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Does Communicating Measurable Diversity Goals Attract or Repel Historically Marginalized Job Applicants? Evidence From the Lab and Field

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Many organizations struggle to attract a demographically diverse workforce. How does adding a measurable goal to a public diversity commitment—for example, "We care about diversity" versus "We care about diversity and plan to hire at least one woman or racial minority for every White man we hire"—impact application rates from women and racial minorities? Extant psychological theory offers competing predictions about how historically marginalized applicants might respond to such goals. On one hand, measurable diversity goals may raise belongingness concerns among marginalized group members who are uncomfortable with being recruited and hired based on their demographics. On the other, measurable goals might increase organizational attraction by signaling that marginalized group members are more likely to be hired. In a preregistered field experiment (n = 5,557), including measurable diversity goals in job advertisements increased application likelihood among marginalized group members—women and racial minorities—by 6.5%, without sacrifices to candidate quality. These field effects were primarily driven by White women, who were 10.5% more likely to apply after seeing a measurable diversity goal. Follow-up studies with women (total n = 893, preregistered) and racial minorities (total n = 865, preregistered) suggest that although measurable diversity goals signal a more instrumental approach to diversity, they also increase perceived strategic benefits and beliefs that the organization's commitment is genuine among both groups, which in turn are tied to increased willingness to apply. We discuss the tensions marginalized group members face when evaluating organizational diversity initiatives.

Public Significance Statement

Many organizations hope to diversify their workforces, but struggle to identify strategies to attract a more diverse pipeline. We explore whether communicating specific, measurable diversity goals can increase application rates from women and racial minorities relative to communicating a vague commitment to diversity alone. Our results suggest this strategy can be effective, especially among White women. Measurable diversity goals signal to marginalized candidates that they are more likely to be hired, more likely to belong, and more likely to encounter a genuine commitment to diversity at the organization.

Keywords: diversity, measurable goals, organizational attraction, gender, race

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The additional online material, preregistrations, data, and code are available on the Open Science Framework (OSF) at https://osf.io/zf423. This work has been presented at several conferences, brown bags, and seminars, including the Academy of Management conference, the International Association for Conflict Management conference, the Society for Judgment and Decision Making conference, the Society for Personality and Social Psychology conference, Behavioral Economics Seminar at the University of Chicago, the New England Managerial Decision Making Symposium in Boston, the Wharton Organizational Behavior conference, Columbia Management Seminar, the Rotman Organizational Behavior Seminar, the University of California Los Angeles Organizational Behavior Seminar, the Stockholm School of Economics, the Cornell Behavioral Economics and Decisions Research Seminar, and the Dartmouth University Tuck Management Research Symposium. Beyond our OSF folder and these conference and seminar talks, the data and ideas in the article have not been shared elsewhere. The research was partially supported by a grant from the Mack Institute for Innovation Management, Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania awarded to Erika L. Kirgios.

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Organizations frequently publicize their commitment to increasing demographic diversity in the workplace. Eighty-seven percent of Fortune 500 companies share diversity values statements publicly (Jones & Donnelly, 2017), and 97% of Fortune 100 companies highlight ongoing diversity initiatives (e.g., affinity groups, internships for underrepresented college students, bias trainings)[1] on their websites. In 2020 alone, U.S. companies pledged over 35 billion dollars to projects advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (Weber, 2020). Yet despite these public commitments, many companies struggle to diversify, in part because they fail to persuade individuals from marginalized groups to apply for positions in the first place (Avery & McKay, 2006; Coury et al., 2020). Our research explores whether a shift in how organizations communicate diversity commitments might impact application rates among historically marginalized candidates.[2]

We examine the effect of including *measurable diversity goals* in job ads on subsequent application rates from women and racial minorities. Currently, most companies employ generic, vague statements about their desire to promote diversity and inclusion to attract historically marginalized people (e.g., "JP Morgan Chase is working to drive a diverse and inclusive culture for our employees and our business"; JP Morgan Chase, 2021). But some take a different tack, publicly setting more specific, quantified diversity goals (e.g., "By 2030, we [at VMware] are confident that we will hire at least one woman for every one man we hire"; VMware, 2021). Measurable diversity goals such as VMware's are targets that focus on achieving a specific, quantifiable diversity-related outcome. Because measurable diversity goals set aims based on clearly defined metrics, they make it straightforward to evaluate an organization's standards and progress. Unlike vague goals (e.g., "We strive towards equity and inclusion"), assessing whether a measurable diversity goal has been met should not be a matter of opinion. Success on vague goals may be particularly difficult to judge in the domain of diversity, where judgments are often subjective and vary widely based on an individual's identity and status (Bauman et al., 2014; Danbold & Unzueta, 2020; Unzueta et al., 2012); measurable goals avoid this issue by setting explicit standards ahead of time. Internally, setting measurable goals may improve follow-through and serve as an effective diversification strategy (Locke & Latham, 2006). But it is unclear how such goal setting might be perceived by organizational outsiders. Specifically, how might communicating a measurable commitment influence historically marginalized individuals' willingness to apply?

Theoretical Background

Extant theories offer opposing predictions about how women and racial minorities might receive measurable diversity goals, with some prior research suggesting that measurable targets will be seen as a negative signal of instrumentality, and other work suggesting they will be viewed as a positive signal of commitment and follow-through. In the following sections, we review these possibilities.

Measurable Diversity Goals May Repel Women and Racial Minorities

Relative to values-focused diversity commitments, measurable diversity goals may signal that an organization is treating diversity instrumentally and reducing what could be viewed as a moral imperative to a performance metric (Georgeac & Rattan, 2023; Hauser & Katz, 1998; Ordóñez et al., 2009). To achieve a measurable diversity goal, organizations might seek out candidates on the basis of demographics (e.g., via targeted recruitment), use identity as a tiebreaker to determine who gets hired, or generally consider surface-level characteristics as a component of the hiring decision. This instrumental approach may repel women and racial minorities for two broad reasons: (1) They may expect to be objectified and treated as organizational resources to be counted and tracked, and (2) they may expect to be judged as less deserving of their place in the organization and to struggle to belong as a result. We explore each in more depth below.

Because hiring a marginalized candidate would be instrumentally useful to organizations with measurable diversity goals, women and racial minorities may worry about being treated as mere tools for goal achievement. This risks making women and racial minorities feel objectified: treated not as valued individuals but as "things" to be tallied up so higher-ups in the organization can make satisfactory progress on their goals (Baldissarri & Andrighetto, 2021; Belmi & Schroeder, 2021; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Thinking that an organization views one in this way is likely to be aversive: Feeling objectified reduces self-efficacy, increases shame and guilt, and damages performance at work (Baldissarri & Andrighetto, 2021; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Moradi & Huang, 2008). For example, when workers completing a proofreading task were treated instrumentally—by being referred to as their identification number, rather than as "dear collaborators"—they reported greater self-objectification and performed less effectively on the task itself (Baldissarri & Andrighetto, 2021).

At the extremes, an instrumental, strategic focus on one's demographic characteristics may feel dehumanizing, undercutting

[1] This estimate stems from an analysis of Fortune 100 company websites conducted by the research team in 2021; see additional online material (Kirgios et al., 2024) for more details.

[2] In this work, we use "historically marginalized candidates/groups" to refer to people who identify as women and as non-White racial/ethnic minorities. We acknowledge that other identity groups are also historically marginalized in the workplace, though they are not the focus of this article. We also note that although both women and racial minorities are historically marginalized, their responses to diversity initiatives and communications may differ, and we explore this possibility in our data.

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women's and racial minorities' belief in their inherent value and undermining their trust in the organization (Belmi & Schroeder, 2021; Haslam, 2006; Väyrynen & Laari-Salmela, 2018). In fact, prior work has shown that job candidates who read more versus less instrumental (i.e., calculative and strategic) organizational mission statements viewed those statements as more objectifying and reported lower feelings of organizational attraction (Belmi & Schroeder, 2021). To the extent that measurable diversity goals make women and racial minorities feel like an organization would view them as resources for goal achievement rather than as valued human beings, they may reduce willingness to apply.

Beyond the inherent discomfort associated with being viewed as an object or tool for goal achievement, being treated as a means to an end may also lead women and racial minorities to infer that they will experience less belonging at work (Georgeac & Rattan, 2023; Starck et al., 2021). Because women and racial minorities are underrepresented in many industries and organizational environments, belonging is a scarce and valued resource for them (Shore et al., 2011). In fact, anticipated belonging is one of the strongest and most reliable drivers of organizational attraction for women and racial minorities (Avery & McKay, 2006; Cheryan et al., 2009; Cohen & Swim, 1995; Flory et al., 2021; Gaucher et al., 2011; Leibbrandt & List, 2018; McNab & Johnston, 2002; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008).

Relative to vague, values-focused statements, measurable goals may trigger social identity threat, or concerns about being devalued based on identity group membership (Branscombe et al., 1999; Georgeac & Rattan, 2023). Because measurable goals highlight that marginalized group members may be preferentially hired due to their demographic identity, women and racial minorities may worry that evaluators (and colleagues) will view them only through the lens of their stigmatized group membership. In particular, they may worry that they will be branded as "diversity hires" once they arrive on the job, chosen for their demographics rather than their skills and character (Leslie et al., 2014). They may expect that colleagues will therefore view them as unworthy of their place in the organization, judging them as less qualified than their White male peers. Consistent with this theorizing, in a large-scale field experiment, Leibbrandt and List (2018) found that racial minorities were less willing to apply to jobs that included equal opportunity employer statements in their job advertisements, particularly when those jobs were located in majority-White cities, because they expected to be treated as "symbolic" hires chosen for their demographics rather than their merits. And these concerns may be well founded. When organizations explicitly consider identity during the hiring process, hired marginalized group members tend to be judged as less warm and competent by their colleagues (Dover et al., 2020; Heilman, 1994; Leslie et al., 2014; Plaut et al., 2011). As a result, marginalized group members might anticipate that even if the organization were to hire them, current employees and supervisors may not be welcoming or invested in their success.

Thus, women and racial minorities may feel less willing to apply to organizations that communicate measurable diversity goals.

Measurable Diversity Goals May Attract Women and Racial Minorities

Although diversity goals could raise concerns for marginalized group members, there is also reason to expect that women and racial minorities might *prefer* to apply to organizations that advertise specific, measurable diversity goals relative to those that do not. In particular, prospective applicants might prioritize applying to places where they expect to be more likely to get an offer. While most people are likely to weigh their perceived chances of success when making application decisions, these concerns might be particularly salient for job seekers from minoritized groups due to anticipated discrimination in the hiring process, or the belief that bias and prejudice will make their career trajectory precarious (Fisk & Overton, 2019; Kang et al., 2016; Linos, 2018). Prior research suggests that, in response to concerns about the impact of discrimination on their careers, women and racial minorities are especially inclined to apply to organizations where they expect to find opportunities for long-term success (Avery, 2003; Linos, 2018). Similarly, one primary consideration of job seekers from marginalized groups deciding where to focus their attention may be their likelihood of successfully landing a job.

