

Who Counts as Diverse? The Strategic Broadening and Narrowing of Diversity

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Abstract

A large majority of US organizations profess a commitment to diversity, but their definitions of diversity can vary greatly. While previous research demonstrates a shift in diversity definitions to include fewer protected demographic groups and more non-demographic characteristics, the present research examines whether this shift might be a motivated process among dominant group members related to anti-egalitarian and colorblind belief systems. White Americans ($N = 498$) were asked how they define diversity, as well as who should be included in a range of diversity initiatives. White participants' higher anti-egalitarian belief was associated with stronger colorblind ideology endorsement, which was then associated with shifting their definition of diversity to include fewer disadvantaged demographic groups, more advantaged demographic groups, and non-demographic groups, as well as employing a colorblind inclusion rhetoric. Instead of only "broadening" diversity to include more characteristics than diversity's original focus, White Americans higher in anti-egalitarian and colorblind motives exhibited a simultaneous "narrowing" of diversity to include fewer protected demographic characteristics. Taken together, these findings have implications for dominant group members' definition of diversity and the subtle ways in which colorblind ideology may be enacted.

Keywords: Diversity, Social identity, Inclusion, Intergroup relation, Diversity definition, Colorblind ideology

1 **Who Counts as Diverse? The Strategic Broadening and Narrowing of Diversity**

2 A large majority of organizations in the United States (U.S.) profess a commitment to
3 diversity (Kirby et al., 2023). How people and organizations define diversity can vary greatly,
4 however (Kirby et al., 2023; Howard et al., 2021). While diversity and diversity initiatives
5 originally served to increase the representation of oppressed and marginalized group members,
6 organizational definitions of diversity have expanded to include individual traits (e.g.,
7 personality, ideology) that are not protected by law (Edelman et al., 2001). For example, a
8 worldwide employment website describes workplace diversity as “the individual characteristics
9 employees have that make them unique,” including “employees’ life experiences, how they
10 solve issues, and socioeconomic status” (Indeed, n.d.). This pattern is also reflected in the
11 diversity statements of the top 250 Fortune companies, where references to non-demographic
12 characteristics increased between 2014 and 2020 (Kirby et al., 2023). This new expanded
13 definition of diversity appears to include virtually *everyone* and insinuates a shift away from
14 diversity’s focus on protected and marginalized identities.

15 In the present research, we aim to gather preliminary evidence for *why* this shift may be
16 occurring. In line with previous research demonstrating the role of individuals’ intergroup beliefs
17 in their definitions of diversity (Danbold and Unzueta, 2020; Unzueta et al., 2012; Unzueta and
18 Binning, 2012), we argue that shifting definitions of diversity may be a motivated process among
19 dominant group members. In particular, we aim to understand how White Americans’ anti-
20 egalitarian belief is associated with colorblind endorsement and therefore shifting definitions of
21 diversity with less focus on protected demographic groups.

22 **Anti-egalitarian Belief and Diversity Construal**

23 Anti-egalitarian belief reflects the extent to which people support social hierarchy and
24 inequality. Individuals high in anti-egalitarian belief (i.e., anti-egalitarian individuals) prefer
25 hierarchical group orientations and dominance over low-status groups, while individuals low in
26 anti-egalitarian belief support egalitarianism within and between groups (Sidanius and Pratto,
27 1999; Ho et al., 2015). Among White Americans, higher endorsement of anti-egalitarian belief is
28 associated more prejudice against ethnic outgroups (Kteily et al., 2011).

29 Anti-egalitarian belief may have a notable impact on how dominant group individuals
30 understand and perceive diversity. Previous research has suggested that people construe the
31 meaning of diversity in ways that serve their anti-egalitarian motives (Unzueta et al., 2012). In
32 particular, anti-egalitarian participants “broaden” their definitions of diversity by judging an
33 organization as more diverse if it is high in occupational heterogeneity (i.e., more even
34 distribution of workforce types), even if it is low in racial heterogeneity – they then use this to
35 legitimize their opposition to affirmative-action policies (Unzueta et al., 2012). Additionally,
36 compared to minoritized group members, dominant group members consider organizations to be
37 “diverse” at lower numerical representations of minoritized group members, which is driven by a
38 desire to maintain their standing in the social hierarchy (Danbold and Unzueta, 2020).

39 Similar to individuals’ construal of diversity, the concept of “discrimination” can also be
40 defined narrowly or broadly, depending on individuals’ definitions of discrimination (Greenland
41 et al., 2022). Specifically, dominant group members strategically employ the broad and narrow
42 definitional boundary of discrimination motivated by their ingroup-serving and hierarchy-
43 maintaining motivations (West et al., 2021; West et al., 2022). For example, when asked what
44 counts as “discrimination”, White male participants included a wider range of behaviors under
45 the label “discrimination” when identifying discrimination against their ingroup; however, they
46 included a narrower range of behaviors when identifying discrimination against their outgroup

47 (West et al., 2022). Notably, these patterns only appear for White men with high levels of anti-
48 egalitarian belief, suggesting their tendency to construe “discrimination” in line with their belief
49 systems.

