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Arthur D. Martinez

Gerald R. Ferris

Sharon Segrest
ssegrest@mail.usf.edu

Ronald M. Buckley

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A Maladjustment and Power Conceptualization of Diversity in Organizations:
Implications for Cultural Stigmatization and Expatriate Effectiveness

Arthur D. Martinez

Department of Management & Quantitative Methods

College of Business

Illinois State University

Normal, IL 61790

E-mail: adm05h@fsu.edu

Gerald R. Ferris

Department of Management, College of Business

Florida State University, 821 Academic Way, P.O. Box 3061110

Tallahassee, FL 32306-1110

Ph: (847) 899-5540; (850) 644-3548

E-mail: gferris@cob.fsu.edu

Sharon L. Segrest

Department of Management, College of Business

University of South Florida St. Petersburg, 140 Seventh Avenue South

St. Petersburg, FL 33701

Ph: (727) 873-4747, E-mail: ssegrest@mail.st.pt.usf.edu

M. Ronald Buckley

Division of Management, Michael Price College of Business

University of Oklahoma, 307 West Brooks

Norman, OK 73019

Ph: (405) 325-5729

E-mail: mbuckley@ou.edu

Abstract

Belonging to a group that is in the minority in an organization (e.g., racial, cultural) inherently puts individuals at a social disadvantage among the majority group, which can position them in ways so as not to be able to build political skill and acquire power and influence in organizations. Those in the minority must feel genuinely committed to their groups while simultaneously leveraging opportunities outside their groups, if they are to secure and maintain personal power. The propositions provided in this conceptualization argue that individuals who are less committed to their group tend to be significantly more personally maladjusted, which, in turn, reduces the degree of political skill they develop and undermine their personal power levels and effectiveness.

A Maladjustment and Power Conceptualization of Diversity in Organizations:

Implications for Cultural Stigmatization and Expatriate Effectiveness

The study of diversity in organizations has experienced a reasonably long, yet rather undistinguished, existence in organizational sciences research (Cox & Blake, 1991; Friday, Friday, & Moss, 2004; Hamdani, & Buckley, in press; Harrison & Klein, 2007; Ilgen & Youtz, 1986; Nkomo, 1992; Roberson & Block, 2001). Even though there have been considerable incremental moves forward with respect to diversity in organizations, there remain a number of areas which, when investigated, will provide insight into diversity and its influence on organizational members. Diversity is part of our socially constructed reality, so how individuals cope with it can have salient effects upon their performance, personal influence and power, and well-being.

Scholars have emphasized the importance and necessity of multi-level research in organizations (Hackman, 2003). Furthermore, ultimately, a multi-level approach to diversity likely is a maximally advantageous approach for the development of the most informed understanding, because the more micro issues and focus can be viewed as nested within broader contextual factors and structures (Brief, Butz, & Deitch, 2005; Nkomo, 1992; Roberson & Block, 2001).

Indeed, it is easy to view racial diversity issues in the United States as societal-level phenomena that entail stratified power structures of social groups, whereby one group typically enjoys more social power than another group (Mintz & Krymkowski, 2010; Nkomo, 1992; Ogbu, 1986; Omi & Winant, 1986). A logical extension of this phenomenon, and one which we consider in this paper, is an extension to situations where expatriates experience alienation and powerlessness as outsiders with respect to the local

nationals of multinational organizations. Such examination might help to shed important theoretical light upon some of the reasons for ineffectiveness in expatriate assignments (Colakoglu & Caliguiri, 2008; Dowling & Welch, 2005; Harvey & Moeller, in press).

Indeed, the *International Journal of Human Resources Development and Management* recently devoted an entire special issue to the topic of: “Leveraging Workplace Diversity.” Specific notable articles in this special issue focused on initiating, motivating, and managing sustainable innovation through effective management of diversity issues (Miedema, 2010). Also, Bristol and Tisdell (2010) focused on diversity leveraging through career development, which stressed the importance of cultural and social capital in maximizing career development experiences, but at the same time, identifying structural impediments that might limit career opportunities. However, perhaps of greatest relevance to the present paper, Sims (2010) examined the intra-racial discrimination among African-American workers, identifying interesting underlying dynamics of power, privilege, and race.

The social dynamics of organizations, in conjunction with the subjective nature of performance and effectiveness, increasingly suggest that social and political competencies are critical to success and advancement in organizations today. Additionally, evidence suggests that social and political competencies are not distributed evenly across employees, and that such competencies are disproportionately concentrated in the majority group due to socio-historic dynamics. Anecdotal evidence, in conjunction with some theory and research, suggests that individuals in the minority in organizations might possess less well-developed political competencies, which limits their power/influence effectiveness, and therefore, hinders their work outcomes.

Ferris and his colleagues (e.g., Ferris, Frink, & Galang, 1993) proposed the “political skill deficiency” view to explain this phenomenon. Essentially, they argued that individuals in the minority in organizations typically do not receive the type of mentoring that transmits to them, and builds, requisite political skill and understanding that are crucial for effectiveness in organizations. As such, they are placed at a competitive disadvantage compared to their majority counterparts, and are forced to compete in a game in which they do not know the rules and lack the requisite skill or competencies. Similarly, expatriates, due to their outsider status, typically are not privy to mentoring opportunities that would help them to develop those political skills necessary for success.