There is also evidence that women and racial minorities sometimes prioritize strategic benefits over social belonging when deciding where to work. Despite the documented negative effects of being tokens, women and racial minorities are more willing to join groups where they will be tokens when they expect to compete against fellow group members for scarce resources (e.g., jobs, bonuses) because they think that standing out on the basis of their identity will confer a strategic benefit (Kirgios et al., 2020). Thus, if women and racial minorities expect to be more likely to get a job at organizations that communicate measurable diversity goals, they should be more willing to apply to those organizations.

Measurable diversity goals may increase marginalized group members' expectations that they will receive a job offer in part because people believe specific goals boost follow-through relative to vague ones. Not only are specific goals tied to increased motivation and effort relative to vague goals (Locke & Latham, 1990), third-party perceivers might also expect that employees and organizational leaders will be more accountable to quantified diversity commitments. While it is difficult to assess whether an organization is making progress on a vague diversity goal (e.g., whether a company has followed through on a promise to "pursue equity for all"), it is easier to assess whether an organization is making progress on specific, measurable goals: The metrics and hoped-for outcome are clearly laid out and progress (or lack thereof) can be tracked. Increased accountability, in turn, should boost follow-through on diversity goals and commitments (Axt & To, 2024; Castilla, 2015; Costa, 2024; Kalev, 2014). If women and racial minorities forecast the benefits of specificity for goal achievement, they might expect organizations that publicly communicate measurable diversity goals to be more likely to follow through. Women and racial minorities may therefore believe they are more likely to receive a job offer from organizations that advertise measurable diversity goals. As a result, women and racial minorities who strategically prioritize likelihood of success when deciding whether to apply might be more likely to apply to organizations that add measurable goals to their diversity statements.

Organizations that are willing to be held accountable to their commitments via measurable diversity targets may also signal a more genuine and authentic commitment to diversity and inclusion. For one thing, publicly defining what it would mean for an organization to succeed or fail to uphold its diversity commitments may be viewed as a risky decision. If the organization fails to make good on its goals, it may be subject to public sanction (Chang et al., 2019).

An organization's willingness to take on this risk may signal to women and racial minorities that their diversity commitments are authentic (Apfelbaum & Suh, 2024; Silver, Kelly, & Small, 2021; Silver & Silverman, 2022). In fact, recent hypothetical lab studies have shown that transparency about poor diversity metrics—a risky choice for organizations to make—increases marginalized group members' perceptions that the organization is genuine in its commitment to diversity (Apfelbaum & Suh, 2024). For another, rendering prosocial impact in concrete, tangible terms can boost perceived authenticity by increasing the vividness with which observers imagine the good deed being carried out (Cryder et al., 2013; Silver, Newman, & Small, 2021). That is, setting a measurable diversity target (as compared to a vague commitment) may lead observers to imagine more easily who a diversity policy may help, enhancing perceptions of authenticity by enhancing perceptions of impact. To the extent that these processes cause applicants to infer that the organization genuinely values diversity and inclusion, they may boost marginalized group members' attraction to the organization (Abraham & Burbano, 2022; Flory et al., 2021).

Consistent with this theorizing, there is some evidence that marginalized group members are, in fact, more likely to compete for rewards or apply to a job when they know an organization is implementing diversity quotas or affirmative action policies. Lab experiments suggest that although women tend to be averse to competition, they are more willing to enter competitive, performance-based tournaments when they know that at least 50% of rewards will be allocated to women (Balafoutas & Sutter, 2012; Niederle et al., 2013). Furthermore, Black applicants express greater intent to apply to organizations that are described as identity-conscious, affirmative action employers rather than those that are described as identity-blind, equal opportunity employers (Slaughter et al., 2002). Finally, field experiments in Colombia suggest that when job advertisements include affirmative action statements and gender quotas (vs. no diversity commitment), women are more likely to apply (Ibañez & Riener, 2018). Importantly, our field experiment allows us to assess the impact of communicating a goal rather than a quota or strict policy and includes a diversity commitment at baseline to disentangle the effects of making any commitment to diversity versus a commitment with a measurable goal. However, these prior articles provide suggestive evidence that when marginalized group members expect organizations to prioritize hiring them, they are more likely to apply.

Taken together, this line of theorizing suggests that, even if belongingness concerns are at play, women and racial minorities might still be more likely to apply to an organization that communicates measurable diversity goals rather than vague diversity commitments, and that this effect may be driven by both strategic inferences and perceptions that the organization genuinely values diversity and inclusion.

Measurable Diversity Goals May Have Different Effects on Women and Racial Minorities

The focus of this article is on the overall effects of measurable diversity goals on historically marginalized applicants, and on the tension that measurable diversity goals raise between one's likelihood of landing a job and one's hiring being used instrumentally. However, these dynamics may differ among different subpopulations of historically marginalized applicants. For example, although White women and racial minorities have historically both faced discrimination in professional settings, the specific obstacles they face, and their experiences of them, differ in many ways. Moreover, White women are typically better represented in organizations than racial minorities, and this difference in baseline representation may influence their response to measurable diversity goals (Apfelbaum et al., 2016). These realities raise the possibility that White women and racial minorities may make different inferences about organizations that broadcast measurable diversity goals and respond to them differently when deciding whether to apply.

However, deriving specific patterns from these different lived experiences is not straightforward. That is, there are reasons to wonder whether measurable diversity goals may be more or less effective for each group. For example, women might be particularly vigilant about avoiding organizations that treat them like a means to an end given that they are historically more likely to face objectification at work (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), making them more averse to measurable diversity goals. On the other hand, since racial minorities are often less well-represented in organizations than White women, they may be more likely to fear tokenization and stigma at organizations that implement measurable diversity goals (Apfelbaum et al., 2016; Leibbrandt & List, 2018). As a result, we did not have strong incoming predictions about specific differences, and we planned at the outset of our studies to test the impact of measurable diversity goals on White women and racial minorities both together and separately. To preview, while responses to measurable diversity goals are generally positive for both White women and racial minorities, we find some important differences in both the lab and field that merit discussion and call for future investigation. In particular, we note that our field effects are more strongly driven by White women, with racial minorities showing a directionally consistent, but not statistically significant, effect. We explore this pattern further in our follow-up experiments and discuss possible reasons for it at length in the General Discussion section.

Overview of the Present Work

Across a large-scale, preregistered field experiment and four preregistered online studies, we sought to investigate competing predictions made by existing theory and test the impact of measurable diversity goals on marginalized candidates' willingness to apply. In Study 1, we conducted a large ($n = 5{,}557$), preregistered field experiment with job seekers from 117 U.S. cities. We randomly assigned interested job seekers to see a job ad with an organizational diversity statement that either did or did not include a measurable diversity goal, and tested the impact of the measurable goal on application completion. Although we did not predict any specific differences in responses to measurable goals across women and racial minorities a priori, our studies also allow us to explore the possibility that their responses to measurable diversity goals diverge. In four preregistered follow-up studies with women and racial minorities (total $n = 1{,}758$), we sought to explore potential mechanisms derived from prior theory (i.e., perceived likelihood of getting a job, expected strategic benefits, beliefs about the genuineness of the organization's diversity commitment, anticipated belonging, and concerns about being treated instrumentally), to generalize our effect across different types of measurable goals, and to assess whether the benchmark against which measurable goals are compared (a generic diversity statement vs. a no-statement control) influenced marginalized candidates' perceptions of those goals.

These studies illuminate the trade-offs women and racial minorities face when they consider applying to organizations that share measurable diversity goals and how they weigh the feeling of being "counted" toward an organization's goal achievement versus signals of the organization's genuine commitment to diversity. In doing so, we adjudicate between competing predictions from extant theory about how communicating measurable diversity goals influences women and racial minorities and deepen our understanding of the drivers of organizational attraction among historically marginalized candidates. Although more work is needed to generalize our effects across a wider variety of hiring contexts, our results suggest that organizations may benefit from setting and communicating measurable diversity goals, as they can help to diversify the pipeline of interested candidates.

Transparency and Openness

The anonymized data and analysis code for Studies 1 and 2A–2D are publicly accessible in our Open Science Framework folder at https://osf.io/zf423 (Kirgios et al., 2024). Preregistrations of all methods, measures, data exclusion practices, and analyses for Studies 1 and 2A–2D are also included in our Open Science Framework folder (Study 1 was preregistered at https://aspredicted.org/8fqd-n8vq.pdf, Study 2A at https://aspredicted.org/c8gj-dxf5.pdf, Study 2B at https://aspredicted.org/mry5-6dk8.pdf, Study 2C at https://aspredicted.org/q3xc-97q8.pdf, and Study 2D at https://aspredicted.org/549w-rdxf.pdf). Throughout the text, we highlight when we have deviated from our preregistrations or when we include exploratory analyses that were not preregistered. The materials for each study are publicly accessible in our additional online material, which is also included in our Open Science Framework folder at https://osf.io/zf423. Throughout this work, we report how we determined our sample size and list all data exclusions (if any), all manipulations, and all measures in each study. All data were analyzed using R, Version 4.2.2. Our experiments received Institutional Review Board approval and comply with all ethical regulations.

Study 1: Field Experiment With Job Seekers

Study 1 tested the impact of communicating a measurable diversity goal on historically marginalized group members' responsiveness to job ads in a preregistered field experiment.

Method

Between February and December of 2020, we posted job advertisements on Craigslist seeking part-time research analysts in 117 U.S. cities (see Figure 1 for job advertisement text). The full list of cities and dates for each job post is included in additional online Table S1 (Kirgios et al., 2024).[3] As advertised, we interviewed and hired multiple applicants from this pool for remote work and adhered to our stated measurable diversity goal when making hiring decisions.

In order to assess the impact of adding measurable diversity goals to an organizational diversity statement on job seekers' willingness to apply, we needed to know both the number of applicants interested in the job *prior* to reading the organization's diversity statement and the number of applicants who followed through with the application *after* reading the organization's diversity statement. To that end, we used a two-stage design to identify the proportion of interested applicants who completed their application after reading the diversity statement (Flory et al., 2015).

