

The Cost of Managing Impressions for Black Employees: An Expectancy Violation Theory Perspective

Abstract

This study identifies a unique bias faced by Black employees which makes it challenging for this group to manage their professional image. Integrating research on racial backlash, image management, and expectancy violation theory, we argue that self-promotion by Black employees will result in detrimental outcomes for this group compared to White, Hispanic, and Asian employees. Due to negative racial stereotypes related to their job competence, we hypothesize that self-promotion by Black employees will be viewed by their White managers as a violation of stereotypically appropriate behavior and will result in a backlash in the form of lower job-related outcomes. We propose that the process by which these effects occur is through manager assessments of their employees on agentic and communal traits. Our hypothesized model was tested with a stratified sample of manager-employee dyads of a large financial institution. Results indicated that self-promotion by Black employees was associated with lower job performance and P-O fit ratings, as well as fewer idiosyncratic deals with their immediate managers compared to White, Hispanic, and Asian employees. Implications of the divergent consequences of self-promotion for Black employees relative to other racial groups are discussed.

Keywords: racial backlash, racial stereotypes, expectancy violation theory, image management, self-promotion

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Racial bias toward Black employees in the workplace is prevalent, and its detrimental consequences for careers is undeniable (Avery et al., 2018; Brief et al., 2005; Cole & Omari, 2003; Colella et al., 2017). For example, a report by McKinsey based on data from 3.7 million employees at two dozen of the U.S.'s largest companies indicates that while Black employees comprise 12 percent of entry-level employees, only 7 percent hold first-level managerial roles (McKinsey & Company, 2021). Further, based on the current rate of advancement for Black employees, they estimate that it would take approximately 95 years for the corporate hierarchy to mirror the 12 percent entry-level representation for this group. Results such as these highlight the career-related consequences that Black employees face due to racial bias.

Consistent with the McKinsey report findings, scholarship in this area indicates substantial evidence that Black employees frequently experience bias in the workplace, and furthermore, this bias often emanates from negative racial stereotypes (e.g., Avery et al., 2018; Colella et al., 2017; King et al., 2006; Luksyte et al., 2013; Ruggs et al., 2013). Negative stereotypes play a prominent role in the process by which discrimination occurs; as well, members of a social identity group that often experiences discrimination tend to be readily aware of those stereotypes (e.g., Devine, 1989; Fiske, 1998). For Black employees, negative competence-related stereotypes such as inadequate skills and low job competence are often dominant stereotypes (Biernat et al., 2009; Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997; Ghavami & Peplau, 2012; He et al., 2019; Krueger, 1996; Plous & Williams, 1995; Shelton & Richeson, 2006; Wilson, 1996) which can be a substantial barrier in creating a professional image, impacting their success in the workplace (e.g., Brief et al., 2005; Devine, 1989; Devine & Elliot, 1995; Dixon &

Rosenbaum, 2004; He et al., 2019).

Because Black employees may anticipate bias due to negative racial stereotypes, they may be especially proactive in managing their professional image (He & Kang, 2021; Kang et al., 2016; Krueger, 1996; Roberts, 2005; Zou & Cheryan, 2017). Image construction transpires from a gap between one's desired professional image and how one thinks others perceive their professional image (Roberts, 2005). This gap begets the use of bottom-up tactics intended to shape others' perceptions of one's capability and character (Bergsieker et al., 2010; Roberts, 2005; Swencionis & Fiske, 2020). Specifically, Black employees may benefit from self-promotion behaviors as they may circumvent their managers' stereotypes related to low competence. Self-promotion is particularly suitable as it involves communicating one's strengths, abilities, contributions, and accomplishments as a way of conveying an image of competence (Godfrey et al., 1986; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Wayne & Ferris, 1990). Although Black employees may engage in self-promotion to develop a positive professional image, there are reasons why this may not be achieved and may even result in detrimental outcomes.

Employees who engage in self-promotion typically do so with the intent of reaping positive benefits, yet this can be a risky tactic for some social identity groups (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Rudman, 1998). Drawing on expectancy violation theory (EVT), self-promotion can come at a cost if the manager views it as counter-stereotypical behavior (Burgoon & Le Poire, 1993; Jussim et al., 1987; Phelan & Rudman, 2010; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). Due to the strength and negative valence of competence-related stereotypes for Black employees (Ghavami & Pelau, 2012), we theorize that self-promotion by Black employees will be viewed as a violation of expected behavior and result in a "backlash effect" (Phelan & Rudman, 2010;

Rosette et al., 2016, 2018; Rudman, 1998; Rudman et al., 2012) in the form of lower manager assessments and support compared to White, Hispanic, and Asian employees¹.

The purpose of our study is to investigate the negative consequences that Black employees may endure (i.e., racial backlash) due to self-promotion and unpack the underlying mechanisms that might explain why these effects occur. Racial backlash is defined as negative repercussions individuals experience due to violating descriptive and prescriptive racial stereotypes (Berdahl & Min, 2012; Hall & Livingston, 2012; Hernandez et al., 2019; Rosette et al., 2018). Integrating research on racial backlash and expectancy violations, we propose that White managers' assessments of their Black employees will be lower, as captured via agentic and communal traits, compared to employees of other racial groups when self-promotion is high compared to low. As a result, we propose that Black employees will be rated lower on performance and fit with the organization (P-O fit) and receive fewer developmental idiosyncratic deals (i-deals) relative to other racial groups. Our hypothesized model is provided in Figure 1.

We make several contributions to scholarship on racism in the workplace by illuminating how racial backlash generates additional barriers for Black employees within organizations. Our study builds on previous research that has revealed how backlash—a phenomenon defined as “social and economic repercussions for disconfirming prescriptive stereotypes” based on race (Rudman & Phelan, 2008, p. 64)—can serve as an intermediary by which subconscious bias occurs in the workplace. Such racial backlash has been shown to adversely shape workplace perceptions of employees from marginalized racial groups, and prompt unequal workplace

¹ We classify employees as Black, White, Hispanic, or Asian. While Hispanic is considered an ethnic category, we use the term race and racial groups to include all four groups for simplicity.

treatment (Berdahl & Min, 2012; Smith et al., 2019). We contribute to knowledge on racial backlash in organizations, by drawing attention to how this expectancy violation can occur when employees use constructive strategies to *counteract* the very stereotypes that undermine positive perceptions of their job competence in the first place. We illuminate how attempts to overcome these negative stereotypes via self-promotion of workplace talents and accomplishments, can backfire for Black employees. In doing so, we uncover a unique aspect of racial backlash in organizations, which results in a burdensome paradox for Black employees. Black employees must grapple with whether to endure detrimental perceptions of their job competence or face repercussions for touting their work accomplishments. Thus, we uncover a subtle, yet damaging bias that impacts Black employees' ability to create a positive image in the eyes of their managers.

