# TARGET PRACTICE: AN ORGANIZATIONAL IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT APPROACH TO ATTRACTING MINORITY AND FEMALE JOB APPLICANTS

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On account of a number of factors, many companies have increased recruitment targeting female and ethnic or racial minority job applicants. Despite evidence suggesting that these applicants are attracted by different factors than traditional applicants and an abundance of recruitment tactics suggested in the popular press, no empirically based approach to recruiting these populations has emerged. This article reviews and integrates literature on organizational impression management, recruitment, marketing, and social psychology and provides a framework to assist practitioners in attracting minority and female job applicants. In addition, several avenues for future research are discussed.

More than a decade ago, Rynes and Barber (1990) projected that shifting demographics and a tightening labor market would bring about an increase in the recruitment of female and ethnic/racial minority job applicants. Since that time, many of the anticipated demographic shifts have occurred. For instance, between 1990 and 2000, women accounted for a substantial amount of labor growth (15.5%) and racial minority representation grew from 18% to 27% (Fullerton & Toossi, 2001). Simultaneously, researchers were reporting that employing a diverse workforce has considerable potential benefits (e.g., Ely & Thomas, 2001; Richard, 2000; Watson, Kumar, & Michaelsen, 1993; Wright, Ferris, Hiller, & Kroll, 1995). As a result, organizations are indeed devoting substantial resources

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to pursue these applicants (Digh, 1999). In fact, a recent study indicated that nearly one in two companies plans to increase their minority recruitment efforts (cf. Thaler-Carter, 2001).

In response to heightening competition over minority and female applicants, Rynes and Barber expected firms to begin considering alternative recruitment sources, using non-White and/or female (i.e., nontraditional) organizational representatives and changing recruitment messages to highlight issues of importance to the targeted applicant pool. They believed these changes to be necessary due to anticipated demographic differences in responses to traditional personnel recruitment practices, which have been subsequently reported (Freeman, 2003; Goldberg, 2003; McNab & Johnston, 2002; Moechnig & Ratz, 2001; K. M. Thomas & Wise, 1999; Young, Place, Rinehart, Jury, & Baits, 1997). For instance, minorities and women place different values than White males on certain characteristics when evaluating potential employers (Freeman, 2003; K. M. Thomas & Wise, 1999). Furthermore, minorities on eight campuses recently reported significantly less favorable images of organizations as employers than did their White counterparts, despite having similar perceptions of companies' attributes and recruitment activities (Turban, 2001). This led Turban to suggest that, "recruitment activities that target minorities and women may provide different signals for minorities and women than for nonminorities and men" (p. 306).

Although there is no shortage of opinions on diversity recruitment in the popular press and practitioner publications (e.g., Digh, 1999; Doverspike, Taylor, Shultz, & McKay, 2000; Leonard, 2001; Rodriguez, 2004; Thaler-Carter, 2001; Tipper, 2004), empirical findings on the topic are scattered about the literature with no organizing framework to consolidate and integrate them. Consequently, practitioners often are left to design their recruitment strategies without the benefit of the latest research on the topic, further contributing to the division between science and practice recently described by Ryan and Tippins (2004). In an effort to address this problem, we provide an overview of the research on recruiting minorities and women in the context of organizational impression management (OIM). The success of targeted recruitment appears to be contingent upon the organization conveying to prospective female and minority applicants that it values diversity (Highhouse, Stierwalt, Bachiochi, Elder, & Fisher, 1999; K. M. Thomas & Wise, 1999). Mor Barak, Cherin, and Berkman (1998) defined organizational value for diversity in terms of fairness (i.e., degree of discrimination against minorities in hiring/promotion practices) and inclusion (i.e., degree that minorities are integrated into work settings). We believe that OIM serves as an excellent vehicle for firms to communicate their fairness and inclusiveness to job seekers during the early stages of recruitment (Rynes, 1991). Evidence suggests that these preliminary impressions influence job seekers' perceptions of fit with organizations, which subsequently affect job-choice decisions, fit as a newcomer, and turnover intentions (Cable & Judge, 1996; Saks & Ashforth, 1997).

In addition, two key individual differences (i.e., attributions and identity salience) and a firm-level variable (diversity reputation) that likely influence the effectiveness of common targeted recruitment practices are discussed. The resulting conclusions hold considerable implications for practitioners and organizations seeking to increase the efficacy of minority and female recruitment efforts. That said, we should note that the conclusions are based on our assessment of the literature and that the level of empirical support for each varies significantly. In addition, because most diversity recruitment studies have not examined more than one strategy, it is uncertain which OIM tactics will work best, individually or in tandem. What follows is a review of the targeted recruitment literature. Subsequently, we briefly discuss Mohamed, Gardner, and Paolillo's (1999) taxonomy of OIM tactics, which serves as a framework for our approach to targeted recruitment. Finally, the OIM approach to targeted recruitment is presented.

# Research on Targeted Recruitment

Although research on the factors precipitating minority and female applicant attraction is relatively novel, the existing literature has produced several noteworthy findings. For instance, K. M. Thomas and Wise (1999) found that (a) women place more importance than men on diversity and job factors and (b) minority job seekers place more weight on the demographics of recruiters and organizational diversity characteristics than their White counterparts. More recently, Freeman (2003) replicated and extended the former finding by demonstrating that employee diversity, work-family balance, and the presence of similar colleagues were more important to women, whereas a high starting salary was more important to men. Backhaus, Stone, and Heiner (2002) also reported that minorities rated diversity as more important in a prospective employer than White participants. Beyond this research showing that there are racial and gender differences, two specific recruitment tactics have emerged; recruitment advertisement diversity and the demographic characteristics of organizational recruiters

## Recruitment Advertisement Diversity

Although recruitment ads have been understudied (Breaugh & Starke, 2000), a few recent inquiries have examined methods of tailoring ads to

better target minority and female job seekers (e.g., Highhouse, Stierwalt et al., 1999; McNab & Johnston, 2002; Perkins, Thomas, & Taylor, 2000). These investigations have identified two cues in recruitment ads that are likely to be of particular interest to these populations: pictorial diversity and equal employment opportunity statements.