In an effort to shed greater light on the performance and effectiveness consequences of diversity in organizations, and in expatriate assignments, the purpose of the present paper is to propose a maladjustment and power conceptualization of diversity that highlights the roles of group commitment, personal maladjustment, political skill, and power. First, we define diversity and summarize some of the existing, interdisciplinary research literature. Then, we systematically move through the linkages in the model in Figure 1, and develop testable propositions for how and why group commitment, diversity, and personal maladjustment are associated with political skill, power and influence, organizational commitment, and citizenship behavior.

The proposed conceptual model presented in Figure 1 integrates personal maladjustment and diversity theoretical arguments of Lewin (1941), and the “political skill deficiency” (Ferris et al., 1993) explanation in order to help understand differential effectiveness in organizations for minority and majority group members. This model has generic relevance for diversity and effectiveness in organizations in general, but we make

special reference to diversity issues as they play out in expatriate assignments, with implications for cultural stigmatization.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Theoretical Foundations and Proposition Development

Diversity in Organizations

The combination of both physical or racial differences and cultural or ethnic heritage has been referred to broadly as diversity (Cox & Nkomo, 1993; Roberson & Block, 2001). Most conceptions of diversity are socially constructed, and this has occurred throughout human history (Blanton, 1987; Nkomo, 1992). Some psycho-evolutionary theories on social affiliation (Sauerland & Hammerl, 2008) and theories of diversity-related stratification suggest that biological tendencies have predisposed people by their basic desire for survival and protection of kinship groups, toward ethnocentric and racist behaviors (Gordon, 1978).

Recent organizational research has examined multiple dimensions of racio-ethnicity utilizing terms including physio-ethnicity or race (physical or biological differences) and ethnicity or ethnic identity (cultural identification) (Phinney, 1990; Sanchez & Fernandez, 1993), whereas other researchers have delineated the ethnicity concept to include socio-ethnicity (social upbringing), and psycho-ethnicity (psychological classification of self) (Birman, 1994). The different conceptions of race and ethnicity are obviously complex (see Phinney, 1990 for a review). For the purposes

of this paper, we combine the aforementioned general concepts of race (physical differences) and ethnicity (cultural differences), and refer to them as ‘diversity.’

Group Commitment and Maladjustment

In this section, we discuss group commitment and personal maladjustment. Lewin (1941) argued that some minorities might try to psychologically flee from their groups, which represents an unhealthy way to cope with discrimination, resulting in maladaptation, which in turn, closes off possibilities for mentoring, political skill development, and power/influence and positioning. Lewin’s paradoxical notion suggests that individuals belonging to less-powerful social groups within societal power structures must remain committed to their less-powerful social groups if they are to realize greater adjustment, well-being, and personal power. Those who do not remain committed to their own social group realize what appears to be discrimination regarding performance, power, reputation, and advancement.

Ferris and his colleagues (1993) proposed that there are group differences in access to political skill development through differential mentoring experiences. Integrating these ideas with Lewin’s (1941) discussion, it is suggested that the personal maladjustment that results from lack of group commitment might help explain how these are the very minorities who may isolate themselves from others. Such isolation prevents them from seeking out help from potential mentors, and results in them not being selected to be mentored by those senior managers who could help them to develop the type of political understanding and skill that would allow them to compete well for advancement in organizations, and realize effectiveness in organizations.

Lewin (1941) argued that the group commitment - maladjustment link exists, and is particularly crucial for those in the minority. Group commitment reflects a healthy psychological relationship with one's assigned social group (e.g., Lewin, 1941). Unhealthy psychological relations with one's central social groups tend to produce personal maladjustment (Lewin, 1941). One aim of this paper and conceptualization is to incorporate this potentially valuable concept into a larger model for a better understanding of the complex issues involved.

It is important to recognize that group membership is essentially assigned via societal conventions, and often it is not selected by individuals themselves. However, according to the orthogonal cultural identification model, the possibility of identifying with cultures other than one's own group exists, and a person can shift from monocultural to become bi-cultural or multicultural (Oetting & Beauvais, 1990). Further, degrees of identification or "culturalism" with one's culture can range from culture anomie, or lack of identification, to high identification (Oetting, Swaim, & Chiarella, 1998). This explanation proposes that different cultures are orthogonal to one another versus on opposite ends of the continuum (Friday et al., 2004; Oetting et al., 1998).

Other theories assume that those in the minority want to transition to the majority group, and in doing so, they may experience "acculturative stress" from the dissonance of identifying with two different cultures but not feeling like a full member of either culture (Berry, 1976). Various researchers have suggested that cultural values and group identity begin to form in early childhood, and continues to evolve throughout an individual's life (Adler, 1997; Friday et al., 2004; Oetting & Beauvais, 1990; Oetting et al., 1998). It has

been suggested that belonging to more than one group is a healthy and important way for those in the minority to cope with their status in society (Bell, 1990; Dubois, 1961).