Even more, while previous research has focused on the repercussions of racial backlash in the form of less developmental feedback and mentoring (Smith et al., 2019), lower negotiated salary offers, and leadership effectiveness ratings (Hernandez et al., 2019; Rosette et al., 2018), our findings indicate that racial backlash reprisals can also materialize through fewer developmental i-deals with managers, and lower perceptions of P-O fit. While generally viewed as less instrumental to career advancement as performance or leadership effectiveness ratings, these managerial assessed evaluations are important for long-term career prospects, as they often serve to establish pathways by which employees can obtain greater job and career opportunities. As such, our study shows how racial backlash not only influences key appraisals of employees' agentic and communal traits but can also shape the micro-deals and interactions with managers that facilitate future career success and allow for upward career mobility. This is important as it identifies the subtle ways by which racial bias indirectly impacts employee career outcomes.

Lastly, our study contributes to the impression management literature. We introduce racial bias as a critical factor that may influence *when* and *why* self-promotion may fail to achieve its desired effects in the eyes of an employee's manager. Whereas much of the impression management literature has focused on an influencer's interpersonal aptitude (i.e., political skill), expressive behavior (i.e., self-monitoring), and overall approach in such impression formation strategies (i.e., genuineness) (e.g., Jones & Pittman, 1982; Wayne & Ferris, 1990), our study suggests that underlying racial dynamics may also govern the effectiveness of those influence behaviors within the employee-leader dyadic relationship. Impression management tactics, such as self-promotion are commonplace within a competitive society and are used by employees from all racial categories to communicate workplace accomplishments and career skills (Barrick et al., 2009; Kang et al., 2016; He & Kang, 2020; Roberts, 2005). Even more, developing a professional image through such interpersonal interactions is a critical "bottom-up" approach for positively shaping one's workplace identity and others' perceptions of one's competence (Godfrey et al, 1986; Roberts, 2005). However, in finding how such a widely used impression management strategy is perceived inequitably for Black employees, we underscore how racial stereotypes contribute to negative reactions of employee self-promotion, and place Black employees at a disadvantage.

Theoretical Development of Hypotheses

Racial Stereotypes and Image Management

Social categorization theory suggests that managers, through an automatic process, categorize their employees based on salient characteristics and then interpret information about them based on that initial categorization (e.g., Allport et al., 1954; Fiske, 1998; Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Race is considered a central attribute that individuals use when

perceiving others because it is easily visible and can be automatically assessed to guide the subsequent process of social group categorization (Avery et al., 2018; Beckett & Park, 1995; Dovidio et al., 2010; Fiske, 1998). This social categorization process sets the stage for stereotypes, defined as beliefs about the traits, attributes, and characteristics ascribed to members of the same social group (Dovidio & Hebl, 2005; Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). Stereotypes are often based on demographic characteristics (e.g., race, gender) and have a profound impact on managers' treatment of their employees in the workplace (Hall et al., 2019). To understand the unique biases faced by Black employees, an important step is to identify the stereotypes ascribed to Black employees that differ from those of White, Hispanic, and Asian employees (Avery et al., 2018; Colella et al., 2017; Luksyte et al., 2013; Ruggs et al., 2013).

Previous research on the negative stereotypes related to competency ascribed to Black individuals has demonstrated that they are salient and consequential, including at work (Biernat et al., 2009; Devine, 1989; Devine & Elliot, 1995; Dixon & Rosenbaum, 2004; Ghavami & Peplu, 2012; Krueger, 1996; Plous & Williams, 1995; Rosette et al., 2018; Shelton & Richeson, 2006; Wilson, 1996). In related research, He et al. (2019) found that when Black individuals are perceived as making up the majority within an occupation, that occupation is perceived as requiring lower competence. The negative stereotypes related to competence ascribed to Black individuals have also resulted in this group being held to higher standards of performance compared to other racial groups, as well as their successful performances attributed to characteristics unrelated to competence (Carton & Rosette, 2011; Foschi, 2000). In sum, Black employees are at a clear disadvantage at work, as managers' negative stereotypes related to Black employees' competency play an instrumental role in evaluations that impact their upward mobility (e.g., Cuddy et al., 2011).

Furthermore, damaging stereotypes related to competence create a formidable challenge for Black employees in establishing a professional image in the workplace. Roberts (2005) defines professional image as how others, including one's manager, perceive one's capability and character. According to this model, individuals will use impression management strategies in shaping others' perceptions of their professional image, especially when they perceive a gap between how others see them (i.e., perceived professional image) and their desired professional image.

Coinciding with Robert's model, studies have found that racial minorities and other stigmatized groups are acutely aware of the negative stereotypes that others hold of their social group and proactively engage in impression management behaviors to mitigate potential bias and create a positive image (Bergsieker et al., 2010; He & Kang, 2021; Kang et al., 2016; Krueger, 1996; Little et al., 2015; Lyons et al., 2018; Roberts, 2005; Zou & Cheryan, 2017). For example, Kang et al. (2016) found that minority applicants "whiten" their resumes by downplaying or removing key signals of their racial identity to prevent anticipated discrimination from hindering their job prospects. While employees from marginalized racial identity groups may use such tactics to prevent racial discrimination during the pre-employment process, research suggests that employees continue to engage in impression management tactics to promote a positive image in the eyes of their manager during their employment tenure. For example, Little et al. (2015) found that pregnant women engaged in impression management techniques to maintain their professional image, which was associated with desirable outcomes including perceiving less discrimination.

The Role of Stereotypes in Creating Racial Backlash

As discussed, Black employees may perceive image management as a way to circumvent managers' negative stereotypes related to their competence and as a pathway for building a professional image. Yet, such an approach may come with risks, as substantiated by research on racial backlash. Racial (and gender) backlash is grounded in the literature on stereotypes and, specifically, the reprisals resulting from individuals who disconfirm prescriptive stereotypes (Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Phelan, 2008). Scholarship in this area suggests that a myriad of mechanisms can trigger racial backlash, including when racial minorities are perceived as violating established status-hierarchy dynamics or perceived as engaging in behaviors that violate descriptive or prescribed racial stereotypes (Berdahl & Min, 2012; Hall & Livingston, 2012; Hernandez et al., 2019; Rosette et al., 2018).

