Intersectional Relational Identity: Co-Creating Work Relationships Across Differences

Jennifer Wiseman[1], Amelia Stillwell[1] and Kylie Rochford[1]

[1]University of Utah

Author Note

Jennifer Wiseman https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1914-1965

We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

We gratefully acknowledge the helpful feedback from Associate Editor Sabat and our two anonymous reviewers.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jennifer Wiseman, Dept. of Management, Business Classroom Building 1645 Campus Center Dr #8, Salt Lake City, UT 84112

Abstract

Extending theories of relational identity for a diverse workforce, we introduce the concept of *intersectional relational identity*— the unique, shared identity created by partners through integrating and transforming their intersecting roles and social positions. First, we introduce the dyadic-level construct of intersectional relational identity and locate it within a 2×2 framework of workplace relational identities. Situating our theorizing within the context of American gender and race labor stratification, we consider how work partners' social identity (dis)similarity and role (mis)alignment interactively shape relational identity development. Second, we theorize how diverse partners co-create intersectional relational identities, identifying key motivators, facilitators, and mechanisms. We outline how the resulting uncertainty can foster relational identity development through the co-creation of work roles. This framework advances relational identity theory by revealing how identity differences and role-prototype misalignment, typically conceptualized as relational barriers, offer flexibility and innovation opportunities.

Plain Language Summary

Diversity in the workplace presents both challenges and opportunities for relationships between coworkers. We focus on the unique identity dynamics that emerge when individuals from diverse backgrounds establish workplace relationships. As partners develop a shared sense of relational identity— the sense that "we" are an "us"— we propose that this "us" is shaped by the unique combination of both partners' group identities. Coworkers from different social groups, particularly different race and gender groups, may need to overcome pre-existing expectations about how work should get done that are not aligned or are warped by group stereotypes. Misalignment in their pre-existing role expectations creates opportunities for partners to forge new expectations that better serve their relationship. Active relationship building can lead to more flexible work partnerships attuned to each member's unique strengths.

Intersectional Relational Identity: Co-Creating Work Relationships Across Differences

Work is accomplished through interpersonal relationships informed by underlying 'relational identities'— the shared cognitive and affective sense of "we", encompassing partners' goals, values, roles, and unique interaction patterns (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Burt, 1992; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Khan, 2007). These identities define 'who we are together' as the foundation from which material relationships emerge. Workplace relational identities are influenced by the behaviors, duties, and expectations associated with partners' work roles. Role prototypes— mental representations of the ideal enactment of a role, such as associating leadership with masculinity and Whiteness (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, 1987/2013; Ellemers, 2018; Lord et al., 1984; Rosette et al., 2008)— provide common ground between coworkers, fostering relational identity building through shared expectations for how work should get done (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Developing a unique relational identity shapes connection and productivity by enabling a shared understanding of how partners will enact their respective roles vis-à-vis each other (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). This shared understanding is expressed through the relational behaviors that define the observable relationship (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007).

Current theories of relational identity do not fully account for how employees develop relational identities across social identity differences that structure labor roles (e.g., race and gender in the United States; Acker, 1990; Ray, 2019). This decontextualization of relational development, combined with an increasingly diverse workforce, has made workplace relationships in modern organizations less understood than those in the more homogenous organizations of the past (Eagly & Wood, 2012; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). For example, existing relational identity frameworks suggest that shared work role expectations are

essential to successful workplace relationships (Blader & Tyler, 2009; Ployhart & Hale, 2014; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Yet, race and gender, tied to hierarchical labor organizing, inform role prototypes, distorting expectations and norms surrounding these roles (Eagly, 1987/2013; Ellemers, 2018; Kanter, 1977; Lord et al., 1984; Rosette et al., 2008), and potentially reducing their 'sharedness' across group lines. Indeed, prior research shows that partners with different social identities often develop more divergent role expectations from one another than homogenous partners (Hall et al., 2019; Tajfel et al., 1971; Turner & Reynolds, 2003; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). Furthermore, coworkers may diminish the power of work roles held by women and people of color— roles that typically command greater deference when occupied by White men (Ely & Padavic, 2007; Kanter, 1977; Sabat et al., 2021). These divergent expectations create both potential obstacles and opportunities for relational identity development between diverse partners, particularly as women and people of color assume more leadership roles in organizations (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). Per Ehrhardt and Ragins, "we still know little about the [relationship] processes and promise" (2019, p.248) within modern diverse organizations.

To this end, we offer a theory of *intersectional relational identity*— the unique, shared identity created between partners through the integration and transformation of their intersecting roles and social positions (e.g., race, gender, class, age, and occupational status), forming a distinct relational unit that transcends individual identities. Bringing together relational, role, and social identity theories, we develop a dyad-level theory of intersectional identity co-creation (Beal, 1970; Ellison & Langhout, 2020; hooks, 1984; Petsko & Bodenhausen, 2020; Rosette et al., 2018; Thatcher et al., 2023). To ground our theorizing, we focus on relationships across

gender and race differences in an American labor context. We draw on research in these areas to unpack how diverse coworkers develop an intersectional relational identity in ways unique from homogenous partnerships. We consider how partners' social identity dissimilarity and partners' role misalignment— divergence between the social identities of who is expected to hold the role (i.e., the *role prototype*) and who is actually in the role— jointly shape the motivators, facilitators, and mechanisms through which relational identities emerge in diverse partnerships. We explain how partners can embrace the uncertainty from identity differences and role misalignment to co-create work roles that extend beyond traditional expectations. This role co-creation allows partners to dyadically imagine and innovate roles that meet their unique needs and capabilities, co-creating an intersectional relational identity. In sum, we develop new theory on workplace relationships across identity differences, theorizing that such dyads can co-create intersectional relational identities that are less constrained by pre-existing, prototypical work roles.

Our paper makes two distinct but related contributions. First, we introduce the dyadic-level construct of intersectional relational identity and situate this novel construct within a 2×2 framework to better locate it within existing knowledge of workplace relationships. We build new theory on workplace interpersonal relationships, reconceiving relational identities as inherently intersectional entities. Second, we theorize how diverse partners co-create a shared relational identity with unique, dyad-level intersectional properties, focusing on relational processes rooted in identity differences and role misalignment. Treating identity differences as opportunities rather than obstacles, we explicate how, and under what conditions, these differences can enable partners to craft relational identities optimized to their specific relational

and professional needs. Advancing relational identity theory (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007), we account for distinct pressures on relational identity development in diverse workplace partnerships (Avery et al., 2009; Fiske & Tetlock, 1997; Mobasseri et al., 2024; Neuberg & Fiske, 1987). Our framework provides new theoretical tools for understanding how organizations can leverage identity differences as assets rather than liabilities to collaboration.

A Framework of Workplace Relational Identity

The Foundations of Identity: Personal, Relational, and Social

Existing theory visualizes identity as a series of concentric circles, each representing a different layer of the self (Brewer, 1991). At the innermost core lies *personal identity,* the unique attributes and experiences that define us as individuals— as a "me" rather than a "we" (Walker, 2022). The next layer is *relational* identity, the interaction-based self we share with others in specific relationships, such as partners, friends, family, and colleagues, giving rise to a sense of a shared "we." In the workplace, this *relational identity* includes a shared sense of "the way we work together," or work role-based identities such as manager-subordinate and leader-follower (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Thus, a unique relational identity develops between partners as they perform their work roles and establish role-based expectations through ongoing interactions. Partners' personal and role identities combine to create a sense of self within the partnership (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007).

The outermost layer of the self is *social* identity— membership in larger groups, such as profession, gender, race, nationality, or cultural communities (Brewer, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It includes shared values, norms, and roles that guide how we categorize ourselves and how others categorize us. Individuals typically identify with more than one social identity group

(Shore et al., 2011; Hall et al., 2019), and these social identities are experienced conjunctively rather than disjunctively, a complexity captured through the concept of *intersectionality* (Beal, 1970; Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2020; hooks, 1984). Partners' multiple, intersecting social identities come together to shape the role expectations they hold of coworkers and themselves (e.g., Bailey & Trudy, 2018; Carbado et al., 2013; Rosette et al., 2008; Thatcher et al., 2023).

While these discrete layers of the self help to visualize how different elements of identity relate to one another, one's personal, relational, and social identities are inextricably intertwined (Markus & Kunda, 1986; Vignoles, 2019; Walker, 2022). Our relationships and social group memberships shape our personal identity. Relational identities overlap with personal identities, as interactions with others impact self-image. Social identities encompass both, affecting overall self-perception (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Brewer, 1991; Turner et al., 1994; Hogg & Turner, 1985). Although these layers are often experienced as a unified self (Gecas, 1982; Vignoles, 2019), examining them separately can help clarify how different levels of self influence and relate to one another.

Relational Identity

We begin our theorizing of intersectional relational identities by locating them within the broader literature of relational identity. Figure 1 illustrates a relational plane with work dyads positioned along two continuums: the (dis)similarity of social identities held by the partners and the (mis)alignment of partners' social identities with traditional role prototypes. While dyads vary continuously along these dimensions, we collapse them into binaries for simplicity and comparison purposes (see Table 1 for examples). Below, we first briefly discuss how social

identities influence relational identity in the homogenous relationships addressed in existing relational theories. We then turn to the right side of the figure, presenting novel theorizing on the development of relational identities between diverse partners, or *intersectional relational identities*.

Figure 1. *Role Alignment and Identity Similarity in Workplace Relationships*

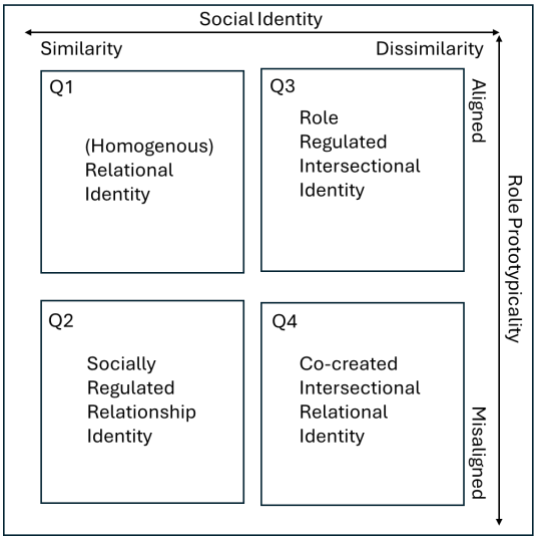

Figure 1 depicts intersectional relational identities located in a relational plane wherein dyads fall along two dimensions: (dis)similarity of social identities on held by the partners on the horizontal plane, and (mis)alignment of partners' social identities and traditional role prototypes on the vertical plane. While dyads vary continuously along these dimensions, we collapse them into binaries for simplicity and purposes of comparison. The bulk of relational theory and research addresses the left-side quadrants, wherein partners presumably share some or all social identity groups. We focus on the right side of the figure, presenting novel theorizing on the construction of relational identities between diverse partners, or *intersectional relational identities* (IRIs).

Relational Identity in Homogenous Work Dyads

The prevailing role-based relational identity model (for brevity, we refer to this as relational identity henceforth; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007) operates well when relationships form between homogenous partners. Sharing social identities such as race, gender, age, etc. renders those social identities less salient (Ely, 1994; Hogg & Abrahms, 2007), allowing homogenous work dyads to combine work roles "independent of who (what kind of person) may be enacting the role" (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007, p.11). When partners' work roles are constructed from shared social and organizational expectations for the "prototypical" worker (Rosette et al., 2008), role expectations are more likely to be consistent across partners and undistorted by their social identities (Joshi et al., 2011). Socialization within a shared social identity group provides a unified foundation for developing similar values and normative expectations (Ertug et al., 2022; Haslam et al., 1998; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). This shared identity acts as a common script, reducing the need for explicit communication and negotiation while facilitating shared understanding and need fulfillment (Biddle, 2013; Crocker et al., 1984; Lau & Murnighan, 2005; Lewis & Lupyan, 2020; Mischel, 1979; Polletta, 2022; Sanchez-Burks et al., 2009).