Like most socially constructed arrangements throughout history, groups are hierarchically structured in the United States, so associating with groups that have more power can be beneficial to those in the minority (Dain, 2002; Graves, 2003; Marger, 2005; Ogbu, 1986; Omi & Winant, 1994; Rothenberg, 1992). In other words, there exists an unequal distribution of power among groups (Alderfer, Alderfer, Tucker, & Tucker, 1980; Ogbu, 1986). Humans create in-groups and out-groups as a means to generate self-esteem for in-group members; unfortunately, this often occurs at the expense of out-group members (Oaks, Haslam & Turner, 1994; Rawls, 1999; Turner & Oakes, 1989). The privileged majority or in-group with the most power in the U.S. is the White/Caucasian group (Ilgen & Youtz, 1986; Ogbu, 1986; Rothenberg, 2005). In an international context, the more privileged group typically is the local national group.

The less powerful groups are inherently more vulnerable to groups with more power (Ogbu, 1986; Operario & Fiske, 1998; Marger, 2005). Vulnerability is rooted in aspects of existentiality (i.e., the fear of losing life), and there are real dangers associated with belonging to a group in the minority (Williams, 1994). Restrictions on resources, opportunities, social support, and other psychologically based assets (e.g., belongingness, dignity, respect, approval, self-esteem, etc.) can lead to problems with existential worth, purposefulness, as well as more concrete problems such as discriminatory treatment, harassment, and bullying in the workplace, which can psychologically and physically threaten life and livelihood (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper,

2003; Nelson & Quick, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Stillman, Baumeister, Lambert, Crescioni, DeWall, & Fincham, 2009; Williams, 2007).

Feelings of vulnerability may trigger the fight versus flight response in some individuals (Roth & Cohen, 1986). Due to potentially adverse consequences of belonging to less powerful social groups, those in the minority may desire to break away from their assigned, vulnerable groups in order to avoid the unbearable existential risks that membership in those groups entail. Consequently, by separating themselves from their groups, they isolate themselves leading to an increase in negative reactions such as ostracism, stigmatization, bullying prejudice (Richman & Leary, 2009). Because they will never be fully accepted by another group, this may lead them into the realm of rejection, ostracism, social isolation, tokenism, or “marginal membership” (Baumeister, Brewer, Tice, & Twenge, 2007; Fairhurst & Snavely, 1983; Gerber & Wheeler, 2009; Lewin, 1941; Richman & Leary, 2009; Williams, 2007).

Social groups or collectives are made up of interdependent members (Kelly & Thibaut, 1978; Lewin, 1939; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959). Member similarity is a frequent and customary definition of a social group, and similarity-attraction theory is used to justify why individuals discriminate against those who are dissimilar (Byrne, 1971). However, Lewin (1939) emphasized that members of a social group are not necessarily required to be similar to one another. Instead, a vital feature of a social group, and inclusion in a social group, is the nature and degree of member interdependence (Kelly & Thibaut, 1978; Lewin, 1939). Hence, it is conceptually important to distinguish between similarity and interdependence.

It is more readily apparent how members of the same minority group are physically and culturally similar. However, it is much less obvious how they are interdependent. People have a basic need to belong, and groups are essential sources of belongingness for their members (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; DeWall, Baumeister, & Vohs, 2008; Lewin, 1941). Within any given group, some members may feel more similar to members of another group, but they often will find it difficult to be fully accepted as members of another group (Lewin, 1941).

Hence, people are not afforded a genuine sense of belonging from another group, so they must depend upon their own group for that real and indispensable sense of belongingness. Interdependence is in essence mutual power (Emerson, 1962). Depending upon another entity is equivalent to that entity possessing power. A state of mutual dependency reflects a situation where both parties have resources that the other wants or needs. Interdependence is captured via group commitment (Le & Agnew, 2003), and individuals' felt group interdependence is important, because it is connected to their personal adjustment.

Personal adjustment is the capacity to behave appropriately in given social situations (Lewin, 1941). Personal maladjustment is associated with important individual-level outcomes, such as emotional instability, unbalanced behavior, and decreased personal well being (see Lewin, 1941, p. 143). According to field theory and other sociological literature, a person's behavior is a function of both the person and the person's psychological environment, and these two components interact with one another (Brief et al., 2005; Lewin, 1939; Reskin, McBrier, Kmec, 1999). Hence, as the environment becomes more unstable, the person becomes more unstable (and vice versa).

Marginal membership or marginalization can be represented psychologically as cognitively unstructured regions (Essed, 1991; Lewin, 1939; Omi & Winant, 1986).

Cognitively unstructured regions are not differentiated into clearly distinguishable parts. Therefore, marginal members may experience difficulties understanding how to behave appropriately in many contexts (Essed, 1991; Lewin, 1939). As an example, a marginal member typically will be uncertain if a poor performance evaluation was due to personal shortcomings or to differences in perception between the majority group and those in the minority.

If an individual knew that it was due to personal shortcomings, then individual improvements could be made. Whereas, if the shortcomings were known to be due to the fact that they are part of the group that is in the minority, then energies could be directed at responding appropriately to the situation. However, because the marginal member typically is uncertain of the cause, the response to the situation likely will be unbalanced (e.g., being simultaneously apologetic and accusatory toward his/her evaluator).

