechanism predicted to underlie the effects.

We also should note that although self-reports of absenteeism often correlate highly with personnel records, participants tend to underreport their absences (Johns, 1994). Assuming this tendency is consistent across racial groups (we can think of no reason why it should not be), racial differences are likely larger than those evident in our data. In fact, a recent meta-analysis found Black-White differences in absenteeism using subjective measures ( $d = .13$ ,  $k = 4$ ,  $N = 642$ ) were nearly half the size of those using objective ( $d = .23$ ,  $k = 8$ ,  $N = 1,413$ ) measures (Roth et al., 2003). Thus, our effect sizes probably underestimate the true magnitude of racial differences in absenteeism and the prospective opportunity costs they present for organizations.

These limitations notwithstanding, this study makes a significant contribution to our understanding of racial differences in absenteeism. Though relatively small in effect size (by conventional standards), the observed three-way interaction has clear practical significance. For instance, the Black-White absenteeism difference when employees had racially similar supervisors and perceived the organization to place little value on diversity was approximately 22 days per year. At even the most conservative estimates (presented at the onset of the article), this would produce losses of \$4,400 per year per Black employee. Using the more liberal estimates brings that total to \$15,400. Conversely, when organizations were

perceived to place greater value on diversity, Black–White differences in absenteeism were not statistically significant.

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