50 Consistent with these findings of motivated construal of diversity and discrimination, we
51 propose that anti-egalitarian belief will affect dominant group members’ overall conception of
52 *who* counts as diverse. We expect that dominant group members’ anti-egalitarian belief to be
53 associated with more broadening of diversity to include more non-demographic groups, as well
54 as privileged demographic groups, as a means to include themselves in diversity. Simultaneously,
55 anti-egalitarian belief will be associated with broader definitions of diversity to include more
56 advantaged demographic groups, consistent with their motives of maintaining their dominant
57 social statuses.

58 **Colorblind Racial Ideology**

59 Why might anti-egalitarian belief be associated with these shifting definitions of
60 diversity? Colorblind racial ideology, or colorblindness, is one underlying ideology that may
61 result in a desire to obscure a focus on protected characteristics and the realities of
62 discrimination. Specifically, colorblindness is an ideology that downplays racial/ethnic identities
63 to focus on individual uniqueness or commonalities with others (Gündemir and Kirby, 2022).
64 Although colorblind ideology could theoretically orient individuals toward equality and
65 intergroup harmony by advocating for intergroup equality and non-discrimination, components
66 of colorblindness can instead serve hierarchy-enhancing ends (Neville et al., 2013; Whitley et al.,
67 2022). For example, endorsing colorblind ideology is associated with higher anti-Black racism,
68 more beliefs that justify societal inequality, and higher ingroup favoritism (Whitley et al., 2022;
69 Yi et al., 2022). Moreover, exposing dominant group members to messages endorsing
70 colorblindness leads to higher levels of explicit and implicit racial bias (Richeson and Nussbaum,
71 2004; Holoien and Shelton, 2012).

72 Colorblindness is also theorized as a form of “new racism” that White Americans uphold
73 to ignore race-based inequalities and injustices and to look another way (Bonilla-Silva, 2003,
74 2015). Endorsing colorblind ideology and utilizing colorblind rhetoric allows White Americans
75 to justify and rationalize contemporary racial inequality, minimize prevalent racial prejudice and
76 discrimination, and deny their existing privilege (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Compared to racial
77 minority students, White college student participants more often exhibit colorblind racial
78 ideology by adopting an “everyone is diverse and unique” mindset (Dingel and Sage, 2020).
79 Some participants exhibited a “laundry-list approach” when describing diversity, where they
80 classify a wide variety of traits as relevant to diversity---many of which are irrelevant to
81 protected demographic identities (Dingel and Sage, 2020). This “laundry-list approach” exhibits
82 entrenched colorblind thinking in its approach of including everyone in diversity; it also
83 demonstrates how an “all-inclusive” definition can obscure systematic inequality (Dingel and
84 Sage, 2020). Therefore, colorblind ideologies might be an appealing strategy employed by
85 individuals who are more anti-egalitarian to obfuscate systematic inequality. We use the term
86 “colorblind-inclusion” to refer to an ideology that includes *everyone* in diversity (i.e., the
87 ideology is inclusive by definition, but enacts a form of colorblindness).

88 Accordingly, we expect anti-egalitarian belief to be associated with endorsement of
89 colorblindness, and therefore White Americans adopting a “colorblind inclusion” mindset and
90 considering non-protected demographic groups and privileged demographic groups as part of
91 their conceptualization of diversity. One possibility is that colorblind-inclusion will manifest as
92 including a range of groups as part of their diversity definitions, including protected-

93 demographic groups. However, because colorblindness downplays race-based inequalities and
94 historical oppression, it could also be associated with White participants being less likely to
95 include disadvantaged demographic groups in diversity.

96 **Present Research**

97 Past research has demonstrated that definitions of diversity are shifting to include more
98 non-demographic groups (Edelman et al., 2001; Kirby et al., 2023). The present research aims to
99 understand the underlying ideologies that may be associated with this process among White
100 Americans. Specifically, we predict that anti-egalitarian attitudes will be associated with stronger
101 colorblind endorsement, which will be associated with including fewer disadvantaged
102 demographic groups (e.g., racial minorities), more non-demographic groups (e.g., mathematical
103 thinkers), and more advantaged demographic groups (e.g., White people) in their conceptions of
104 diversity¹.

105 **Methods**

106 **Participants**

107 We recruited 549 White undergraduate participants from the participant pool at a public
108 Midwestern University in the U.S. We excluded 19 participants who were under the age of 18, 26
109 who identified as a race other than White, and 6 who failed the manipulation check, leaving a
110 final sample of 498 (age $M = 18.63$, $SD = 0.96$). Of these, 320 identified as women, 174
111 identified as men, and 4 identified as non-binary or another identity. The majority (78%) of
112 participants indicated U.S. American as their nationality.

113 As pre-registered

114 (https://osf.io/b2dgz/?view_only=f23026a9e9d34e21ada3763882d24b84) we needed to recruit
115 352 participants to obtain $d = .3$ according to the t-test function for two independent groups in
116 GPower (Faul et al., 2009). To account for possible participant exclusions, we aimed to collect
117 data from 375 participants. Given our obtained sample size, a sensitivity analysis using GPower
118 3.1 suggested that we could detect an effect size as small as $\eta^2 = 0.02$ with 80% statistical power
119 at an alpha level of 0.05.