Past research pertaining to racial bias has uncovered how backlash occurs in various facets of organizational life, including salary negotiations, expressions of anger at work, displays of celebration, and leadership evaluations (Adam & Shirako, 2013; Hall & Livingston, 2012; Hernandez et al., 2019; Rosette et al., 2016; 2018). In each instance, employees from marginalized racial groups were found to encounter negative consequences, as a result of engaging in behaviors perceived to violate category-based (race) expectations. Adjacent literature concerning gender bias has shown how women also incur a penalty when they engage in counter-stereotypical behavior in the workplace, typically in the form of violating femininity stereotypes (Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 2001; Rudman et al., 2012). In recent years, scholars have bridged these two literatures, using an intersectional perspective, to explain how a unique form of backlash occurs in the context of when someone is a member of two or more demographic categories (Crenshaw, 1991; Hall et al., 2019; Motro et al., 2022; Rosette et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2019). This scholarship has uncovered the complex intersection with which

stereotypes of two or more salient social identities (i.e., Asian, female) are implicitly integrated to form impressions that result in a unique form of racial backlash. For example, because Asian women are often stereotyped as being submissive and docile (Li, 2014; Prasso, 2005), and Asians more generally (men and women) are associated with feminine traits, Asian women may be especially at risk of incurring penalties for behaviors reflecting dominance, which violates prescribed stereotypes for both women and Asians (Rosette et al., 2018). While studies based on an intersectionality perspective have identified unique stereotypes between men and women of the same race (Rosette et al., 2018; Hall et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2019), we assert that negative stereotyping related to competence of Black employees will engender a racial backlash that will affect Black women and Black men in a similar manner. This is based on stereotyping research which finds that both Black women and Black men suffer from negative stereotypes related to competence (Avery et al. 2018; Ghavami & Peplau, 2012; He et al., 2019; Rosette et al., 2018).

Within these literatures, EVT (Burgoon & Le Poire, 1993; Jussim et al., 1987) has been used to explain the underlying mechanisms that trigger backlash. Expectancy violation occurs when a target's behavior violates descriptive or prescribed racial or gender stereotypes (Burgoon & Le Poire, 1993; Jussim et al., 1987). Applying EVT, we argue that managers' expectations of Black employees' image management behavior is shaped by negative stereotypes associated with their racial group. Bettencourt et al. (1997) distinguished between category inconsistent behavior and category violation, stating "the distinction between behaviors that are *violations* of expectations and those that are inconsistent is important, because behaviors that are merely inconsistent with expectations may fail to have enough impact to elicit emotional reactions" (p. 272). Based on this research, we contend that due to the negativity of Black employees' stereotypes related to competence, counter-stereotypic behavior in the form of self-promotion, by

Black employees will be viewed as a *violation* of expectations and result in negative outcomes, whereas for Hispanics such behavior may be viewed as unmet expectations, and for Whites and Asians as expectancy-consistent behavior.

Self-Promotion: Counter-stereotypical Behavior for Black Employees

There are several tactics that employees may use to influence their managers' impressions of them (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Wayne & Ferris, 1990; Wayne & Liden, 1985). Among these, we examine self-promotion, defined as touting one's abilities and accomplishments with the intent of being viewed as competent (Jones & Pittman, 1982). Because Black employees are burdened with the image discrepancy between negative stereotypes related to competence, engaging in self-promotion may be viewed by this group of employees as a particularly befitting avenue by which they can circumvent negative perceptions of their competence (Bergsieker et al., 2010; Roberts, 2005; Rosenfeld et al., 1995; Swencionis & Fiske, 2020). The question remains as to whether Black employees' self-promotion will have the desired effect.

We propose that the risks associated with self-promotion are higher for Black employees than employees from other racial groups and poses a critical challenge for Black employees who seek to create a desired work image. Self-promotion by Black employees involves attempts to persuade others of one's capabilities and accomplishments, which may be viewed by their White managers as a violation of their stereotyped assumption that they are low in job-related competence (Rosette et al., 2016). As well, White managers may view such behavior as disingenuous. For example, Hernandez et al. (2019) found that Black job seekers were expected to negotiate their salary less than their White counterparts and were penalized when they did so. Considering the negative stereotypes related to competence of Black employees in comparison

with other minority groups (Avery et al., 2018), we expect Black employees will experience negative consequences when engaging in self-promotion.

We consider leaders' biased assessment of Black employees' traits as the mechanism by which "backlash effects" result from Black employees' self-promotion. Previous research has identified two broad classes to capture different person perceptions—agentic traits and communal traits (Abele, 2003; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Koenig & Eagly, 2014; Rosette et al., 2016, 2018; Dupree & Fiske, 2019). Agentic traits refer to being viewed as dominant (e.g., ambitious, self-confident, and assertive) and competent (e.g., capable, skillful, and efficient) (Carrier et al., 2014; Rosette et al., 2016). Communal traits reflect warmth, friendliness, being good-natured, and engender liking (Abele, 2003; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). Labeled as social cognition's "Big Two" dimensions, agentic traits and communal traits have been found to account for 80 to 90 percent of the variance in individual impressions (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Fiske, 2018; Fiske et al., 2002, 2007). We thus adopt these two broad categories to capture managers' overall assessment on their employees' traits.

When Black employees engage in self-promotion, their behaviors are likely to be seen as a violation of managers' stereotypes related to the low capability and the lack of skills. Managers' perceived expectancy violation suppresses Black employees' self-promotion efforts, while these efforts may be effective for other racial groups. As a result, Black employees who engage in self-promotion may fail to demonstrate their abilities and skills. Thus, we hypothesize that for employees who engage in high versus low self-promotion, Black employees will be rated by their managers as lower in agentic traits than other racial groups.

We also contend that Black employees who self-promote will be rated lower on communal traits, as individuals who engage in counter-stereotypical behavior are often disliked

(Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001). For example, He and Kang (2021) found that women who used less feminine language in their cover letters for male-dominated jobs were seen as less likable due to behaving in counter-stereotypical ways. Thus, we expect that because of the counter-stereotypical nature of self-promotion for Black employees, self-promotion by Black employees will be negatively related to manager's assessments in communal traits compared to White, Hispanic, and Asian employees.