In the first stage, we posted job ads that contained no mention of organizational diversity. The job postings specified that the organization was seeking remote, part-time research assistance and noted the nature of the job, relevant tasks, and hourly pay. Interested applicants could apply by completing a short survey (linked in the job posting) and providing their résumé. This focal survey first asked participants for their email address, gender ("Man," "Woman," "Identity not listed," or "Prefer not to answer"), age, years of work experience, education level, college major (if applicable), and race ("Asian," "Black," "Latinx or Hispanic," "Middle Eastern," "Multi-racial or bi-racial," "Native American," "Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander," "White," "Another identity not listed," or "Prefer not to say"). This step allowed us to identify the pool of interested job seekers—those who clicked on the link and shared their demographic information—who would serve as participants in our experiment (n = 5,557; 90.8% provided both gender and race information; 4,039 identified as women; 1,366 identified as men; 116 indicated they preferred not to share their gender; 36 identified as another gender identity not listed; 2,756 identified as White; 688 identified as Black; 630 identified as Latinx or Hispanic; 498 indicated they preferred not to share their racial identity; 423 identified as Asian; 392 identified as multiracial or biracial; 53 identified as Native American; 38 identified as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; 34 identified as Middle Eastern; and 45 identified as another racial identity not listed; overall, 682 identified as monoracial White men).[4]

Next, the job survey randomized prospective applicants (stratified by city) into one of two experimental conditions: the *diversity statement with measurable goal* condition (n = 2,778) or the *diversity statement alone* condition (n = 2,779). All participants were reminded of the details of the role advertised in the ad (required skills, example tasks, etc.), and all read a diversity statement from the organization. In the *diversity statement alone* condition, the diversity statement read:

> We value diversity. We strive to have an organization where every team member brings a unique perspective and every team member has the opportunity to succeed. **We are committed to diversity and inclusion for all, and we believe this commitment improves our work and our workplace.**

(Bold emphasis was presented to applicants). This statement includes a vague goal ("We strive to have an organization …") but not a

[3] Throughout the text, we refer to tables in the main manuscript as Table 1, Table 2, etc., and tables in the additional online material as Table S1, Table S2, etc. (Kirgios et al., 2024).

[4] Our preregistration specified that we would recruit 2,500 White men and 2,500 women and racial minorities. We selected this sample size in the hopes of having 80% power to detect an effect size of ~5.5 percentage points for each group with a baseline application rate of 50% (knowing that our actual power might vary based on realized application rates). However, it became apparent that the application rate from White men was too low to reach this target given our constraints. As a result, we stopped collecting data once we received data from 5,000 job seekers who identified their race and gender, regardless of the race and gender they indicated. Note that while we were interested in measuring responses from White men, our key question of interest is how measurable goals affect application rates from historically marginalized applicants, whom diversity statements are presumably designed to attract. Because we did not reach our target sample of White men, we caution against strong interpretations among this subsample.

Figure 1
Job Advertisement Text in Study 1

[Role]: Part-Time Work (City)

Seeking a part-time (employee).

Your duties could include (but are not limited to): participating in multiple projects, data entry, and proofreading writing or PowerPoints. The work can vary based on your expertise.

Attention to detail is critical for this work! It's also helpful if you have a creative mind, strong analytical skills, and a willingness to learn.

In this job, work hours are flexible and you can make your own schedule. Workload will vary week-to-week. Some tasks will be long-term, while others will require a quick turn-around. This job is open immediately—we are hoping to hire one or more candidates ASAP.

If you are interested, you will need to provide your resume and answer a short survey here: [LINK]

Compensation: $15.00 per hour
Employment type: Part-time
Telecommuting okay

Note. The term ASAP in the text of the job advertisement means "as soon as possible".

measurable one. In the *diversity statement with measurable goal* condition, the diversity statement began identically, but elaborated on the organization's vague commitment with the following measurable diversity goal:

> **That's why we've set a goal of hiring at least one woman or racial minority for every White man we hire in our organization**.

(Bold underline emphasis was presented to applicants). The baseline diversity commitment was modeled after statements frequently found on organizational websites. The measurable goal was adapted from a real organizational diversity statement (VMware, 2021) and was selected in part because of its specificity and clarity: It is the type of measurable target that the goal-setting literature suggests should be particularly effective in helping goal setters (i.e., organizational decision makers) achieve their diversity aims (Locke & Latham, 2006).

After reading the diversity statement, prospective applicants were given the choice of whether to complete the application. Specifically, applicants were told that the next step was to submit a résumé and write a short paragraph expressing interest in the role and were then asked to indicate whether they wanted to proceed. Those who declined to proceed exited the survey; those who said yes were directed to a page where they could upload a résumé and fill out a short statement of interest. Our key dependent variable was an indicator for whether participants completed the application in full.

Study materials are included in the additional online material (Kirgios et al., 2024). Summary statistics of participant characteristics and balance checks confirming that randomization was successful (specifically, no imbalance was detected on applicant gender, race, education, age, or years of work experience) are included in additional online Tables S2 and S3 (Kirgios et al., 2024).

Results

Application Rates

Our primary dependent variable was the proportion of the 5,557 interested job seekers who completed the application in full by submitting their résumé and writing a paragraph expressing their interest in the role. We preregistered analyzing application rates across conditions for the full sample (n = 5,557) and for the subsample of women and racial minorities together (n = 4,678).[5] We planned to analyze women and racial minorities as a group because we did not have a priori predictions about how measurable diversity goals might differentially impact these subgroups of historically marginalized applicants. However, we also preregistered analyzing application rates across conditions for White women only (n = 2,072) and for racial minorities only (n = 2,303) to assess potential differences in response patterns across groups. In what follows, we also explore our effects for White men only (n = 682) and present results for women of all races (n = 4,039), racial minority women (n = 1,664), and racial minority men (n = 599) in Tables 1–3, though none of these analyses were specifically preregistered. We report results among all gender-race subsets in the additional online material (Kirgios et al., 2024).

Baseline application rates in the *diversity statement alone* condition were 52.6% for the overall sample, 59.8% for White men, 51.8% for women and racial minorities together, and 51.1% and 53.3% for White women and racial minorities separately, respectively. Given these baseline application rates and our sample sizes for each group, we had 80% power to detect a 3.7 percentage-point change in raw application rates overall; a 10.2 percentage-point change for White men; a 4.0 percentage-point change for women and racial minorities together; and a 6.1 and 5.7 percentage-point change for White women and racial minorities separately, respectively. Controlling for preregistered covariates in our analyses should boost our statistical power slightly, particularly given our binary dependent variable (Hernández et al., 2004).

[5] Because our theorizing focuses on how marginalized group members respond to measurable goals (rather than a contrast between their response and the response of White men), subgroup analyses are appropriate for assessing our hypotheses. We report the interaction between treatment and self-identification as a White male in additional online Table S11 (Kirgios et al., 2024) for interested readers.

Table 1
Application Rates Across Demographic Subgroups in Study 1

Demographic subgroup	Application rates in diversity statement with measurable goal condition	Application rates in diversity statement alone condition	Proportions test (z statistic)	Proportions test (p value)	*OR*	95% CI for the *OR*
All job seekers (n = 5,557)	**55.18%**	52.61%	1.93	p = .054	1.11	[1.00, 1.23]
White male job seekers (n = 682)	56.98%	**59.76%**	−0.74	p = .460	0.89	[0.66, 1.21]
Female and racial minority job seekers (n = 4,678)	**55.05%**	51.84%	2.20	p = .027	1.14	[1.01, 1.28]
Female job seekers (n = 4,039)	**54.79%**	51.01%	2.41	p = .016	1.16	[1.03, 1.32]
Racial minority job seekers (n = 2,303)	**54.47%**	53.31%	0.56	p = .576	1.05	[0.89, 1.23]
White female job seekers (n = 2,072)	**56.29%**	51.12%	2.36	p = .018	1.23	[1.04, 1.46]
Racial minority female job seekers (n = 1,664)	**53.59%**	51.87%	0.71	p = .482	1.07	[0.88, 1.30]
Racial minority male job seekers (n = 599)	57.14%	**58.10%**	−0.24	p = .813	0.96	[0.70, 1.33]

Note. For each race and gender subset of job seekers in Study 1, this table reports application rates in the *diversity statement with measurable goal* condition, application rates in the *diversity statement alone* condition, z statistics and p values from proportions tests comparing application rates across conditions, the odds ratios for the application rates across conditions, and 95% confidence intervals for the odds ratios. The subsets of data include all job seekers, White male job seekers, female and racial minority job seekers, female job seekers, racial minority job seekers, White female job seekers, racial minority female job seekers, and racial minority male job seekers. The preregistered subgroups were all job seekers, female and racial minority job seekers, White female job seekers, and racial minority job seekers. For each subset of participants, the conditions in which application rates were (directionally) higher are presented in bold for ease of processing. *OR* = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval.

We present raw application rates for both our preregistered and exploratory demographic subsamples across conditions in Table 1, along with odds ratios and proportions tests exploring basic comparisons absent our preregistered controls. These analyses suggest that including the measurable diversity goal in the job ad had directionally positive effects overall, and significantly positive effects for women and racial minorities (together) and (White) women alone. All other effects did not rise to the level of statistical significance. We depict raw application rates across conditions for the overall sample, the sample of women and racial minorities together, and for White men only in Figure 2, Panel 1.

We next turned our attention to our primary preregistered analysis, which was an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression with robust standard errors predicting application completion from condition (0 = *diversity statement alone*, 1 = *diversity statement with measurable goal*), with fixed-effects controls for day and month the job ad was posted as well as the location in which the job ad was posted, a continuous control for participant age, and, if applicable, fixed effects for participant gender and race. We preregistered running this regression: (1) for the overall sample, (2) for women and racial minorities together, and (3) for White women and racial minorities separately. As exploratory, nonpreregistered analyses, we also report regression results for White men. Our preregistered analyses yielded consistent results with the proportion tests listed in Table 1, suggesting that our results are not sensitive to the inclusion of our preregistered control variables (or how we impute missing values for these variables).

Specifically, our planned model revealed that, collapsing across all applicants, application rates were a regression-estimated 5.1% higher in the *diversity statement with measurable goal* condition than in the *diversity statement alone* condition (b = 0.027, SE = 0.013, p = .045, 95% CI [0.001, 0.053]; see Table 2, Model 1).[6] We did not find a significant effect of the treatment on White men (b = −0.034, SE = 0.039, p = .376, 95% CI [−0.110, 0.041]; see Table 2, Model 2). However, women and racial minorities together were a regression-estimated 6.5% more likely to apply when the organization added a measurable target to its diversity commitment (b = 0.034, SE = 0.015, p = .020, 95% CI [0.005, 0.062]; see Table 2, Model 3). In particular, White women were a regression-estimated 10.5% more likely to apply when the organization communicated a measurable diversity goal (b = 0.054, SE = 0.022, p = .014, 95% CI [0.011, 0.097]; see Table 2, Model 6). Meanwhile, racial minorities were a nonsignificant 3.0% more likely to apply in the *diversity statement with measurable goal* condition (b = 0.016, SE = 0.021, p = .444, 95% CI [−0.025, 0.057]; see Table 2, Model 5). Our results are consistent using logistic regression rather than OLS regression (see additional online Table S5; Kirgios et al., 2024).

In sum, adding measurable diversity goals increased application rates overall, and, per our preregistered analysis of interest, among women and racial minorities together. Follow-up analyses suggest that the effect among marginalized groups was driven by women (and White women in particular), with effects among racial minorities being positive but nonsignificant and White men being negative but nonsignificant.