While homogenous dyads share social identities, they can still vary in the degree of alignment between those social identities and partners' respective role prototypes. For example, a relational identity between two White women nurses is both homogenous as partners share the same race and gender identities, and prototype-aligned as stereotypes about White women align with prototypical characteristics of nurses (e.g., Table 1 and Figure 1- Quadrant 1; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). On the other hand, the relational identity between a White woman leader and a White woman subordinate is homogenous, but there is misalignment between the White woman

stereotypes and the traditional leader prototype (e.g., Table 1 and Figure 1- Quadrant 2; Rosette et al., 2008). When partners' role expectations are misaligned with their salient social identities, social mechanisms, including social reinforcement and backlash, create pressures toward role realignment (Burke, 2014; Eagly & Wood, 2012; Teresa-Morales et al., 2022). Partners may approach this role conflict (Ebbers & Wijnberg, 2017) in different ways: from identity-based solidarity, such as peer support between women, to the more competitive "queen bee syndrome," wherein women seeking power will strategically distance themselves from other women (Derks et al., 2011; Berdahl & Bhattacharyya, 2024).

Relational Identity in Intersectional Work Dyads

Prevailing models of relational identity have not accounted for the influence of diverse social identities on the development of role-based work relationships. While a wide array of social identities impact work relationships, to ground our theorizing, we focus on dyads composed of individuals with diverse race and/or gender identities. We know that work roles are neither gender- nor race-neutral (Zimmer, 1988; Ridgeway, 2006; Ray, 2019) and that these social identities interactively shape relational dynamics (Toosi et al., 2012). To illustrate, consider the everyday occurrence of a Black woman walking down a hallway at work. As she walks, she considers thoughts and emotions, including concerns for her needs in the surrounding context and the role expectations others hold of her. We might also imagine a White man walking down a perpendicular hallway, considering his thoughts and emotions about need fulfillment and role expectations. When the two meet and begin walking together, the pair experiences their relationship as a novel entity, with intersectional properties held by the dyad itself— new and different concerns, needs, and role expectations unique to their relationship. For

example, research shows that cross-race interactions can create unique concerns about partner perceptions: the White man may wonder if he is seen as moral, while the Black woman may wonder if she is perceived as competent— relational considerations not as relevant with shared-identity partners (Bergsieker et al., 2010). Partners across differences might develop relational patterns between them rather than exclusively within either individual. For example, partners may create shared rituals for handling meetings where others incorrectly assume which one of them is the senior person. Due to their non-prototypical pairing, they may be particularly aware of observers in the broader social context: will their collegial rapport be perceived as professional, or distorted by race and gender stereotypes? Their journey together becomes an emergent relational identity as they develop a new "us." This *intersectional relational identity* exists at the dyadic level— it is not simply the sum of two individuals, but rather a distinct entity emerging from the unique combination of partners' social positions (see Figure 2).

In hierarchical labor systems, the distinct intersection of both partners' identities likely also conveys specific role expectations for how partners relate to, and work with, one another (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Jost et al., 2004; Moss-Racusin et al., 2010; Ridgeway, 2006; Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). For instance, given historical and contemporary divisions of labor that disproportionately place White men at the top of organizational hierarchies, White male workers may subconsciously expect to (and may be expected to) assume a decision-making role within their relationships with women and racial minority men (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Petsko & Rosette, 2023). Further, relational demography research suggests that high-status workers may view partner dissimilarity negatively because role advancement among low-status out-group members threatens their social status and self-esteem (Tsui et al., 2002; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989).

Thus, dyad-level intersectional role expectations shape how partners collaborate and, as a result, the pair's intersectional relational identity.

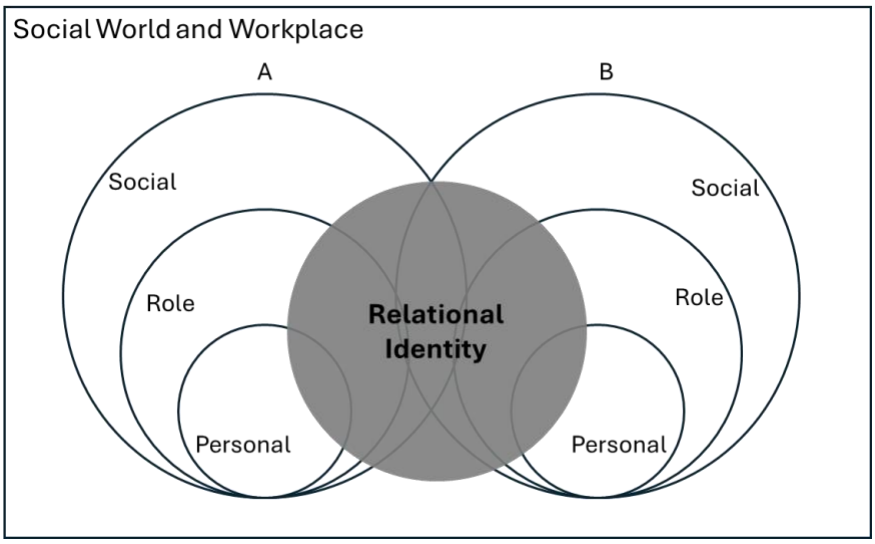

Figure 2. *Intersectional Relational Identity*

Note. The diagram depicts two work partners (person A and person B) representing distinct social positions, each containing nested elements of Social identity, Role identity, and Personal identity dimensions. At the center, a prominent overlap region represents Intersectional Relational Identity, the nexus where individuals' social and workplace identities converge and interact.

Challenges of Intersectional Relational Identities

While past research has identified a wide range of challenges to relational identity formation between diverse partners, given our focus on relationships at work, we highlight two specific types of obstacles: interpersonal- and role-based uncertainty, and stereotypes leading to role encapsulation (Chattopadhyay et al., 2004; Holoien et al., 2015; Kanter, 1977; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989; Turner et al., 2008). Partners who cannot surmount these challenges will struggle to support relational needs and suffer diminished mutual understanding, creating superficial or strained interactions and undermining relational development (Tsui et al., 2002; David et al., 2015).

Interpersonal and role uncertainty. Interpersonal and role uncertainty present unique challenges to the development of intersectional relational identities. As documented elsewhere, uncertainty in interpersonal interactions can evoke anxiety and trigger fight, flight, or freeze responses (Anderson et al., 2019; Chan & McAllister, 2014; Hirsh et al., 2012; Lebel, 2017). For instance, both Black and White individuals experience anxiety at the thought of cross-race interactions, and when they do interact, are less likely to understand one another (Appiah et al., 2022; Dovidio et al., 2002; Holoien et al., 2015). Similarly, partners in cross-gender relationships can face unclear boundaries around appropriate behavior that create mutual discomfort and hesitation, such as heightened concerns about sexual harassment (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006; Winstead & Morganson, 2013). This uncertainty can limit initial interactions and contribute to ongoing tension, sometimes resulting in a 'glass partition' of social separation between male and female coworkers. Accordingly, a recent meta-analysis suggests that gender diversity alters the dyadic identification process within workplace interpersonal relationships (Zhong et al., 2024). Furthermore, Toosi and colleagues (2011) find evidence that as identity differences compound (e.g., cross-race, cross-gender interactions), negative affect and uncertainty also further compound (e.g., compared to same-gender cross-race interactions).

Uncertainty about how to navigate professional interactions creates unique challenges to role clarity in diverse work relationships. Without the mutual understanding that arises from a shared social identity, relationships between diverse partners tend to be more ambiguous and uncertain, as partners lack shared expectations for how their collaboration should unfold (Thomas, 1993). Diverse partners likely have less shared understanding of appropriate work roles, as roles are socially constructed within a particular community and often vary between

social groups (Kelman, 2005). For instance, general expectations of how work should get done and specific expectations about appropriate work roles for men and women vary between nations and cultures (Batnitzky et al., 2009; Kosakowska-Berezecka et al., 2024; Lewis & Lupyan, 2020; Sanchez-Burkes & Lee, 2009). Indeed, relational demography theory suggests that social identity differences increase role uncertainty and, consequently, can lead to negative outcomes for work partners (e.g., turnover, lower morale; Chattopadhyay et al., 2004; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989; Tsui et al., 1992).

Stereotypes & role encapsulation. Stereotypes associated with group identities can make relational identity development between diverse partners particularly challenging. Given the uncertainty of diverse relationships, partners may instead lean on identity-based stereotypes and role prototypes to inform initial expectations (Heilman, 2012). Dominant groups often reinforce their power by promoting prototypical representations of powerful roles that favor their group (Legault et al., 2011; Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999; Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). Likewise, race and gender stereotypes shape work role prototypes in ways that disproportionately disadvantage women and racial minorities (Cook & Glass, 2014; Gündemir et al., 2019; Kanter, 1977). People readily use race and gender identity to categorize others into associated workplace roles and relationships, even without conscious thought or prejudicial ideology (Devine, 1989; Fasang & Aisenbrey, 2022; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Hogg & Abrams, 2007; Linton, 1940, 1942; Parsons, 1942). Stereotypes of women and racial minorities as submissive and less competent create a perceived fit between these workers and the requirements of low-power, supportive roles (Donovan, 2011; Ghavami & Peplau, 2012; Rosette et al., 2018; Toosi et al., 2012). Evaluators may favor White and male workers, whose intersectional group stereotypes align with leader

prototypes (Baugh & Graen, 1997; Burke, 2014; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Lee et al., 2023; Rosette et al., 2008; Stainback & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2009). Thus, stereotypes can cast a shadow over partners' individuality, hampering co-creation of roles that reflect both partners' strengths and needs (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000; Turner & Reynolds, 2003; Tajfel et al., 1971).

When women and racial minority workers do assume counter-stereotypical work roles, the conflict between their identity and the role prototype can create role encapsulation— when others narrow "permissible or rewarded action", which distorts expectations to "fit pre-existing generalizations" of these individuals (Kanter, 1977, p. 231). Musician/composer Jon Batiste observed as much from his own experience, stating, "People often think there is one or two ideas of what a Black creative should be doing. And, because people are just so used to seeing those specific narratives, then when they see something else, it has to be dumbed down for them to receive it. The levels of our achievements are diminished. They're not seen as a part of the canon" (Heineman, 2023). Role encapsulation distorts otherwise agentic and high-power positions by realigning them with communal and deferential stereotypes, pigeonholing women and racial minorities into low-power role expectations (Carter & Peters, 2016; Glass & Cook, 2016; Soleymanpour Omran et al., 2015). Such identity-based bias toward the role-holder can decrease a role's perceived value or importance by others in the organization, ultimately undermining the formation of a co-created relational identity (Holder et al., 2015; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008).

Given these known challenges, how can diverse work dyads develop an *intersectional* relational identity? While diverse partners may not share role scripts rooted in a common identity, they do have access to group stereotypes that may inform expectations of one another's

behavior, competencies, and responsibilities (Avery et al., 2009; Eagly & Wood, 2012; Fiske & Tetlock, 1997; Polletta, 2022; Sanchez-Burks et al., 2009; Waguespack & Sorenson, 2011). In the absence of shared role expectations, diverse partners may rely on these identity-based stereotypes and role prototypes to fill in the gaps.

Role-constructed Intersectional Relational Identities

Role-constructed intersectional relational identities (Figure 1, Quadrant 3) are characterized by intersectionality, i.e., the unique combination of partners' differing social identities, and role prototypicality alignment between each partner's social identities and their role's prototype. Examples of these dyads include vertical relationships between a White male supervisor and a Black female supervisee, or a senior male leader and a junior female subordinate. Each partner inhabits roles aligned with broader societal hierarchies and stereotypes of their group, where White, male, and supervisor correspond with expectations of superiority and control, and Black, female, and subordinate correspond with expectations of lower competency and supporting positions (Jahoda, 1998; Pieterse, 1992; Toosi et al., 2012).

Functional intersectional relational identities may emerge between diverse partners when there is alignment between partners' social identity and the role's prototype. Identity stereotypes and role prototypes provide a framework, albeit an often oversimplified and biased one, for the role each person 'should' play based on their intersecting identities. These scripts guide initial interactions and clarify how work should get done, offering a foundation for constructing a relational identity from established expectations. Congruence between role expectations and partner stereotypes may make interactions appear more straightforward, guided by these identity-congruent role expectations. As such, partners may calibrate their relational identity to these

preexisting roles (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Sluss et al., 2012). For instance, women may use preexisting gender roles (e.g., the mother role) to help construct effective cross-gender relational identities with their male work partners (Koppman et al., 2022). Thus, role-aligned relational identities may reflect role-based scripts that align with social identity-based expectations, creating greater role clarity.