Pictorial diversity. Portraying racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in photographs depicted in recruitment advertising has become more the norm than the exception. In fact, it appears that the more diverse a firm is, the more eager it is to display that diversity to the public (Bernardi, Bean, & Weippert, 2002). For example, the overwhelming majority (78%) of Fortune 100 companies portraying people on their Web sites varied the racial and/or gender composition of those depicted (Cober, Brown, & Levy, 2004). Furthermore, several organizations have gone so far as to digitally alter photographs to present more diverse images to prospective applicants and consumers (Conklin, 2001). This phenomenon reflects a growing consensus among recruitment practitioners that you must show diversity if you hope to attract diverse applicants (Thaler-Carter, 2001). In a summarization of this viewpoint, Paddison (1990) declared, "our experience working with organizations seeking to diversify is that 'they' (minorities) won't apply unless they can see evidence that people like themselves are already successfully employed by the organization" (p. 54). Similarly, Rynes, Bretz, and Gehart (1991) found that many female job seekers consciously look for evidence that women are successfully employed when evaluating prospective employers.

Research in the recruitment literature on this topic is limited but growing (Avery, 2003; Avery, Hernandez, & Hebl, 2004; Perkins et al., 2000). In perhaps the first study to assess the impact of pictorial diversity in recruitment ads on job seekers, Perkins et al. determined that racial congruence between the applicant and those shown in the ad increases both applicants' perceptions of fit with, as well as their attraction to, the organization. Although Perkins et al.'s sample contained only Black and White participants, Avery et al.'s results indicated that minority job seekers (Black and Hispanic) are most attracted to companies that portray other minorities, even if the individual is not of their own racial/ethnic group. Furthermore, perceived similarity mediated this effect. Minority applicants viewing minorities in ads perceived greater interpersonal similarity to the advertising firm's employees and, therefore, were more attracted to the organization. It also appears that the impact of pictorial ad diversity differs depending on the hierarchical status of minorities portrayed in the ad and that there are between- and within-racial group differences in these effects (Avery, 2003). Altogether, these findings suggest that the effects of pictorial ad diversity on applicants are surprisingly complex. Nonetheless, it appears that minority applicants generally tend to find ads depicting more diversity preferable to less diverse ads.

Equal employment opportunity (EEO) statements. Williams and Bauer (1994) found no gender or racial differences in attraction to companies whose ads either included or did not include a statement regarding diversity management. Subsequently, researchers have found that Black applicants are more attracted to organizations that advertise identity-conscious staffing policies and affirmative action plans emphasizing a commitment to equal opportunity, access to training, and a commitment to recruiting Black applicants (Highhouse et al., 1999; Slaughter, Sinar, & Bachiochi, 2002). Furthermore, female applicants respond more favorably to ads emphasizing EEO as opposed to affirmative action or diversity management (McNab & Johnston, 2002; Moechnig & Ratz, 2001). Broadly speaking, these findings suggest that promoting policies of equal opportunity enhances female and minority applicants' perceptions of organizations.

# Recruiter Demographics

Despite no shortage of authors advocating the use of non-White male recruiters to attract minority and female applicants (e.g., Doverspike et al., 2000), their position is somewhat unfounded (Breaugh & Starke, 2000). Of the studies conducted in the past 20 years examining the effect of a recruiter's demographics on diverse applicants, few have linked it to job seekers' decision making. An examination of these studies presents a picture of mixed, and sometimes counterintuitive, findings. For example, Liden and Parsons (1986) and Maurer, Howe, and Lee (1992) both showed that recruiter gender was unrelated to job acceptance intentions. Turban and Dougherty (1992) reported that gender similarity between recruiter and applicant positively influenced organizational attraction among male but not female job seekers. Taylor and Bergmann (1987) found a negative effect of female recruiters on job attractiveness and offer acceptance probability for female (but not male) applicants.

Two recent studies suggest that recruiter race affects organizational attractiveness. Young et al. (1997) found that Black applicants were more attracted to an organization when a Black recruiter was used. However, this effect was moderated by recruiter gender and the content of the recruitment message delivered by the recruiter. Black recruiters heightened Black applicants' attraction if (a) the recruiter was female and discussed the work itself or the work environment or (b) the recruiter was male and discussed the economic incentives that accompany the job. Black job seekers also report placing more emphasis on recruiter characteristics such

as race than do their White counterparts (K. M. Thomas & Wise, 1999). More recently, applicant—recruiter racial, but not gender similarity, was shown to enhance attraction to the recruiter (Goldberg, 2003). Thus, it appears that aligning recruiter demographics may prove more effective in garnering the interest of minority job seekers, but this cannot be stated with a high degree of certainty.

# Organizational Impression Management

A potentially useful tool for targeted recruitment is OIM. Although the majority of research on the role of impression management in business has focused on individuals (e.g., Bolino & Turnley, 2003; Ellis, West, Ryan, & DeShon, 2002; Kristof-Brown, Barrick, & Franke, 2002; Stevens, 1997; Stevens & Kristof, 1995), recent investigations have extrapolated its usage to the organizational level of analysis (e.g., Arndt & Bigelow, 2000; Elsbach, 1994; Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Elsbach, Sutton, & Principe, 1998; Ginzel, Kramer, & Sutton, 1992). "OIM refers to any action purposefully designed and carried out to influence an audience's perceptions of an organization" (Elsbach et al., 1998, p. 68). This definition encompasses a number of organizational activities including personnel recruitment, which seeks to present the organization in a favorable light to prospective job applicants (Cable & Graham, 2000). Thus, diversity recruitment, specifically the initial attraction stage, is discussed in the context of OIM throughout the remainder of this article.

In an effort to stimulate research on OIM, Mohamed, Gardner, and Paolillo (1999) recently provided a useful framework for its conceptualization. Their  $2\times 2$  taxonomy divided potential impression management tactics into four types according to whether they are (a) direct or indirect and (b) assertive or defensive. The former distinction is a derivation from individual-level impression management research by Cialdini (1989). Direct tactics present information about the firm's characteristics, competencies, or accomplishments. Conversely, indirect tactics present information about constituencies with whom the firm is associated. The latter distinction comes from the work of Tedeschi and Norman (1985). Assertive tactics are proactive in nature whereas defensive tactics are reactive. Because recruitment involves the presentation of firm-relevant information, the present discussion focuses on direct assertive and defensive OIM tactics.