To assess whether these differences in the effects of measurable diversity goals across women and racial minorities were significant, we conducted three exploratory heterogeneity analyses. Specifically, we restricted our sample to women and racial minorities only and ran our preregistered regression model with the addition of an interaction term between the indicator for assignment to the *diversity statement with measurable goal* condition and (Model 1) an indicator for whether the participant was a woman (woman = 1, racial minority man = 0), (Model 2) an indicator for whether the participant was a White woman (White woman = 1, racial minority = 0), or (Model 3) an indicator for whether the participant was a racial minority woman (racial minority woman = 1, racial minority man or White woman = 0). None of these models yielded a significant interaction between measurable

[6] Throughout our results, we calculate percent changes in likelihood of applying by using the regression-estimated percentage-point change from our primary preregistered regression and dividing it by the baseline application rates for the relevant applicant group in the *diversity statement alone* condition.

Table 2

Regression-Estimated Effects of Including Measurable Diversity Goals in Job Advertisements on Application Rates in Study 1

	Did the job seeker apply? (1 = *Yes*, 0 = *No*)							
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Variable	Overall	White men	Women and racial minorities	Women	Racial minorities	White women	Racial minority women	Racial minority men
Diversity statement with measurable goal	0.027* (0.013)	−0.034 (0.039)	0.034* (0.015)	0.041** (0.016)	0.016 (0.021)	0.054* (0.022)	0.028 (0.025)	−0.000 (0.045)
Job seeker is a woman	−0.049** (0.016)		−0.055* (0.024)		−0.055* (0.025)			
Job seeker listed gender as other	−0.157† (0.086)		−0.124 (0.104)		−0.163 (0.109)			
Job seeker declined to share gender	−0.117* (0.053)		−0.164 (0.136)		−0.170 (0.135)			
Job seeker's age	0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	−0.000 (0.001)	0.003* (0.001)	−0.002 (0.002)
Job seeker declined to share age	−0.001 (0.049)	0.087 (0.257)	−0.007 (0.054)	−0.018 (0.057)	0.177* (0.089)	−0.065 (0.091)	0.233* (0.108)	0.198 (0.151)
Fixed effects for day and month	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fixed effects for location	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fixed effects for race	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	5,557	682	4,678	4,039	2,303	2,072	1,664	599
Adjusted R^2	0.016	0.001	0.018	0.014	0.010	0.026	0.002	0.056

Note. This table reports the results of eight preregistered and exploratory ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models with robust standard errors predicting whether a job seeker applied in response to a job advertisement in Study 1. Specifically, Models 1, 3, 5, and 6 are preregistered. Models 2, 4, 7, and 8 are exploratory. Across each regression model, the predictor variable is a binary indicator for whether the job advertisement included a measurable diversity goal. Each regression model includes the following preregistered controls: fixed effects for the day and month the job advertisement was posted, fixed effects for the location in which the job advertisement was posted, fixed effects for the job seeker's gender (when applicable), fixed effects for the job seeker's race (when applicable), a continuous variable for the job seeker's age, and a binary indicator for whether the job seeker declined to share their age. Model 1 reports results for the overall data set and includes all preregistered controls. Model 2 (exploratory) reports results for White male job seekers and does not include fixed effects for job seeker gender or race. Model 3 reports results for female and racial minority job seekers and includes all preregistered controls. Model 4 (exploratory) reports results for female job seekers and does not include fixed effects for job seeker gender or race. Model 5 reports results for racial minority job seekers and includes all preregistered controls. Model 6 reports results for White female minority job seekers and does not include fixed effects for job seeker gender or race. Model 7 (exploratory) reports results for female racial minority job seekers and does not include fixed effects for job seeker gender. Model 8 (exploratory) reports results for male racial minority job seekers and does not include fixed effects for job seeker gender. Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.

†, *, and ** denote significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively.

Table 3
Application Rates Across Demographic Subgroups for Job Seekers With Bachelor's Degrees in Study 1

Demographic subgroup	Application rates in diversity statement with measurable goal condition	Application rates in diversity statement alone condition	Proportions test (z statistic)	Proportions test (p value)	*OR*	95% CI for the *OR*
All job seekers with bachelor's degrees (n = 3,264)	**59.09%**	55.05%	2.33	p = .020	1.18	[1.03, 1.36]
White male job seekers with bachelor's degrees (n = 460)	55.56%	**61.70%**	−1.34	p = .181	0.78	[0.53, 1.13]
Female and racial minority job seekers with bachelor's degrees (n = 2,665)	**60.02%**	54.27%	3.00	p = .003	1.26	[1.08, 1.48]
Female job seekers with bachelor's degrees (n = 2,299)	**60.04%**	53.82%	3.01	p = .003	1.29	[1.09, 1.52]
Racial minority job seekers with bachelor's degrees (n = 1,232)	**59.56%**	57.23%	0.83	p = .407	1.10	[0.88, 1.38]
White female job seekers with bachelor's degrees (n = 1,227)	**61.58%**	52.89%	3.07	p = .002	1.43	[1.14, 1.79]
Racial minority female job seekers with bachelor's degrees (n = 866)	**59.40%**	57.17%	0.66	p = .508	1.10	[0.84, 1.44]
Racial minority male job seekers with bachelor's degrees (n = 339)	**61.29%**	58.82%	0.46	p = .644	1.11	[0.71, 1.72]

Note. In this table, the Study 1 data are restricted to job seekers with bachelor's degrees. For each gender-race subset of job seekers in Study 1, this table reports application rates in the *diversity statement with measurable goal* condition, application rates in the *diversity statement alone* condition, z statistics and p values from proportions tests comparing application rates across conditions, the odds ratios for the application rates across conditions, and 95% confidence intervals for the odds ratios. The data subsets include all job seekers with bachelor's degrees, White male job seekers with bachelor's degrees, female and racial minority job seekers with bachelor's degrees, female job seekers with bachelor's degrees, racial minority job seekers with bachelor's degrees, White female job seekers with bachelor's degrees, racial minority female job seekers with bachelor's degrees, and racial minority male job seekers with bachelor's degrees. For each subset of participants, the conditions in which application rates were (directionally) higher are presented in bold for ease of processing. *OR* = odds ratio; CI = confidence interval.

diversity goals and participant identity on application rates (Model 1: p = .193; Model 2: p = .212; Model 3: p = .712), suggesting that the directional difference in responses to measurable diversity goals across (White) women and racial minorities may not itself be significant (Gelman & Stern, 2006). Although we did not predict differences in responsiveness to treatment between women and racial minorities and find mixed evidence that such a difference may exist, we speculate about possible explanations in Study 2 and the General Discussion section.

Applicant Quality

Although measurable diversity goals increased application rates overall and among women in particular, it is possible that these effects might have been driven by less qualified candidates, who would be unlikely to be hired either way, and that more qualified candidates are instead indifferent to or repelled by measurable diversity goals. We explore this possibility in our data.

Following prior research (e.g., Angrist & Guryan, 2008; Baltrunaite et al., 2014; Kotakorpi & Poutvaara, 2011; Ng & Feldman, 2009), our preregistered proxy for applicant quality was education level, which is frequently used as an explicit qualification in hiring contexts (Gallagher, 2018).[7] We preregistered OLS regressions predicting applicant education level from condition (see additional online Table S6; Kirgios et al., 2024), but here we opt to present a more intuitive exploratory (nonpreregistered) analysis approach in which we compare application rates across conditions for the subgroup of candidates with bachelor's degrees to assess the impact of treatment on highly qualified candidates. Both approaches find consistent results.

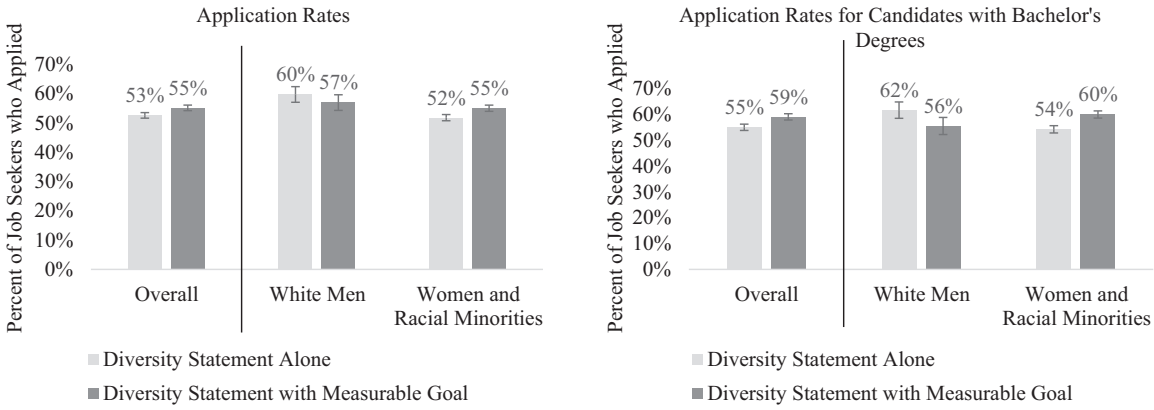
To do this, we examined the effects of measurable diversity goals restricting our sample to the 3,264 prospective applicants with at least a bachelor's degree (58.7% of the overall sample; *diversity statement with measurable goal* condition n = 1,611 and *diversity statement alone* condition n = 1,653). As in our analysis of application rates, we compared application rates across conditions for the overall sample (n = 3,264), for White men only (n = 460), for women and racial minorities together (n = 2,665), for White women only (n = 1,227), and for racial minorities only (n = 1,232). Raw application rates, odds ratios, and proportions test results are described in Table 3 and depicted in Figure 2, Panel 2. These basic analyses suggest that measurable goals significantly increased overall application rates among candidates with bachelor's degrees, as well as among women and racial minority candidates with bachelor's degrees and (White) women with bachelor's degrees. Again, no other differences reached statistical significance.

To examine these patterns more closely, we reran our preregistered OLS regression on each of these subgroups (see additional online Table S7; Kirgios et al., 2024). Prospective applicants with bachelor's degrees were a regression-estimated 7.3% more likely to apply in the *diversity statement with measurable goal* condition than in the *diversity statement alone* condition (b = 0.040, SE = 0.018, p = .023, 95% CI [0.006, 0.074]). There was a directionally negative effect of experimental condition on willingness to apply for White men with bachelor's degrees (b = −0.088, SE = 0.051,

[7] A job seeker's education level may also be correlated with their social class (though prior literature typically uses mother's education as a proxy for social class, e.g., Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). We encourage future work to explore whether there is a relationship between social class and responses to measurable diversity goals.