While this clarity may make role-aligned partnerships appear more stable and functional, it may also impede the *co-creation* of an intersectional relational identity, as these dyadic processes require *mutuality* between partners—reciprocal influence through creative engagement with their differences, and the development of deeper bonds, positive regard, and shared strategies for working well together (Heilman, 2012; Hinz et al., 2022). Instead, such pairings may be limited to perfunctory work-related interactions that lack the deep connection and positive outcomes of mutual, co-created relational identities (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). For role-aligned partners, the challenge of co-creating a relational identity lies in transcending readily available scripts to develop genuine interpersonal understanding. Alignment with traditional labor roles further reinforces group divisions and social hierarchy between partners (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, 1987/2013; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). While these partnerships may function smoothly, they are not mutual. They remain restricted by identity-based roles that confine both partners to their respective social identity groups (Miller & Stiver, 1993). This obscures partners' distinct skills and needs, undermines opportunities to leverage strengths, and creates tension when expectations clash with relational needs. Over time, this can hinder mutual respect and understanding, as each person may struggle to see past identity-based expectations of their partner. Convergence of role prototype and social identity expectations can also make it difficult

for partners to differentiate between role-based behaviors and identity-based assumptions. For example, a partner may wonder, does my partner speak over me because of his role-based authority, or because he is a White man and I am a Black woman? Alignment between partners' identity stereotypes and their role expectations makes such attributions more ambiguous (Dupree et al., 2021; McCabe, 2009; Michael-Makri, 2010). As such, role-aligned intersectional relational identities may be limited in the depth and mutuality possible between partners (Colbert et al., 2016; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Heilman, 2012; Hinz et al., 2022).

Despite finding themselves on a well-worn relational track, diverse role-aligned partners may attempt to re-negotiate roles to create a more meaningful connection. While roles are generally self-reinforcing and resistant to change (Eagly, 1987/2013; Eagly & Wood, 2012), they are also socially constructed between partners (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007) and can fluctuate and realign over time. This reimagination also creates opportunities for reduction of these biases (e.g., Costa, 2024). However, shifting relational norms requires substantial emotional labor, as people resist applying norms from one relationship type to another (e.g., from manager-supervisee to peer-to-peer; Fiske & Tetlock, 1997).

Next, we consider the challenges and opportunities of co-creating an intersectional relational identity without traditional stereotypes and scripts as a guide. Unlike aligned intersectional relational identities, which may never move beyond superficial, script-based interactions without conscious intervention, misalignment between partners' identities and role prototypes necessitates active sense-making and relationship-building to co-create an intersectional relational identity.

Co-created Intersectional Relational Identities

Co-created intersectional relational identities are characterized by intersectionality and role misalignment. We propose that while the lack of social and role-based guidance in these dyads increases uncertainty, it also creates a generative space that can facilitate the emergence of a co-created intersectional relational identity (Levinthal & Rerup, 2021). Rather than being constructed from existing role-based norms and stereotypes, these relational identities are *co-created*. We define co-creation as the dyadic process of producing something "imaginative or innovative…to bring something into existence" (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). We conceptualize co-creation as distinct from co-construction because the latter primarily involves reorganizing existing elements (i.e., finding ways to work within existing role prototypes), whereas the former involves creating new elements (i.e., reimagining and negotiating mutually beneficial norms and expectations). While partners may experience the relational identity differently, co-created identities are defined by the shared interaction patterns between partners.

A dyad in this quadrant (Quadrant 4: Co-created Intersectional) might include a Black female leader and a White male subordinate— an inversion of role prototypes that associate leadership with agentic qualities stereotypically attributed to White men, and low-power, supportive roles with women, especially women of color. These dyads must create an intersectional relational identity without the external guidance of stereotype-aligned role prototypes, as these scripts do not match one or more partners' identities (i.e., there is not a prototypical script for how a Black female leader should interact with a White male subordinate). This creates greater potential for role uncertainty and conflict that may undermine the dyad's effectiveness (Koenig et al., 2011; Petsko & Rosette, 2023). However, partners in this quadrant do not require perfect alignment in their understanding of their connection (Weick et al., 2005) and can function minimally by deferring to one or the other of their conflicting role scripts. The challenge lies in *how* partners can co-create an intersectional relational identity in the face of this inherent uncertainty.

A Process Model for Co-Creating Intersectional Relational Identities

Having established our typology of workplace relational identities and introduced the concept of intersectional relational identity, we now turn to theorizing *how* diverse partners can co-create intersectional relational identities (see Figure 3). We first consider the factors that motivate diverse partners to expend effort co-creating an intersectional relational identity. We then turn our attention to the co-creation process itself, proposing that humble inquiry and a wisdom orientation facilitate this process, which unfolds through three key interpersonal mechanisms: identity comprehension, optimizing the other, and role co-creation.

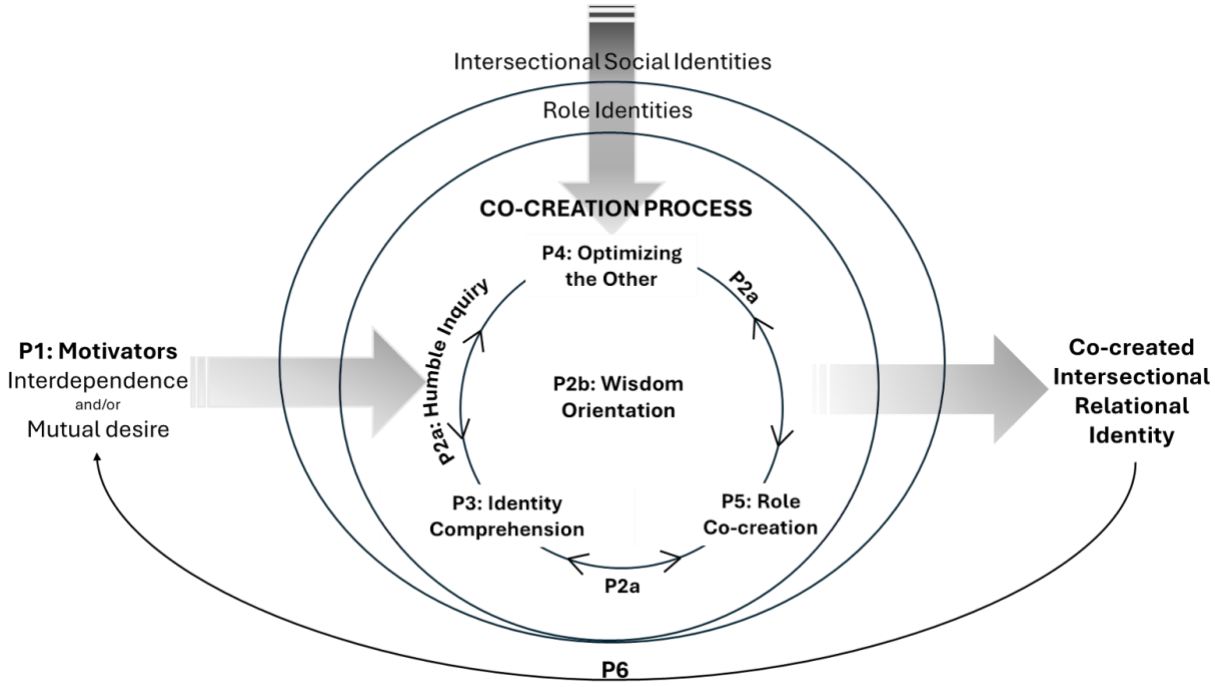

Figure 3. *Intersectional Relational Identity Co-Creation Process*
Note. Model of theorized intersectional relational identity processes. P1, P2, etc. refer to Proposition 1, Proposition 2, etc.

Factors Supporting Intersectional Relational Identity Co-creation

Motivators

We propose that co-creating intersectional relational identities requires a motivating force to initiate the formation of relational identities. In work settings, we identify two main motivators of relational identity formation between diverse, role-misaligned partners (see Figure 3): recognition of mutual interdependence (e.g., shared tasks or roles) and/or a mutual desire for connection (e.g., social support, informal bonding; Schultz et al., 2015). These motivators correspond to cognition-based and affect-based motives for forming diverse relationships (Chattopadhyay et al., 2016). Work interdependence can compel diverse, role-misaligned partners to build positive relationships, as effective collaboration is often essential for

performance (Claypool et al., 2014; Guarana & Hernandez, 2015; Grant & Parker, 2009; Koschate & van Dick, 2011). Indeed, recent research demonstrates how such interdependence can help overcome demographic barriers (Kotzur et al., 2022; Fiske, 2000/2013/2021). Even employees with traditional gender role beliefs can form strong cross-gender connections when work interdependence helps reveal shared values between coworkers (Adamovic & Molines, 2023).

In addition to the practical demands of interdependence, workplace relationships are an important potential source of social support and relational need fulfillment, helping to prevent burnout (Converso et al., 2015) and promote feelings of psychological safety, community, and resilience (Carmeli et al., 2009; Carmeli & Gittell, 2009). As such, coworkers can also be intrinsically motivated to co-create a relational identity with a partner, particularly if these needs are going unmet (Spreitzer et al., 2017; Claypool et al., 2014). Furthermore, while mutual desire and interdependence can each initiate the formation of relational identity between diverse partners, together they may produce synergistic benefits that further encourage relationship building.

Proposition 1: Co-creation of an intersectional relational identity requires motivating factors: mutually recognized interdependence and/or a mutual desire for a relationship.

Facilitators

We further propose that co-creating intersectional relational identities requires partners to have the interpersonal capacity to craft new patterns of relating with each other. Specifically, we identify humble inquiry and wisdom orientation as essential facilitators of relational identity co-creation (Schein, 2013; Schein & Schein, 2020).

Humble Inquiry. Grounded in the recognized interdependence between partners, humble inquiry enables the formation of relational identity by encouraging search for individuating information, affirming partner value, and disrupting status and role hierarchies (Schein, 2013). Humble inquiry is a relational behavior and approach focused on the power of "asking instead of telling" (Schein & Schein, 2020, p. 55; Schein, 2013), highlighting the ability of inquiry (asking) to co-create meaning, acknowledge difference, and temporarily redistribute power through respectful, open-ended dialogue. The act of listening to one's partner confers status on the speaker and signals that the input is worthy of attention and consideration (Hinz et al., 2022). By asking questions that do not inspire "scripted socially acceptable responses," partners can move beyond stereotypes and cultural assumptions (Schein & Schein, 2020, p. 29). When partners engage in humble inquiry, they experience "here-and-now humility" (Shein & Shein, 2020, p. 26; Schein, 2013)— a state in which, by virtue of inquiring, the listener's own ignorance is revealed alongside a genuine interest in the other's knowledge— establishing partners' interdependence and value (Kashdan et al., 2013).

Humble inquiry can be particularly useful when (and oftentimes assumes) the listener is of a higher status than the speaker, as the very act of asking creates a degree of vulnerability and signals that the speaker possesses knowledge important to the listener. Indeed, Phillips (2016) posits that such curiosity and information gathering can involve "disrupting and recasting categories" and "can also be a vehicle for more fundamental explorations of social difference" (p.18). This is achieved by phrasing questions as open-ended without 'telling' speakers how to answer or give the response the listener wants to hear. Further, Schein and Schein (2020) suggest incorporating a sense of 'we' into questions, as partners ask questions that focus on shared

decision-making and accountability. For example, Schein suggests a sharing-based question could be: “Can we reconstruct together how we got to this point?” (Schein & Schein, 2020, p. 134). Asking questions in this way inspires reciprocal curiosity between partners, while avoiding the harmful consequences of superficial or one-way curiosity (see Sue et al., 2007; Lewis et al., 2013). As such, humble inquiry is a key approach for navigating the uncertainty of role misalignment in intersectional partnerships.

Proposition 2a: Humble inquiry behaviors facilitate co-creation of an intersectional relational identity.