Hypothesis 1: Self-promotion moderates the relation between race and manager assessment of employee agentic traits. Black employees are rated lower on agentic traits compared to White, Hispanic, and Asian employees, and the differences are larger when self-promotion is higher.

Hypothesis 2: Self-promotion moderates the relation between race and manager assessment of employee communal traits. Black employees are rated lower on communal traits compared to White, Hispanic, and Asian employees, and the differences are larger when self-promotion is higher.

Agentic and Communal Traits and Precursors of Upward Mobility

Managers' biased assessments of Black employees' agentic and communal traits are the mechanisms by which self-promotion has differential effects on outcomes for Black employees in the workplace. Regarding the repercussions of this form of bias, we focused on precursors of future upward mobility, including performance ratings, P-O fit, and developmental i-deals. These outcomes are particularly relevant to our model as they are based on managers' subjective judgments of their employees and thus are more prone to bias due to manager racial stereotypes. Additionally, these outcomes are predicted to be impacted by manager assessments of employees' agentic and/or communal traits. Employee agentic traits are critical qualities that

impacts managers' evaluations of employee performance and P-O fit (e.g., Carton & Rosette, 2011; Fiske et al., 2002; Rosette & Livingston, 2012; Rosette et al., 2016; Rudman & Glick, 2001). Employee communal traits are expected to relate to employee P-O fit and allocation of developmental i-deals, as both are influenced by manager's affect toward the employee.

In the context of the workplace, employees' agentic traits have been related to both objective and subjective career success, with agentic traits having a strong relationship to assessments of performance (Abele, 2003). Performance ratings are often impacted by manager bias because performance criteria are inherently vague, requiring subjective judgments of the quality of employee performance. Ambiguity in performance criteria provides an opportunity for cognitive distortion such that stereotyped judgments of agentic traits impact performance ratings (Heilman, 2001). Another common characteristic of the performance evaluation process that perpetuates racial bias is the lack of multiple raters of performance. Relying solely on one individual (i.e., the manager) to evaluate an employee's performance increases the likelihood of stereotyped assumptions of the employee's agentic traits impacting performance ratings. For these reasons, we expect managers' assessments of employees' agentic traits to be positively related to performance ratings.

Hypothesis 3: Manager assessment of employee agentic traits is positively related to performance ratings.

A manager's perceptions of an employee's fit with the organization (perceived P-O fit) is another subjective assessment that impacts not only who is hired for a position, but also who is promoted (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1997; Hoobler et al., 2009). Manager perceptions of employee fit are based on judging the compatibility between the employee and the organization (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). It is a subjective judgment that can be impacted by bias, as the manager

applies their own weighting to the person versus organization, as well as what factors to consider as part of the organization (Kristof-Brown et al., 2002). Studies indicate that race and gender stereotypes impact others' perceptions of one's fit with jobs, as well as fit with the organization overall. Heilman's (1983) Lack of Fit Model theorizes that stereotypes impact women's biased treatment in the workplace because they are perceived as a poor fit for masculinely sex-typed jobs. Extending the impact of gender bias to fit with the organization, Hoobler et al. (2009) found that sex-role stereotypes impacted managers' perceptions of employee P-O fit. Although P-O fit research has been primarily conducted in the context of recruiters' perceptions of candidates' fit with the organization, these studies indicate that characteristics associated with agentic and communal qualities are both valued in employees. For example, Kristof-Brown et al. (2002) found that judgments of applicants' knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs), as well as personality traits impacted recruiters' perceptions of candidates' fit. Similarly, Judge and Ferris (1992) contend that manager perceptions of an employee's KSAs and liking toward that person are key antecedents of fit that impact selection decisions. Thus, P-O fit perceptions appear to be based on broad characteristics that are reflected in agentic and communal traits. Based on these studies and Cuddy et al.'s (2011) contention that while agentic traits are prioritized in organizational contexts, communal traits are valued as well, we hypothesize that manager perceptions of employee P-O fit are impacted by assessments of employees' agentic and communal traits.

Hypothesis 4: Manager assessment of employee agentic (4a) and communal traits (4b) are positively related to P-O fit.

Developmental i-deals are arrangements that employees negotiate with their manager that are unique to the individual, that is, they are nonstandard. These include opportunities for skill

development, career development, and training (Anand et al., 2010). Employee political skill and the quality of one's relationship with the manager have been found to impact the granting of an i-deal to an employee (Rosen et al., 2013), suggesting that whether someone receives an i-deal may have less to do with whether the manager views the employee as possessing agentic traits and more with whether the manager likes the employee. Communal traits are associated with friendliness, warmth, and trustworthiness, which elicit the manager's liking toward the employee (Fiske et al. 2002). According to the behaviors from intergroup affect and stereotypes (BIAS) map (Cuddy et al., 2007), which is an extension of the SCM, when individuals (i.e., employees) are stereotyped as possessing high communal traits, perceivers (i.e., managers) are more likely to engage in behaviors of "active facilitation" or helping. One explanation for the behavioral inclination to help is because high warmth captures the employee's intentions toward the manager and thus has more direct implications for manager behavior.

Hypothesis 5: Manager assessment of employee communal traits is positively related to developmental i-deals.

Moderated Mediation Effects of Self-Promotion & Race

By integrating research on racial stereotypes (Fiske et al., 2002) and EVT (Burgoon & LePoire, 1993; Jussim et al., 1987), we propose that self-promotion, being a counter-stereotypic behavior for Black employees, will moderate the relation between race and manager ratings of their agentic and communal traits such that Black employees, compared to White, Hispanic, and Asian employees, will be rated lower, and the difference is strengthened by higher self-promotion. Further, the negative effects or "backlash effects" of self-promotion for Black employees will extend from agentic and communal traits to outcomes that are precursors to upward mobility: performance ratings, perceived P-O fit, and developmental i-deals. Taken

together, our theorizing suggests that manager assessments of their employees' agentic and communal traits are the mechanisms by which race impacts performance ratings, P-O fit, and i-deals, and higher employee self-promotion strengthens the difference.

Hypothesis 6: Self-promotion moderates the effect of race on performance ratings (6a) and P-O fit (6b) through manager assessment of employee agentic traits. Black employees are rated lower on performance ratings and P-O fit compared to White, Hispanic, and Asian employees through lower agentic traits, and the differences are larger when self-promotion is higher.