Figure 2

Application Rates in Study 1



Note. This figure depicts prospective job applicants' application rates in response to job advertisements in Study 1. The left panel shows the percent of all prospective applicants ($n = 5{,}557$) who applied in the two leftmost bars, the percent of White male prospective applicants ($n = 682$) who applied in the two middle bars, and the percent of women and racial minorities ($n = 4{,}678$) who applied in the two rightmost bars. The right panel shows the percent of all prospective applicants with bachelor's degrees ($n = 3{,}264$) who applied in the two leftmost bars, the percent of White male prospective applicants with bachelor's degrees ($n = 460$) who applied in the two middle bars, and the percent of women and racial minorities with bachelor's degrees ($n = 2{,}665$) who applied in the two rightmost bars. Across both panels, the gray bars display application rates in the control condition, and the black bars display application rates in the diversity statement with measurable diversity goal condition. Standard error bars are depicted around each proportion.

$p = .083$, 95% CI [−0.183, 0.007]). Meanwhile, women and racial minorities with bachelor's degrees were a regression-estimated 11.0% more likely to apply in the *diversity statement with measurable goal* condition than in the *diversity statement alone* condition ($b = 0.060$, $SE = 0.019$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [0.022, 0.098]). This effect was driven by White women with bachelor's degrees, who were a regression-estimated 18.4% more likely to apply when a measurable diversity goal was included in the job advertisement ($b = 0.097$, $SE = 0.029$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.041, 0.154]). Racial minorities with bachelor's degrees were not significantly more likely to apply in the *diversity statement with measurable goal* condition ($b = 0.035$, $SE = 0.029$, $p = .239$, 95% CI [−0.022, 0.091]).

Overall, including measurable diversity goals in the job ad increased application rates from women and racial minorities with bachelor's degrees by 11.0%. Meanwhile, measurable diversity goals did not affect application rates from women and racial minorities without bachelor's degrees: This group was a nonsignificant 2.0% more likely to apply in the *diversity statement with measurable goal* condition ($b = 0.010$, $SE = 0.023$, $p = .677$, 95% CI [−0.035, 0.054]; see additional online Table S8, Model 3; Kirgios et al., 2024). These effects are inconsistent with an account in which communicating measurable diversity goals only attracts less qualified marginalized candidates.[8]

We report regression results restricting our sample to candidates without bachelor's degrees in additional online Tables S8–S9 (Kirgios et al., 2024). The supplement also includes the results of other preregistered exploratory analyses in additional online Tables S10–S12 (Kirgios et al., 2024).

Discussion

In Study 1, we find that communicating measurable diversity goals in job advertisements can increase application rates from marginalized group members, though this effect was primarily driven by women, and White women in particular. Moreover, we did not observe a significant effect of including measurable diversity goals in job advertisements on White male candidates' application rates, although we are careful to state that (1) an absence of evidence does not indicate that there is no effect—if anything the effect was slightly negative—and (2) we were underpowered to detect an effect among White men relative to our preregistered target.

Study 1 also provides evidence that communicating measurable diversity goals does not negatively impact candidate quality. White women with bachelor's degrees were 18.4% more likely to apply to jobs that communicated measurable diversity goals than those that simply communicated vague diversity commitments, while there was no significant effect of communicating a measurable diversity goal on application rates among White men and racial minorities with bachelor's degrees. Thus, in Study 1, including measurable diversity goals in job advertisements increased the likelihood that (highly educated) White women applied to the job without significantly impacting White male applicants' willingness to apply

[8] To assess whether the effect of measurable diversity goals on women's and racial minorities' application rates varied significantly across more versus less qualified job seekers, we can modify our primary preregistered regression to include an interaction between assignment to the *diversity statement with measurable goal* condition and an indicator for whether the job seeker has a bachelor's degree. When considering women and racial minorities overall, we do not find evidence of significant moderation ($b = 0.049$, $SE = 0.030$, $p = .104$, 95% CI [−0.010, 0.107]). But when we restrict our attention to White women, we do find significant evidence of moderation such that White women with bachelor's degrees are significantly more likely to apply to organizations that communicate measurable diversity goals than White women without bachelor's degrees ($b = 0.097$, $SE = 0.046$, $p = .034$, 95% CI [0.008, 0.187]). These exploratory analyses suggest that at least among White women, communicating measurable diversity goals is a more effective recruitment strategy for more versus less qualified candidates.

(although again, an absence of evidence does not indicate that there is no effect, and directionally, White men with bachelor's degrees were less likely to apply).

Although Study 1 provides intriguing evidence that measurable diversity goals may help organizations attract applicants from minoritized groups, we note a few important limitations. While our effects are consistent with the hypothesis that measurable diversity goals improve application rates for (White) women, our effect sizes are modest, so our results should be interpreted with caution. Furthermore, the specific measurable goal used in our study could be considered idiosyncratic for a few reasons. First, the one-for-every-one language of the goal, although highly concrete, might seem more unusual or more zero sum than other measurable goals that identify ideal final levels of representation (e.g., 50% women) or improvements (e.g., a 15% increase). Second, bundling women and racial minorities together in the measurable goal itself (i.e., by saying "we've set a goal of hiring at least one woman or racial minority for every white man we hire") might also have raised questions about which group would really be prioritized during the hiring process. Third, the goal itself was quite modest: Hiring only one woman and/or racial minority for every White man hired would still mean hiring 50% White men, who represent only about 30% of the U.S. population. Modest goals may seem less strategically beneficial, undermining historically marginalized candidates' attraction. Moreover, while our field experiment allows us to measure marginalized candidates' behavioral responses to measurable diversity goals (i.e., application rates), we do not have access to their psychological perceptions of the goals.

In Studies 2A–2D, we sought to address many of these limitations. Specifically, we explored how women and racial minorities perceive measurable goals that target their identity group specifically; we stimulus sampled the measurable goal language; and we compared measurable diversity goals to no mention of diversity in job ads at all.

Studies 2A–2D: Online Studies on Applicant Perceptions

In Studies 2A–2D, we explored prospective applicants' perceptions of measurable diversity goals. Unlike Study 1, in which the measurable goal bundled women and racial minorities together,[9] Studies 2A–2D recruited these groups separately and assessed their perceptions of measurable goals targeting only their respective group. These studies also tested a variety of implementations of measurable goals. Finally, Studies 2A and 2B examined perceptions of measurable goals benchmarked against diversity statements with vague goals, whereas Studies 2C and 2D compared measurable goals to a no-diversity-statement control.

Study 2A: Online Study on Female Applicants' Perceptions

Method

Participants included 442 self-identified women on Amazon Mechanical Turk who had experience looking for jobs online. Participants were recruited to complete a 3-min survey for $0.60. We used filters on Amazon Mechanical Turk to recruit women only, but also asked participants to self-report their gender at the end of the survey (by selecting "Man," "Woman," or "Another identity not listed") and only included those who identified as women in our analyses, per our preregistration. We also asked participants to report their race by selecting one (or more) of the following options: "Asian," "Black," "Hispanic," "White," or "Another identity not listed."[10] Overall, 370 participants identified as monoracial White, 32 identified as monoracial Black, 23 identified as Hispanic, six identified as monoracial Asian, two identified as another identity not listed, and nine identified as multiracial. Restricting our sample to White women does not meaningfully affect our results, so we include women of all races in our analyses. For Studies 2A–2D, we preregistered targeting a sample size of 450 participants in order to achieve 90% power to detect a small effect ($d = 0.15$–0.20).

Participants were asked to imagine that they worked as software engineers but were hoping to leave their current position at a startup for a more secure position at a larger firm. They had just found promising open roles at two different companies, Company A and Company B. They were told that both roles offered similar, competitive compensation packages, involved hybrid work in their cities, and were at well-established firms in the same industry. Moreover, employee satisfaction was high at both firms. The only difference between the two companies was that they communicated different diversity statements to prospective applicants.

Company A's diversity statement mirrored the statement shared in the *diversity statement alone* condition in our field experiment, including only a vague goal:

> We value diversity. We strive to have an organization where every team member brings a unique perspective and every team member has the opportunity to succeed. We are committed to diversity and inclusion for all, and we believe this commitment improves our work and our workplace.

Company B's diversity statement included the same language, with the addition of a measurable diversity goal that targeted women. To stimulus sample the language of the measurable diversity goal, we randomly assigned participants to see one of three different goals. Specifically, participants either saw a "ratio" goal that mirrored the measurable goal from our field experiment, a "percent target" goal, or a "percent increase" goal:

> Ratio: "**That's why we've set a goal of hiring one woman for every man we hire at our organization.**" or
>
> Percent target: "**That's why for our next hiring push, we've pledged to hire 50% women.**" or
>
> Percent increase: "**That's why we aim to increase the representation of women at our organization by 15% by 2030.**"

(Bold emphasis was presented to participants). After reading both companies' diversity statements, participants first answered a question about their willingness to apply to the two companies: "Where would you be more likely to apply?" Participants responded

[9] This feature of the goal may have contributed to directional differences in effect size across women and racial minorities in Study 1, especially if participants expected the measurable goal ("one woman or racial minority") to primarily benefit (White) women. Because we were not interested in inferences about bundled goals per se, we ran Studies 2A–2D with measurable goals that focused on each group separately.

[10] We used this strategy for gathering participant demographic information across Studies 2A–2D.

on a 7-point scale from "Definitely Company A" (coded as −3) to "Definitely Company B" (coded as 3). The midpoint of the scale was "Equally likely at Company A and Company B" (coded as 0). This was our primary dependent variable.

Then, participants answered five questions intended to measure their perceptions of the two diversity statements, again on a 7-point scale from "Definitely Company A" (coded as −3) to "Definitely Company B" (coded as 3), where the midpoint suggests both are equal (coded as 0). These five follow-up questions were presented in randomized order: "Where do you think you have a higher chance of getting a job if you apply?" "Which company's diversity statement is most strategically beneficial to you as an applicant?" "Which company cares more genuinely about diversity, equity, and inclusion?" "Where do you expect to fit in better?" and "Which company is most likely to treat hiring you as a means to an end?" These questions were intended to induce participants to compare the two ads on dimensions deemed relevant to prior theory (see the Introduction section): strategic consideration and authentic commitment, which we theorized might favor measurable diversity goals, and belongingness and instrumentality, which we theorized might cut against them.[11]

Results

For our primary dependent variable and each of our five follow-up items, we preregistered collapsing across goal types and conducting one-sample, two-tailed t tests to compare responses to the neutral midpoint at "0." Mirroring our field experiment, the women in our study were significantly more willing to apply to the organization that communicated a measurable diversity goal, $M = 0.441$, $t(441) = 5.004$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.24$.

Moreover, women expected to be more likely to get a job at the organization that communicated the measurable diversity goal, $M = 1.464$, $t(441) = 22.013$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.05$, and believed that the measurable diversity goal was more strategically beneficial to them than the baseline diversity statement, $M = 1.665$, $t(441) = 22.325$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.06$. The women in our study also thought the organization that shared the measurable diversity goal was more genuinely committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion, $M = 0.511$, $t(441) = 6.744$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.32$.