120 **Procedure**

121 Participants were brought into the lab by research assistants and completed the survey on
122 lab computers. In a 2-level design, they were randomly assigned to either read about changing
123 demographics at their university, where racial minorities will become the majority of the student
124 body, or a control article about geographic mobility after graduation (adapted from Craig and
125 Richeson, 2014). While the original manipulation describes either shifting racial demographics
126 or shifting geographic mobility of United States citizens (Craig and Richeson, 2014), our
127 adaptation discusses shifts in the university student body. After reading the manipulation article,
128 they completed the dependent measures in the order described below, as well as manipulation
129 checks and demographics.

130 **Measures**

131 ***Count Measure of Diversity Definition.*** To determine participants' definitions of
132 diversity, they decided which identities should be included in four campus diversity initiatives
133 (mentoring, college application outreach program, having a designated space on campus, and

¹ We pre-registered the study to have a 2-level design where we manipulate racial demographic change at participants' university to examine how racial demographic change impacts participants' definitions of diversity. As discussed in the method section, we ultimately collapsed the data across experimental conditions and shifted our focus to exploratory analyses. Thus, our predictions were secondary predictions that we did not pre-register.

134 extra resources) and also directly responded about who they included in their definition of
135 diversity. They read a list of 22 identities that included 9 disadvantaged demographic groups
136 (e.g., black people; $\alpha = .98$), 9 non-demographic groups (e.g., mathematical thinkers; $\alpha = .98$),
137 and 3 advantaged demographic groups (e.g., white people; $\alpha = .93$) and responded on a scale
138 from 1 (definitely do not include) to 6 (definitely include). Because the anchors had no midpoint,
139 the measure served as a forced choice inclusion or exclusion measure. See Table 1 for specific
140 groups included in each category.

141 We pre-registered that we would first create a mean of participants' overall desire to
142 include the three different categories of groups in the diversity initiatives and definition as our
143 primary dependent measure (our pre-registered hypothesis). We pre-registered we would then
144 create another measure where we dichotomize participants' answers in a binary variable and
145 average the total number of groups they included for each category. We collapsed across
146 conditions and shifted our focus to understand variables that might be associated with diversity
147 definition shift. Thus, we chose to have the latter variable (the dichotomized measure) as our
148 primary measure of diversity definition shift since it conceptually aligns with our research
149 questions. Specifically, the dichotomous measure directly denotes participants' conception of
150 "who" counts as diverse. We report the mediation results for the first diversity definition measure
151 in the supplemental material, but it fully replicates the findings reported in the main text for the
152 count measure.

153 We first dichotomized participants' answers into a binary variable, where responses
154 ranging from 1 to 3 (definitely do not include to maybe do not include) were recoded as 0 (i.e.,
155 exclude) and responses ranging from 4 to 6 (definitely include to maybe include) were recoded
156 as 1 (i.e., include). Next, we summed the number of groups of each category participants
157 included within the five initiative types. Finally, we created a mean across the initiative types go
158 give a single mean sum for each identity type: disadvantaged demographic groups ($M = 8.29$, SD
159 $= 1.17$), non-demographic groups, $M = 5.60$, $SD = 2.68$), and advantaged demographic groups
160 ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 0.82$).

161 **Open-Ended Definition of Diversity.** To assess participant's definition of diversity, they
162 answered the question "What factors should determine if a group should be included in a
163 diversity initiative (e.g., who should be included in diversity efforts)? Do different groups
164 matter in different ways? Why do you feel that way?" with an open-ended response. Their
165 responses were then coded by two research assistants. See Table 2 for content coding categories.
166 Research assistants coded responses for whether participants discussed each of the categories
167 with the following codes: -1 = Mentioned (should not be included), 0 = Not mentioned, 1 =
168 Mentioned (should be included). Because mentioning that a group should be excluded was rare
169 ($n < 10$), we recoded these values (-1) into 0, such that the variables were binary (1 = Group
170 should be included, 0 = Group should be excluded or wasn't mentioned). We also coded for
171 colorblind inclusion rhetoric, where coders assessed whether participants' responses suggested
172 that everyone should be included in diversity, or that no particular groups should be prioritized
173 over others.

174 After coding two practice rounds of 20 statements to refine the coding categories,
175 research assistants coded the full set. When discrepancies arose, research assistants discussed
176 until they agreed on how to code the response.

177 **Anti-egalitarian Beliefs.** Participants indicated their agreement with eight items from the
178 shortened Social Dominance Orientation scale (SDO_{7(S)}; Ho et al., 2015; $\alpha = 0.80$) measuring
179 their anti-egalitarian beliefs on a 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*) scale (e.g., "An

180 ideal society requires some groups to be on top and others to be on the bottom”). We averaged all
 181 items to form a measure where higher values corresponded to higher anti-egalitarian beliefs.

182 **Colorblindness.** We measured colorblindness with the Color Evasion subscale of the
 183 Multidimensional Assessment of Racial Colorblindness scale (Whitley et al., 2022; $\alpha = .92$; e.g.,
 184 “Talking about racial issues causes unnecessary tension”). We focused on the Color Evasion
 185 subscale because it reflects a desire to downplay the importance of race and ethnicity and instead
 186 highlight similarities (Whitley et al., 2022). Participants indicated their agreement with nine
 187 items on a 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*) scale. We averaged all items to form a
 188 measure where higher values corresponded to higher colorblind endorsement.