Hypothesis 7: Self-promotion moderates the effect of race on P-O fit (7a) and i-deals (7b) through manager assessment of employee communal traits. Black employees are rated lower on P-O fit and i-deals compared to White, Hispanic, and Asian employees through lower communal traits, and the differences are larger when self-promotion is higher.

Method

Participants of the present study were U.S. employees and their managers from a large financial institution. Senior management collaborated with our research team on a study designed to uncover why minorities were underrepresented in management, despite their larger representation at lower hierarchical levels. Prior to developing the research model, the first author conducted 15 hours of individual interviews with a racially diverse group of employees ($n = 13$) and three HR managers in order to gain insights into potential racial bias influencing manager assessments of employees. One key finding of the interviews was that developing a positive relationship with one's direct manager was critical to success because managers had expansive decision-making authority including performance ratings and developmental opportunities. For example, one interviewee stated, "Keep your manager happy. They have a lot

to say when they decide your next move, bonus, and promotion.”

The survey administration included two parts: (1) the employee survey, which measured employees' self-promotion, i-deals, and control variables (i.e., organizational tenure and education), and (2) the manager survey, which assessed managers' ratings of employees' agentic and communal traits and P-O fit. Data derived from the company's Human Resource Information System (HRIS) (i.e., race, gender, manager rating of employee performance) were then linked to the survey data.

Sample and Procedure

To obtain a representative sample, we used a random stratified sampling strategy based on race (Black, White, Hispanic, and Asian), gender (male and female), and grade levels (five organizational levels included) for the employee sample. A total of 1,149 employees and their direct supervisors (i.e., 563 managers) were invited to participate.

Survey links were sent to employees' e-mail addresses provided by the company, and four weeks later to managers of participating employees. We received 530 employee surveys and 366 manager surveys, yielding response rates of 46% and 52%, respectively. There were 317 paired responses after linking manager ratings to employee responses. Because our theoretical model focuses on White managers' impressions of employees, we retained only the 249 employees under the supervision of White managers in the final sample.

Hence, the data analyses were based on 249 manager-employee dyads, with 249 employees (including 69 White, 56 Black, 76 Hispanic, and 48 Asian employees) under the supervision of 207 White managers. For the participating employees, 51% were male, and 70% had a college degree and above. On average, they had been working 9.05 years for the company, 3.87 years in the current position, and 2.61 years with their current manager. Most of the

managers (83%) had a college degree or above, and 53% were male. The managers had an average of 13.48 years of organizational tenure and 16.49 years of supervisory experience.

We compared data for the employees who were included ($n = 249$) and those employees removed from our analyses due to having non-White managers ($n = 42$) or missing data ($n = 26$) on manager race. The results of t -tests for variables in our model showed that only self-promotion revealed a significant difference between these two groups ($t = 3.15, p = .002$), indicating that employees who were working with White managers engaged in more self-promotion than employees who were working with managers in other racial categories and whose managers' racial information was missed.

Measures

Variables in the employee and manager surveys were measured on 5-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), unless otherwise noted.

Race (HRIS). Employees' race was derived from the HIRS database, and consisted of four categories: White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian. Three dummy coded variables were created with Black employees as the comparison group. The company defined racial categories based on the EEO-1 definitions of: White (Not Hispanic or Latino) - A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. Black or African American (Not Hispanic or Latino) - A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa. Hispanic or Latino - A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. Asian (Not Hispanic or Latino) - A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian Subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Self-promotion (Employee survey). We measured employees' self-promotion by Bolino and Turnley's (1999) four-item scale. A sample item is "I talk proudly about my experience or education with others at [company name]". The reliability (α) was .89.

Agentic and communal traits (Manager survey). We followed previous studies to measure manager rating of employees' agentic and communal traits with two scales of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence & Helmreich, 1978; see also Abele, 2003). Two agentic items ("very self-confident" and "feels superior") and one communal item ("very emotional") were not included based on communications with our contact in human resources that they would be viewed as very negative qualities in employees, and thus incompatible with the intent of these measures.

Specifically, the agentic traits were measured by six items (*can make decisions easily, very active, very independent, stands up very well under pressure, never gives up easily, very competitive*), and the communal traits were assessed by seven items (*very kind, very helpful to others, able to devote self completely to others, very warm in relations to others, very understanding, aware of feelings of others, very gentle*). Managers rated each item on the scale from 1 = "not at all" to 5 = "completely." Reliabilities (α) for agentic and communal traits were .85 and .93, respectively.

Performance ratings (HRIS). We obtained employees' most recent performance rating from the company's HRIS. The company used a 5-point Likert scale for the assessment of performance. Specifically, employee performance was rated on the scale of 1 = "Below Expectations", 2 = "Mixed", 3 = "Solid", 4 = "Distinguished", and 5 = "Outstanding."

P-O fit (Manager survey). We measured manager perceptions of their employee's P-O fit with the three items used in Cable and DeRue's (2002) study. Because the original scale

measured employee perceptions, we used the reference shift approach and modified the items to capture the manager's perspective of employee fit. Items included: "This employee's personal values match [company name]'s values and culture; The things that this employee values in life are very similar to what [company name] values; [company name]'s values and culture provide a good fit with the things this employee values in life" ($\alpha = .97$).

Developmental i-deals (Employee survey). Employees' i-deals were assessed via the four items of the developmental i-deals sub-scale, consistent with previous research (i.e., Anand et al., 2010). Employees were asked the extent to which (from 1 = not at all to 5 = completely) they had negotiated and received unique developmental opportunities, such as "training opportunities that are different from your coworkers and that address your unique needs" ($\alpha = .93$).

Control variables. We controlled for employee gender, education, and organizational tenure on the mediators (i.e., agentic and communal traits) and outcome variables (performance rating, P-O fit, and developmental i-deals). Gender was obtained from the HRIS, and education level and organizational tenure were included in the employee survey.

Transparency and Openness

In the sections above, we described our sampling plan, data inclusion/exclusion decision, and all measures in the study. We adhered to the Journal of Applied Psychology methodological checklist. Analysis code and measures are available on Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/mxj8h/?view_only=22ee650f30e44df6b22961636a9c8be1). Data are not available due to their proprietary nature. Data were analyzed using Mplus 8.4. The study design, hypotheses, and analysis were not preregistered.