Contrary to our expectations, women expected to be *more* likely to belong at the organization that shared the measurable diversity goal, $M = 0.534$, $t(441) = 6.641$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.32$. However, they did believe their hiring was more of a means to an end for the organization that communicated the measurable diversity goal, $M = 1.190$, $t(441) = 17.651$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.84$.

These effects were largely consistent across all three types of measurable diversity goals (see additional online Table S13; Kirgios et al., 2024 for full results broken down by goal type), though women's willingness to apply was not significantly boosted by the ratio goal. This may suggest that the measurable goal included in Study 1 was a conservative test of our theorizing, as other implementations of measurable goals were actually more attractive to women in Study 2A.

To explore potential relationships between women's perceptions of the measurable goal and their willingness to apply, we preregistered an OLS regression predicting willingness to apply with each of the five follow-up items as predictors. Women's willingness to apply was significantly predicted by their expectations of strategic benefits ($b = 0.167$, $SE = 0.049$, $p < .001$), anticipated belonging ($b = 0.560$, $SE = 0.042$, $p < .001$), and perceptions that the organization's commitment to diversity was genuine ($b = 0.275$, $SE = 0.041$, $p < .001$). Meanwhile, women's expected likelihood of receiving a job offer was only directionally predictive of their willingness to apply ($b = 0.104$, $SE = 0.056$, $p = .065$),[12] and their concern about being treated instrumentally was negatively tied to their organizational attraction ($b = -0.096$, $SE = 0.042$, $p = .022$). We report correlations between all variables in additional online Table S14 (Kirgios et al., 2024).

Study 2B: Online Study on Racial Minority Applicants' Perceptions

Method

Participants included 430 self-identified racial minorities on Prolific who had experience looking for jobs online and were recruited to complete a 4-min survey for $0.80. One hundred eighty-seven identified as women, 145 identified as men, seven identified as another gender identity not listed, 146 identified as monoracial Asian, 153 identified as monoracial Black, 62 identified as Hispanic alone, 50 identified as multiracial, and 19 identified as another racial identity not listed.

We followed the same methods as in Study 2A. Participants were asked to imagine that they were software engineers looking for a new job, and they had identified two very similar, promising positions at Company A and Company B. Again, the primary difference between the two companies was that they communicated slightly different diversity statements: As in Study 2A, Company A shared a diversity statement that included only a vague goal while Company B shared the same baseline statement but elaborated on the vague commitment with the addition of a measurable diversity goal. Again, we stimulus sampled the language of the measurable diversity goals by randomly assigning participants to see one of three different goals. Participants either saw a "ratio" goal, a "percent target" goal, or a "percent increase" goal:

> Ratio: "**That's why we've set a goal of hiring one racial minority for every white person we hire at our organization**." or
>
> Percent target: "**That's why for our next hiring push, we've pledged to hire 50% racial minorities**." or
>
> Percent increase: "**That's why we aim to increase the representation of racial minorities at our organization by 15% by 2030**."

(Bold emphasis was presented to participants). After reading both company's diversity statements, participants first responded to our primary dependent variable: "Where would you be more likely to apply?" rated on a 7-point scale from "Definitely Company A" (coded as −3) to "Definitely Company B" (coded as 3). The

[11] Candidates make comparative judgments across the two organizations to mirror application decisions made in joint evaluation environments (e.g., candidates scrolling job boards for roles that catch their attention are evaluating many potential open roles at once). Typically, these candidates are exploring many opportunities, so they might pit potential options against each other.

[12] Note that the correlation between perceived strategic benefits and likelihood of receiving a job offer was 0.67 ($p < .001$).

midpoint of the scale was "Equally likely at Company A and Company B" (coded as 0).

Then, participants answered the same five questions about their perceptions of the organizations as in Study 2A (in randomized order). Participants responded to the following questions: "Where do you think you have a higher chance of getting a job if you apply?" "Which company's diversity statement is most strategically beneficial to you as an applicant?" "Which company cares more genuinely about diversity, equity, and inclusion?" "Where do you expect to fit in better?" and "Which company is most likely to treat hiring you as a means to an end?" Again, participants responded to each question on a 7-point scale from "Definitely Company A" to "Definitely Company B."

Results

For each item we collected, we preregistered one-sample, two-tailed t tests to compare responses to the neutral midpoint at "0." First, we examined racial minorities' willingness to apply to organizations that did versus did not share measurable goals in their diversity statements. We found overall a null effect, suggesting that racial minorities were indifferent on average to the inclusion of measurable goals in diversity statements, $M = 0.123$, $t(429) = 1.350$, $p = .178$, Cohen's $d = 0.07$. However, this null effect was qualified by racial minorities' opposing reactions to measurable goals framed as ratios (hiring one racial minority for every one White person) versus measurable goals framed as percent targets or aimed-for increases in representation (hiring 50% racial minorities or increasing racial minority representation by 15%). Racial minorities were significantly *less* willing to apply to organizations that shared measurable goals framed as ratios, $M = -0.536$, $t(139) = -3.049$, $p = .003$, Cohen's $d = -0.26$. Meanwhile, racial minorities were significantly *more* willing to apply to organizations that shared measurable goals framed as percent targets, $M = 0.455$, $t(144) = 3.150$, $p = .002$, Cohen's $d = 0.26$, or increases in representation, $M = 0.428$, $t(144) = 3.053$, $p = .003$, Cohen's $d = 0.25$. As a nonpreregistered exploratory analysis, we also analyzed our results excluding Asian men ($n = 91$, including both men who identified only as "Asian" or as both "Asian" and "White"), who may not feel underrepresented in a software engineering context.[13] The remaining racial minority participants were directionally more likely to apply to organizations that shared measurable goals, $M = 0.204$, $t(338) = 1.962$, $p = .051$, Cohen's $d = 0.11$, suggesting that Asian men may respond more negatively to measurable goals in this particular context, dampening the benefits of diversity targets in the full sample.

Focusing on the follow-up items intended to measure perceptions of the organizations, we found that like women in Study 2A, racial minority participants expected to be more likely to get a job at the organization that shared the measurable diversity goal, $M = 0.970$, $t(429) = 12.671$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.61$, and to strategically benefit more from the diversity statement that included a measurable diversity goal, $M = 1.086$, $t(429) = 11.981$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.58$. These perceptions were similar across ratio goals and other goal types (see additional online Table S15; Kirgios et al., 2024 for full results broken down by goal type). Moreover, the racial minority participants in our study believed that the measurable diversity goal indicated a more genuine commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion than did the baseline diversity statement, $M = 0.498$, $t(429) = 6.023$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.29$. These effects were driven by percent and percent increase goals, as racial minorities' perceptions of genuineness were unaffected by ratio goals (see additional online Table S15; Kirgios et al., 2024). These results were unaffected by the exclusion of Asian male participants.

Unlike the women in Study 2A, who expected to experience greater belonging at the organization that communicated a measurable goal, racial minority participants' expected sense of belonging was unaffected by whether an organization shared a measurable diversity goal or not, $M = 0.126$, $t(429) = 1.524$, $p = .128$, Cohen's $d = 0.07$. However, when we excluded Asian men from our sample, the remaining racial minorities did anticipate more belonging at organizations that shared measurable goals, $M = 0.215$, $t(338) = 2.292$, $p = .023$, Cohen's $d = 0.12$. Moreover, the overall null effect was qualified by differing reactions to ratio versus nonratio goals: Racial minorities expected to experience directionally less belonging at organizations that shared ratio goals ($p = .056$) and more at organizations that shared percent target and percent increase goals (both ps $< .05$, see additional online Table S15; Kirgios et al., 2024). However, across all measurable goal types, racial minorities believed that the organization that communicated the measurable goal would be more likely to treat their hiring as a means to an end, $M = 0.863$, $t(429) = 11.179$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.54$.

To understand the relationship between organizational attraction and perceptions of measurable goals, we again ran a preregistered OLS regression predicting willingness to apply with each of our five follow-up items. Neither perceived likelihood of getting a job offer ($b = 0.031$, $SE = 0.047$, $p = .516$) nor perceived likelihood of being treated as a means to an end significantly predicted willingness to apply ($b = -0.040$, $SE = 0.034$, $p = .239$). Meanwhile, perceived strategic benefits ($b = 0.174$, $SE = 0.038$, $p < .001$), perceived genuineness ($b = 0.249$, $SE = 0.040$, $p < .001$), and anticipated belonging ($b = 0.584$, $SE = 0.045$, $p < .001$) all significantly and positively predicted willingness to apply. These results suggest that racial minorities' divergent responses to ratio goals relative to other types of measurable goals may be related to the fact that perceived genuineness and anticipated belonging were either unaffected or dampened by ratio goals (but boosted by other types of measurable goals). We report correlations between all variables in additional online Table S16 (Kirgios et al., 2024).

Study 2C: Online Study on Female Applicants' Perceptions With No-Statement Control

In Studies 2C and 2D, participants evaluated measurable diversity goals relative to a no-diversity-goal control (rather than a vague goal control, as in Studies 1, 2A, and 2B). We ran these studies given extant research (Leibbrandt & List, 2018) suggesting that merely adding boilerplate diversity statements (i.e., equal opportunity employer statements) to a job ad that otherwise does not mention diversity can reduce racial minorities' willingness to apply. This raises the concern that both diversity statement conditions in Study 1 might have dampened application rates relative to no mention of diversity at all. Studies 2C and 2D sought to examine this possibility.

[13] We thank an anonymous reviewer for this helpful suggestion.

Method

Participants included 451 self-identified women on Prolific who had experience looking for jobs online and were recruited to complete a 4-min survey for $0.80. Three hundred twenty-one participants identified as monoracial White, 42 identified as monoracial Black, 48 identified as monoracial Asian, 13 identified as Hispanic, 22 identified as multiracial, and five identified as another identity not listed. As in Study 2A, we include women of all races in our analyses. Our results are consistent when we restrict our sample to White women only.

Participants completed a study nearly identical in design to Study 2A. The only change was that participants learned that Company A did not share a diversity statement with prospective applicants, while Company B did. Company B's statement was then described as in Study 2A (i.e., the baseline diversity statement along with a stimulus sampled measurable goal). As in Study 2A, we then collected participants' willingness to apply to Company A versus B before measuring (in randomized order) where they expect a higher chance of getting a job, where they expect to fit in better, which company they believe most genuinely cares about diversity, and which company is most likely to hire them as a means to an end. We omitted strategic perceptions of the two companies' diversity statements as Company A did not share a diversity statement in this study.

Results

For our primary dependent variable and each of our five follow-up items, we preregistered collapsing across goal types and conducting one-sample, two-tailed t tests to compare responses to the neutral midpoint at "0." Women were again significantly more willing to apply to the organization that communicated a measurable diversity goal, $M = 1.086$, $t(450) = 15.606$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.73$.