Mohamed et al. (1999) discuss five types of direct assertive tactics: Ingratiation, intimidation, organizational promotion, exemplification, and supplication. The goal of each tactic is to bring the company closer to the achievement of some desired outcome(s). Ingratiation is a strategic attempt to enhance a firm's attractiveness. Intimidation involves the

conveyance of power and assertiveness. Organizational promotion behaviors seek to present organizational attributes that demonstrate competency and/or effectiveness. Exemplification refers to efforts to present the firm as prototypical of some desirable characteristic (e.g., corporate social responsibility). Finally, supplication behaviors communicate dependence and vulnerability. We believe that direct assertive tactics hold potential for use in the recruitment of women and minorities and that the relevant circumstances determine which strategies may be more appropriate for a given situation. For instance, because intimidation is most appropriate when the target is dependent on the organization (Oliver, 1991), and applicants usually are not, it is often inappropriate. Furthermore, although supplication may prove useful in certain instances, it is probably not a viable strategy for most organizations because it could dissuade job seekers who interpret the strategy as an act of desperation (Barber, Hollenbeck, Tower, & Phillips, 1994; Turban & Dougherty, 1992).

Mohammed et al. also describe six direct defensive tactics: accounts, disclaimers, organizational handicapping, apologies, restitution, and prosocial behavior. Accounts are explanations that attempt to minimize the perceived implications of some potentially negative event or occurrence. Disclaimers are explanations that attempt to counter potentially embarrassing occurrences *before* they occur. Similarly, organizational handicapping encompasses efforts to minimize expectations of organizational success in order to make failure appear less undesirable. Apologies admit blame for a negative event. Restitution goes one step further than apologies by offering some form of compensation to victims of the negative event. Finally, prosocial behavior involves willfully engaging in acts of atonement in light of some negative events in the organization's history. Like direct assertive tactics, we believe that practitioners involved in the recruitment of minorities and women may find these strategies potentially useful in certain instances.

So how can firms use direct OIM strategies to facilitate more diverse recruitment? Given that minority and female applicants are attracted by different factors than their White male counterparts (K. M. Thomas & Wise, 1999), organizations should seek to make a different impression on members of these groups. Following this line of reasoning, targeted recruitment practices could serve as a means for organizations to influence these job seekers' impressions of them. More specifically, such practices may help to create the impression that a firm is truly an equal opportunity employer (i.e., fair and inclusive). Essentially, this is tantamount to the process of employment branding described by recent recruitment researchers (Cable & Turban, 2001, 2003; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Han & Collins, 2002; Sovina & Collins, 2003). Their work indicates that organizational promotional activities and recruitment practices help to increase

awareness of and associations with a company's employment brand image (i.e., job seekers' beliefs about potential employers; Collins & Stevens, 2002), which subsequently influences recruitment outcomes. Applied in the current context, OIM tactics may help organizations foster employment brands associated with diversity thereby making them more appealing to minority and female job seekers.

# The OIM Approach to Targeted Recruitment

To determine the optimal strategies for attracting minority and female applicants, we integrated the empirical findings on targeted recruitment with the practical literature in the context of OIM. This produced several practices such as targeted recruitment advertising, promoting policies of inclusiveness (e.g., EEO/AA), recruiting at colleges and universities with high minority and female enrollments, employing diverse recruiters, and participating in job fairs in highly diverse communities (Charles & McCleary, 1997; Digh, 1999; Doverspike et al., 2000; Paddison, 1990; Thaler-Carter, 2001; Whitehead, 1999; Wiley, 1992). Our conclusions build on recent findings indicating that job applicants infer information about a company's values and attributes from its recruiting materials (Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, & Edwards, 2000; Collins & Stevens, 2002; Highhouse, Zickar, Thorsteinson, Stierwalt, & Slaughter, 1999; Honeycutt & Rosen, 1997). In addition, it is important to note that such inferences account for incremental variance in organizational attraction beyond that of job and organizational characteristics (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). A model illustrating the OIM approach is provided in Figure 1. We should note that the model attempts to integrate findings from individual studies of single variables into a cohesive framework. Thus, the collective model is hypothetical and needs to be tested.

Exposing minority and female job seekers to diversity in recruitment practices should lead them to form impressions about the organization's values and atmosphere, and subsequently make subjective assessments of congruence between their personal values (e.g., equal opportunity) and those ascribed to the recruiting organization. The outcome of this assessment will likely determine pursuit intentions because higher fit perceptions usually lead to higher attraction (Cable & Judge, 1996; Judge & Cable 1997), and subjective fit is more important than actual fit (Dineen, Ash, & Noe, 2002).

# Strategy 1: Ingratiating Female and Minority Job Seekers

Firms have various OIM tactics at their disposal to present an equitable employment brand image. Perhaps the most effective of these are

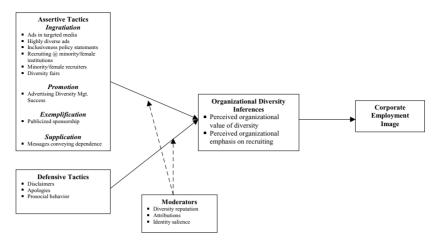


Figure 1: The Impact of Organization Impression Management Tactics on Corporate Employment Images during Diversity Recruitment Efforts.

ingratiation tactics designed to attract minorities. For instance, they can manipulate the placement of, the demographic composition of those depicted in, and the content of their recruitment ads. These factors likely influence the demographic composition of respondents as well as the strength of their pursuit intentions. Although the literature on personnel recruitment is only beginning to consider the relationships between these factors and key outcomes, research on consumer marketing provides some insight as to how targeted recruitment ingratiation tactics will be perceived.

Often, strategic ad placement is proposed as an excellent way to attract more diverse job applicants (e.g., Thiederman, 1994; Wiley, 1992). Proponents believe that placing ads in media viewed more frequently by minority populations should result in a more diverse composition of respondents (Paddison, 1990). Green (1999) makes a similar argument with respect to consumer advertising. Based on accommodation theory (Koslow, Shamdasani, & Touchstone, 1994), he hypothesized that, "the greater the accommodation by the advertiser (i.e., culturally congruent media placement), the more favorable the evaluations of ads among the target audience" (p. 52). His results were supportive for Black participants with strong ethnic identification, as these individuals indicated more positive attitudes toward and greater intentions to purchase cosmetic foundation when it was advertised in a targeted medium. It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that minority and female job seekers will draw different inferences about companies whose recruitment ads appear in targeted as opposed to mainstream media. Furthermore, some evidence suggests that

women and minorities may be more likely than their White male counterparts to use these ads (Kirnan, Farley, & Geisinger, 1989). Thus, the placement of such ads likely will be interpreted as a signal that the organization values members of the targeted group (cf. Laabs, 1991; Paddison, 1990).