Field theory asserts that group belongingness involves the “spatial relation of psychological regions” within an individual (Lewin, 1944, p. 39). For example, a person who feels belongingness toward a social group knows which behaviors are norms for that group, and which behaviors are taboo. Furthermore, group belongingness is a psychological concept that has the conceptual dimension of “psychological position” (Lewin, 1944, p. 39). Basically, this suggests that individuals who experience belongingness know and accept where they belong, and also where they do not belong.

This is consistent with social categorization or social identity theory in which individuals perceive social categories of in-groups, to which they belong, and out-groups,

to which they do not belong (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The conceptual dimension “cognitive structure” refers to “spatial relations of a multitude of psychological regions” (Lewin, 1944, p. 39). Psychological regions (e.g., what it means to belong to one group versus what it means to belong to other groups) defined by clearer boundaries will result in more developed cognitive structures. On the other hand, psychological regions with unclear or fuzzy boundaries are associated with undeveloped cognitive structures.

The conceptual dimension that refers to the movement from one psychological position to another is known as “locomotion” (Lewin, 1944, p. 39). For example, locomotion may involve moving from one social group to another group. The “tendency to locomotion” is recognized as a “force” (Lewin, 1944, p. 39). The “time perspective” in field theory refers to what an individual expects to come true (e.g., fear, hope, and guilt (Lewin, 1944, p. 40). Time perspectives, such as fear and hope, are common forces related to locomotion, and can be associated with rejection-related expectations of negative emotions, such as sadness, anger, jealousy, anger, loneliness and hurt feelings (Richman & Leary, 2009).

A “goal” or “force field” has the conceptual dimension of a “distribution of psychological forces in psychological space” (Lewin, 1944, pp. 39-40). The “overlapping of at least two force fields” is viewed as psychological “conflict” (Lewin, 1944, p. 40). Marginal members want to quit groups they cannot quit, and join groups they cannot join, so they characteristically experience substantial psychological conflict. Field-theoretic analyses of the “marginal member” phenomenon calls attention to at least three important aspects (Lewin, 1941).

First, marginal members are driven (i.e., usually via psychological forces stemming from the time perspective of fear) to change their group memberships (i.e., psychological position locomotion). Second, marginal members inevitably will sense that they will never be “fully” accepted by another group (i.e., they will never be successful at achieving complete repositioning). Third, marginal members ultimately will remain personally maladjusted (i.e., they will remain psychologically conflicted and display conflicting behavior). Also, researchers have suggested another possibility, that a prosocial response to fear of rejection or lack of belongingness that decreases psychological conflict occurs when marginal, minority group members increase the psychological attachment or investment in their in-group in order to increase well-being and feelings of belongingness (Schmidt & Branscombe, 2002).

Contrary to the negative emotions often displayed by marginal members, there are individuals in the minority who, despite any fears and feelings of rejection, will possess feelings of group interdependence and respond in pro-social ways. This is consistent with Richman and Leary’s (2009) multi-motive model of rejection. Those in the minority may feel a sense of commitment toward their groups, and may use strategies to satiate the hunger for belonging by socially “snacking” or looking at symbolic reminders (e.g., e-mails or photographs) for reinforcement of their social connections when they feel a deficit of belonging (Gardner, Pickett, Jefferis, & Knowles, 2005; Lewin, 1941). Alternatively, they may cognitively distort experiences so that they feel more accepted, or they may use self-affirmation strategies to remind themselves of their valued attributes (Murray & Holmes, 2000; Richman & Leary, 2009; Sherman & Cohen, 2006).

These kinds of pro-social or positive attitudes toward their groups will promote less conflict, both psychologically and behaviorally. One reason for this is that they do not possess conflicting group membership goals. Compared to marginal members, these individuals possess relatively healthier relationships with their groups. Conversely, researchers have suggested that weaker group identity, which can be viewed as a type of social isolation or threatened belonging, is related to lower self-esteem and the perception of greater environmental threats (Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Richman & Leary, 2009).

Individuals who belong to the majority will not experience the same dilemma as those in the minority, because they do not face the same set of existential dangers (e.g., Lewin, 1941; Nkomo; 1992). Generally, then, individuals who belong to the majority will not experience similar impacts from more or less group commitment. Thus, we propose that diversity moderates the relationship between minority group commitment and personal maladjustment.

Proposition 1: There is an interaction of group commitment and group membership on personal maladjustment. Specifically, for individuals who belong to the minority group, felt group commitment is negatively related to personal maladjustment. For individuals who belong to the majority group, felt group commitment is unrelated to personal maladjustment.

Personal Maladjustment, Political Skill, and Power

Political skill. Ferris and his colleagues characterized political skill as “a comprehensive pattern of social competencies, with cognitive, affective, and behavioral manifestations, which have both direct effects on outcomes, as well as moderating effects on predictor – outcome relationships” (Ferris, Treadway et al., 2007, p. 291), which has

been defined as: “The ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one’s personal and/or organizational objectives” (Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005, p. 127). The political skill construct is comprised of four underlying dimensions: Social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity.