Results

All analyses were conducted with *Mplus* version 8.4, using Full Information Maximum Likelihood to handle missing data (total missing data less than 0.5%). Since some managers rated more than one employee, the standard errors and chi-square test of model fit were estimated with a sandwich estimator by using TYPE = COMPLEX function in *Mplus* to account for the non-independence of nested data. Maximum likelihood with robust standard errors (MLR) estimator was used because that provides higher robustness to both non-independence of data and nonnormality of data in testing moderating effects (Cheung et al., 2021).

Measurement Invariance Tests

As data were collected from employees of four ethnic groups, we first conducted a series of measurement invariance tests to examine the comparability of estimates across ethnic groups. Since there were five latent constructs measured with a total of 24 items, the sample size of each ethnic group was too small for the configural invariance test. Hence, we conducted the measurement invariance tests with three models: Model A with manager-rated communal traits and employee-rated developmental i-deals; Model B with employee-rated self-promotion and manager-rated employee P-O fit; and Model C with manager-rated agentic traits. Since multiple tests were conducted, we adopted a Type I error rate at 0.01 to control the overall error rate. Overall model fits were examined with RMSEA and CFI. SRMR is not reported because it is not a good model fit indicator for small samples (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2018). Results in Table 1 show that all three models passed the configural, metric and scalar invariance tests. We also conducted a latent mean comparison on self-promotion by constraining the latent means to be equivalent across groups. The difference in chi-square with three degrees of freedom between the constrained and unconstrained model was 7.61 ($p = .06$), indicating the latent means of self-promotion were not significantly different across groups.

Preliminary Analyses

In order to attain an adequate sample size for testing the hypotheses, we combined data from the four ethnic groups into one larger sample and created dummy variables to represent the employee race with Black employees as the reference group. Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, average variance extracted (AVE), reliabilities, and zero-order correlations for all variables. We followed the 4-step procedure outlined in Cheung et al. (2021) to test the moderated mediation effects with latent moderated structural equations (LMS, Klein & Moosbrugger, 2000), which produces more accurate parameter estimates and confidence intervals than the more common regression approach (Cheung & Lau, 2017).

Step 1 involves the evaluation of the measurement model. We sought to establish convergent and discriminant validity of our measures by running a confirmatory factor analysis. In this model (Model 1), we have included the items for employee-rated self-promotion and developmental i-deals, manager-rated agentic and communal traits, and manager-rated P-O fit. Each item loaded on its appropriate factor, and no item cross-loaded. The overall model fit was acceptable ($\chi^2 = 451.91$, $df = 242$, CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.07). In this model, all factor loadings were significant ($p < .001$), and all standardized factor loadings were higher than 0.6 except one item for the agentic trait at 0.40. All construct reliabilities (composite reliabilities) are higher than 0.85. All AVE are higher than 0.5, supporting convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Correlation coefficients among all factors were substantially smaller than 1.0 (the highest correlation was between P-O fit and communal traits at 0.51), and all squared correlations were smaller than the corresponding AVE, providing strong support for discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Test of Hypotheses

To examine if the moderated mediation hypotheses were full mediation or partial mediation, we included direct paths from employee race to performance rating, P-O fit, and developmental i-deals to our hypothesized model in Figure 1. Since LMS does not provide usual fit indices, Step 2 of the 4-step procedure was to estimate a model (Model 2) without the latent interaction terms to assess overall model fit (Cheung et al., 2021). The overall model fit indices of Model 2 indicated the model fitted the data adequately ($\chi^2 = 762.68$, $df = 446$, $CFI = 0.93$, $RMSEA = 0.05$, $SRMR = 0.08$).

In Step 3, we estimated the model with latent interactions (Model 3) by creating latent interactions of employee race with self-promotion and then estimated the paths from these latent interactions to performance rating, P-O fit, and developmental i-deals through agentic traits and communal traits. The fit of this model was compared to Model 2; the chi-square difference value (based on the loglikelihood values) was 13.72 ($df = 6$, $p = .033$), showing the inclusion of the latent interactions improved model fit significantly. The regression coefficients of Model 3 are shown in Table 3.

Results in Table 3 show that the interaction effects between race and self-promotion on manager assessment of employee agentic traits are all statistically significant. Figure 2a shows that when self-promotion is higher, ratings on agentic traits of Black employees drop markedly. As a result, when self-promotion was high (1 standard deviation above mean), Black employees had significantly lower ratings in agentic traits than White employees ($b = -0.66$, $p = .002$). On the other hand, when self-promotion was low (1 standard deviation below mean), the difference between Black and White employees in agentic traits was not statistically significant ($b = .00$, $p = .986$). Similarly, when self-promotion was high, Black employees had significantly lower ratings in agentic traits than Hispanic employees ($b = -0.51$, $p = .007$), but the difference was not

statistically significant when self-promotion was low ($b = .28, p = .191$). Finally, when self-promotion was high, Black employees had significantly lower ratings in agentic traits than Asian employees ($b = -0.77, p < .001$), but the difference was not statistically significant when self-promotion was low ($b = .07, p = .755$). Hence, H1 was supported.

Table 3 also shows that the interaction effects between race and self-promotion on manager assessment of employee communal traits are all statistically significant. Figure 2b shows that when self-promotion is higher, the ratings on communal traits of Black employees become lower. Thus, when self-promotion was high, the difference in communal traits between Black and White employees was not statistically significant ($b = -0.23, p = .215$). On the other hand, when self-promotion was low, Black employees had significantly higher ratings in communal traits than White employees ($b = 0.48, p = .004$). Similarly, when self-promotion was high, the difference in communal traits between Black and Hispanic employees was not statistically significant ($b = -0.13, p = .436$), but the Black employees' communal traits were significantly higher than those of Hispanic employees when self-promotion was low ($b = .36, p = .032$). Finally, the difference in communal traits between Black and Asian employees when self-promotion was high ($b = -0.30, p = .110$), and the difference in communal traits when self-promotion was low ($b = 0.27, p = .111$), were not statistically significant. Thus, H2 was partially supported.

Results in Table 3 show that the positive relationship between agentic traits and performance ratings ($b = 0.31, p < .001$) is significant, providing support for H3. With respect to manager perceptions of employee P-O fit, the positive relationships for both agentic traits ($b = 0.22, p = .002$) and communal traits ($b = 0.45, p < .001$) were significant. Hence, H4a and H4b

were supported. Furthermore, the positive relationship between communal traits and developmental i-deals ($b = 0.50, p = .001$) was statistically significant, providing support for H5.