Conclusion 1: Placing recruitment ads in targeted media will convey the impression to women and minorities that the company values diversity.

In addition to considering the contextual placement of the ad, it is important to consider the features of the ad itself. One such feature involves the individuals shown in the ad. Researchers in consumer and recruitment advertising have examined the effects of ad composition on viewers (e.g., Perkins et al., 2000; Whittler & Spira, 2002). With respect to recruitment ads, these studies have shown that as ad diversity increases, so too does minority job seekers' attraction to the organization and perceptions of fit (Avery, 2003; Perkins et al., 2000). Less is known, however, about the mechanism underlying these effects. It is probable that ad diversity acts as a cue signaling inclusiveness to diverse applicants that in turn enhances their fit perceptions and attraction (Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001). Demographic diversity in a recruitment ad suggests that the organization places a high value on diversity and that the company is likely to employ diverse employees.

The rationale for the preceding conclusion is straightforward. Because job seekers rarely are able to observe or even obtain information regarding a firm's demographic composition, employees in recruitment ads likely are used as proxies for actual employees (Rafaeli & Oliver, 1998). Some preliminary support for this assertion is provided by a recent study in which the proportion of Blacks in a recruitment ad was related positively to respondents' agreement with the statement "Black workers are employed at all organizational levels in this company" (Avery, 2003). Other recent evidence further supports the notion that viewers will interpret ad diversity in this manner (Cable & Graham, 2000; Thaler-Carter, 2001). For example, the presence of ad diversity symbolized to applicants in a recent study that the organization does not discriminate (Cable & Graham, 2000 p. 935). Similarly, 16% of surveyed job seekers indicated that they use a company's workforce demographics as a signal of its commitment to diversity, and more than one-third of Blacks, women, and Hispanics ruled out a company because it lacked sufficient employee diversity (Thaler-Carter, 2001). This suggests that using ads portraying traditional racial and/or gender homogeneity will not ingratiate minority and female job seekers because such ads are interpreted as an indication that the company does not value diversity. It should be noted that this logic is consistent with others suggesting that observable diversity has symbolic effects on viewers (Ely, 1994; Milliken & Martens, 1996).

Conclusion 2: Portraying highly diverse ads will convey the impression to women and minorities that the firm values diversity.

The final component involved in using ads to ingratiate minority applicants is the targeting of the recruitment message contained in the ad. Of particular importance is the statement on human resource policies geared toward inclusiveness. Numerous studies have examined the relationship between such statements and applicant reactions (Barber & Roehling, 1993; Brown, Cober, Keeping, & Levy, 2002; Highhouse et al., 1999; McNab & Johnston, 2002; Moechnig & Ratz, 2001; Slaughter et al., 2002; K. M. Thomas & Wise, 1999; Williams & Bauer, 1994). These studies have focused on the impact of three types of human resource management statements in recruitment advertisements: affirmative action plans (AAP), diversity management programs (DMP), and equal employment opportunity (EEO). According to R. R. Thomas (1990), AAPs are designed to compensate for historical discrimination against certain demographic groups whereas DMPs are designed to create climates wherein all employees are allowed and encouraged to reach their full potential. Falling between these two positions are EEO policies designed to minimize present and future occurrences of discrimination. In short, this literature has shown that DMPs are seen as more attractive than AAPs in some instances (Moechnig & Ratz, 2001; Williams & Bauer, 1994), but less attractive in others (Smith, Wokutch, Harrington, & Dennis, 2004). Moreover, a comparative study suggests EEO statements to be more appealing than either of the two (Moechnig & Ratz, 2001). The attraction of an EEO statement is presumably due to its assurance that the organization conforms to antidiscrimination legislation (Mohamed et al., 1999, p. 113). As such, viewers are likely to conclude that all types of applicants (including members of their own group) are welcome.

In line with this reasoning, Black respondents in one study perceived an organization as being more favorable toward minorities when its staffing policy was identity conscious as opposed to identity blind (Highhouse et al., 1999). More recently, Rau and Hyland (2003) found that minority men and White women were more attracted to companies that included statements about their commitment to diversity in their recruitment advertisements than to those that did not. Similarly, organizations including a diversity initiative in their recruitment brochures have been perceived as placing significantly greater value on diversity than those that did not (Kim & Gelfand, 2003; Rau & Hyland, 2003).

*Conclusion 3*: Presenting inclusiveness policy statements in ads will convey the impression to women and minorities that the firm values diversity.

Another available ingratiation tactic is campus recruiting at predominantly female and minority institutions of higher education. Because these students are approached in an environment with an overt connection to their identity, the company is explicitly indicating its belief that members of their group are valuable and worth pursuing. Although it is assumed that recruiting at these sites helps bolster diversity recruitment (e.g., Doverspike et al., 2000; Thiederman, 1994), we were unable to locate any published studies that have examined its impact on job seekers. Nevertheless, Black applicants do respond favorably to AAPs involving "special efforts made to recruit black applicants" (Slaughter et al., 2002, p. 336), suggesting that they also may respond favorably to targeted campus recruitment.

Despite the lack of empirical investigation, there is reason to believe that women and minorities will recognize targeted campus recruitment when they see it (Aaker, Brumbaugh, & Grier, 2000; Brumbaugh, 2002; Grier & Brumbaugh, 1999). For instance, in a study by Grier and Brumbaugh (1999), Blacks, gays, and lesbians all proved particularly adept at detecting and decoding targeted consumer-marketing efforts. Although White participants did not interpret cues, they too recognized that the ads were targeting a particular demographic group. It stands to reason, therefore, that a student at a historically black college or university (HBCU) or an all-female college who is being interviewed by a college recruiter is likely to view the campus visit as ingratiating. Furthermore, this OIM tactic will likely be viewed as an indication of the organization's intent toward attracting a diverse workforce.