Moreover, women expected to be more likely to get a job at the organization that communicated the measurable diversity goal, $M = 1.512$, $t(450) = 26.748$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.26$, and to be more likely to fit in there, $M = 1.004$, $t(450) = 14.352$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.68$. They also thought the organization that shared the measurable diversity goal was more genuinely committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion, $M = 1.659$, $t(450) = 29.829$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.40$. They did expect, however, that their hiring was more likely to be treated as a means to an end by the organization that shared the measurable goal, $M = 0.738$, $t(450) = 11.636$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.55$. Unlike in Study 2A, these results were completely consistent across all types of measurable goals (all ps $< .001$); while ratio goals were less attractive than other goal types compared to a baseline diversity statement, this was not the case when comparing to a no-statement control.

Once again, we predicted women's willingness to apply with their responses to each of the four follow-up items in a preregistered OLS regression. We found that women's willingness to apply was significantly predicted by their expected likelihood of receiving a job offer ($b = 0.246$, $SE = 0.043$, $p < .001$) and anticipated belonging ($b = 0.641$, $SE = 0.038$, $p < .001$). Meanwhile, women's concern about being treated instrumentally was negatively tied to their organizational attraction ($b = -0.090$, $SE = 0.032$, $p = .005$) and their perceptions of the organization's commitment to diversity were not significantly related to their willingness to apply ($b = 0.059$, $SE = 0.044$, $p = .183$). We report correlations between all variables in additional online Table S17 (Kirgios et al., 2024).

Study 2D: Online Study on Racial Minority Applicants' Perceptions With No-Statement Control

Method

Participants included 435 self-identified racial minorities on Prolific who had experience looking for jobs online and were recruited to complete a 4-min survey for $0.80. Two hundred twenty-three participants identified as women, 194 identified as men, 18 identified as another gender identity not listed, 143 identified as monoracial Black, 147 identified as monoracial Asian, 57 identified as Hispanic alone, 73 identified as multiracial, and 15 identified as another racial identity not listed.

Participants completed a study nearly identical in design to Study 2B. Again, the only difference was that Company B's measurable diversity goal was benchmarked against Company A's lack of a diversity statement rather than against a baseline, vague diversity goal. We collected the same measures as in Study 2C. Specifically, participants were asked to indicate whether they were more willing to apply to Company A versus B and then to indicate which company was most likely to offer them a job, to be genuinely committed to diversity and inclusion, to foster belonging, and to hire them as a means to an end.

Results

For our primary dependent variable and each of our five follow-up items, we preregistered collapsing across goal types and conducting one-sample, two-tailed t tests to compare responses to the neutral midpoint at "0." In this case, racial minorities were significantly more willing to apply to the organization that communicated a measurable diversity goal, $M = 0.869$, $t(434) = 10.794$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.52$.

Racial minorities in Study 2D reacted very similarly to the measurable goal relative to a no-statement control as did women in Study 2C: They anticipated a higher likelihood of getting a job, $M = 1.292$, $t(434) = 18.796$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.90$, more belonging, $M = 0.995$, $t(434) = 13.974$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.67$, and a higher likelihood of being treated as a means to an end, $M = 0.791$, $t(434) = 11.231$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.54$, at the organization that shared the measurable goal. They also perceived that organization as more genuinely committed to diversity and inclusion, $M = 1.497$, $t(434) = 21.961$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.05$. Unlike in Study 2B, these results were completely consistent across all types of measurable goals (all ps $< .001$); relative to a no-statement control, racial minorities found even a ratio goal appealing. Moreover, unlike in Study 2B, excluding Asian men from our sample did not affect our results.

We assessed which of these perceptions were predictive of racial minorities' willingness to apply in a preregistered OLS regression. We found that racial minorities' willingness to apply was predicted by their expected likelihood of receiving a job offer ($b = 0.193$, $SE = 0.046$, $p < .001$), anticipated belonging ($b = 0.662$, $SE = 0.049$, $p < .001$), and perceptions of the organization's commitment to diversity and inclusion ($b = 0.130$, $SE = 0.046$, $p = .005$). Meanwhile, racial minorities' concern about being treated instrumentally was not

related to their organizational attraction ($b = -0.050$, $SE = 0.037$, $p = .180$). We report correlations between all variables in additional online Table S18 (Kirgios et al., 2024).

Discussion

In Study 2, we unpack marginalized candidates' perceptions of measurable diversity goals, focusing separately on women's reactions to measurable goals that focus on improving gender diversity (Studies 2A and 2C) and racial minorities' reactions to measurable goals that focus on improving racial diversity (Studies 2B and 2D). We theorized that there would be tension in marginalized candidates' responses to measurable goals: Candidates might expect to be more likely to get the job and may view the organization's commitment as more genuine (which might boost their organizational attraction), while also expecting to be less likely to belong and more likely to be treated as a means to an end (which might dampen their organizational attraction).

Our results were partially consistent with this theorizing: Both women and racial minorities expected their hiring to be treated more instrumentally by organizations that shared measurable goals, while simultaneously viewing those organizations as more genuine, more likely to offer them a job, and more likely to confer them with strategic benefits. However, women also expected to experience more belonging at organizations that shared measurable goals, contrary to predictions from prior theory. Here, racial minorities and women diverged, as we found mixed effects of measurable goals (relative to vague goals) on racial minorities' expected belonging: Ratio goals *reduced* anticipated belonging, while nonratio goals *increased* it. Notably, however, both women and racial minorities expected to experience more belonging at organizations that shared measurable goals relative to those that did not share a commitment to diversity at all.

We also measured women and racial minorities' willingness to apply to an organization that shared a measurable goal versus an organization that simply shared a baseline diversity statement, replicating the results of Study 1: Women were more likely to apply to organizations that shared measurable goals, while racial minorities were indifferent. However, by stimulus sampling the measurable goal in Study 2, we were able to deconstruct this pattern and assess how women and racial minorities responded to different types of measurable goals. In doing so, we found evidence that ratio goals, like the one we explored in Study 1, may be among the less effective forms of measurable goals for attracting marginalized candidates. Both women and racial minorities were significantly more attracted to organizations that shared measurable goals framed as percent targets or increases to representation but were either indifferent to (women) or repelled by (racial minorities) organizations that shared ratio goals. These effects suggest that our field experiment may have been a conservative test of the benefits of communicating measurable diversity goals. Ratio goals may be less effective because they are more likely to threaten anticipated belonging (for racial minorities in particular), perhaps because they feel more zero sum in nature and therefore increase concerns about facing stigma at the organization. Ultimately, the ratio goal language may have dampened racial minorities' willingness to apply when faced with a measurable goal in Study 1.

Given that even generic diversity statements (i.e., equal opportunity employer statements) can sometimes reduce marginalized candidates' willingness to apply (Leibbrandt & List, 2018), we also wanted to explore the possibility that marginalized group members might prefer quantified, measurable commitments to diversity relative to vague ones, but strictly prefer the absence of a diversity commitment in general. Such a pattern would suggest that *neither* of the diversity goals used in our field experiment should be recommended to increase application rates from historically marginalized groups (relative to not mentioning diversity at all). To test whether this might be the case, we assessed candidates' perceptions of measurable goals relative to a no-statement control in Studies 2C and 2D and found evidence to the contrary. If anything, both women and racial minorities showed a stronger preference (in terms of effect size) for measurable goals when they were benchmarked relative to a no-diversity-goal control.[14]

Although useful for probing relevant judgments and mapping possible relationships among psychological variables, willingness to apply measures in hypothetical vignettes should be treated with caution. In Study 2, participants are imagining a hypothetical scenario in which they need a job and are trying to find one; in Study 1, they are living that scenario. Job seekers in the field are likely to more highly value and weigh their likelihood of getting a job in their decision making (because they actually need to find work) than are online participants. This may explain why online participants in Study 2 were more averse to ratio goals than actual job seekers in Study 1. Still, the results of Study 2 suggest that other types of measurable goals we examined may prove even more effective at recruiting women and racial minorities.

General Discussion

To attract more candidates from historically marginalized groups, some organizations choose to communicate specific, measurable diversity goals in their diversity commitments, deviating from the (more common) practice of sharing diversity statements that simply include vague, values-driven goals and commitments. In this work, we seek to understand how this strategy impacts organizational attraction for women and racial minorities, resolving competing predictions from prior literature and exploring the tensions these groups face when considering organizational diversity initiatives. In particular, we investigate how communicating measurable goals influences women's and racial minorities' strategic perceptions, their belief in an organization's genuineness, their anticipated belonging, and their expectation that their hiring will be treated as a means to an end—each of which can affect their willingness to apply.

In a preregistered field experiment, we tested how including a measurable diversity goal influences job application rates from

[14] Our results may diverge from those of Leibbrandt and List (2018) in part because equal employment opportunity (EEO) statements, which tend to use boilerplate language, may be interpreted differently than a personalized commitment, and differently from measurable goals in particular. For example, the rarity and riskiness of a statement that includes a measurable goal relative to an EEO statement may signal greater authenticity (Silver, Newman, & Small, 2021). Alternatively, it is possible that there are differences between the lab and field. Leibbrandt and List (2018) found that their effects were moderated by the racial composition of the applicant's city such that EEO statements were more repellant in Whiter cities, suggesting that inferences about current organizational composition may have played a role. In the lab, those inferences may look quite different (though it is notable that we did not find similar moderation in Study 1).

female and racial minority candidates. Overall, measurable diversity goals increased application rates and brought in more applications from historically marginalized job seekers. The effect was largely driven by women: White women were 10.5% more likely to apply to a job when the job ad included a measurable diversity goal, while racial minorities were 3.0% more likely to apply. The effect was also driven by more educated candidates, increasing application rates from women and racial minorities with bachelor's degrees by 11.0% (vs. 2.0% from women and racial minorities without bachelor's degrees). In preregistered follow-up studies, we found evidence that both women and racial minorities perceive measurable diversity goals that specifically target them as strategically beneficial, expecting organizations that communicate such goals to be more likely to hire them and more genuinely committed to diversity and inclusion.

While we did find evidence that measurable diversity goals signaled a more instrumental approach to diversity, these perceptions did not carry anticipated belongingness costs, as might be suggested by prior literature (e.g., Georgeac & Rattan, 2023; Leibbrandt & List, 2018; Leslie et al., 2014). Instead, both women's and racial minorities' expected sense of belonging was boosted by the inclusion of a measurable diversity goal in a diversity statement for nearly all types of measurable goals. These results challenge existing thinking on organizational belonging, which suggests that hiring strategies that explicitly take identity into account—particularly those that treat diversity instrumentally—generate social identity threat and undermine anticipated belonging (Georgeac & Rattan, 2023; Heilman, 1994; Leslie et al., 2014). Instead, our results suggest that signals of instrumentality may be less alienating when they also imply greater genuineness and a higher likelihood of follow-through on diversity commitments—as in the case of specific, measurable goal setting. Ultimately, perceptions that an organization is genuinely committed to diversity and inclusion may attenuate identity threats, perhaps because women and racial minorities expect to face less stigma in environments in which employers authentically care about equity. Future work should explore this possibility to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the drivers of organizational belonging for historically marginalized group members.