Hypotheses 6 and 7 posit that the differences between Black employees and employees in other racial groups in performance ratings and P-O fit through agentic traits, as well as the differences in P-O fit and developmental i-deals through communal traits are larger when self-promotion is higher. These hypotheses were tested with the Index of Moderated Mediation (Index MM; Hayes, 2015). Since moderated mediation effects are not normally distributed, we adopted the Monte Carlo simulation procedure suggested by Preacher and Selig (2012) for generating confidence intervals of mediation effects for multilevel models. However, instead of their recommendation of reporting the confidence intervals based on the percentile method, we enhanced the procedures by using more powerful bias-corrected confidence intervals (Cheung & Lau, 2008).

Index MM presented in Table 4 show that self-promotion moderates the differences in performance ratings through manager assessment of employee agentic traits between Black employees and White (Index MM = -0.18, $p = .028$, 95% CI [-0.36, -0.02]), Hispanic (Index MM = -0.21, $p = .010$, 95% CI [-0.41, -0.05]), and Asian employees (Index MM = -0.19, $p = .012$, 95% CI [-0.36, -0.04]). Figure 3a shows that when self-promotion is high, Black employees have significantly lower performance ratings through agentic traits when compared with White, Hispanic, and Asian employees. Similarly, self-promotion moderates the differences in manager-rated P-O fit through agentic traits between Black employees and White (Index MM = -0.12, $p = .018$, 95% CI [-0.30, -0.02]), Hispanic (Index MM = -0.15, $p = .007$, 95% CI [-0.34, -0.04]), and Asian employees (Index MM = -0.13, $p = .009$, 95% CI [-0.31, -0.03]). Figure 3b shows that when self-promotion is high, Black employees are rated significantly lower on P-O fit through

agentic traits compared to White, Hispanic, and Asians. Thus, both H6a and H6b were supported.

Results in Table 4 also show that self-promotion moderates the differences between Black employees and White (Index MM = -0.28, $p = .005$, 95% CI [-0.51, -0.09]), Hispanic (Index MM = -0.19, $p < .034$, 95% CI [-0.39, -0.02]), and Asian employees (Index MM = -0.22, $p = .048$, 95% CI [-0.47, -0.02]) in P-O fit through manager assessment of employee communal traits. Figure 3c shows that when self-promotion is high, Black employees are rated significantly lower on P-O fit through communal traits compared with White, Hispanic, and Asian employees. On the other hand, Black employees are rated significantly higher on P-O fit through communal traits when self-promotion is low. Finally, self-promotion also moderates the differences between Black employees and White (Index MM = -0.31, $p = .005$, 95% CI [-0.71, -0.07]), Hispanic (Index MM = -0.21, $p = .029$, 95% CI [-0.55, -0.02]), and Asian employees (Index MM = -0.24, $p = .030$, 95% CI [-0.65, -0.02]) in developmental i-deals through communal traits. Figure 3d shows that Black employees receive fewer developmental i-deals through communal traits compared with White, Hispanic, and Asian employees when self-promotion is high. On the other hand, contrary to our theorizing, Black employees receive more developmental i-deals through communal traits compared to White, Hispanic, and Asian employees when self-promotion is low. Thus, H7a and H7b were partially supported.

Discussion

How and when do Black employees experience biased manager evaluations compared to their Hispanic, Asian, and White counterparts? In a field study of leader-follower dyads comprised of employees from four racial groups and their White managers, we demonstrated that Black employees are harmed in comparison to other racial groups when engaging in self-

promotion. Specifically, self-promotion by Black employees compared to Whites, Hispanics, and Asians led to lower manager ratings of their job performance and assessments of their fit with the organization, as well as fewer developmental i-deals negotiated with their manager. Drawing on stereotype research, we found that managers' biased perceptions of employees' agentic and communal traits serve as the explanatory mechanisms for these effects. Contrary to our theorizing, we found that when self-promotion was low, Black employees were rated higher on P-O fit and received more i-deals (via communal traits) than other racial groups.

Theoretical Contributions

The results of our study have several implications for theory and research on racial bias in the workplace. Our study revealed a novel manager bias in the workplace that is unique to Black employees. From a broader perspective, this suggests that societal stereotypes based on the general population or student samples may not capture unique forms of bias that manifest in the workplace, affirming calls for research designed to uncover bias that affects certain minority groups (Avery et al., 2018). For example, Zou and Cheryan's (2017) study of racial stereotypes in the U.S. found that Hispanic/Latino Americans and Asian Americans often experience racial prejudice in their everyday interactions due to others' perceiving them as foreign and "less" American. Whether the "foreignness" stereotype is a prevalent managerial bias that impacts promotion decisions and upward mobility for these two groups is not yet known. Without such research, these unique biases will remain invisible and damaging, and we will continue to see a lack of progress in the representation of minorities in the middle- and upper-level management roles.

In addition to identifying a racial bias that is unique to Black employees, our findings demonstrate the consequential effects of that bias. All too often, the downstream effects of bias

are not examined, which obscures its potential damage on employee careers. Our findings extend the link between race and performance ratings, to manager assessment of employee P-O fit and the provision of developmental i-deals, both of which are associated with employee upward mobility. Perhaps more importantly, insufficient research has explored the process through which race impacts these outcomes, or the conditions under which this process is manifested. Thus, our study not only identifies self-promotion as a unique form of bias that impacts manager perceptions of their Black employees, but also demonstrates its effects on critical employee outcomes through its impact on manager judgments of agentic and communal traits. Uncovering this form of bias is important as “all bias matters” and has major costs for organizations and their employees (Hardy et al., 2021, p. 26); identifying bias is the first step to addressing ways to eliminate its impact.

