

DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

Jenny Oh

“Essays on the Supply- and Demand-Side Perspectives and Outcomes of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Processes”

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Organizations routinely attempt to signal support for an equal and equitable workplace through the implementation of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies and initiatives. However, contrary to organizational expectations, individuals' reception of these firm-level efforts to embrace DEI often remains mixed, highlighting a rift between organizational and individual-level beliefs on what truly constitutes DEI. In this dissertation comprised of three chapters, I propose to examine these tensions by considering both the supply-side and demand-side outcomes and implications of individuals' engagement with and perceptions of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts in contemporary labor markets through extensive theoretical and empirical exploration and analyses of the pertinent research questions at play.

In Chapter 1, in joint work with Oliver Hahl and Trevor Young-Hyman, I examine the mechanisms that create differences in status aspirations among Asian Americans. Research has shown that Asian Americans tend to pursue membership in higher status organizations at higher rates than Americans of other ethnic heritage. However, most of this research has focused on differences across those with different ethnicities without consideration of the underlying mechanisms that might create differences among Asian Americans in their propensity to aspire to higher status positions in society. Understanding what might drive differences among Asian Americans can help identify who is more at risk of threats to social or emotional well-being based on added pressures related to status attainment. We argue that the population density of an individual's hometown will have an inverted U-shaped relationship with status pursuit as initial increases in population density will increase social comparison and norm conformity within the group, until the group is large enough for subgroups to emerge and norm enforcement to decrease. We show this effect for those Americans of East Asian descent but not South Asian descent in the context of post-undergraduate job application patterns among Asian Americans at an elite university in the United States. While some previous work has treated status aspirations as a trait or monolithic feature of all Asian Americans, this paper shows that status aspirations can differ by different subgroups of Asian Americans and by the amount of social identification and group size of the community of Asian Americans within which an individual is raised.

In Chapter 2, I propose to examine how job applicants of different racial backgrounds and identities and their varying levels of engagement with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) processes may result in different hiring outcomes in the form of callbacks. White job applicants, for instance, may benefit in the form of a positive perception from the hiring firm if they exhibit signs of commitment to DEI. However, Black job applicants may experience hiring penalties such that they can be perceived as being overcommitted to any DEI-related cause and, subsequently, less committed to the values of the hiring firm. I propose to examine the potential mechanisms driving applicant signals of fit and/or commitment to the organization. I plan to examine and test whether commitment matters and whether there is a difference between Blacks and Whites signaling engagement with DEI on the labor market through an online experiment and randomized resume audit study. This issue is critical as more and more organizations designate individuals of color to DEI-focused roles in the organization. If there is a negative effect for people of color filling these roles, such appointments might be doing more harm than good, potentially increasing inequality in career outcomes for Blacks when compared to Whites.

In Chapter 3, jointly in progress with Catherine Shea, I propose to examine how DEI statements and values from organizations are perceived by employees in these firms, and how these perceptions lead to lower or higher ratings for these companies in regards to diversity and inclusion and workplace favorability. I will examine this question using a colorblindness and multiculturalism framework in the context of semantics. I propose to use data on over 1 million Glassdoor reviews from the top Fortune 500 companies from 2018-2022, as well as longitudinal data on complete DEI statements and web-scraped content from the corresponding webpages dedicated to DEI from these 500 firms. I plan to further investigate how employees' perceptions of organizational communication of DEI values and ideals could be attributed to economic outcomes, such as employee turnover. To examine this last point, I propose to gather exit interview data from a local firm.