Politically skilled individuals are more capable of understanding the social context of the workplace. Such individuals are able to read and comprehend social cues, and to accurately detect the underlying intentions of others (Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams, & Thatcher, 2007). Because of this understanding of the work environment, politically skilled individuals behave in ways that are appropriate for a given context, and excel in interpersonal interactions and influence (Treadway, Hochwarter, Kacmar, & Ferris, 2005).

The social astuteness, inherent in political skill, allows individuals to accurately comprehend the social context of the workplace, and to detect others’ motivations. Such individuals reflect the ability to optimally calibrate and control behaviors, and adapt to changes in situational demands, and to do so in a genuine, sincere, and socially appropriate manner (Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005). Such behavior execution tends to create positive perceptions (Treadway et al., 2007), and inspire trust (Treadway et al., 2004) and confidence in others, while also assisting in the creation of broad social networks (Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005; Ferris, Treadway et al., 2007).

Political skill development and acquisition. Employees in organizations experience learning, understanding, and sense making, which is so critical to effectiveness, and represents important aspects of early socialization and mentoring

experiences. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that politics in organizations is a key content area of socialization (Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Gardner, Klein, & Gardner, 1994) and mentoring (e.g., Noe, Greenberger, & Wang, 2002). Chao et al. (1994) suggested that individuals who are well socialized into organizational politics may be more promotable than those who are well socialized with people.

As perhaps one of the principal vehicles for disseminating information and building understanding and savvy about how things work in organizations, mentoring has emerged as an important area of inquiry in the organizational sciences (e.g., Noe et al., 2002). In fact, mentoring has been viewed as the most likely way that employees are educated about politics in the organization (Ferris & Judge, 1991), and Perrewé, Young, and Blass (2002) suggested that the development of political skill is a critical function of mentoring relationships.

Blass, Brouer, Perrewé, and Ferris (2007) reported that mentoring directly affected mastery and understanding of politics in the work environment, which then led to the development of political skill. In so doing, they validated statements about the content of mentoring experiences suggested by Perrewé et al. (2002) and by Lankau and Scandura (2002). Lankau and Scandura suggested that the content of mentoring relationships focuses on both work content and interpersonal, social, and political competencies.

Thus, mentoring and coaching in organizations is a useful way to build and develop political skill in employees. Indeed, Ferris, Davidson, and Perrewé (2005, p. 51) stated: "Mentoring and the informal transmission of information are the principal vehicles by which 'the ropes,' 'the rules of the game,' and so forth are passed on. This

process also conveys valuable information about alliance building, along with access to influential networks where important behind-the-scenes transactions take place.”

Political skill deficiency for those in the minority. Perhaps because they are frequently operating from positions of less power in organizations, those in the minority should be highly motivated to demonstrate influence attempts at work (Fernandez, 1993; Rosenfeld, Giacalone, & Riordan, 1994). However, it might be that these individuals are deficient in their knowledge, skill, and understanding of organization politics, and thus are at a disadvantage when attempting to compete in political dynamics.

This “political skill deficiency” hypothesis was proposed by Ferris and his colleagues, and it suggested that those in the minority typically are not taught the “ropes,” or “inside information” on the politics of the organization, because that information usually is passed on from similar others who are acting as informal advisors in mentoring roles (Ferris, Frink, & Galang, 1993; Ferris, Bhawuk, Frink, Keiser, Gilmore, & Canton, 1996). Indeed, Perrewé et al. (2002) recently argued that a major focus of the mentoring process is on educating workers about the politics of the organization and building political skill.

Therefore, if those in the minority are not able to demonstrate social effectiveness and political savvy, it may be less of a motivation problem and more of a skill deficiency problem. Presumably, such skill deficiency could be addressed through informal training and development that goes on through coaching and mentoring (e.g., Ferris et al., 2005). Unfortunately, the lack of political savvy and skill may result in social and structural positioning problems for these individuals, which make it even more difficult for them to be effective, thus creating further barriers that do not permit fair competition.

Ibarra (1993) argued that network characteristics, such as range and status, affect resource provisions critical to effectiveness. Close ties, that reflect status contacts, can provide access to important, sensitive, and informal information. Furthermore, she suggested that even when those in the minority show a greater range of contacts, advantages may be negated because the broader range is likely to be of lower status. This can result in them being closed out of access to such sensitive work-related information, which might take the form of coaching and mentoring regarding power and political dynamics, and internal job opportunities (e.g., Friedman, Kane, & Cornfield, 1998).

Further work by Ibarra (1995) found that minority managers were less central in their networks, which tended to reduce their access to important work information. Also, she reported that minority managers who achieved the greatest career success were those who practiced a “pluralistic strategy,” which was characterized by efforts to maintain one’s identity, but at the same time utilize effective network building and development strategies used by managers from the majority group. This corresponds to bicultural or multicultural strategies (Bell, 1990).

Also adopting a network perspective, Hayes (1995) found that those in the minority experienced slower managerial advancement in organizations, and proposed that social capital and network positioning served to intervene between employee group membership and advancement progress. Although this, and the above work by Ibarra (1993, 1995), provide an interesting and logical perspective on minority effectiveness, it seems to suggest one important additional question of just how do people get positioned where they are in networks within organizations?