Wisdom orientation. A “wisdom orientation”— the “simultaneous engagement with possibly divergent views to maintain and even expand ambiguity” (Levinthal & Rerup, 2021, p.537), also facilitates co-creation of intersectional relational identities. Wisdom is an orientation toward knowledge as an ever-evolving entity that encompasses multiple “truths” that can even be contradictory or uncertain. Rather than seeking to reduce or simplify their differences, partners cultivate the capacity to simultaneously hold multiple, sometimes conflicting viewpoints that may surface through humble inquiry (Glynn & Watkiss, 2020). For example, a given interpersonal situation may complicate interactions where social norms of deference conflict with organizational role norms of leadership. In such cases, there may be no single, underlying "truth" to uncover through questioning. Instead, the challenge lies in developing a shared understanding that honors these differing perspectives. This is how wisdom serves as a crucial complement to humble inquiry, facilitating what Schein calls "abandon[ing] certainty for clarity” (Schein & Schein, 2020, p. xii).

A wisdom orientation encourages relational partners to view their different perspectives and backgrounds as valuable resources (Levinthal & Rerup, 2021), helping them overcome the fight-or-flight response by experiencing uncertainty and ambiguity as a constructive challenge rather than a source of stress (Schultz et al., 2015). Embracing uncertainty and ambiguity creates opportunities to develop complex, enriched understandings (Levinthal & Rerup, 2021). Partners engage with perspectives that challenge their assumptions (Davidson & James, 2007; Flynn, 2005; Guarana & Hernandez, 2015), helping them to navigate role ambiguity and to recognize their own perspective as partial and shaped by social context (Collins, 2000; Zuo et al., 2019).

Holding dissonant ideas at once implies that partners will continue to maintain these disagreements as part of their pooled knowledge. Rather than maintaining fixed power roles, this allows both partners to contribute equally through knowledge giving and knowledge receiving. This approach shifts the focus from hierarchical information exchange to collaborative knowledge pooling, thereby creating a more equitable co-creation process. When partners remain motivated to work through uncertainty through co-creation, they can maintain more collaborative power dynamics (Glynn & Watkiss, 2020; Schultz et al., 2015; Feldman et al., 2019), thereby co-creating an intersectional relational identity over time.

Proposition 2b: A wisdom orientation facilitates co-creation of an intersectional relational identity.

Interpersonal Mechanisms for Co-Creating Intersectional Relational Identities

We propose that partners engage in three interconnected processes to co-create an intersectional relational identity that meets their relational needs: identity comprehension, optimizing the other, and role co-creation. These processes work synergistically, with partners

simultaneously discovering valuable attributes in one another while calibrating new ways of working together. Continuation of a relationship over time requires that it meets each partner's dual needs for belonging and distinctiveness (i.e., *optimal distinctiveness*; Brewer, 1991). To meet these relational needs, partners must preserve and celebrate individual uniqueness while also building common points of connection (Brewer, 1995; Thomas & Ely, 1996). By definition, partners co-creating an intersectional relational identity have fewer common aspects of social identity to facilitate a sense of belonging, necessitating deeper exploration of shared attributes or values to establish connection between partners. Diverse partners face the unique challenge of honoring these differences without reducing one another to unidimensional out-group stereotypes (Badea et al., 2010; Hogg et al., 2017; Hogg & Rast, 2022). Together, identity comprehension, optimizing the other, and role co-creation help diverse partners meet these challenges to co-create an intersectional relational identity.

Identity Comprehension

Meeting one another's relational needs requires partners to understand both 'what matters to me' and 'what matters to you' to determine 'how we fit together'. The mutual understanding fostered through humble inquiry and wisdom enables partners to develop identity comprehension, "the degree to which the relative importance of one's identities is recognized by important others" (Thatcher et al., 2003; Thatcher & Greer, 2008, p.6). Thus, before partners can effectively collaborate across differences, they must recognize which aspects of their partner's identity are most meaningful to their work and sense of professional self-worth. Though informed by identity categories, these identity needs extend beyond them and shape how partners approach collaboration. For example, a Black woman in a leadership role may need recognition

for her strategic thinking capabilities rather than being praised for her collaborative style, while her White male partner may need acknowledgment of his willingness to share power rather than assumptions about his natural authority.

Identity comprehension is key to meeting relational needs, as it helps partners understand what gives their colleagues a sense of belonging and uniqueness. Partners' underlying identity needs may go unspoken, yet are central to their feeling respected and empowered in the relationship. Through humble inquiry, partners listen for what energizes their partner, what frustrates them, where they invest their attention, and how they respond to different types of recognition or challenge. Partners might engage in mutual self-disclosure, or explicitly discuss how their unique attributes could complement each other. In addition to direct disclosure, which may be incomplete or filtered through social expectations, partners attend to both what their partner says and what their partner does in workplace interactions (Appiah et al., 2022; Holoien et al., 2015). Partners can focus their efforts on recognizing the aspects of identity and capability that are important to their partner's professional sense of self. This targeted understanding reveals what makes each partner feel authentic and valued at work and helps partners avoid dismissing or devaluing what matters most to their colleague.

Partners with greater identity comprehension more readily recognize how their differences can create opportunities for synergy rather than obstacles to overcome, enabling effective collaboration. Identity comprehension helps partners recognize not just who they are as individuals, but also how they fit together— their complementary capabilities, potential friction points, and the value they create as a pair. This mutual understanding provides the foundation for co-creating an intersectional relational identity.

Proposition 3: Identity comprehension facilitates co-creation of an intersectional relational identity by supporting partners' relational needs for belonging and uniqueness.

Optimizing the Other

Partners that co-create an intersectional relational identity also engage in what we term *optimizing the other*— a cognitive and interpersonal process through which partners selectively attend to, interpret, and reinforce those attributes of their partner that fulfill *their own* relational needs for belonging and distinctiveness. This process goes beyond mere positive perception or idealization of one's partner; rather, it involves a targeted search for and emphasis on attributes that create both connection and complementarity between partners. Just as individuals attend to self- and in-group information that supports feelings of belonging and uniqueness (Pickett et al., 2002; Slotter et al., 2014), partners recalibrate their perceptions of each other to emphasize their relational identity's optimal distinctiveness (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Search for belonging directs attention to attributes that foster connection within the dyad— shared values, combined strengths, and mutual understanding, such as a shared commitment to innovation and quality. Search for distinctiveness simultaneously highlights complementary skills and unique contributions that distinguish partnerships within the larger organizational context; for example, how their different networks and perspectives create unique problem-solving capabilities. Optimization mentally magnifies the importance of attributes that serve these relational needs while downplaying or contextualizing those that might threaten them. This creates a multidimensional understanding of their partner that captures both mutual value and collective distinctiveness.

Evidence of partner optimization comes from research on motivated perceptions in close relationships, which shows that individuals construe their partner's behavior as reciprocating their own, reflecting motivated cognition that fulfills relational needs (Lemay & Clark, 2015). For example, people who are caring toward their partner tend to perceive their partner as caring for them in return (Lemay et al., 2007), suggesting that partners' impressions of one another tend to signal mutual belonging. Similarly, people with a greater need for autonomy may downplay their partner's responsiveness (Beck & Clark, 2010). Partners may also interpret ambiguous behaviors and traits in ways that foster both commonality and complementarity by extending charitable interpretations of potentially negative behaviors while highlighting the value that differences bring to the relational identity. For instance, a White manager might view a Black employee's questioning of standard procedures not as resistance but as valuable critical thinking that strengthens their collective approach. Rather than a misinterpretation of one's partner, these perceptions reflect a cognitive tendency to attend to and interpret social interactions in ways that support our personal needs.

The process of optimization directly contributes to relational identity development by creating a foundation of mutual appreciation and understanding. Unlike simplified stereotypical perceptions, optimization involves a complex and nuanced view of one's partner that acknowledges both similarities and differences. This allows for greater flexibility and resilience in the relationship, as partners can draw on multiple sources of connection when facing challenges. Partners might deliberately create opportunities for skill demonstration or discuss how their unique attributes could complement each other. Such efforts are sustained by a wisdom orientation, helping partners to perceive the full complexity of each other's humanity. Through

this search for shared and complementary characteristics, skills, and knowledge, partners can acknowledge real differences without letting them become relationship-defining.

Optimization may be enabled by the reduced competitive threat that cross-group partnerships present (Gerber et al., 2018; Mumford, 1983). Individuals more readily compare themselves to similar others within their reference group, rather than to outgroup members with whom they are not competing for ingroup standing (Festinger, 1954; Leach & Vliek, 2008). Because they are less likely to view one another as competitive threats, diverse partners may be more receptive to each other's contributions and complementary skills. Thus, diverse partners may experience greater flexibility in perceiving and optimizing one another because the absence of competitive threat creates a more open and collaborative working dynamic. Evidence of this appears in research by Guarana, Li, and Hernandez (2017), who found that managers with a strong tendency toward social comparison were more receptive to input from subordinates of a different gender (vs. the same gender). This suggests that when social comparison pressures are minimized, as occurs when feedback originates from outgroup members who pose less competitive threat, partners become more open to recognizing one another's contributions, enabling optimization.

In sum, optimization allows partners in diverse relationships to challenge the limitations of categorical perceptions and develop personalized, multifaceted understandings of one another, together. This process enables partners to co-create a relational identity that honors both their shared attributes and their unique contributions.

Proposition 4: Optimizing the other facilitates co-creation of an intersectional relational identity by supporting partners' relational needs for belonging and uniqueness.

Role Co-creation

In the absence of shared role expectations, diverse partners in misaligned roles have unique opportunities to co-create new roles that foster belonging and distinction. We define *role co-creation* as a collaborative dyadic process through which partners shape the roles, responsibilities, and relational norms that govern their work collaboration, such as through narratives (Swann et al., 1992) and active social shaping (Taeuscher et al., 2022). Role misalignment necessitates clarifying communication about partners' roles and expectations, making implicit assumptions more explicit and therefore open to mutual shaping. Partners actively negotiate these ambiguities to avoid confusion, inefficiency, or conflict that could undermine collaboration. Role co-creation is similar to role crafting in that it involves "changing one's role in terms of what one does and who one interacts with at work to improve intrinsic benefits" (Bruning & Campion, 2018, p. 501). However, unlike role crafting, role co-creation is a dyadic process in which relational partners mutually partake in creating one another's roles. As partners actively shape the role each will play in the relationship, they bridge diverging expectations to form mutual understanding of how they can collaborate effectively. This sense of "how we work together" becomes a key component of their relational identity.

Role co-creation can include both work role expansion— "enlargement of the incumbent's work role to include elements of work and related activities not originally in the formal job description" and social expansion— "changing the scope, number, and nature of social relationships within one's work" (Bruning & Campion, 2018, p. 506; Grant & Hofmann, 2011). Work role expansion helps partners shape roles around their complementary strengths and needs, while social expansion allows these roles to push beyond identity-based expectations. For

example, a Black woman consultant might take the lead in client strategy and relationship-building. At the same time, her more introverted White man partner focuses on operational planning and behind-the-scenes execution, expanding expectations about who occupies visible leadership roles. By co-creating roles, partners can subvert such default assumptions and align responsibilities with their strengths and preferences.

Throughout this process, partners generate shared narratives about their relational identity that legitimize their co-created roles to themselves and others. Relational narratives integrate elements of both social identity and personal attributes to create coherent accounts of why their particular role arrangement is effective (Bisagni, 2013; Jian, 2022). Bisagni argues that such narratives "are always experienced as forces, able to create closeness and distance and regulate the rhythm of the ongoing interplay between individuals" (2013, p. 623). Narratives around 'how we' and 'what we' do become part of the relationship's shared identity and inform how partners position themselves and each other both within and beyond the relationship.

Narratives around competence, relative to the relationship, can be particularly useful for co-creating effective roles, given individuals' difficulties recognizing their own strengths and weaknesses (Kim et al., 2020; Kruger & Dunning, 1999). In discussing and recognizing competence, partners share information about one another's unique capabilities, limitations, and preferences. This communication allows for more personalized role arrangements that capitalize on each partner's strengths while accommodating their challenges. They can also support partners in navigating conflicting role expectations and identity-based stereotypes (Sanchez-Burks & Lee, 2009). For instance, Robin Quivers, a Black woman breaking barriers in shock jock radio, credits her White male co-host, Howard Stern, for recognizing and validating

qualities in her that others might have overlooked. “You’re a genius,” she recalls Stern urging her. “Please, every time you come in, participate, talk to me— please, please, please”, encouraging Quivers to see her unique contributions as valuable (Quivers, 2014, para. 2). She describes their partnership as positive, synergistic, and fulfilling, hallmarks of a co-created intersectional relational identity: “Our amazing chemistry is both a compliment to the show and a blessing in my life.” Thus, through role co-creation, partners can transcend the constraints of prototypes and stereotypes to craft roles better aligned with their strengths and needs.