Our work also moves beyond self-reported measures of attraction to measure application rates for a real position in a large-scale field experiment. In analyzing nonhypothetical application decisions, our findings address competing predictions from past work about how historically marginalized group members might respond to measurable diversity goals in real-stakes settings, with some extant work suggesting they will be alienated by concerns about being hired on the basis of their identity rather than their personal merit (Leibbrandt & List, 2018; Leslie et al., 2014), and other work suggesting they will be attracted by the signal that they are more likely to succeed (Ibañez & Riener, 2018; Niederle et al., 2013). We find that women, and racial minorities to a lesser extent, may prioritize strategic considerations when deciding where to work, consistent with Kirgios et al. (2020).

Differences in Responses to Measurable Diversity Goals Across Women and Racial Minorities

Although the effects of communicating measurable diversity goals were generally positive among both White women and racial minorities across our studies, further work is needed to examine whether apparent differences in the strength of these effects in Study 1 are meaningful. Specifically, White women were significantly more likely to apply to organizations that communicated measurable diversity goals, while racial minorities were nonsignificantly more likely to do so. However, we did not find evidence of significant interactions between assignment to the *diversity statement with measurable goal* condition and group membership. This leaves open two possibilities: (1) The difference in responsiveness may simply be noise, and both White women and racial minorities may respond positively to measurable diversity goals, or (2) the pattern of results may be diagnostic of a real difference in reactions to measurable diversity goals across groups.

One possibility is that it is not measurable goals in general but rather the precise goal used in Study 1 that led to divergent reactions. Specifically, the measurable goal in Study 1 bundled women and racial minorities together ("we've set a goal of hiring at least one woman or racial minority for every white man we hire"), and people may expect diversity initiatives that lump gender and race under the same umbrella to primarily benefit women (and White women in particular). This inference would undercut a key driver of willingness to apply—perceived likelihood of getting the job—for racial minorities, but not White women. Alternatively, the measurable goal in Study 1 may have led to divergent reactions because it was a ratio goal. While both women and racial minorities in Study 2 were least attracted to ratio goals (relative to other types of measurable goals), only racial minorities were significantly repelled by ratio goals.

Another possibility is that racial minorities respond less positively to measurable goals in general. Extant work suggests that racial minorities are more averse than women to diversity policies that make their group membership salient, because they are typically less well-represented in organizations and therefore more concerned about facing stereotyping and tokenization (Apfelbaum et al., 2016). By definition, measurable diversity goals make group membership salient, highlighting that an organization will consider identity when making hiring decisions. This may be more threatening for racial minorities than for White women, leading to divergent responses. Another possibility is that racial minorities may make inferences or else be uncertain about which specific racial/ethnic groups are most likely to be sought out by an organization hoping to increase its racial diversity. Maybe the organization is hoping to hire more Black candidates in particular, or maybe Black candidates are likely to be overlooked in favor of Asian candidates. This uncertainty might dampen the positive strategic signal conveyed by measurable diversity goals and, ultimately, reduce the potential benefit of such goals for attracting racial minorities.

Overall, our results do not provide a conclusive answer as to whether or not women and racial minorities are aligned in their response to measurable diversity goals. We encourage future work to explore this important question further, and to disentangle potential reasons for any divergence that may exist.

Future Directions

Future research might also more closely consider the impact of measurable diversity goals on majority group members. Although we did not detect backlash from White men, we were underpowered to do so given the relatively small sample of White male prospective applicants ($n = 682$). Moreover, it is possible that the White men who were most averse to diversity initiatives may have exited our study

when asked for their demographics, prior to random assignment. While asking for demographics is common in job applications, particularly among equal opportunity employers, we may have found stronger evidence for backlash from White men if we had asked for demographics at the end of the survey rather than the beginning. However, such a design would only allow us to know the demographics of people who completed the application in full, limiting our ability to answer our research question.

More broadly, more research is needed to examine the impact of *setting* measurable diversity goals (whether or not they are communicated in job ads). It is possible that managers and peers who learn about measurable goals may start to believe that female and racial minority employees—even those who joined prior to the implementation of the goal—were hired on the basis of their identity rather than their personal merit. As a result, they may perceive them to be less competent, provide them with fewer opportunities for advancement, or otherwise exclude them (Dover et al., 2020; Heilman, 1994; Leslie et al., 2014; Plaut et al., 2011). On the other hand, employees who support diversity initiatives may see setting measurable goals as signaling genuine commitment from organizational leadership in the same way prospective applications do, leading to greater pride in the organization, feelings of inclusion, and/or organizational identification.

It is also possible that some hiring managers may be averse to implementing measurable goals and exhibit backlash in their own hiring decisions. To the extent that managers view goals pushed down from organizational leadership as limiting their agency to make preferred hiring decisions, they may exhibit reactance and hire *fewer* women and racial minorities after such goals are imposed (Dobbin et al., 2015). Ironically, this would suggest that the very goals that signaled strategic benefits to women and racial minorities might undermine their chances of landing a job. It is worth exploring whether measurable goals boost the rate at which women and racial minorities are hired—consistent with research on goal setting theory and accountability (Axt & To, 2024; Castilla, 2015; Costa, 2024; Locke & Latham, 2006)—or lead to backlash.

We also encourage future work to consider when measurable diversity goals might fail to attract historically marginalized candidates. Our theorizing suggests that when the measurable goal appears to be too modest, for example, it might prove less effective both because modest goals are less likely to suggest genuine commitment to diversity and because they are less strategically beneficial. While the goals in our studies varied slightly in ambition—the goal in Study 1 was less ambitious, for example, than the ratio or percent target goals in Studies 2A–2D, and the percent increase goal's ambition was ambiguous—we did not test reactions to extremely modest goals (e.g., increasing representation of women from 17% to 18%), and this question is worthy of future exploration. Moreover, measurable diversity goals may be less effective when accompanied by further indicators that the organization is treating diversity instrumentally. For example, women and racial minorities may be more likely to interpret measurable diversity goals that are accompanied by a business (vs. moral) case for diversity as signals of objectification and tokenization rather than of an authentic diversity commitment, which should reduce their organizational attraction.

As of 2021, only 16% of Fortune 100 companies included measurable goals when communicating their diversity initiatives in interviewing, hiring, or promotion (see additional online material, Kirgios et al., 2024 for a coding of corporate websites). It is worth exploring why managers may be reluctant to implement measurable diversity goals. Moreover, future research should consider how the effectiveness of these goals might shift if they become commonplace. Measurable diversity goals may currently be viewed as a risky signal of commitment to diversification, increasing candidates' perceptions that the organization is likely to follow through (Silver, Kelly, & Small, 2021; Silver & Silverman, 2022). If so, the effectiveness of measurable diversity goals may dampen with wider use. On the other hand, if organizations make and follow through on measurable diversity commitments, this might decrease cynicism about organizational diversity initiatives in general.

Constraints on Generality

We note a few important limitations and constraints on generality. First, our field experiment focused on remote, part-time work at an entry level. Although such work is on the rise in the wake of COVID-19 (Parker et al., 2022), it may be the case that applying to higher level, in-person roles may entail different belongingness considerations. Relative to part-time remote work, full-time in-person work is likely to involve both more interaction with coworkers (which may heighten concerns about belonging) and higher pay (which may heighten concerns about getting the job at all). While our online studies are hypothetical, they do suggest that among women and racial minorities, expected belonging and perceived likelihood of landing a job are both boosted by (nonratio) measurable goals. So, it is plausible that measurable diversity goals may be more effective for full-time in-person work than remote part-time work; however, it is also plausible that they may be less effective if concerns about being objectified are heightened for in-office, full-time work. We leave it to future work to explore this question.

Second, most job seekers in our experiment were women and racial minorities, raising questions as to whether our effects might hold in White- or male-dominated contexts, where concerns about being tokenized may be more salient.[15] To address this concern, in a separate study, we surveyed women and racial minorities and asked them to predict who would apply to the job we advertised in Study 1. 97.4% of participants expected the applicant pool to be majority White and 70% expected it to be majority male, suggesting that applicants in our field experiment likely expected to be competing primarily against White men for the job. Still, future work is needed to replicate and extend our findings across a wider range of diversity initiatives, jobs, and industries.

Moreover, our field experiment focused exclusively on one type of measurable goal (a ratio goal). We examined multiple goal types in Studies 2A–2D, and the results of these studies suggest that our field experiment may have underestimated the benefits of measurable goals: Marginalized candidates were *least* attracted to ratio goals of the sort we used in Study 1. However, it would be worthwhile for future research to assess the impact of other types of measurable goals on women's and racial minorities' application rates.

[15] Conversely, it is also possible that the benefits of communicating measurable diversity goals will be stronger in White- or male-dominated contexts. In those environments, marginalized candidates might assume, at baseline, that the organization is not committed to diversity and inclusion and that they have a low chance of being hired.

Finally, our field experiment was run during a time of considerable turmoil in society, given that it overlapped with COVID-19 and the racial reckoning of 2020. In addition, it occurred prior to the Supreme Court ruling in Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard, which has changed the conversation around many organizational diversity and inclusion efforts. As such, we encourage future work to replicate our effects in the field in the future.

In our online studies, we restricted our attention to women and racial minorities given our focus on how marginalized group members respond to measurable goals. The targeted population in these studies were online survey takers, who are used to looking for work opportunities online, which may enhance their ability to accurately forecast their own behavior in our vignette studies. However, the design in Study 2 may have limited external validity, as the studies lacked real incentives, measured behavioral intentions rather than real behaviors, and were conducted within subjects. Moreover, across Studies 2A–2D, we focused on a software engineering context, which may be qualitatively different from other organizational contexts. However, we believe that our field experiment establishes that adding a measurable goal can aid diversity recruitment in a real-world, incentive-compatible context outside of software engineering. Further, most job candidates consider multiple companies when applying to jobs, suggesting that within-subjects comparisons are appropriate for assessing people's preferences.

Conclusion

Many organizations wrestle with how to best pursue diversity, equity, and inclusion in hiring. Prior research suggests that setting measurable goals can motivate progress internally by providing clear benchmarks and facilitating accountability (Locke & Latham, 2006). Our work explores whether communicating measurable goals *externally* to job seekers may offer a further benefit: increased application rates. In our data, measurable diversity goals seem to appeal to marginalized job seekers—especially White women—seeking a signal that they can advance in an environment where prejudice often holds them back (Fisk & Overton, 2019; Milkman et al., 2015). By making candidates from historically marginalized groups feel that they are more likely to succeed, organizations may also increase their own chance of success toward organizational diversity goals.

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