189 **Political Orientation.** To assess participants’ political orientation, they answered two
 190 questions (“What is your political ideology with respect to social issues?” “What is your political
 191 ideology with respect to economic issues?”) on a 1 (*Extremely Liberal*) to 7 (*Extremely*
 192 *Conservative*) scale ($\alpha = .78$). We averaged the two items to form a measure where higher values
 193 corresponded to more conservative political orientation.

194

Results

195 Analytic Strategy

196 The demographic shift manipulation had an effect on one of three dependent measures, p
 197 $< .001$, $d = 2.67$. Because it was the opposite of our hypotheses and past findings (Craig &
 198 Richeson, 2014) and only emerged on one out of three measures, we believe it should be
 199 interpreted cautiously. Thus, we shifted our focus to exploratory analyses understanding potential
 200 variables that are associated with diversity definition shift (collapsed across experimental
 201 conditions).² We report all original pre-registered analyses in the online supplement.

202 Specifically, we ran multiple regression analyses with colorblindness and anti-egalitarian
 203 beliefs as independent measures and the indices of diversity definition shifts as dependent
 204 measures. We used the PROCESS macro version 4.2 (Model 4, 10,000 bootstraps; Hayes, 2013)
 205 to test whether colorblindness mediated the relationship between anti-egalitarian belief beliefs
 206 and diversity definition shifts, operationalized as the inclusion of disadvantaged demographic
 207 groups, non-demographic groups, advantaged demographic groups, and the use of colorblind
 208 inclusion rhetoric. Since the qualitative dependent variables are binary variables, we utilized
 209 PROCESS macro’s function to run logistic regressions on the binary dependent variables.

210 To assess whether our proposed model held beyond the effects of political orientation, we
 211 ran all the above mediation analyses controlling for political orientation. We also examined
 212 political orientation as an alternative predictor variable (in place of anti-egalitarian belief) in the
 213 mediation model. We report the results in the online supplement.

214 Previous research has also demonstrated that anti-egalitarian belief moderates the
 215 association between colorblindness and outgroup attitudes, suggesting the possibility that anti-
 216 egalitarian belief moderates the association between colorblindness and diversity definition shift
 217 (Yogeeswaran et al., 2017). Because the results from the moderation model were unexpected and
 218 showed divergent patterns across dependent measures, we believe they should be interpreted
 219 cautiously until they are replicated. They are reported in full in the online supplement³.

² We also ran all the analyses controlling for condition, and condition did not have a significant effect on any analysis we ran in the paper.

³ In the alternative model, we found interactions between colorblindness and anti-egalitarian beliefs on inclusion of disadvantaged demographic groups, $F(1, 494) = 15.34$, $p < .001$, and inclusion of advantaged demographic groups, $F(1, 493) = 19.46$, $p < .001$. Specifically, at average and high levels, but not low levels, of anti-egalitarian beliefs, colorblindness was

220 Preliminary Analyses

221 Descriptive statistics and correlations between social dominance beliefs, colorblindness,
 222 and all diversity definition variables are reported in Table 3. In participants' open-ended
 223 responses on diversity definition, 223 (44.8%) participants mentioned specific disadvantaged
 224 demographic groups, and 121 (24.3%) participants mentioned disadvantaged demographic
 225 groups in general ways (e.g., "minority groups"). Moreover, 55 (11%) participants mentioned
 226 non-demographic groups to be included in definition of diversity, and 17 (3.4%) mentioned
 227 advantaged demographic groups in their definition of diversity. Lastly, 159 (31.9%) participants
 228 used the colorblind-inclusion rhetoric, where they claimed that everyone should be included in
 229 diversity or that no particular group should be prioritized over others.

230 Stronger social dominance orientation was associated with including fewer disadvantaged
 231 demographic characteristics, but was not consistently associated with inclusion of other
 232 characteristics (see Table 3). Stronger colorblindness was also associated with including fewer
 233 disadvantaged demographic characteristics, as well as *more* advantaged demographic and non-
 234 demographic characteristics—albeit more consistently for the quantitative than the qualitative
 235 open-ended coding measures.

236 Main Analyses

237 *Quantitative Diversity Definition Shift*

238 Consistent with expectations, higher levels of social dominance orientation were
 239 associated with higher levels of colorblindness, $b = 0.81$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$ (path *a*).
 240 Colorblindness, in turn, was significantly associated with including fewer disadvantaged
 241 demographic groups, $b = -0.15$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, more non-demographic groups, $b = 0.30$, SE
 242 $= 0.09$, $p = .001$, and more advantaged demographic groups, $b = 0.11$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$, when
 243 controlling for social dominance orientation (path *b*).