Partners’ differing social identities may also create unique opportunities for crafting novel roles by negating the pressure of felt competition between partners. In the absence of surface identity similarities, co-created intersectional relational identities tend to form around deeper shared attributes, encouraging partners to see these as pathways to belonging rather than as grounds for comparison. These shared attributes further encourage connection rather than competition, as feelings of solidarity with out-group members can help diffuse identity threat (Johnson et al., 2024). In addition, partners’ different backgrounds and values may orient each individual toward different resources and opportunities, reducing potential for direct competition. Consequently, while navigating intersectional differences demands significant cognitive investment, these differences may actually enhance role co-creation by facilitating a collaborative orientation, even within resource-constrained environments.

Role co-creation is a cognitively demanding process that requires sustained effort from both partners. Yet, asymmetries in engagement may still produce a co-created relational identity as long as both partners' needs are met through their collective efforts. Partners have varying communication styles and relationship skills informed by personal and social identity

differences. As such, forcing symmetrical engagement could undermine authenticity and play against each person's natural strengths. Just as partners bring different professional skills to collaborative projects, they also possess varying relational capabilities— one might excel at emotional attunement while another contributes stronger communication or conflict resolution skills. Partners' specific strategies matter less than their combined ability to create roles that support belonging and distinctiveness for both parties. This flexibility reflects a central insight of our framework: diverse work partnerships are most effective when the partners themselves shape roles.

In sum, role co-creation allows partners to develop complementary approaches to shared goals, invest positively in their relationship, and become more open to each other's influence (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Differences between partners become opportunities for creativity and collaboration, turning them into shared strengths and points of connection (Arnett, 2023; Brennecke, 2020). Thus, role co-creation is a key mechanism in the intersectional relational identity co-creation process.

Proposition 5: Role co-creation facilitates co-creation of an intersectional relational identity by supporting partners' relational needs for belonging and uniqueness.

As partners co-create their roles together, they develop mutual interdependence, as each partner's success reinforces the other's (Deutsch, 1949, 1962; Johnson & Johnson, 2005). This interdependence occurs when partners pursue shared objectives with outcomes tied to each other's actions, offer help and assistance, exchange resources, provide feedback, and offer encouragement (Johnson & Johnson, 2001, 2005). Partners come to view their collaborator's achievements as beneficial to their own goals, become open to each other's influence, and adapt

their approach based on their collaborator's feedback. This differs from social dependence, where one person's outcomes rely on another's actions without reciprocal effect, and individuals' results remain uninfluenced by others' behaviors. Creative collaboration strengthens partners' recognition of their interdependence and unique value to each other, further encouraging feelings of "we" -ness (Randel et al., 2018; Swann et al., 2004). Moreover, as partners successfully collaborate, they develop a shared understanding and mutual appreciation for one another, further reinforcing the desire for the relationship (Allport, 1954; Heaphy & Dutton, 2008; Pettigrew, 1998). Thus, co-creation of partners' relational identity— a positive, shared sense of "we"— further deepens their feelings of interdependence and desire for the relationship, fueling a virtuous cycle that further strengthens the relational identity.

Proposition 6: Co-creating an intersectional relational identity further reinforces partners' feelings of interdependence and desire for the relationship.

Opportunities to create a virtuous cycle are amplified when partners bring both humble inquiry and wisdom to the relational identity co-creation process. Their mutual interest in understanding one another's point of view becomes a form of interdependence in itself, creating sustainable partnerships where differences serve as ongoing sources of insight and innovation. Consistent with Ely and Thomas's (2001) diversity integration perspective, partners who are both highly interdependent and curious about each other are especially motivated to seek out their counterpoint's perspective. We add to this partner's valuation of their differences and disagreements via a wisdom orientation. As partners build a relational identity that draws upon rather than ignores their differences, this virtuous cycle can transform what might initially appear as challenges into sources of relational strength. Over time, this dynamic enables resilient

relationships, with role patterns of mutual learning and collaborative problem-solving that can help partners navigate novel challenges.

Discussion

This paper acknowledges the significant impact of intersecting social identities on the formation of relational identity. We explicate how these social identities fundamentally shape both the emergent relational identity between partners and their collaborative role enactment, making it a critical factor that must be incorporated into theories of workplace relationships. When partners' social identities render preexisting organizational expectations inadequate for facilitating effective relationships and enabling good work, partners are compelled to actively create relational identities that work to meet their specific needs. Thus, the complexity of partners' intersecting social and role identities becomes a generative force that drives intentional relational identity construction in workplace partnerships across identity differences.

Building on this premise, the theoretical arguments in this paper aim to achieve two primary goals. First, we reconceptualize workplace relational identities as intersectional entities at the dyadic level of analysis, introducing a typology that makes novel predictions about the specific challenges and opportunities facing work partnerships between (dis)similar and role (mis)aligned workers. In doing so, we theorize how work partners co-create intersectional workplace relational identities that can positively transcend the constraints of social and role hierarchies. Second, we develop a new theory explaining how partners can overcome the unique challenges to relational identity formation between diverse partners. We present an elaborated relational identity model that both locates pressures and challenges and presents pathways toward interdependence and relational identity development. Enabled by wisdom and humble

inquiry, partners leverage identity comprehension, optimizing the other, and role co-creation to co-create an intersectional relational identity that fulfills partners' relational needs. Together, these contributions provide a novel framework for understanding workplace relationships in a diverse workforce.

Limitations and Constraints on Generalizability

While we ground our theorizing in gender and racial identity and roles in traditional American labor organizing, our framework can also shed light on relational identity co-creation between partners with other social identity differences. The value of wisdom and humble inquiry— and the relational processes they enable (identity comprehension, optimizing the other, and role co-creation)— likely extends to other social identity differences embedded in hierarchical labor roles. At the same time, application of our dyadic intersectional framework must be sensitive to the unique intersectional dynamics and contextual factors of any relationship (Cho et al., 2013), as specific social identities, power dynamics, organizational cultures, and historical contexts shape the lived experiences of partners in intersectional relationships. Other social identities, such as nationality, disability status, sexual orientation, age, religion, and socioeconomic status, and their intersections may create complexities that have been overlooked in more narrowly focused studies, pointing to an important area for future research (Cole, 2009; McCall, 2005; Jones et al., 2017).

While we focus our theorizing on contextually salient labor-organizing social identities, our propositions remain relevant regardless of how strongly individual partners identify with those identities. Visible markers, such as race or gender, shape how people are perceived and treated at work, regardless of whether they view those identities as central to their sense of self.

These external perceptions influence how others interpret their roles and responsibilities, shaping expectations and interactions. The processes we describe focus on how partners navigate these dynamics together, not just how individuals relate to their own identities. In this context, what matters most is not whether a partner identifies particularly, but whether both partners reach a mutual understanding of how identity matters to one another. In this way, humble inquiry with a wisdom orientation and identity comprehension remains a valuable tool for engaging across differences and responding to identity-based role expectations, even when identification is low or varies between partners.

Future Research Directions

Our theorizing offers many opportunities for empirical consideration. For example, future research could investigate whether and under what conditions co-created intersectional relationships can lead to positive outcomes, such as personal growth, stereotype disruption, role expansion, and dyadic effectiveness. Further, future research could examine how the barriers created by role misalignment are addressed through our theorized dyadic processes (identity comprehension, optimizing the other, and role co-creation), rather than being deterministic of outcomes. Such studies could examine dyads across varying degrees of role misalignment and track how process engagement relates to relationship quality over time.

Future research might also examine how the co-creation of intersectional relationships influences each partner's personal identity. Co-created intersectional relationships may enable partners' personal growth (Epley & Dunning, 2006) by serving as both a catalyst and a container for partners' self-discovery, helping partners see *themselves* beyond their own preexisting expectations. Relational identities are key to self-knowledge, as Jung (1925, 1959) observed in

his claim that relationship partners help cultivate facets of the self. This is echoed in research showing that even in individualistic cultures, self-knowledge develops through social ties (Markus & Kitayama, 2010) and in neuroimaging studies linking positive social interactions with self-awareness and emotional regulation (Lieberman, 2007). By recognizing and affirming one another's strengths (Eagly, 2005; Gardner et al., 2005; Sanchez-Burks & Lee, 2009), partners help each other see themselves beyond the limits of traditional stereotypes, fostering deeper self-understanding (e.g., Caza et al., 2024). Future research should consider how such relationships shape and reaffirm partners' sense of self and related mental health outcomes such as resilience and psychological well-being (Kreiner & Sheep, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Intersectional relationships may serve as mirrors, revealing hidden aspects of the self that partners might not otherwise see.

By developing roles around relational needs rather than prototypes and stereotypes, role co-creation likely fosters opportunities to disrupt both identity-based role prototypes (e.g., role expansion; Grant & Hofmann, 2011) and group stereotypes (Cialdini, 2007; Reno et al., 1993). The observable behaviors associated with each individual's co-created role, from generating reports to facilitating team meetings, form and reinforce role expectations in one's partner, and among others in the workplace (Eagly, 1987/2013; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ely et al., 2012). As coworkers witness each other performing tasks that transcend conventional role expectations, they likely update their beliefs and associations about what that role requires and who can enact it — that is, role expansion (Grant & Hofmann, 2011; Sherman et al., 2005; Todd et al., 2012). Thus, future research should explore whether and under what circumstances these co-created roles subvert gender and race role prototypes and stereotypes.

Future research should also consider whether and when role co-creation can improve the diverse partners' performance, particularly in the face of novel or complex problems. The role uncertainty present in diverse, misaligned relationships enables partners to craft roles based on their unique skills, knowledge, and needs. Dissimilar partners may leverage their unique skills and knowledge more freely, separated in psychological space from the demands of other social ingroup members (Marques & Paez, 1994; Trope & Liberman, 2010). For instance, past research shows that cognitively diverse dyads outperform homogenous pairs on complex problems by spending more time on dyadic, interactive problem-solving (Canham et al., 2012). Co-creation of roles may facilitate such collaboration effectiveness by allowing partners to respond dynamically to novel and complex tasks.

Conclusion

This paper reconceptualizes workplace relationships across identity differences as emergent intersectional entities shaped by partners' social identities and work roles. As the modern labor force continues to diversify, the workplace will serve as a critical host to the formation of such collaborations. We argue that much is to be gained from embracing the uncertainty of role-misaligned intersectional relationships. By outlining the pressures these partnerships face and offering strategies for turning these obstacles into opportunities for positive relationship-building, we highlight key processes for effective relationship-building in modern, diverse organizations.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used large language models to assist with the writing process. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the publication's content.

References

Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society*, 4(2), 139–158.

Adamovic, M., & Molines, M. (2023). What if the supervisor has a different gender? The roles of value fit, identification, and beliefs in gender equality. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 39(1), 101259.

Anderson, E. C., Carleton, R. N., Diefenbach, M., & Han, P. K. (2019). The relationship between uncertainty and affect. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 2504.

Appiah, O., Eveland Jr, W., Bullock, O., & Coduto, K. (2022). Why we can't talk openly about race: The impact of race and partisanship on respondents' perceptions of intergroup conversations. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 25(2), 434–452.

Arnett, R. D. (2023). Uniting through difference: Rich cultural-identity expression as a conduit to inclusion. *Organization Science,* 34(5), 1887-1913.

Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social identity theory and the organization. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(1), 20–39.

Avery, D. R., McKay, P. F., Wilson, D. C., & Tonidandel, S. (2009). Unequal attendance: The relationships between race, organizational diversity cues, and absenteeism. *Personnel Psychology*, 62(1), 59–82.

Badea, C., Jetten, J., Czukor, G., & Askevis-Leherpeux, F. (2010). The bases of identification: When optimal distinctiveness needs face social identity threat. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 49(1), 21–41.

Bailey, M., & Trudy. (2018). On misogynoir: Citation, erasure, and plagiarism. *Feminist Media Studies*, 18(4), 762–768.