Conclusion 4: Recruiting at predominantly minority or female institutions of higher education will convey the impression to women and minorities that the firm values diversity.

Employing a minority or female recruiter is another way that firms may ingratiate minority and female job seekers. Rynes and Barber (1990) proposed that firms would begin using more nontraditional representatives in an effort to bolster the recruitment of nontraditional applicants. This was based in part on literature demonstrating that individuals are more attracted to those perceived as highly similar to themselves (e.g., Byrne, 1971; Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 1998; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). Although some studies have failed to find confirmation for this phenomenon, known as the similarity-attraction paradigm (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1996; Taylor & Bergmann, 1987), others have proven supportive (e.g., Goldberg, 2003). For example, a study on the recruitment of teachers revealed that both White and Black job seekers were more attracted to recruiters of their own race (Young et al., 1997). The presence of a minority or female recruiter

demonstrates not only employee diversity but also that diverse employees are valued enough to be sent as company representatives. Hence, this tactic may serve a dual purpose of both ingratiating applicants and exemplifying the firm's commitment to diversity.

Conclusion 5: Employing a female or minority recruiter will convey the impression to women and minorities that the firm values diversity.

Empirical examinations of job fairs as a recruitment vehicle are scarce (Han & Collins, 2002; Roehling & Cavanaugh, 2000; Sciarini & Woods, 1997). In one of the few studies, Roehling and Cavanaugh (2000) examined students' expectations of employer practices at job fairs and discovered that students report job fairs as having a significant impact on their perceptions of prospective employers. More recently, Han and Collins (2002) found that firms' participation in job fairs positively predicted applicants' awareness of, perceived attributes of, perceived quality of, and attraction to companies. Similarly, Sciarini and Woods reported that "many students base their perceptions of companies on the individual contact they have with those firms at a job fair" (p. 79). These findings strongly suggest that information gleaned from and interactions taking place at job fairs have a sizeable impact on job seekers. As such, they may prove effective in enhancing a firm's employment brand by ingratiating applicants or promoting the organization.

One type of job fair targets underrepresented groups (commonly referred to as diversity fairs). These fairs have grown in popularity recently because they "present career or job opportunities to one or more minority groups including African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Hispanics, women, disabled people, and gays and lesbians" (Dunham, 2001, p. B10). As such, they also present employers with access to members of these groups that might not be obtainable otherwise. Given that the emphasis of such a fair is clearly diversity, an employer's participation should have symbolic meaning to prospective applicants (Milliken & Martins, 1996), thereby improving the likelihood of the organization making a favorable impression.

Conclusion 6: Participation in diversity fairs will convey the impression to women and minorities that the firm values diversity.

# Strategy 2: Promoting Effective Diversity Management

Firms that have received recognition for successful management of diversity should promote this fact in their advertisements because such awards could convey to job seekers that discrimination is low or nonexistent and that the environment is inclusive. In addition, this type of promotion helps to publicize the organization's competency at managing

diversity, which is likely unknown to prospective applicants. Although including mention of acclaim concerning the firm's treatment of diversity is the most obvious way of indicating successful diversity management, only a limited number of firms have received such commendation. Therefore, many practitioners may wonder how they can convey success in the absence of awards. One possibility involves highlighting a mentoring program that has helped female and minority employees to advance their careers (Making the most, 2002). Researchers have shown that mentoring programs often are vital to the career success of members of traditionally disadvantaged groups (e.g., Dreher & Cox, 1996; Mattis, 2001; Ragins & Cotton, 1999; D. A. Thomas, 2001). Hence, these job seekers may be particularly attuned to information about mentoring opportunities and interpret a track record of successful female and minority mentoring as evidence of the organization's commitment to diversity.

Another way for prospective employees to learn of an organization's success in managing diversity is through word of mouth. Research by Collins and his colleagues (Collins & Han, 2004; Collins & Stevens, 2002) has demonstrated that word-of-mouth endorsements have a considerable impact on the job-seeking behavior of prospective applicants through their effect on employment brands. Thus, organizations should encourage their employees to share news of their diversity-related success with others. A more directly controllable way of disseminating this type of information is through organizational representatives, who should be equipped with this knowledge and encouraged to share it with prospective recruits. Given that minority and female job seekers tend to look for information regarding a company's diversity management (K. M. Thomas & Wise, 1999), the sharing of these accolades by company representatives is likely to alert job seekers to the organization's commitment to diversity.

Conclusion 7: Presenting evidence of successful diversity management through ads and representatives will convey the impression to women and minorities that the firm values diversity.

# Strategy 3: Exemplification

In general, exemplification involves organizational attempts to portray themselves favorably by performing acts of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Previous research illustrates that job seekers tend to be more attracted to organizations that act in a socially responsible manner (Turban & Greening, 1997). One means of demonstrating CSR with respect to minorities and women is to sponsor events and organizations with direct connections to these groups. For instance, Aramark Healthcare Support Services Division and Sodexho Marriott Services recently announced plans to fund the Black Culinary Alliance and Multicultural Foodservice Alliance, two

organizations that are committed to the career advancement of minorities in the food sector (Prewitt, 2000). Although no empirical research to date has linked this type of sponsorship to applicant behavior, there is reason to believe such a linkage exists. Collins and Stevens (2002) found that high sponsorship (general) results in job seekers holding more favorable attitudes toward the organization (i.e., employment brand images), so long as the sponsorship is well publicized. More recently, Collins and Han (2004) demonstrated that sponsorship helps produce higher-quality applicant pools. Because minorities and women tend to be more highly attuned to diversity information about organizations, publicity regarding targeted sponsorship will probably induce perceptions among members of these groups that the company values diversity.

Conclusion 8: Publicized sponsorship of minority and women's causes will convey the impression to women and minorities that the firm values diversity.

For a number of reasons (e.g., history of discrimination, homogenous workforce), many practitioners find themselves in positions wherein it would be impossible to convince minority and female job seekers that the company values diversity. In such cases, a more realistic objective may be to convey that the company *seeks* diversity. Despite a lack of empirical evidence in this area, we extend the framework of OIM to arrive at conclusions regarding how these organizations might best proceed. Admittedly, the next two conclusions are somewhat more speculative than the preceding eight. Nevertheless, we believe that practitioners may find these tactics to be particularly useful in their efforts to diversify their organizations.