244 The mediation models showed significant indirect effects for disadvantaged demographic
 245 groups, non-demographic groups, and advantaged demographic groups. Specifically, social
 246 dominance orientation was associated with colorblind endorsement, which was associated with
 247 participants including fewer disadvantaged demographic groups, $b = -0.12$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% C.I.
 248 $[-.20, -.05]$, more non-demographic groups, $b = 0.24$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% C.I. $[.10, .39]$, and more
 249 advantaged demographic groups, $b = 0.09$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% C.I. $[.05, .14]$ (See Figure 1 for one
 250 example mediation model and Table 4 for full mediation pathway results).

251 Because of the limitations of cross-sectional mediation analysis (see Fiedler et al., 2018),
 252 we also tested the reverse pathway (See Table 5). This pathway revealed significant indirect
 253 effects for the quantity of disadvantaged demographic groups, but not for the quantity of
 254 advantaged demographics groups. Although this suggests that this alternative model is possible,
 255 the other model has slightly more consistent results, and we consider our proposed pathway to be
 256 more theoretically plausible.

257 *Qualitative Diversity Definition Shift*

associated with participants including fewer disadvantaged demographic groups in diversity. However, at medium and low levels, but not high levels, of anti-egalitarian beliefs, colorblindness was associated with participants including more advantaged demographic groups. These unexpected findings tentatively suggest that even egalitarian-minded participants demonstrate a "broadening" pattern when they hold colorblind beliefs systems. Anti-egalitarians' tendency to include advantaged demographic groups may reflect a desire to be included in diversity and multiculturalism, which dovetails with research suggesting that dominant groups are concerned about being excluded from diversity (Plaut et al., 2011). Because we did not theorize these divergent patterns across dependent measures a priori (and interactions often require large sample sizes to achieve sufficient statistical power; Blake and Gangestad, 2020), we believe that these findings should be interpreted cautiously until they are replicated.

258 The direct effects for the qualitative diversity definition variables showed that
259 colorblindness was negatively associated with participants mentioning disadvantaged
260 demographic groups in non-specific ways, $b = -0.20$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = .018$, and positively
261 associated with participants using the colorblind inclusion rhetoric, $b = 0.22$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = .003$,
262 when controlling for social dominance orientation (path b). However, colorblindness was not
263 significantly associated with participants mentioning specific disadvantaged demographic
264 groups, $b = -0.10$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = .158$, mentioning non-demographic groups, $b = -0.08$, $SE =$
265 0.11 , $p = .476$, and mentioning privileged groups, $b = -0.10$, $SE = 0.19$, $p = .595$.

266 Inconsistent with our quantitative measure, the mediation tests revealed that
267 colorblindness did not mediate the association between social dominance orientation and
268 participants' mention of specific disadvantaged demographic groups, $b = -0.08$, $SE = 0.06$, 95%
269 C.I. [-.20, .03], non-demographic groups, $b = -0.06$, $SE = 0.10$, 95% C.I. [-.26, .12], or
270 advantaged demographic groups, $b = -0.08$, $SE = 0.17$, 95% C.I. [-.45, .23]. However, consistent
271 with our quantitative measure, colorblindness significantly mediated the association between
272 social dominance orientation and participants' mention of non-specific disadvantaged
273 demographic groups, $b = -0.16$, $SE = 0.07$, 95% C.I. [-.31, -.03], and use of the "everyone"
274 rhetoric, $b = 0.18$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% C.I. [.06, .31]. In other words, social dominance beliefs were
275 associated with colorblindness endorsement, which was associated with participants mentioning
276 disadvantaged demographic groups less frequently and using the "colorblind inclusion" rhetoric
277 more frequently. See Table 4 for full mediation pathway results.

278 Similar with our quantitative measure, we also tested the reverse pathway (See Table 5)
279 of social dominance orientation mediating the association between colorblindness and dependent
280 variables. Neither of the indirect effects for the reverse pathway were significant, further
281 supporting our proposed pathway.

282 ***Main Analyses Controlling for Political Orientation***

283 We also examined the mediation effect of colorblindness on the association between
284 social dominance orientation and diversity definition shift, controlling for political orientation.
285 The effects on quantity of disadvantaged demographic groups and non-demographic groups
286 remained statistically significant. However, the effects on quantity of advantaged demographic
287 groups, mention of non-specific disadvantaged groups, and use of colorblind inclusion rhetoric
288 did not hold when controlling for political orientation. Overall, the mediation pathways held on 2
289 out of 5 models controlling for political orientation, suggesting that the effects only remain
290 robust for diversity definition shift regarding including fewer disadvantaged demographic groups
291 and more non-demographic groups in diversity.

292

293

General Discussion

294 Using multiple methodologies assessing White Americans' definitions of diversity, the
295 present research suggests that certain diversity definitions may have underlying motivations
296 focused on maintaining the current social hierarchy in the US. In particular, White participants'
297 higher social dominance orientation was associated with stronger colorblind ideology
298 endorsement, which was then associated with shifting their definition of diversity. This shifting
299 was associated with participants including more non-demographic groups and advantaged
300 demographic groups in their definition, a phenomenon previously termed "broadening" diversity
301 (i.e., including more characteristics than diversity's original focus on protected demographic
302 groups; Kirby et al., 2023; Trawalter et al., 2016; Unzueta et al., 2012). Participants shifted the

303 definition further, however, by also including *fewer* disadvantaged demographic groups in their
304 definition of diversity when they were higher in anti-egalitarian and colorblind motives. One
305 possible way of shifting diversity definitions is to include so many characteristics (a “laundry
306 list”) that the original focus on demographics is obscured (Dingel and Sage, 2020). However,
307 increasing the number of characteristics while simultaneously reducing the number of protected
308 characteristics (relative to those lower in colorblindness) is a particularly strong demonstration of
309 the phenomenon. This hints at the possibility of a strategic shift in diversity definition that
310 depends on participants’ motivations related to the current social hierarchy.