Batnitzky, A., McDowell, L., & Dyer, S. (2009). Flexible and strategic masculinities: The working lives and gendered identities of male migrants in London. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 35(8), 1275–1293.

Baugh, S. G., & Graen, G. B. (1997). Effects of team gender and racial composition on perceptions of team performance in cross-functional teams. *Group & Organization Management*, 22(3), 366–383.

Beal, F. M. (1970). Double Jeopardy: To be Black and female. Detroit, MI: Radical Education Project.

Beck, L. A., & Clark, M. S. (2010). Looking a gift horse in the mouth as a defense against increasing intimacy. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 46(4), 676–679.

Berdahl, J. L., & Bhattacharyya, B. (2024). Do White Women Gain Status for Engaging in Anti-black Racism at Work? An Experimental Examination of Status Conferral. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 1–20.

Biddle, B. J. (2013). Role theory: Expectations, identities, and behaviors. Academic Press.

Bisagni, F. (2013). On the impact of words: interpretation, empathy and affect regulation. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 58(5), 615–635.

Blader, S. L., & Tyler, T. R. (2009). Testing and extending the group engagement model: Linkages between social identity, procedural justice, economic outcomes, and extrarole behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 94(2), 445.

Brennecke, J. (2020). Dissonant ties in intraorganizational networks: Why individuals seek problem-solving assistance from difficult colleagues. *Academy of Management Journal*, 63(3), 743–778.

Brewer, M. B. (1991). The social self: On being the same and different at the same time. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 17(5), 475–482.

Brewer, M. B. (1991). The social self: On being the same and different at the same time. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 17(5), 475–482.

Brewer, M.B. (1995). Managing diversity: The role of social identities. In S. Jackson & M. Ruderman (Eds.), Diversity in workteams (pp. 131–159). Washington, DC: APA Books.

Brewer, M. B. (1999). The psychology of prejudice: Ingroup love and outgroup hate? *Journal of Social Issues*, 55(3), 429–444.

Brewer, M. B., & Gardner, W. (1996). Who is this "We"? Levels of collective identity and self representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71(1), 83.

Bruning, P. F., & Campion, M. A. (2018). A role–resource approach–avoidance model of job crafting: A multimethod integration and extension of job crafting theory. *Academy of Management Journal*, 61(2), 499–522.

Burke, R. J. (2014). Individual, organizational, and societal backlash against women. In *Gender in Organizations* (pp. 335–362). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Burt, R. S. (1992). Structural holes: The social structure of competition. Harvard University Press.

Canham, M. S., Wiley, J., & Mayer, R. E. (2012). When diversity in training improves dyadic problem solving. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 26(3), 421–430.

Carbado, D. W., Crenshaw, K. W., Mays, V. M., & Tomlinson, B. (2013). Intersectionality: Mapping the movements of a theory. Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race, 10(2), 303–312.

Carmeli, A., & Gittell, J. H. (2009). High-quality relationships, psychological safety, and learning from failures in work organizations. *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior*, 30(6), 709–729.

Carmeli, A., Brueller, D., & Dutton, J. E. (2009). Learning behaviours in the workplace: The role of high-quality interpersonal relationships and psychological safety. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science: The Official Journal of the International Federation for Systems Research*, 26(1), 81–98.

Carter, D. R., & Peters, T. (2016). The underrepresentation of African American women in executive leadership: What's getting in the way? *Journal of Business Studies Quarterly*, 7(4), 115–134.

Caza, B. B., Heaphy, E. D., Roberts, L. M., & Spreitzer, G. (2024). Revaluing Ordinary Moments: Disrupting Gendered Positive Self-Concepts through a Narrative Feedback Intervention. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 10(1), 34–58.

Chan, M. E., & McAllister, D. J. (2014). Abusive supervision through the lens of employee state paranoia. *Academy of Management Review*, 39(1), 44–66.

Chattopadhyay, P., George, E., & Lawrence, S. A. (2004). Why does dissimilarity matter? Exploring self-categorization, self-enhancement, and uncertainty reduction. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(5), 892.

Chattopadhyay, P., George, E., & Ng, C. K. (2016). Hearts and minds: Integrating regulatory focus and relational demography research. *Organizational Psychology Review*, 6(2), 139–161.

Cheryan, S., Master, A., & Meltzoff, A. N. (2015). Cultural stereotypes as gatekeepers: Increasing girls' interest in computer science and engineering by diversifying stereotypes. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 49.

Cho, S., Crenshaw, K. W., & McCall, L. (2013). Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theory, applications, and praxis. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 38(4), 785–810.

Cialdini, R. B. (2007). Descriptive social norms as underappreciated sources of social control. *Psychometrika*, 72(2), 263-268.

Claypool, H. M., & Bernstein, M. J. (2014). Social exclusion and stereotyping: Why and when exclusion fosters individuation of others. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 106(4), 571.

Colbert, A. E., Bono, J. E., & Purvanova, R. K. (2016). Flourishing via workplace relationships: Moving beyond instrumental support. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59(4), 1199–1223.

Cole, E. R. (2009). Intersectionality and research in psychology. *American Psychologist*, 64(3), 170.

Collins, P. H. (2000). Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment. Routledge.

Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2020). Intersectionality. John Wiley & Sons.

Converso, D., Loera, B., Viotti, S., & Martini, M. (2015). Do positive relations with patients play a protective role for healthcare employees? Effects of patients' gratitude and support on nurses' burnout. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 470.

Cook, A., & Glass, C. (2014). Above the glass ceiling: When are women and racial/ethnic minorities promoted to CEO? *Strategic Management Journal*, 35(7), 1080–1089.

Costa, E. (2024). Examining the effectiveness of interventions to reduce discriminatory behavior at work: An attitude dimension consistency perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 109(11), 1669–1692. https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0001215

Crenshaw, K. W. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine (pp. 139–168). In University of Chicago Legal Forum.

Crocker, J., Fiske, S. T., & Taylor, S. E. (1984). Schematic bases of belief change. In Attitudinal Judgment (pp. 197–226). New York, NY: Springer New York.

David, E. M., Avery, D. R., Witt, L. A., & McKay, P. F. (2015). A time-lagged investigation of the impact of coworker behavior on the effects of demographic dissimilarity. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 36(4), 582–606.

Davidson, M. N., & James, E. H. (2007). The engines of positive relationships across difference: Conflict and learning. In J. E. Dutton & B. R. Ragins (Eds.), Exploring positive relationships at work: Building a theoretical and research foundation (pp. 137–158). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Derks, B., Ellemers, N., Van Laar, C., & De Groot, K. (2011). Do sexist organizational cultures create the Queen Bee?. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 50(3), 519-535.

Deutsch, M. (1949). A theory of cooperation and competition. *Human Relations*. 2, 129–151.

Deutsch, M. (1962). "Cooperation and trust: some theoretical notes," in Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, ed M. Jones (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 275–319.

Devine, P. G. (1989). Stereotypes and prejudice: Their automatic and controlled components. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56(1), 5.

DeWall, C. N., Altermatt, T. W., & Thompson, H. (2005). Understanding the structure of stereotypes of women: Virtue and agency as dimensions distinguishing female subgroups. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *29*(4), 396–405.

Donovan, R. A. (2011). Tough or Tender: (Dis) Similarities in White College Students' Perceptions of Black and White Women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly,* 35(3), 458–468.

Donovan, R., & Williams, M. (2002). Living at the intersection: The effects of racism and sexism on Black rape survivors. *Women & Therapy*, *25*(3-4), 95–105.

Dovidio, J. F., Gaertner, S. E., Kawakami, K., & Hodson, G. (2002). Why can't we just get along? Interpersonal biases and interracial distrust. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 8(2), 88.

Dupree, C. H., Torrez, B., Obioha, O., & Fiske, S. T. (2021). Race–status associations: Distinct effects of three novel measures among White and Black perceivers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 120(3), 601.

Dutton, J. E., & Heaphy, E. D. (2003). The power of high-quality connections. Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline, 3(3), 263–278.

Eagly, A. H. (2005). Achieving relational authenticity in leadership: Does gender matter?. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16(3), 459-474.

Eagly, A. H. (2013). Sex differences in social behavior: A social-role interpretation. Psychology Press. (Original work published 1987).

Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109(3), 573.

Eagly, A. H., & Wood, W. (2012). Social role theory. In P. A. M. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), Handbook of theories of social psychology (pp. 458-476). Sage Publications Ltd.

Eaton, A. A., Saunders, J. F., Jacobson, R. K., & West, K. (2020). How gender and race stereotypes impact the advancement of scholars in STEM: Professors' biased evaluations of physics and biology post-doctoral candidates. *Sex Roles*, 82, 127–141.

Ebbers, J. J., & Wijnberg, N. M. (2017). Betwixt and between: Role conflict, role ambiguity and role definition in project-based dual-leadership structures. *Human Relations,* 70(11), 1342-1365.

Ehrhardt, K., & Ragins, B. R. (2019). Relational attachment at work: A complementary fit perspective on the role of relationships in organizational life. *Academy of Management Journal*, 62(1), 248–282.

Ellemers, N. (2018). Gender stereotypes. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 69, 275–298.

Ellison, E. R., & Langhout, R. D. (2020). Embodied relational praxis in intersectional organizing: Developing intersectional solidarity. *Journal of Social Issues*, 76(4), 949–970.

Elsesser, K. M., & Peplau, L. A. (2006). The glass partition: Obstacles to cross-sex friendships at work. *Human Relations,* 59(8), 1077-1100.

Ely, R. & Thomas, D. (2001). Cultural diversity at work: The effects of diversity perspectives on work group processes and outcomes. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 46, 229–273.

Ely, R. J. (1994). The effects of organizational demographics and social identity on relationships among professional women. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 39(2), 203–238.

Ely, R. J., & Padavic, I. (2007). A feminist analysis of organizational research on sex differences. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(4), 1121–1143.

Ely, R. J., Padavic, I., & Thomas, D. A. (2012). Racial diversity, racial asymmetries, and team learning environment: Effects on performance. *Organization Studies*, 33(3), 341–362.
Epley, N., & Dunning, D. (2006). The mixed blessings of self-knowledge in behavioral prediction: Enhanced discrimination but exacerbated bias. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 32(5), 641–655.
Ertug, G., Brennecke, J., Kovács, B., & Zou, T. (2022). What does homophily do? A review of the consequences of homophily. *Academy of Management Annals*, 16(1), 38–69.
Fasang, A. E., & Aisenbrey, S. (2022). Uncovering social stratification: Intersectional inequalities in work and family life courses by gender and race. *Social Forces*, 101(2), 575-605.
Feldman Hall, O., & Shenhav, A. (2019). Resolving uncertainty in a social world. *Nature Human Behaviour,* 3(5), 426–435.
Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations*, 7(2), 117–140.

Fielden, S. L., Davidson, M. J., Gale, A. W., & Davey, C. L. (2000). Women in construction: the untapped resource. *Construction Management & Economics,* 18(1), 113–121.
Fiske, S. T., & Neuberg, S. L. (1990). A continuum of impression formation, from category-based to individuating processes: Influences of information and motivation on attention and interpretation. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 23, 1–74.
Fiske, S. T., & Tetlock, P. E. (1997). Taboo trade-offs: Reactions to transactions that transgress the spheres of justice. *Political Psychology*, 18(2), 255-297.
Fiske, S. T. (2013). Interdependence and the reduction of prejudice. In Reducing prejudice and discrimination (1st ed., pp. 115-135). Psychology Press. (Original work published 2000).
Fiske, S. T. (2021). How status and interdependence explain different forms of dehumanization. The Routledge Handbook of Dehumanization, 245-259.
Flynn, F. J. (2005). Having an open mind: the impact of openness to experience on interracial attitudes and impression formation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 88(5), 816.
Gardner, W. L., Avolio, B. J., Luthans, F., May, D. R., & Walumbwa, F. (2005). "Can you see the real me?" A self-based model of authentic leader and follower development. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16(3), 343–372.
Gecas, V. (1982). The self-concept. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 8(1), 1–33.
Gerber, J. P., Wheeler, L., & Suls, J. (2018). A social comparison theory meta-analysis 60+ years on. *Psychological Bulletin,* 144(2), 177.
Ghavami, N., & Peplau, L. A. (2012). An intersectional analysis of gender and ethnic stereotypes: Testing three hypotheses. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 37(1), 113–127.
Glass, C., & Cook, A. (2016). Leading at the top: Understanding women's challenges above the glass ceiling. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 27(1), 51-63.
Glynn, M. A., & Watkiss, L. (2020). Of organizing and sensemaking: From action to meaning and back again in a half-century of Weick's theorizing. *Journal of Management Studies,* 57(7), 1331–1354.
Grant, A. M., & Parker, S. K. (2009). Redesigning work design theories: the rise of relational and proactive perspectives. *Academy of Management Annals,* 3(1), 317–375.
Grant, A.M., & Hofmann, D.A. (2011). Role expansion as a persuasion process: The interpersonal influence dynamics of role redefinition. *Organizational Psychology Review*, 1(1), 9–31.