We suggest that it is the development of political skill that actually gets individuals effectively positioned in organizations, so that they are able to take advantage of job and career opportunities, whether they are minority or non-minority employees. Furthermore, those in the minority who position themselves in ways to exercise influence, gain power, be personally effective, and realize career success are personally well adjusted individuals who both retain their group identity, yet also adopt majority influence and networking strategies.

Some indirect support for the validity of the political skill deficiency hypothesis proposed by Ferris and his colleagues (Ferris et al., 1993; Ferris, Bhawuk et al., 1996) has been provided in recent years. Ferris, Frink, Bhawuk et al. (1996) investigated the extent to which diverse groups reacted differently to politics in organizations as a function of their level of understanding of politics. Specifically, it was hypothesized that understanding would moderate the relationships between politics perceptions and work outcomes of job anxiety and job satisfaction for white males but not for women or other minorities. The case for white females was suggested to produce mixed, and less clear-cut, results.

The results provided support for the hypotheses, suggesting that “time, experience, and comprehension of the work environment and how it operates (i.e., understanding) would be expected to lessen the potential negative effects of perceptions of politics to the degree one has a conceptual context, framework, or road map for the intricacies, boundaries, and informal rules of the game of politics. This context is what is provided to “insiders” through the transmission of privileged political information, and is unavailable to “outsiders.” If one does not possess the conceptual context of politics in a

particular environment, simply spending more time and gaining more experience in that environment will do little to shed light on the way political dynamics operate” (Ferris et al., 1996, p. 31).

A more recent study also has provided indirect support for this perspective about political skill differences by race/ethnicity. Blass et al. (2007) suggested that mentoring in organizations tends to focus on “learning the ropes,” or understanding the politics of the organization. Furthermore, this process also is believed to result in building greater political skill, hence, networking ability. Their study examined the relationships among mentoring, politics understanding, and networking ability. It was proposed that individuals’ who experience the mentoring process, would report a higher level of knowledge regarding understanding the political climate in the organization, which would lead to greater networking ability.

Specifically, Blass et al. (2007) reported that politics understanding fully mediated the relationship between mentoring and networking ability. Additionally, they tested, and provided support for, the “political skill deficiency hypothesis,” that the mentoring - politics understanding – networking ability mediated relationship would be moderated by gender and by race/ethnicity, such that the mediation would occur for men and for Caucasians, but not for women and minorities.

The effects of both race and gender on advancement in the workplace were investigated by Bell and Nkomo (2001) in a multi-year qualitative study. They reported that a main barrier to advancement for women, in general, and black women in particular, was limited access to informal and social networks within organizations. Similarly, expatriates, due to their outsider status, are typically not privy to informal and social

networks within organizations that might help them to develop those skills necessary for to facilitate their performance. Interestingly, those able to overcome these barriers to advancement and realize success shared several things in common.

First, these women were keen observers of the social-structural barriers and the organizational culture, and thus were able to steer through their political corporate cultures without sacrificing their own identities. Second, they were able to establish the support of several influential people within the organization. Third, these women were able to use their influence in such a manner that was not perceived as brazen; that is, they were honest and forthright, and sincere. Finally, they were able to obtain important information even when they did not have direct access to the dominant informal organizational networks (Bell & Nkomo, 2001).

As such, these women are examples of individuals reflecting dissimilarity with the majority group (or dominant culture) who were able to develop political skill, use political skill to overcome the barriers to advancement, and succeed in the upper echelons of their corporations. Their political understanding and skill allowed them to use interpersonal influence and networking skills to garner the support of influential people in the organization, thus building and leveraging their social capital in influential ways to achieve their goals. Further, these women were able to access important information, which was then used to increase their understanding of the environment, but also to enhance their ability to use influence and build power bases.

So, it appears that the “political skill deficiency” hypothesis provides a reasonable explanation for the differential treatment and outcomes of those in the minority in organizations today. Those individuals who do not achieve success in organizations may

not do so because they are not equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and understanding to compete with those who do. Furthermore, the success of some individuals in the minority group might be explained by the special opportunities, information, and experiences presented to them by mentors who positioned them to be treated like “insiders.”

At this point, we utilize field theory to contend that a primary cause for “political skill deficiency” is personal maladjustment. Lewin (1941) argued that race and ethnicity are typically significant sources of personal maladjustment. Personally maladjusted individuals are psychologically conflicted. Psychologically conflicted individuals typically display conflicting behavior in social situations, because their cognitive structures are undeveloped. Hence, personally maladjusted individuals do not fully comprehend the appropriate and inappropriate behavior required by their social groups. This incomprehension of required behavior is incompatible with political skill.

Proposition 2: Personal maladjustment is negatively related to political skill.

Proposition 3: Personal maladjustment fully mediates the relationship between group commitment and political skill.

Politically skilled individuals possess the ability to adjust and calibrate their behavior to different situations in a genuine and sincere manner. They are very socially aware, and they reflect the capacity to generate alliances, coalitions, and networks of connections they can leverage for influence. This set of competencies inspires the trust, support, and confidence of others, and influences their decisions and actions toward these politically skilled individuals (Ferris, Treadway et al., 2007). As such, political skill has

been theorized to influence performance, reputation, power, and career success evaluations by decision makers (e.g., Ferris et al., 2005; Ferris et al., 2007).