311 These associations between anti-egalitarian and colorblind motivations with definition
312 shifts did not replicate in some of the open-ended coding variables, where participants responded
313 about their definition of diversity. However, anti-egalitarian belief was associated with
314 participants using the “colorblind-inclusion” rhetoric (i.e., endorsing the notion that everyone
315 should be included in diversity) and being less likely to include disadvantaged characteristics in
316 their definition of diversity---with both effects mediated by colorblindness beliefs. Thus, the
317 findings are fairly consistent overall in supporting the idea that anti-egalitarian motives are
318 associated with colorblind beliefs thus a strategic shift in diversity definition to include more
319 characteristics beyond disadvantaged demographic groups and fewer disadvantaged demographic
320 characteristics.

321 **Theoretical Implications**

322 The present research contributes to the literature on motivated construal of diversity by
323 showing that anti-egalitarian belief is associated with colorblindness, which in turn is associated
324 with the type of groups dominant group members tend to include in their definitions of diversity.
325 In addition to revealing anti-egalitarian beliefs motivating participants to “broaden” their
326 conception of diversity by including more advantaged demographic groups, and non-
327 demographic groups, and using the colorblind inclusion rhetoric, our findings indicate a
328 simultaneous “narrowing” of diversity to include fewer disadvantaged demographic groups.
329 These findings suggest that anti-egalitarian motives do not simply perpetuate a “broadening”
330 effect of diversity; they might simultaneously engender a “narrowing” effect where dominant
331 group members downplay the importance of enhancing the treatment of historically marginalized
332 and oppressed groups. This simultaneous “broadening” and “narrowing” of diversity definition
333 mirrors previous research on dominant group member’s double standard on the definition of
334 discrimination (West et al., 2022), and extends previous research on showing the flexible
335 definitional boundary of diversity driven by anti-egalitarian belief and colorblind motives.

336 Another major contribution of the present research is that we directly assessed what the
337 concept of diversity entails for dominant group members. While diversity initiatives originally
338 served to enhance the experiences of underrepresented minorities in the society (Edelman et al.,
339 2001), less than half (42%) of the participants in the present study mentioned specific
340 disadvantaged demographic groups in an open-ended response asking for their definitions of
341 diversity. Furthermore, over thirty percent of the participants displayed “colorblind inclusion”
342 rhetoric---claiming that everyone should be included in diversity, or that no particular groups
343 should be prioritized over others. Consistent with the findings of Dingel and Sage (2020), these
344 patterns of White’s definitions of diversity generally reflect a colorblind approach to defining
345 diversity.

346 Relatedly, the present research contributes to the existing literature on colorblind racial
347 ideology by showing another potential downstream consequence of colorblind ideology---the
348 strategic “broadening” and “narrowing” of diversity among dominant group members. With the

349 increasingly pervasive endorsement of colorblindness in the society (Apfelbaum et al., 2012), it
350 is possible that a shifted definition of diversity will also pervade over time, ultimately distracting
351 from diversity initiatives' original focus on disadvantaged demographic groups.

352 **Limitations and Future Directions**

353 A key methodological limitation of the current study concerns its correlational nature,
354 given our interest in understanding motivations for shifting definitions of diversity. We examined
355 the association between anti-egalitarian belief, colorblindness, and diversity definitions with
356 mediation analyses, but we cannot draw causal inferences from our data. Relatedly, our
357 mediation model draws on cross-sectional data, which limits our ability to rule out the possibility
358 of other models (see Fiedler et al., 2018) or establish temporal inferences based on the mediation
359 analysis. Future research should manipulate anti-egalitarian belief or colorblindness
360 experimentally to establish the causal effects of social hierarchy-enhancing beliefs on diversity
361 definition shifts.

362 In addition, the main findings should be interpreted with caution given the possibility of
363 political orientation and anti-egalitarian thoughts both being associated with diversity definition
364 shift. In the present research, anti-egalitarian beliefs were highly correlated with political
365 orientation, in line with previous research (Wilson and Sibley, 2012). When controlling for
366 political orientation, anti-egalitarian belief's association with diversity definition shift became
367 less robust. When using political orientation as an alternative predictor in the mediation model,
368 political orientation was associated with higher colorblindness beliefs, which was associated with
369 inclusion of fewer disadvantaged demographic groups in diversity. While we cannot tease apart
370 the effects of political orientation and anti-egalitarian belief in the current study, future research
371 should examine the unique effect of anti-egalitarian belief on diversity definition shift.