Guarana, C. L., & Hernandez, M. (2015). Building sense out of situational complexity: The role of ambivalence in creating functional leadership processes. *Organizational Psychology Review,* 5(1), 50–73.

Guarana, C. L., Li, J. J., & Hernandez, M. (2017). Examining the effects of manager-subordinate gender match on managerial response to voice. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 72, 147–160.

Gündemir, S., Martin, A. E., & Homan, A. C. (2019). Understanding diversity ideologies from the target's perspective: A review and future directions. *Frontiers in Psychology,* 10, 420953.

Hall, E. V., Hall, A. V., Galinsky, A. D., & Phillips, K. W. (2019). MOSAIC: A model of stereotyping through associated and intersectional categories. *Academy of Management Review,* 44(3), 643–672.

Haslam, S. A., Turner, J. C., Oakes, P. J., Reynolds, K. J., Eggins, R. A., Nolan, M., & Tweedie, J. (1998). When do stereotypes become really consensual? Investigating the group-based dynamics of the consensualization process. *European Journal of Social Psychology,* 28(5), 755–776.

Heilman, M. E. (2012). Gender stereotypes and workplace bias. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 32, 113-135.

Heineman, M. (2023). American Symphony. Our Time Projects.

Hinz, J., Stephens, J. P., & Van Oosten, E. B. (2022). Toward a pedagogy of connection: A critical view of being relational in listening. *Management Learning,* 53(1), 76-97.

Hirsh, J. B., Mar, R. A., & Peterson, J. B. (2012). Psychological entropy: A framework for understanding uncertainty-related anxiety. *Psychological Review*, 119(2), 304.

Hogg, M. A., & Abrams, D. (2007). Intergroup behavior and social identity. The Sage Handbook of Social Psychology: Concise Student Edition, 335–360.

Hogg, M. A., & Rast III, D. E. (2022). Group processes and intergroup relations: Past, present, and future. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 25(3), 564-594.

Hogg, M. A., & Turner, J. C. (1985). Interpersonal attraction, social identification and psychological group formation. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 15(1), 51–66.

Hogg, M. A., van Knippenberg, D., & Rast III, D. E. (2017). The social identity theory of leadership: Theoretical origins, research findings, and conceptual developments. E*uropean Review of Social Psychology*, 28(1), 303-331.

Holder, A., Jackson, M. A., & Ponterotto, J. G. (2015). Racial microaggression experiences and coping strategies of Black women in corporate leadership. *Qualitative Psychology,* 2(2), 164.

Holoien, D. S., Bergsieker, H. B., Shelton, J. N., & Alegre, J. M. (2015). Do you really understand? Achieving accuracy in interracial relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 108(1), 76.

hooks, b. (1984). Feminist theory: From margin to center. South End Press.

Jahoda, G. (1998). Images of savages: Ancient roots of modern prejudice in Western culture. Routledge.

Jian, G. (2022). From empathic leader to empathic leadership practice: An extension to relational leadership theory. *Human Relations*, 75(5), 931–955.

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2001). Cooperation and competition, psychology of. In International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (pp. 2747–2751). Elsevier.

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2005). New developments in social interdependence theory. *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs*, 131(4), 285–358.

Johnson, H. H., Umphress, E., Bates, J. T., Parkinson, S. M., & Sheppard, L. D. (2024). Does Identification Hurt or Help Under Identity Threat? The Exacerbating Role of Identity Centrality on Feeling Offended and the Buffering Role of Coworker Solidarity on Identity-Protection Behaviors. *Academy of Management Journal*. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2022.0221

Jones, K. P., Sabat, I. E., King, E. B., Ahmad, A., McCausland, T. C., & Chen, T. (2017). Isms and schisms: A meta-analysis of the prejudice-discrimination relationship across racism, sexism, and ageism. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 38(7), 1076–1110.

Joshi, A., Liao, H., & Roh, H. (2011). Bridging domains in workplace demography research: A review and reconceptualization. *Journal of Management*, 37(2), 521–552.

Jost, J. T., Banaji, M. R., & Nosek, B. A. (2004). A decade of system justification theory: Accumulated evidence of conscious and unconscious bolstering of the status quo. *Political Psychology,* 25(6), 881–919.

Jung, C. G. (1959). Marriage as a psychological relationship. In V. S. DeLaszlo (Ed.), The basic writings of C. G. Jung (R. F. C. Hull, Trans., pp. 531–544). New York: Modern Library. (Original work published 1925).

Kanter, R. M. (1977). Men and women of the corporation. Basic Books..

Kashdan, T. B., Sherman, R. A., Yarbro, J., & Funder, D. C. (2013). How are curious people viewed and how do they behave in social situations? From the perspectives of self, friends, parents, and unacquainted observers. *Journal of Personality,* 81(2), 142–154.

Kelman, H. C. (2005). Building trust among enemies: The central challenge for international conflict resolution. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29(6), 639-650.

Kim, J., Brockner, J., & Block, C. J. (2020). Congruence between self-affirmation and self-construal eliminates the MBA gender performance gap. In *Academy of Management Proceedings* (Vol. 2020, No. 1, p. 12480). Briarcliff Manor, NY 10510: Academy of Management.

Koenig, A. M., Eagly, A. H., Mitchell, A. A., & Ristikari, T. (2011). Are leader stereotypes masculine? A meta-analysis of three research paradigms. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137(4), 616.

Koppman, S., Bechky, B. A., & Cohen, A. C. (2022). Overcoming conflict between symmetric occupations: How "creatives" and "suits" use gender ordering in advertising. *Academy of Management Journal*, 65(5), 1623–1651.

Kosakowska-Berezecka, N., Sawicki, A., Celikkol, G., Bosson, J. K., Van Laar, C., Van Rossum, A., Best, D., Jurek, P., Besta, T., Olech, M., & Glick, P. (2024). Does Culture Moderate Gender Stereotypes? Individualism Predicts Communal (but Not Agentic) Prescriptions for Men Across 62 Nations. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506231221913

Koschate, M., & van Dick, R. (2011). A multilevel test of Allport's contact conditions. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations,* 14(6), 769-787.

Kotzur, P. F., Stricker, J., Fricke, R., McPhetres, J., & Meyer, B. (2022). How does team diversity relate to the willingness to collaborate with asylum seekers? It depends on the diversity dimensions investigated and boundary conditions. *Plos One*, 17(3), e0266166.

Kreiner, G. E., & Sheep, M. L. (2009). Growing pains and gains: Framing identity dynamics as opportunities for identity growth. In Exploring positive identities and organizations (pp. 47–70). Psychology Press.

Kruger, J., & Dunning, D. (1999). Unskilled and unaware of it: how difficulties in recognizing one's own incompetence lead to inflated self-assessments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77(6), 1121.

Lau, D. C., & Murnighan, J. K. (2005). Interactions within groups and subgroups: The effects of demographic faultlines. *Academy of Management Journal*, 48(4), 645–659.

Leach, C. W., & Vliek, M. L. (2008). Group membership as a 'frame of reference' for interpersonal comparison. Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 2(1), 539-554.

Lebel, R. D. (2017). Moving beyond fight and flight: A contingent model of how the emotional regulation of anger and fear sparks proactivity. *Academy of Management Review*, 42(2), 190–206.

Lee, Y. G., Koval, C. Z., & Lee, S. S. (2023). The glass wall and the gendered evaluation of role expansion in freelancing careers. *Academy of Management Journal*, 66(4), 1042-1070.

Legault, L., Gutsell, J. N., & Inzlicht, M. (2011). Ironic effects of antiprejudice messages: How motivational interventions can reduce (but also increase) prejudice. *Psychological Science*, 22(12), 1472-1477.

Lemay Jr, E. P., Clark, M. S., & Feeney, B. C. (2007). Projection of responsiveness to needs and the construction of satisfying communal relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 92(5), 834.

Lemay, E. P., & Clark, M. S. (2015). Motivated cognition in relationships. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 1, 72–75.

Leong, F. T., & Gupta, A. (2007). Career Development and Vocational Behaviors of Asian Americans.

Levinthal, D., & Rerup, C. (2021). The plural of goal: Learning in a world of ambiguity. *Organization Science*, 32(4), 527–543.

Lewis, J. A., Mendenhall, R., Harwood, S. A., & Browne Huntt, M. (2013). Coping with gendered racial microaggressions among Black women college students. *Journal of African American Studies,* 17, 51–73.

Lewis, M., & Lupyan, G. (2020). Gender stereotypes are reflected in the distributional structure of 25 languages. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 4(10), 1021-1028.

Lieberman, M. D. (2007). Social cognitive neuroscience: a review of core processes. *Annual Review Psychology*, 58(1), 259–289.

Linton, R. (1940). A neglected aspect of social organization. *American Journal of Sociology*, 45(6), 870–886.

Linton, R. (1942). Age and sex categories. *American Sociological Review*, pp. 589–603.

Lord, R. G., Foti, R. J., & De Vader, C. L. (1984). A test of leadership categorization theory: Internal structure, information processing, and leadership perceptions. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance,* 34(3), 343-378.

Lounsbury, J. W., Foster, N. A., Levy, J. J., & Gibson, L. W. (2014). Key personality traits of sales managers. *Work*, 48(2), 239–253.

Macrae, C. N., & Bodenhausen, G. V. (2000). Social cognition: Thinking categorically about others. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 51(1), 93–120.

Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, 98(2), 224.

Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (2010). Cultures and selves: A cycle of mutual constitution. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 5(4), 420-430.
Markus, H., & Kunda, Z. (1986). Stability and malleability of the self-concept. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51(4), 858.
Marquardt, D. J., Brown, L. W., & Casper, W. J. (2018). Ethical leadership perceptions: Does it matter if you're black or white?. *Journal of Business Ethics,* 151, 599–612.
Marques, J. M., & Paez, D. (1994). The 'black sheep effect': Social categorization, rejection of ingroup deviates, and perception of group variability. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 5(1), 37–68.
McCabe, J. (2009). Racial and gender microaggressions on a predominantly-White campus: Experiences of Black, Latina/o and White undergraduates. *Race, Gender & Class*, 16(1/2), 133–151.
McCall, L. (2005). The complexity of intersectionality. Signs: *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30(3), 1771-1800.
Michael-Makri, S. (2010). Racial and ethnic minority graduate experiences with racial microaggressions in CACREP-accredited programs. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 88(2), 161–171.
Miller, J. B., & Stiver, I. P. (1993). A relational approach to understanding women's lives and problems. *Psychiatric Annals*, 23(8), 424–431.
Mischel, W. (1979). On the interface of cognition and personality: Beyond the person–situation debate. *American Psychologist,* 34(9), 740.
Mobasseri, S., Kahn, W. A., & Ely, R. J. (2024). Racial inequality in organizations: A systems psychodynamic perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, 49(4), 718–745.
Moss-Racusin, C. A., Phelan, J. E., & Rudman, L. A. (2010). When men break the gender rules: status incongruity and backlash against modest men. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity,* 11(2), 140.
Mumford, M. D. (1983). Social comparison theory and the evaluation of peer evaluations: A review and some applied implications. *Personnel Psychology*, 36(4), 867–881.
Mummendey, A., & Wenzel, M. (1999). Social discrimination and tolerance in intergroup relations: Reactions to intergroup difference. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 3(2), 158–174.
Neuberg, S. L., & Fiske, S. T. (1987). Motivational influences on impression formation: Outcome dependency, accuracy-driven attention, and individuating processes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53(3), 431.
Oxford English Dictionary. (n.d.). Create. In Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford University Press. Retrieved July 1, 2025, from https://www.oed.com/
Parks-Stamm, E. J., Heilman, M. E., & Hearns, K. A. (2008). Motivated to penalize: Women's strategic rejection of successful women. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34(2), 237–247.
Parsons, T. (1942). Age and sex in the social structure of the United States. American Sociological Review, 7(5), 604–616.
Pedulla, D. S. (2014). The positive consequences of negative stereotypes: Race, sexual orientation, and the job application process. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 77(1), 75-94.
People. (2012, April 17). Robin Quivers: Howard Stern Helped Her Through Cancer (Exclusive). Retrieved November 20, 2024, from https://people.com/robin-quivers-howard-stern-helped-cancer-stage-3c-endometrial-exclusive-8383706

Petsko, C. D., & Bodenhausen, G. V. (2020). Multifarious person perception: How social perceivers manage the complexity of intersectional targets. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *14*(2), e12518.