### Strategy 4: Supplication

Although it may seem counterintuitive for a company to portray itself as dependent in most instances, this is not necessarily the case in recruitment. The U.S. Army has enjoyed longstanding success with its "I want you!" recruiting slogan. Because of its volunteer status, the Army is dependent upon prospective recruits enlisting in order to survive. Although the case is somewhat less extreme, demographically homogenous companies seeking to diversify find themselves in a rather similar situation. They do not have the diversity sought by females and minorities to showcase during recruitment (K. M. Thomas & Wise, 1999). Consequently, instead of misrepresenting themselves by portraying diverse advertisements or alienating women and minorities by portraying homogenous ads, they could express their dependence by admitting that the only way the company can become more diverse is if women and minorities apply.

Conclusion 9: Recruitment messages that convey dependence upon minority and female applicants will convey the impression to women and minorities that the organization seeks diversity.

# Strategy 5: Defensive Impression Management

According to Mohamed et al. (1999), organizations can use six tactics to protect or restore their images in light of potentially damaging information or events: accounts, disclaimers, organizational handicapping, apologies, restitution, and prosocial behavior. Four types of accounts are available to organizations: denials, excuses, justification, or apology. Without question, one of the more common types of accounts utilized by organizations when it comes to discrimination is denial (R. R. Thomas, 2001). Although the OIM literature does not contain any comparative analyses, results from individual impression management research suggest that in short interactions (as is the case with most early recruitment), acknowledgements are received more favorably than denials (Bottom, Gibson, Daniels, & Murnighan, 2002). Bottom et al. also reported that "apologies and simple explanations were effective at reestablishing cooperation and increasing positive reactions" (p. 509). Thus, it may behoove organizations to own up to previous discrimination or a known lack of diversity if the goal is to reestablish credibility with minorities and women.

Toward this end, firms can use disclaimers, apologies, and prosocial behavior. For example, minorities and women are apt to develop impressions that company workforces are demographically heterogeneous if they see diverse ads and encounter minority or female representatives during recruitment (Avery, 2003; Avery et al., 2004). To the extent that such an impression is inaccurate, it could contribute to unmet expectations, which often result in turnover (Major, Kozlowski, Chao, & Gardner, 1995). The use of a disclaimer offered in the ad or by representatives could help to establish a more realistic set of expectations. In cases of previous discrimination, formal apologies may prove useful if the company accepts responsibility for its actions and demonstrates contrition by acting to rectify its discriminatory practices. For instance, in the wake of a major lawsuit, Denny's overhauled its diversity image to become one of Fortune's "best companies for minorities" by bolstering its employee training considerably to promote a more diversity-friendly environment (Adamson, 2000). Similarly, the Navy made a concerted effort to increase awareness of gender issues and developed better career opportunities for women following a sexual harassment scandal (Ebbert & Hall, 1994).

Conclusion 10: Using defensive OIM tactics during recruitment will convey the impression to women and minorities that the organization seeks diversity.

## Why Targeted Recruitment May Fail to Attract

# Diversity Reputation

The utility of each of the above tactics in creating the desired impression varies according to the firm's diversity reputation, a specific type of employment brand. Although there are no universally accepted means of determining a corporation's diversity reputation, one common approach has been advocated in the literature (Cox & Blake, 1991; Ford, 2004; Hannon & Milkovich, 1996; Roberson & Park, 2004; Wright et al., 1995). Many professional organizations (including the government) and magazines (e.g., Fortune, Diversity Inc.) conduct annual diversity assessments that lead to awards or rankings. Positive accolades associated with these assessments are indicators of a favorable diversity reputation. Conversely, a history of public allegations of discrimination and high-profile lawsuits represent the other end of the spectrum (Wright et al., 1995). We suspect that the majority of companies find themselves at some point between these two extremes.

Firms that have received neither commendation nor criticism for their diversity management generally have no need for defensive strategies. Moreover, they would likely benefit from avoiding the use of supplication because this rather extreme approach could alienate some female and minority job seekers. For companies with highly favorable diversity reputations, the best approach is simple—organizational promotion. Any action that draws attention to the firm's diversity-related commendation is apt to help garner the interest of minority and female job seekers (Cox & Blake, 1991). Finally, firms with unfavorable diversity reputations should rely heavily upon defensive OIM strategies to help account for their histories. In addition, firms may benefit from supplication by emphasizing to minority and female job seekers that the company cannot become diverse unless they join. This is not to suggest that all firms cannot benefit from using one (or all) of the strategies discussed above. Rather, we believe that each is particularly well suited to organizations according to their diversity reputation.

Conclusion 11: A firm's diversity reputation will moderate the effect of OIM-targeted recruitment strategies in conveying impressions that companies value/seek diversity. Specifically, assertive (defensive) tactics will be more effective for firms with more (less) favorable diversity reputations.

### Attributions

Thus far, we have proposed that OIM tactics related to diversity recruitment will induce the belief among minority and female job seekers that a

firm either values or seeks diversity. Though it is important to women and minorities that firms demonstrate an interest in recruiting them, the company's underlying motives for doing so are likely to be of interest as well. Consequently, job seeker attributions regarding targeted recruitment may determine the ultimate success of these efforts. Minorities and women may not attribute an organization's targeted recruitment efforts to its value for diversity. Instead, cynicism regarding the firm's motives may undermine the success of OIM tactics among female and minority job seekers. Avery (2003) voiced a comparable argument to explain why ad diversity that was limited to lower hierarchical levels failed to attract diverse applicants.

Weiner's (1986) theory of attribution posits that individuals will search for causes of events that are negative, novel, unexpected, or important. Targeted recruitment attempts are likely to satisfy each of these criteria except the first. The purpose of this search is to determine the reason for an event and its locus, stability, and controllability. Internal, stable, controllable attributions of positive events tend to influence perceivers' subsequent behaviors and choices favorably (Weiner, 1986). Clearly, recruitment cues are perceived to be controlled by the organization and often are interpreted as indicators of stable organizational characteristics (cf. Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001). Thus, the key attributional determinant in targeted recruitment is locus.