372 The present research hypothesized that anti-egalitarian belief and colorblindness would
373 be associated with targeted broadening and narrowing of diversity. However, other mechanisms
374 related to individuals' egalitarian beliefs (e.g., right wing authoritarianism, ingroup favoritism)
375 could also be associated with diversity definition shifts. Additionally, our manipulation only had
376 a significant effect on one of the dependent variables, thus the overall effect of the manipulation
377 is not robust. Future research could use a different threat manipulation – for example,
378 information activating more self-relevant realistic threat (Rios et al., 2018) might lead dominant
379 group individuals to shift their definitions of diversity.

380 To obtain a general sense of participants' definitions of diversity, we provided
381 participants a variety of demographic groups and asked them to decide which groups to include
382 across four diversity initiatives and their own definition of diversity. We recoded participants'
383 answers into binary variables and calculated the number of groups participants included out of
384 the three group categories (i.e., disadvantaged demographic group, non-demographic group,
385 privileged group). However, there might be more nuances within each category in participants'
386 decision-making process.

387 Given our interest in disadvantaged demographic groups in general (not minoritized
388 racial groups in particular), the use of colorblindness instead of a more general identity-blind
389 measure was somewhat mismatched with the dependent measures. Although colorblind
390 ideologies might function similarly to identity-blind diversity ideologies, this has not been
391 established thus far. For example, people interpret gender-blind and colorblind ideologies
392 differently (Martin, 2023).

393

Conclusion

394 Discourse around who should be included in diversity has gone through substantial
395 changes over the last few decades. This study shows that dominant group members' definitions
396 of diversity closely align with their anti-egalitarian motives and colorblindness endorsement. A
397 colorblind mindset may be one key motivator for White Americans to "broaden" their conception
398 of diversity to include groups that were not the traditional focus of diversity and "narrow" their
399 conception of diversity to include fewer oppressed or marginalized groups. Understanding the
400 divergent definitions of diversity and the possible motivations underlying strategic shift could
401 offer insights into the paradoxes of implementation of diversity-related policies. Taken together,
402 these findings contribute to previous literature on motivated construal of diversity and have
403 implications for the subtle ways in which colorblind ideology may be enacted.

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Table 1

Quantitative definition categories

| Category name | Groups included in the category |
|--|--|
| Disadvantaged Demographic Groups | Gay or lesbian people, transgender people, women, bisexual people, Black people, people of lower socioeconomic status, Muslim people, Asian Americans, Latina/o/x Americans, Native Americans, neurodivergent people (e.g., people with autism), and people with physical disabilities |
| Non-demographic Groups | introverts, free spirited thinkers, people who are night owls, mathematical thinkers, visual learners, left-handed people, passive communicators, assertive communicators, logical thinkers, creative thinkers, tactile learners, and deductive problem solvers |
| Advantaged (or Neutral) Demographic Groups | White people, Christian people, and conservative people |

Table 2

Content coding categories.

| Category name | Definition of category |
|---|---|
| Specific disadvantaged demographic groups | Disadvantaged demographic groups that are protected by law from discrimination, such as ethnicity, race, gender, sex, sexual orientation, nationality (includes language, being from another place), religion, disability status, or age. |
| Non-specific disadvantaged demographic groups | Specific disadvantaged groups are not listed, but participant discusses groups that have experienced stigmatization in the past more generally (e.g., “minority groups,” “underrepresented groups”) |
| Non-demographic groups | Individual characteristics, such as personality, skills, abilities, perspectives, beliefs, talents, life experiences, background, working styles, work expertise, professional experience, or political views |
| Advantaged demographic groups | Advantaged demographic groups such as White people, men, Christians |
| Colorblind inclusion | Response suggests that everyone should be included or that no particular groups should be prioritized over others (e.g., “people from all different types of backgrounds should be included”) |

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables

| Variable | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
|---|----------|-----------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------|------|----|
| 1. Social Dominance Orientation | 2.49 | 0.92 | — | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2. Colorblindness | 3.55 | 1.51 | .49** | — | | | | | | | | | |
| 3. Political Orientation | 3.99 | 1.30 | .45** | .61** | — | | | | | | | | |
| 4. Quantity of Disadvantaged Demographic Groups Included | 8.29 | 1.17 | -.31** | -.30* | -.28** | — | | | | | | | |
| 5. Quantity of Non-Demographic Groups Included | 5.60 | 2.68 | -.00 | .13** | .10* | .35** | — | | | | | | |
| 6. Quantity of Advantaged Demographic Groups Included | 2.19 | 0.82 | .09* | .21** | .26** | .45** | .70** | — | | | | | |
| | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7. Mention of Specific Disadvantaged Demographic Groups | 223 | 44.8 | -.07 | -.09* | -.11* | -.01 | -.11* | -.07 | — | | | | |
| 8. Mention of Non-Specific Disadvantaged Demographic Groups | 121 | 24.3 | -.05 | -.12** | -.16** | .02 | -.20** | -.22** | -.50** | — | | | |
| 9. Mention of Non-demographic Groups | 55 | 11.0 | .06 | .00 | .04 | .00 | .11* | .09* | .13** | -.14** | — | | |
| 10. Mention of Advantaged Demographic Groups | 17 | 3.4 | -.06 | -.05 | -.08 | .05 | .02 | .07 | .14** | -.06 | .11* | — | |
| 11. Use of Colorblind Inclusion Rhetoric | 159 | 31.9 | .04 | .14** | .13** | .09* | .33** | .33** | -.30** | -.25** | -.04 | -.03 | — |

