

# Investigating the Racioethnic Differences in the Link Between Workplace Racioethnic Dissimilarity and Life Satisfaction

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Though researchers have examined racioethnic dissimilarity in the workplace, few have looked at how it relates to life satisfaction, and none have examined prospective racioethnic differences in this linkage. This study used data from a nationally representative interview survey of more than 500 people employed in the United States to test relationships between workplace dissimilarity, prejudice, racioethnicity, and life satisfaction. We found that the dissimilarity–satisfaction linkage is positive for Black and Hispanic Americans and negative for White Americans. Further exploring the latter finding, our results showed that the negative association between dissimilarity and life satisfaction was present only among White Americans higher in prejudice. This study extends the literature on interracial interactions and further illustrates the importance of reducing prejudice in organizational settings.

*Keywords:* life satisfaction, racioethnic dissimilarity, prejudice

Future projections indicate that approximately half of the U.S. labor force will be composed of racioethnic minorities by 2050 (Toossi, 2006). Given that Americans are living increasingly racioethnically segregated lives outside of work (Estlund, 2003), one must wonder how they will respond to the influx of minorities into the workplace. As the proportions of people from different racioethnic groups grows, employees stand to find themselves working with a greater percentage of racioethnically dissimilar coworkers than before. For instance, Black employees will work with more Hispanic, White, and Asian colleagues than they did previously, and vice versa. Unfortunately, employees often react unfavorably to higher levels of workplace racioethnic dissimilarity in the form of lower organizational commitment and greater job withdrawal (Thomas, 2008; Tsui & Gutek, 1999).

Beyond the previously demonstrated effects on workplace attitudes and behaviors, workplace racioethnic dissimilarity probably also relates to employees' more global attitudes such as life satisfaction. To our knowledge, however, only a single study (i.e., Enchautegui-de-Jesus, Hughes, Johnston, & Oh, 2006) has considered this possibility, finding that life satisfaction was the highest when employees worked in settings with moderate levels of racioethnic dissimilarity. Notably, they did not test for racioethnic differences in the response patterns of their participants and did not include any White employees. Consequently, it remains uncertain how the dissimilarity–life satisfaction relationship might differ depending upon racioethnicity, which is important because several

studies have documented differences in the ways majority and minority group members react to members of other groups (Richeson & Shelton, 2007; Tonidandel, Avery, Bucholtz, & McKay, 2008). Failure to understand racioethnic differences in the workplace dissimilarity–life satisfaction relationship represents both a theoretical shortcoming (Proudford & Nkomo, 2006) and a potential threat to organizational effectiveness as companies grow increasingly diverse.

To fill this void, the present study investigates racioethnic group differences in the linkage between perceived racioethnic dissimilarity and employee life satisfaction by using data from a large national survey. We choose life satisfaction as our criterion because (a) it relates to important personal and organizational outcomes such as health and job performance (Schaefer, King, & Bernard, 2007; Wright, Cropanzano, & Bonett, 2007) and (b) it contributes incremental variance to the prediction of performance beyond that of job satisfaction alone (Jones, 2006). Importantly, beyond simply identifying prospective between-groups differences in the dissimilarity–life satisfaction relationship, we also seek to explain them. Specifically, we examine how variance in racioethnic prejudice influences the response pattern of White Americans, whom we expect to differ from Blacks and Hispanics with respect to the dissimilarity–life satisfaction linkage. In the following sections, we briefly review the literature on interracial interactions to develop the conceptual rationale for our hypotheses.

## Interracioethnic Interactions

A number of researchers have contributed to our understanding of interracial interactions (i.e., those containing members of different racioethnic groups). For instance, meta-analytic evidence demonstrates that well-structured contact with members of other racioethnic groups can lessen prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Despite this potential benefit, however, other research clearly shows that interracial interactions often produce stress, anxiety, and discomfort for the participants involved (Dovidio, Hebl, Richeson, & Shelton, 2006). Among minorities,

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