Aside from an organization truly valuing diversity (internal), there are a number of other reasons that a company might target female and minority job seekers (Dass & Parker, 1999). For instance, to avoid the appearance of being discriminatory and the possibility of litigation, companies may try to portray themselves as concerned about diversity. Similarly, many firms may engage in targeted recruitment to comply with affirmative action or EEO mandates (D. A. Thomas & Ely, 1996). In fact, Smith et al. (2004) found that AAPs tend to be perceived as attempts at legal compliance. Another externally motivated reason might be to bolster the company's public image (Bernardi et al., 2002). Given all of these possible motives, firms engaging in targeted recruitment must ensure that their reasons for doing so are clear. Minorities want to see that the organization is truly committed to diversity (Fyock, 1993, p. 37).

Recent empirical results help to further illustrate the importance of attributions during targeted recruitment. For instance, Richard and Kirby (1998, 1999) explored the impact of firms' justifications for workforce diversity programs on Black and female respondents' reactions to them. Their findings revealed that unjustified programs elicited unfavorable reactions from both groups. Conversely, when a marketing justification (similar to the "access and legitimacy" paradigm discussed by D. A. Thomas & Ely, 1996) was provided for the programs, reactions from both groups were favorable. One interpretation of these findings is that in the absence of

adequate justification for diversity programs, potential beneficiaries tend to attribute them to pressure from external constituencies instead of concluding that the organization values diversity. This interpretation also aids in explaining the finding that women prefer equal employment opportunity (often perceived as internally motivated) to affirmative action (externally motivated) clauses in recruitment literature (Moechnig & Ratz, 2001). Altogether, the preceding suggests that the success of minority and female recruitment hinges upon the attributions drawn by these applicants for a firm's underlying motives.

Conclusion 12: The impact of targeted recruitment on minorities' and women's perceptions that the company values/seeks diversity will be moderated by job seekers' attributions. In particular, the specified targeted recruitment practices will only enhance diversity perceptions if job seekers attribute them to the organization's desire to attract diversity (internally oriented attributions).

## Identity Salience

The efficacy of targeted recruitment efforts also should depend on the salience of job seekers' respective distinctive identities. Each person has multiple social identities that are arranged hierarchically in terms of salience (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Identity salience refers to the extent that a particular identity is activated in a given setting or situation (Stryker, 1968). Research suggests that identification strength and numerical distinctiveness increase identity salience (Brickson, 2000; Forehand, Deshpandé, & Reed, 2002; Mehra et al., 1998; Randel, 2002; Saylor & Aries, 1999; Thompson, 1999), such that strongly identified people and those who are demographically unique tend to define themselves in terms of their salient identity (Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). The physical environment also appears to affect identity salience, in that ethnic identity is most important to Blacks at work (where potential for discrimination is greatest) and least important at home (Jaret & Reitzes, 1999).

In general, people tend to behave in ways that are consistent with their most salient identity. For instance, Honeycutt and Rosen (1997) showed that employees were most attracted to organizations whose human resource policies were consistent with their salient identities (i.e., career, family, and balanced between career and family). Ely (1995) showed that gender identity salience affects the propensity for women to endorse stereotypically feminine (e.g., cooperation, sensitive to people) versus masculine behavior (e.g., aggressive, overbearing) at work. In particular, gender salience was found to be higher in predominantly male law firms wherein female employees held more polarized views of typical

male versus female behavior. In sex-integrated firms, gender identity was less salient; therefore, female workers tended to describe men and women as exhibiting a combination of masculine and feminine behaviors.

Racial identity salience has been linked positively to preferences for same-race friendships and social activities among racial minority groups (Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Saylor & Aries, 1999; Sellers et al., 1997; Thompson, 1999). Moreover, Linnehan, Konrad, Reitman, Greenhalgh, and London (2003) recently found that Asian Americans with strong racial identities were more likely than those with lower racial identities to value organizational efforts to increase diversity and reduce discrimination. Similarly, Kim and Gelfand (2003) found that those higher in ethnic identity were more positive toward organizations that included a diversity initiative in their recruitment brochures than to those that did not. Thus, in the current context, when minority and female job seekers' distinctive identities are salient, targeted recruitment attempts should be received more favorably.

Conclusion 13: The impact of targeted recruitment on minorities' and women's perceptions that the company values/seeks diversity will be moderated by their identity salience. In particular, the specified targeted recruitment practices will only enhance diversity perceptions if job seekers' distinctive identities are highly salient.

# The Impact of Organizational Diversity Inferences

Creating the impression that the company values (or seeks) diversity should enhance minority and female job seekers' perceptions of the company's corporate employment image. Highhouse et al. (1999) defined corporate employment image as an individual's view of how favorable a company is as a place to work and found that various fast-food restaurant chains could be discriminated reliably in terms of image. Cox and Blake (1991) suggested that firms with successful diversity records would enjoy a competitive advantage with respect to attracting diverse applicants because their records signal to minorities that the company is a good place for them to work. In a related empirical finding, Greening and Turban (2000) reported that firms with poor diversity records are less attractive to women than men as potential employers.

Conclusion 14: Female and minority job seeker perceptions that companies value or seek diversity will result in favorable corporate employment images.

Shaping corporate employment image perceptions is of utmost importance to organizations seeking to recruit diverse applicants. Ideas regarding what an organization is like and what it is like to work there

have been linked directly to application intentions (Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993; Lemmink, Schuijf, & Streukens, 2003) and probably form the basis for estimating person–organization (P–O) fit (Horvath, Ryan, & Kriska, 2000). Chatman (1989) defined P–O fit as "the congruence between the norms and values of organizations and the values of persons" (p. 339). Fit is maximized when an individual's values are aligned with what they perceive to be the organization's norms and values (Chatman, 1989; Kristof, 1996). Predicting fit is important because job seekers are attracted to, and tend to accept offers from, firms thought to possess values similar to their own (Cable & Judge, 1994, 1996; Judge & Bretz, 1992; Judge & Cable, 1997; Tom, 1971).

# Implications and Future Research Directions

## **Implications**

A primary implication of this research is that practitioners must consider a firm's reputation before designing and implementing a targeted recruitment strategy. Perceptions of a firm's competency and achievement in managing diversity (diversity reputation) can become a source of sustained competitive advantage in attracting talented individuals of all backgrounds (Cox & Blake, 1991). Conversely, a poor diversity reputation can make it particularly difficult for firms to recruit talent, especially among female and minority job seekers (Greening & Turban, 2000; Leonard, 2001). Consequently, a firm with a poor diversity reputation would need to adopt a very different female and minority recruitment approach than one with a favorable reputation.