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 4
Mediation Pathway Results for Diversity Definition Shift Variables

| | <i>b</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>p</i> |
|---|----------|-----------|----------|
| Model: SDO → Colorblindness → Quantity of Disadvantaged Demographic Groups | | | |
| a (SDO → Colorblindness) | 0.81 | 0.05 | <.001 |
| b (Colorblindness → Quantity of Groups) | -0.15 | 0.04 | <.001 |
| c (SDO → Quantity of Groups) | -0.39 | 0.06 | <.001 |
| c' (Direct Effects) | -0.27 | 0.07 | <.001 |
| Model: SDO → Colorblindness → Quantity of Non-demographic Groups | | | |
| a (SDO → Colorblindness) | 0.81 | 0.05 | <.001 |
| b (Colorblindness → Quantity of Groups) | 0.30 | 0.09 | .001 |
| c (SDO → Quantity of Groups) | -0.01 | 0.13 | .952 |
| c' (Direct Effects) | -0.25 | 0.15 | 0.09 |
| Model: SDO → Colorblindness → Quantity of Advantaged Demographic Groups | | | |
| a (SDO → Colorblindness) | 0.81 | 0.05 | <.001 |
| b (Colorblindness → Quantity of Groups) | 0.12 | 0.03 | <.001 |
| c (SDO → Quantity of Groups) | 0.08 | 0.04 | .035 |
| c' (Direct Effects) | -0.01 | 0.04 | .840 |
| Model: SDO → Colorblindness → Mention of Specific Disadvantaged Demographic Group | | | |
| a (SDO → Color Evasion) | 0.81 | 0.05 | <.001 |
| b (Colorblindness → Mention of Group) | -0.11 | 0.07 | .158 |
| c' (Direct Effects) | -0.07 | 0.11 | .529 |
| Model: SDO → Colorblindness → Mention of Non-specific Disadvantaged Demographic Group | | | |
| a (SDO → Colorblindness) | 0.81 | 0.05 | <.001 |
| b (Colorblindness → Mention of Group) | -0.20 | 0.08 | .018 |
| c' (Direct Effects) | -0.02 | 0.13 | .877 |

| | | | |
|---|-------|------|-------|
| Model: SDO → Colorblindness → | | | |
| Mention of Non-demographic Group | | | |
| a (SDO → Colorblindness) | 0.81 | 0.05 | <.001 |
| b (Colorblindness → Mention of Group) | -0.08 | 0.11 | .455 |
| c' (Direct Effects) | 0.27 | 0.17 | .120 |
| Model: SDO → Colorblindness → | | | |
| Mention of Advantaged Demographic Group | | | |
| a (SDO → Colorblindness) | 0.81 | 0.05 | <.001 |
| b (Colorblindness → Mention of Group) | -0.10 | 0.19 | .595 |
| c' (Direct Effects) | -0.30 | 0.34 | .367 |
| Model: SDO → Colorblindness → | | | |
| Use of Colorblind Inclusion Rhetoric | | | |
| a (SDO → Colorblindness) | 0.81 | 0.05 | <.001 |
| b (Colorblindness → Use of Rhetoric) | 0.22 | 0.08 | .003 |
| c' (Direct Effects) | -0.10 | 0.12 | .486 |

Note. SDO=social dominance orientation

Table 5

Indirect Effects from Mediation Models

| Dependent Variable | <u>Social Dominance Orientation → Colorblindness → Dependent Variable</u> | | | <u>Colorblindness → Social Dominance Orientation → Dependent Variable</u> | | |
|---|---|-----------|--------------|---|-----------|--------------|
| | <i>b</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI | <i>b</i> | <i>SE</i> | 95% CI |
| Quantity of Disadvantaged Demographic Groups | -0.14 | 0.04 | [-.23, -.07] | -0.09 | 0.02 | [-.14, -.05] |
| Quantity of Non-demographic Groups | 0.24 | 0.08 | [.10, .39] | -0.07 | 0.04 | [-.16, .01] |
| Quantity of Advantaged Demographic Groups | 0.09 | 0.02 | [.05, .14] | -0.01 | 0.01 | [-.03, .02] |
| Mention of Specific Disadvantaged Demographic Group | -0.08 | 0.06 | [-.20, .02] | -0.02 | 0.03 | [-.09, .05] |
| Mention of Non-specific Disadvantaged Demographic Group | -0.19 | 0.07 | [-.30, -.04] | -0.03 | 0.04 | [-.10, .04] |
| Mention of Non-demographic Group | -0.07 | 0.10 | [-.27, .12] | 0.08 | 0.05 | [-.02, .19] |
| Mention of Advantaged Demographic Group | -0.10 | 0.19 | [-.40, .24] | -0.10 | 0.34 | [-.31, .07] |
| Use of Colorblind Inclusion Rhetoric | 0.22 | 0.06 | [.08, .33] | -0.03 | 0.04 | [-.07, .08] |

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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