To date, empirical research has reported strong and consistent positive predictability of political skill on job performance ratings (e.g., Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005; Jawahar, Meurs, Ferris, & Hochwarter, 2008; Kolodinsky, Treadway, & Ferris, 2007; Semadar, Robins, & Ferris, 2006). Theory and research in this area has suggested that similar patterns of relationships exist between political skill and career success measures, and empirical evidence recently has supported such suggestions (Blickle, Schneider, Liu, & Ferris, 2009). Political knowledge and understanding has been shown to be related to promotion, salary, and career satisfaction, in a recent meta-analysis (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005).

The notion of political skill as requisite for success in organizations is implicit in the results of a study by Cox and Nkomo (1986). They argued that raters use different criteria to evaluate ratees depending upon the group identity of the ratee. Because the dominant coalition typically is made up of white males, this situation would typically find whites rating blacks more on social behaviors than on objective, job-related criteria. Social behaviors are prone to impression management, particularly by those with well-developed political skill, and thus can be opportunities for subordinates to exercise influence over their performance ratings (e.g., Ferris, Judge, Rowland, & Fitzgibbons, 1994; Wayne & Ferris, 1990).

However, the fact that those in the minority group historically have not done well in this process, and often receive lower performance ratings than those in the majority, might suggest that indeed they suffer from “political skill deficiency,” as argued by Ferris

et al. (1993). What is needed are more direct tests of the political skill deficiency hypothesis in order to not only assess the extent to which there are race/ethnicity differences in political skill, but that political skill then mediates the relationship between race-ethnicity and important work outcomes. The present research is intended to address this need.

Proposition 4: Political skill is positively related to power/influence.

Proposition 5: Political skill fully mediates the relationship between personal maladjustment and power/influence.

Personal Maladjustment, Organizational Commitment, and OCB

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), with roots in early industrial and organizational psychology literature (Barnard, 1938; Katz, 1964), originally was conceptualized by Organ (1988) as the “good soldier syndrome.” Since then, many revisions and refinements have been made to the construct, and OCB research has proliferated utilizing different contexts and proposing various dimensions (Bowler & Brass, 2006). Consistent with previous research, Schnappe (1998) found that organizational commitment was a significant correlate of OCB, and that organizational commitment explained a significant amount of the variance in OCB.

In a 2002 meta-analysis of OCB with effect sizes of 37 studies (including Schanppe’s aforementioned study), LePine, Erez, and Johnson (2002) and numerous other researchers have confirmed that organizational commitment is an important predictor of OCB (; Spitzmuller, Van Dyne & Illies, 2008). For this reason, we include this important and common relationship between organizational commitment and OCB in our model as proposed below.

We contend that personal maladjustment is negatively related to organizational commitment. The meta-analysis conducted by Mathieu and Zajac (1990) found that organizational commitment was strongly, and positively, related to perceived personal competence. Personally maladjusted employees typically perceive less personal competence, especially with regard to social effectiveness (e.g., Lewin, 1944). The same study (i.e., Mathieu & Zajac, 1990) also showed that job role ambiguity was moderately, and negatively, related to organizational commitment. More personally maladjusted employees are more likely to perceive ambiguity in their job roles, and thus less organizational commitment.

In the counterproductive work behavior (CWB) literature, social exchange theory (Thiabut & Kelley, 1959), psychological contract theory (Rousseau, 1989), and the reciprocity norm (Gouldner, 1960) all have been used to explain the relationship between OCB and CWB, as well as the relationship between OCB and organizational commitment, organizational justice, and satisfaction (Dalal, 2005). According to social exchange theory, relationships are viewed as being based on perceived cost-benefit analysis. In other words, workplace dissatisfaction ultimately should lead to lower organizational commitment and lower incidences of OCB.

Similar to CWB, personal maladjustment is associated with negative emotions and outcomes, such as emotional instability, unbalanced behavior, and decreased personal well being (see Lewin, 1941, p. 143). This corresponds with the self-regulation perspective that argues that people are unable to self-regulate after being rejected, and this often leads to antisocial (e.g. defensive), avoidant, or aggressive responses as opposed to pro-social behaviors (Baumeister, 2005; Richman & Leary, 2009; Twenge

Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007). This lends additional support to our contention that personal maladjustment would be negatively related to organizational commitment.

A positive relationship has been empirically demonstrated between feelings of elevation (i.e., positive emotion) and pro-social or altruistic behavior (Schnall, Roper & Fessler, 2010). The altruistic behavior in the previous study is quite similar to OCB. Therefore, we would expect the negative feelings associated with maladjustment to be negatively related to both OCB and organizational commitment. Consistent with this argument, Twenge et al., (2007) demonstrated that social exclusion was negatively related to pro-social or helping behavior. Their study supports our assertions to the degree that personal maladjustment and OCB substitute for social exclusion and pro-social behavior, respectively.