A second implication is that firms should communicate not only that they are interested in attracting diversity but also their motive for doing so. Generally, minorities seek workplaces wherein their competency rather than their salient characteristics determines their outcomes (Blank & Slipp, 1994). If practitioners truly wish to diversify their companies' workforces, it is imperative that they convey to minority and female job seekers that their distinctive identities will be valued. The OIM approach presented here suggests that attempts to attract minority and female job applicants could prove highly effective when tactics convey that the organization is targeting these groups because it values the differences they bring. If accepted as legitimate, such conveyances should enhance perceptions of corporate employment image and person–organization fit, as well as job pursuit intentions. Nevertheless, it is perhaps even more important that an organization ensures that its policies and practices are indeed promoting such a workplace (Joplin & Daus, 1997, p. 33). Else, diversity recruits are

apt to feel that they were misled during their recruitment and some form of backlash is probable (cf. Dineen, Ash, & Noe, 2002).

A third implication is that despite a practitioner's best efforts, targeted recruitment may fail to attract some minority and female job seekers. Nevertheless, it is important to determine *why* the effort was not successful. Consider, for instance, the following scenario: Company X sends a minority representative to a predominantly minority university. When asked about the company's diversity climate, she replies (off the record) that minorities at the company often have encountered unique difficulty in attaining promotions. Consequently, the tactics used by the firm to create a favorable organizational impression were undermined by the nature of the message delivered during recruitment. Our point here is that targeted recruitment cannot be improved without first understanding why previous efforts have failed.

Practitioners also should consider that targeting their recruitment in the manner specified in this article could elicit unfavorable reactions on the part of some majority group members. White males often are less supportive of efforts to promote diversity (Konrad & Linnehan, 1995; Parker, Baltes, & Christiansen, 1997) and some are even repelled by the diversity messages in recruitment (Rau & Hyland, 2003). However, for organizations truly committed to building supportive workplaces, the withdrawal of these individuals could prove beneficial. For example, at least two studies have shown that White males responding in this manner tend to be less tolerant of diversity (Avery, 2003; Brown et al., 2002), suggesting that firms seriously committed to diversity could be better off without these individuals.

### Future Research Directions

Reviewing what is known about targeted recruitment helps to identify what remains unknown. One area needing further attention is that of comparative research on targeted recruitment strategies. Because much of the research discussed here examined only one strategy at a time, no conclusions can be drawn concerning which OIM tactics are the most effective or even which would work best together. It appears, however, that many practitioners have drawn their own conclusions about combining certain tactics. For instance, we performed a comparison of corporate advertisements found in the most recent issue of a targeted (i.e., *Diversity Inc.*) and several mainstream (i.e., *Business Week, Forbes*, and *Fortune*) publications.<sup>1</sup> Although a fairly high proportion of the ads in both contained

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for making this suggestion.

racially and gender diverse employees (78.4% in targeted vs. 60.9% in mainstream), all 37 ads in the targeted publication included a statement on diversity or inclusiveness compared to none of the 23 ads in mainstream publications. Thus, despite a lack of empirical evidence validating this combination of tactics (ad diversity and targeted media), there appears to be an implicit assumption that the practice will yield results.

The literature also could benefit from more research investigating moderators of the relationship between OIM tactics and corporate employment images. For instance, situational moderators, such as job scarcity, may influence this linkage, resulting in OIM tactics having the greatest potential impact on job seekers when vacancies are perceived to be plentiful. Information quantity also may moderate the effects of OIM tactics (Barber & Roehling, 1993; Gatewood et al., 1993). For example, Yuce and Highhouse (1998) found that greater amounts of information in actual job postings corresponded in higher applicant job pursuit intentions but only when the information was relevant. Furthermore, a recent laboratory study revealed that more extensive EEO statements in job advertisements were more attractive than less extensive statements to female applicants (McNab & Johnston, 2002). Unfortunately, extensive information concerning AAPs, DMPs, and EEO policies may not be available to job seekers, and we could find no field study replicating McNab and Johnston's finding. Thus, future studies should determine how much information about these policies is available to actual applicants and the effects of variance in the quantity of this information.

It also could be fruitful to investigate outcomes of the OIM tactics discussed here other than those concerning recruitment. For instance, some firms may use ad diversity as a defensive impression management tactic, rather than as an ingratiation tactic, to avoid drawing public attention to a lack of employee diversity or to attenuate the effects of negative publicity produced by a lawsuit. In addition, OIM tactics could influence the retention of minority and female new hires if there is incongruence between the images presented via OIM tactics and an organization's actual diversity climate (McKay & Avery, 2005). For instance, diversity awards advertised to attract diverse applicants could be based on factors that have little bearing on the treatment of female and minority employees (e.g., board of directors composition or an available but unused daycare program). Researchers should examine the potential post-hire effects of the employment brands created by OIM in such instances.

Finally, it is important to remember that OIM tactics used in targeted recruitment are only one of the factors affecting initial applicant

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for making this suggestion.

attraction. Positional and non-diversity-related organizational information plays a major role in the recruitment of female and minority job applicants (K. M. Thomas & Wise, 1999). Consequently, it is imperative to determine the collective effects of these factors during recruitment. For instance, do women and minorities pass on what otherwise appear to be great employment opportunities if an organization is perceived as less hospitable to diversity than alternative firms offering lesser opportunities? Although some related evidence suggests that they might (Rynes et al., 1991; Thaler-Carter, 2001), explicit tests of this sort would prove highly valuable to practitioners.

By integrating and synthesizing the literatures on OIM and targeted recruiting, we believe that this article provides theoretically sound suggestions for practitioners looking to increase the attractiveness of their organizations in the eyes of female and minority job seekers, which is an important first step toward recruiting these individuals (Rynes, 1991). Furthermore, although our research conclusions are based on empirical evidence, theory, and practice concerning the recruitment of racial and ethnic minorities and women, similar principles may apply to the recruitment of older, gay/lesbian, and disabled job seekers. Designing recruitment to create favorable impressions among members of these groups could aid in their attraction. Ultimately, it is our hope that this article will assist those wishing to diversify their applicant pools and to stimulate future research on targeted recruitment.

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