Petsko, C. D., & Rosette, A. S. (2023). Are leaders still presumed white by default? Racial bias in leader categorization revisited. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 108(2), 330.

Phillips, R. (2016). Curious about others: Relational and empathetic curiosity for diverse societies. *New Formations*, 88(88), 123–142.

Pickett, C. L., Silver, M. D., & Brewer, M. B. (2002). The impact of assimilation and differentiation needs on perceived group importance and judgments of ingroup size. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28(4), 546–558.

Pieterse, J. N. (1992). White on black: Images of Africa and blacks in Western popular culture. Yale University Press.

Ployhart, R. E., & Hale Jr, D. (2014). The fascinating psychological microfoundations of strategy and competitive advantage. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavio*r, 1(1), 145–172.

Polletta, F. (2022). Best friends forever: Relationship schemas, organizational forms, and institutional change. *Organization Theory*, 3(1), 26317877211072550.

Prentice, D. A., & Carranza, E. (2002). What women and men should be, shouldn't be, are allowed to be, and don't have to be: The contents of prescriptive gender stereotypes. *Psychology of Women Quarterly,* 26(4), 269–281.

Randel, A. E., Galvin, B. M., Shore, L. M., Ehrhart, K. H., Chung, B. G., Dean, M. A., & Kedharnath, U. (2018). Inclusive leadership: Realizing positive outcomes through belongingness and being valued for uniqueness. *Human Resource Management Review,* 28(2), 190–203.

Ray, V. (2019). A theory of racialized organizations. *American Sociological Review*, 84(1), 26–53.

Reno, R. R., Cialdini, R. B., & Kallgren, C. A. (1993). The transsituational influence of social norms. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 64(1), 104.

Reynolds-Dobbs, W., Thomas, K. M., & Harrison, M. S. (2008). From mammy to superwoman: Images that hinder Black women's career development. J*ournal of Career Development,* 35, 129–150. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0894845308325645

Ridgeway, C. L. (2006). Linking social structure and interpersonal behavior: A theoretical perspective on cultural schemas and social relations. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 69(1), 5–16.

Rosette, A. S., Leonardelli, G. J., & Phillips, K. W. (2008). The White standard: racial bias in leader categorization. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 93(4), 758.

Rosette, A. S., de Leon, R. P., Koval, C. Z., & Harrison, D. A. (2018). Intersectionality: Connecting experiences of gender with race at work. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 38, 1–22.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness. Guilford Publications.

Sabat, I. E., Goldberg, C., King, E. B., Dawson, J., & Zhang, L. (2021). Pygmalion in the pipeline: How managers' perceptions influence racial differences in turnover. *Human Resource Management*, 60(4), 603–616.

Sanchez-Burks, J., & Lee, F. (2009). Commentary: The elusive search for a positive relational identity—Grappling with multiplicity and conflict. In Exploring Positive Identities and Organizations (pp. 341–358). Psychology Press.

Sanchez-Burks, J., Bartel, C. A., & Blount, S. (2009). Performance in intercultural interactions at work: Cross-cultural differences in response to behavioral mirroring—Journal *of Applied Psychology*, 94(1), 216.

Schein, Edgar H. *Humble Inquiry: The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling.* 1st ed. 2013. Print. BK Business.

Schein, E. H., & Schein, P. A. (2020). *Humble Inquiry: The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Schultz, J. R., Gaither, S. E., Urry, H. L., & Maddox, K. B. (2015). Reframing anxiety to encourage interracial interactions. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science*, 1(4), 392.

Sherman, J. W., Stroessner, S. J., Conrey, F. R., & Azam, O. A. (2005). Prejudice and Stereotype Maintenance Processes: Attention, Attribution, and Individuation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 89(4), 607–622. https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.utah.edu/10.1037/0022-3514.89.4.607

Shore, L. M., Randel, A. E., Chung, B. G., Dean, M. A., Holcombe Ehrhart, K., & Singh, G. (2011). Inclusion and diversity in work groups: A review and model for future research. *Journal of Management*, 37(4), 1262–1289.

Sidanius, J., & Pratto, F. (2001). Social dominance: An intergroup theory of social hierarchy and oppression. Cambridge University Press.

Slotter, E. B., Duffy, C. W., & Gardner, W. L. (2014). Balancing the need to be "me" with the need to be "we": Applying Optimal Distinctiveness Theory to the understanding of multiple motives within romantic relationships. J*ournal of Experimental Social Psychology*, pp. 52, 71–81.

Sluss, D. M., & Ashforth, B. E. (2007). Relational identity and identification: Defining ourselves through work relationships. *Academy of Management Review,* 32(1), 9–32.

Sluss, D. M., Ployhart, R. E., Cobb, M. G., & Ashforth, B. E. (2012). Generalizing newcomers' relational and organizational identifications: Processes and prototypicality. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(4), 949–975.

Soleymanpour Omran, M., Alizadeh, H., & Esmaeeli, B. (2015). The analysis of glass ceiling phenomenon in the promotion of women's abilities in organizations. *International Journal of Organizational Leadership*, 4, 315–323.

Spreitzer, G., Bacevice, P., & Garrett, L. (2017). Coworking communities as enablers of thriving at work. In The Routledge Companion to Wellbeing at Work (pp. 197–206). Routledge.

Stainback, K., & Tomaskovic-Devey, D. (2009). Intersections of power and privilege: Long-term trends in managerial representation. *American Sociological Review,* 74(5), 800–820.

Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, 62(4), 271.

Swann Jr, W. B., Polzer, J. T., Seyle, D. C., & Ko, S. J. (2004). Finding value in diversity: Verification of personal and social self-views in diverse groups. *Academy of Management Review,* 29(1), 9–27.

Swann Jr, W. B., Wenzlaff, R. M., Krull, D. S., & Pelham, B. W. (1992). Allure of negative feedback: Self-verification strivings among depressed persons. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology,* 101(2), 293.

Sy, T., Shore, L. M., Strauss, J., Shore, T. H., Tram, S., Whiteley, P., & Ikeda-Muromachi, K. (2010). Leadership perceptions as a function of race–occupation fit: The case of Asian Americans—*Journal of Applied Psychology*, 95(5), 902.

Taeuscher, K., Bouncken, R., & Pesch, R. (2022). Gaining legitimacy by being different: Optimal distinctiveness in crowdfunding platforms. *Academy of Management Journal,* 64(1), 149-179.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 33-47). Brooks/Cole.

Tajfel, H., Billig, M. G., Bundy, R. P., & Flament, C. (1971). Social categorization and intergroup behaviour. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 1(2), 149–178.

Teresa-Morales, C., Rodríguez-Pérez, M., Araujo-Hernández, M., & Feria-Ramírez, C. (2022). Current stereotypes associated with nursing and nursing professionals: An integrative review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(13), 7640.

Terry, D., Peck, B., Carden, C., Perkins, A. J., & Smith, A. (2020). Traversing the Funambulist's fine line between nursing and male identity: a systematic review of the factors that influence men as they seek to navigate the nursing profession. *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*, 10(3), 691–703.

Thatcher, S. M., Doucet, L., & Tuncel, E. (2003). Subjective identities and identity communication processes in information technology teams. In Identity issues in groups (pp. 53–89). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Thatcher, S. M., & Greer, L. L. (2008). Does it really matter if you recognize who I am? The implications of identity comprehension for individuals in work teams. *Journal of Management*, 34(1), 5–24.

Thatcher, S. M., Hymer, C. B., & Arwine, R. P. (2023). Pushing back against power: Using a multilevel power lens to understand intersectionality in the workplace. *Academy of Management Annals*, 17(2), 710–750.

Thomas, D. A. (1993). Racial dynamics in cross-race developmental relationships. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38(2), 169–194.

Thomas, D. A., & Ely, R. J. (1996). Making differences matter. *Harvard Business Review,* 74(5), 79–90.

Todd, A. R., Galinsky, A. D., & Bodenhausen, G. V. (2012). Perspective taking undermines stereotype maintenance processes: Evidence from social memory, behavior explanation, and information solicitation. *Social Cognition*, 30(1), 94–108.

Toosi, N. R., Babbitt, L. G., Ambady, N., & Sommers, S. R. (2012). Dyadic interracial interactions: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 138(1), 1.

Trope, Y., & Liberman, N. (2010). Construal-level theory of psychological distance. *Psychological Review,* 117(2), 440.

Tsui, A. S., & O'Reilly III, C. A. (1989). Beyond simple demographic effects: The importance of relational demography in superior-subordinate dyads. *Academy of Management Journal*, 32(2), 402–423.

Tsui, A. S., Egan, T. D., & O'Reilly III, C. A. (1992). Being different: Relational demography and organizational attachment. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 549–579.

Tsui, A. S., Porter, L. W., & Egan, T. D. (2002). When both similarities and dissimilarities matter: Extending the concept of relational demography. *Human Relations*, 55(8), 899–929.

Turner, J. C., & Reynolds, K. J. (2003). The social identity perspective in intergroup relations: Theories, themes, and controversies. Blackwell handbook of social psychology: Intergroup processes, 133–152.

Turner, J. C., Oakes, P. J., Haslam, S. A., & McGarty, C. (1994). Self and collective: Cognition and social context. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 20(5), 454–463.

Turner, R. N., Hewstone, M., Voci, A., & Vonofakou, C. (2008). A test of the extended intergroup contact hypothesis: the mediating role of intergroup anxiety, perceived ingroup and outgroup norms, and inclusion of the outgroup in the self—Journal *of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95(4), 843.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023). Labor force characteristics by race and ethnicity, 2022. Retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/race-and-ethnicity/2022/home.htm

Van Veelen, R., & Derks, B. (2022). Academics as Agentic Superheroes: Female academics' lack of fit with the agentic stereotype of success limits their career advancement. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 61(3), 748-767.

Vignoles, V. L. (2019). Identity: Personal AND Social. In K. Deaux & M. Snyder (Eds.), Oxford Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology (pp. 289–316). Oxford University Press.

Waguespack, D. M., & Sorenson, O. (2011). The ratings game: Asymmetry in classification. Organization Science, 22(3), 541–553.

Walker, B. W. (2022). A dynamic reframing of the social/personal identity dichotomy. Organizational Psychology Review, 12(1), 73–104.

Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. Organization Science, 16(4), 409–421.

Weitz, R., & Gordon, L. (1993). Images of Black women among Anglo college students. Sex Roles, 28, 19-34.

Williams, K. Y., & O'Reilly III, C. A. (1998). Demography and Research in Organizational Behavior, 20, 77–140.

Winstead, B. A., & Morganson, V. J. (2013). Workplace friendships. In Handbook of research on gender and economic life. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Wong, Y. J., & McCullough, K. M. (2021). The intersectional prototypicality model: Understanding the discriminatory experiences of Asian American women and men. Asian American Journal of Psychology, 12(2), 87.

Zhong, Y., Sluss, D. M., & Badura, K. L. (2024). Subordinate-to-supervisor relational identification: A meta-analytic review. Journal of Applied Psychology, 109(9), 1431–1460. https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0001169

Zimmer, L. (1988). Tokenism and women in the workplace: The limits of gender-neutral theory. Social Problems, 35(1), 64–77.

Zuo, B., Wen, F., Wang, M., & Wang, Y. (2019). The mediating role of cognitive flexibility in the influence of counter-stereotypes on creativity. Frontiers in Psychology, 10, 105.