Organizational commitment is positively related to OCB (e.g., see LePine et al., 2002). Because personal maladjustment is expected to be negatively related to organizational commitment, we also expect that personal maladjustment would be negatively related to OCB, and a 2005 meta-analysis conducted by Dalal supports this idea, in that he found a modest negative relationship between OCB and CWB. We would expect that maladjustment would be related to OCB in the same manner as other CWBs. In other words, we assert that personal maladjustment is negatively related to OCB, mediated by organizational commitment. Thus, we offer the following set of propositions:

Proposition 6: Personal maladjustment is negatively related to organizational commitment.

Proposition 7: Organizational commitment is positively related to organizational citizenship behavior.

Proposition 8: Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between personal maladjustment and organizational citizenship behavior.

Discussion

The proposed theoretical model attempts to develop a more informed understanding of diversity and group membership in organizations. As such, it responds to Nkomo (1992), who lamented the lack of understanding of the role of diversity in organizational behavior, and appealed to scholars for more systematic, multi-level efforts to study diversity in organizations. Also, the present investigation provided an initial reply to Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, Blass, Kolodinsky, and Treadway (2002), who after review of theory and research on social influence in organizations, concluded that we know virtually nothing about diversity, power, and influence.

Finally, this investigation responds to Hackman's (2003) call for more multi-level research in the organizational sciences, and to Roberson and Block's (2001) call for more research that examines the broader contextual effects on those in the minority in organizations (both racially and culturally), with particular reference to networks and social capital. There is some evidence that the personally maladjusted demonstrate self-limiting behaviors, which might close them out of critical experiences contributing to their potential success. Similarly, expectations of rejection may cause those in the minority to refocus their political efforts among their own groups. This could be a productive strategy if it is not done to the exclusion of political efforts focused on powerful majority groups.

Also, with regard to how people relate, we suggested that individuals are influenced by their group's relative power in society. Those in the minority sometimes yearn to flee their less powerful groups in an effort to gain more power. Moreover, when they are unable to do so, they may invest more into their in-group and give up on political strategies directed toward the majority group. We suggest that learning bicultural political skills is often important and necessary for success in organizations.

Contributions and Implications of the Conceptualization

Research to date has demonstrated that increased social/political skill is associated with increased social capital, higher reputation, greater power, increased job performance ratings, and higher promotability ratings and salary (e.g., Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005; Ferris, Treadway et al., 2007; Ferris, Witt, & Hochwarter, 2001;). If those in the minority reflect lower levels of such skills, then they will be at a competitive disadvantage with those who do possess political skill and power/influence, in competing for work outcome rewards. Additionally, efforts need to be made by those in power in organizations to overcome the previously mentioned similarity-attraction tendencies, and mentor those who are dissimilar to themselves. Individuals are inherently constrained with regard to their effectiveness in dealing with social/cultural structures.

Typically, individual responses to social problems have limited efficacy. Belonging to a less powerful minority group can be inherently disadvantageous for an individual, but paradoxically, failure to commit to those less powerful groups causes further disadvantage. Those in power positions are attracted to those who are similar to themselves. Thus, more energy, attention, and resources are directed at developing these similar individuals, resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy which perpetuates the success

of majority individuals and in turn perpetuates the various ceilings or barriers confronting different minority groups.

Directions for Future Research

The obvious initial direction for future research is to conduct tests of the proposed theoretical model and testable propositions. Additionally, one area for future research would be to investigate potential predictors of group commitment, and more careful examination of the maladjustment construct. Maladjustment deserves more attention, and could prove to be very useful in organizational science research. In the future, research could examine the various types of emotions associated with maladjustment related to minority group status.

This could be tied to the literature examining reactions to rejections. Some research has suggested that many of the negative reactions to rejection (e.g., sadness, anger, jealousy, anger, and loneliness) may be rooted in “hurt feelings” or at least heavily involve some degree of hurt feelings (Leary & Leder, in press). Research in the social exclusion literature also has demonstrated various pro-social reactions in response to rejection as a renewed attempt to gain acceptance, and this research could be extended to encompass pro-social responses to being dissimilar to the majority group.

Recent research has likened the pain from social exclusion to tangible pain. For example, extreme rejection, ostracism, or betrayal by colleagues can be likened to a punch in the stomach, a slap in the face, or even a knife in the heart (Zhou & Gao, 2008). Future research could even examine, in experimental research, the differences and/or similarities between physical pain and social pain from rejection, and the buffering effects from sources such as social support. This may be particularly salient in collective

cultures in which group acceptance is critical, and in Asian and Latin cultures where “face” and pride are essential to self-esteem.

So, examining political skill deficiency in the U.S., the multicultural and international comparisons of these concepts is a fertile area for research. One social psychology theory that has been used as an attempt to assimilate those in the minority and to explain prejudice is the contact hypothesis. This hypothesis posits that the best way to reduce prejudice is through positive interactions between the majority and minority groups. This is considered an assimilation attempt, since it is trying to blur the boundaries of the groups. In future research, it would be worthwhile to see if the contact hypothesis, in fact, can be effectively utilized in organizations or in laboratory experiments that simulate organizations to see if this really is a useful approach to reduce prejudice and to increase the value of diversity.

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Figure 1. *Model of Diversity, Personal Maladjustment, and Power in Organizations*