An Analysis of The Mentor Selection Process as Impacted by Stereotypes and Social Group Identification

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Introduction

- Social identity theory (SIT) proposes that people derive a portion of their self-concept from their social group memberships
- A key concept within SIT is social categorization which refers to the tendency of people to classify themselves and others into various groups based on similar characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and/or gender.
- Past research has found that racial and gender minorities may subvert expectations by preferring to interact with members of the out-group while at work.
- At work, formal and in-formal mentorships are a common relationship type, with 100% of Fortune 50 companies having mentoring programs.
- This study aims to investigate how social group identification and stereotypes impact who a mentee would prefer as a mentor.
  - How do these preferences differ across race, ethnicity, and gender?
  - How are these preferences impacted by race, ethnicity, and gender?
  - Are these preferences supported or contradicted by stereotypes about those groups?

Methods

- Florida State undergraduate students (N= 116) completed a fully online research study through Qualtrics
- The study should have taken no more than 30 minutes total to complete and participants were compensated with 0.5 SONA credit.
- Participants completed a series of demographic questions and identity scales
  - The Cross-Ethnic Racial Identity – Adult Scale
  - Ethnic Identity Scale - Brief
  - Hoffman Gender Scale
  - Swann Identity Fusion Measure
- Students answered questions about their preferences in a mentor and their beliefs surrounding mentoring
- Example of questions; responses were on a Likert scale
  - "I prefer having a mentor who is my same ethnicity"
  - "if given the choice between 2 similar mentors, I will almost ALWAYS choose the mentor who shares my same gender"

Hypothesis

- **Hypothesis 1:** Participants with strong racial, ethnic, and gender identity scores will prefer a mentor who shares those same identities.
- **Hypothesis 2**: Participants with a weak racial, ethnic, or gender identity will not have a preference for the demographics of their mentor in either direction.
- **Hypothesis 3:** Participants with scores that indicate a negative relationship to their own race, ethnicity, or gender will prefer a mentor who does not share their same demographic.

Correlations

		Prefers mentor of same race	Racial/Ethnic identity scale
Prefers mentor of same race	Pearson Correlation	1	.275**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.005
	N	103	103
Racial/Ethnic identity scale	Pearson Correlation	.275**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	
	N	103	103

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

		Prefers mentor of same race/ethnicity	Negative attitudes towards own race/ethnicity
Prefers mentor of same race/ethnicity	Pearson Correlation	1	−.394**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	103	103
Negative attitudes towards own race/ethnicity	Pearson Correlation	−.394**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	103	103

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

		Prefers mentor of same gender	Gender identity strength
Prefers mentor of same gender	Pearson Correlation	1	.255**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.009
	N	103	103
Gender identity strength	Pearson Correlation	.255**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	
	N	103	103

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Scatterplots

Results

- **Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 supported:** It was found that the strength of one's identity in their race/ethnicity is positively correlated with a desire for a mentor of the same race/ethnicity. r (101) = .28, p = .005. It was also found that the strength of one's identity in their gender is positively correlated with a desire for a mentor of the same gender. r (101) =.26, p = .009.
- **Hypothesis 3 supported:** It was found that a negative relationship and perception towards one's own race/ethnicity was negatively correlated with a desire for a mentor of their same race/ethnicity. r (101) = -.39, p < .001.

Discussion

- Negative stereotypes about racial and gender minorities play a part in the negative relationship to one's own race and the negative preference towards mentors of a certain demographic
- **Implications**
  - This is important in the workplace because it can be used when pairing entry-level employees with senior employees within a diverse organization
  - Can be used to help organizations retain diverse employees
- **Future directions**
  - In the future, I would be interested in looking at the differences in mentor racial, ethnic, or gender preferences across each races ethnicity, and gender
  - I would be interested in looking at the mentor preferences across major and career
  - I would be interested in looking at this same research question from a mentor perspective
- **Limitations**
  - The participants are all FSU undergraduate students; most of them are psychology majors and women.
  - No scale measuring negative relationships to participant's own gender
  - No experimental manipulations