Our results contribute to the accumulating set of studies that extend expectancy violation theory and the “backlash effect” beyond gender bias to racial bias in the workplace. The negative consequences of counter-stereotypical behavior for women are well established (e.g., Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001). For example, women who engage in agentic or masculine behaviors often experience detrimental outcomes because perceivers view such behaviors as violating expectations of women as more communal and less agentic than men. Extending the findings on gender bias, our study indicates that expectancy violation theory applies to racial bias as well, but its application in this context is more nuanced. Specifically, while both Black and Hispanic individuals are stereotyped similarly in terms of agentic and communal traits, the counter-stereotypical behavior of self-promotion resulted in a “backlash effect” only for Black employees. Bettencourt et al.’s (1997) contention that there is a distinction between category-inconsistent and category-violation behavior provides an explanation for this finding. They

suggest that perceivers *may* or *may not* react to others' category-inconsistent behavior, depending on the degree of unexpectedness of that behavior. In other words, perceivers view others' behavior on a continuum from expectancy violation behavior at one end to expectancy consistent behavior at the other end. Category-inconsistent behavior falls somewhere between these two end points. The distinction between behaviors that are viewed as expectancy violation versus category-inconsistent is important because the latter may fail to elicit emotional and behavioral reactions from the perceiver (Bettencourt et al., 1997). In the context of our study, we argue that the stronger negative stereotypes associated with Black employees compared to Hispanic employees may explain managers' differential reactions to self-promotion by the two groups. Accordingly, self-promotion for Hispanics may be viewed as category-inconsistent behavior but may not rise to the point of an expectancy violation. We encourage future research to explore these ideas by assessing the extent to which employee race impacts managers' perceptions of the unexpectedness of employee behavior and, in turn, their treatment.

The results of our study have important implications for prior research that identifies self-promotion as an effective "bottom-up tactic" that has the potential to shape managers' perceptions of their employees' competence and professional image (Roberts, 2005). Although previous studies have identified several effective impression management tactics for people from disadvantaged groups to manage their professional image (e.g., Little et al., 2015; Lyons et al., 2018), our research found Black employees do not benefit, and instead are harmed by engaging in self-promotion. This point is especially critical given Bergsieker and colleagues' (2010) research indicating that Black individuals are more apt to adopt impression management goals to be viewed as competent (i.e., self-promotion) rather than likable when interacting with White dyadic partners. Building on our results, future research is needed to investigate whether other

impression management tactics have similar damaging consequences for Black employees who may mistakenly think they contribute to creating a desirable professional image because they appear to do so for other racial groups (Roberts, 2005; Wayne & Ferris, 1990).

While our hypotheses focused on the negative consequences of high self-promotion for Black employees, there were a few unexpected findings. Black employees who engaged in low levels of self-promotion were rated by their managers as higher on communal traits and were perceived as having higher fit with the organization and received more developmental i-deals than Whites, Hispanics, and Asians. This unexpected result regarding the beneficial effects of Black employees' low self-promotion may be explained by research on invisibility. Existing research has found that employees strategically engage in invisibility to avoid unwanted scrutinization and prejudice (Neel & Lassetter, 2019; Smith et al., 2019). However, using invisibility as a strategy may also have costs, such as causing ostracism and impeding the development of positive relationships (Neel & Lassetter, 2019; Settles et al., 2018). Given the paradoxical effects of strategic invisibility and our research finding, future studies may explore the conditions in which refraining from self-promotion by Black employees may bring about benefits as well as costs.²

Finally, extending expectancy violation theory to examine race-based differences in a manager's "in-group" (e.g., Whites) compared to members of their "out-group" (e.g., Blacks) provides a bridge to the broader literature. For example, Kluemper and colleagues (2019) show that leaders are blind to the negative behavior of their "favored followers" in their in-group, resulting in them being let off the hook when being evaluated. Conversely, members of the out-group who are victims of harmful workplace behaviors are mistakenly blamed by their managers,

² We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

resulting in more negative and biased evaluations. As such, expectancy violations due to racial differences may help to explain this phenomenon and should be explored in future research. In this connection, our study links to the broader literature in intriguing ways, opening the door to theoretical integration of racial bias with a range of literatures such as leader-member exchange, workplace deviance, victim blaming, among others.

Implications for Practice

Our research offers a number of practical insights for organizations and their employees. From an organizational perspective, our study highlights the need to understand racial bias through a more nuanced lens beyond grouping all “people of color” together as a monolith, as Black employees experienced a different form of bias not experienced by Asians and Hispanics. As such, an enhanced understanding of the differences in bias between racial groups informs practice in a more fine-grained and accurate way and should be incorporated into manager training on implicit biases in particular. At the same time, manager diversity training should be implemented with care, as it is a point of contention whether such training breaks down stereotypes or reinforces them (Dover et al., 2020; Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015) or has other negative consequences (Leslie, 2019). Due to the challenges of designing effective training programs, organizations should monitor manager judgments and resource allocations (i.e., performance ratings, P-O fit, and developmental i-deals) by conducting analyses to determine if those decisions are impacted by employee race.

Considering the “backlash effects” of self-promotion for Black employees, what are our recommendations for this group of employees in particular? We do *not* believe it is the responsibility of those who experience discrimination to be responsible for removing those racial barriers. In fact, our results question the efficacy of the “racial uplift” approach, which

encourages Black employees to proactively display and demonstrate their abilities to clear racial barriers (Cole & Omari, 2003). Instead, our perspective is similar to scholars who have criticized the “Lean-in” movement for placing much of the responsibility for addressing gender inequality in the workplace to women. In a study on “Lean-in” messages, Kim et al. (2018) found that messages suggesting that women can overcome gender inequality by focusing on their own low confidence and low ambition resulted in women viewing themselves as the cause of the inequalities and seeing themselves as responsible for solving it. These messages led women to recommend how they should change, rather than what actions management or their companies should take to address the problem (Kim et al., 2018). The authors noted that the “Lean-in” self-improvement messages intended to empower women to address gender inequities might instead yield harmful societal beliefs. Consistent with these ideas, we contend that organizational leaders need to take action to address racial bias--it is not Black employees’ responsibility to change their behavior to obviate racial stereotypes in the workplace.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is not without limitations. For example, this study was conducted in one organization and industry (i.e., financial services). It may be that our findings apply to occupations where Black employees are under-represented (Huffman & Cohen, 2004). Ruggs et al. (2013, p. 55) note that “discrimination-related research is hard to conduct. Top management is understandably cautious about approving and giving access to the investigation of discrimination-related issues within their organizations” as they may become vulnerable to lawsuits and suffer damage to their reputations. Despite this challenge, future research should evaluate whether our results generalize to other organizations and industries.

It is important to acknowledge that our study focused on race-based stereotypes to uncover the unique challenges Black employees face when engaging in self-promotion in the workplace. Based on prior research and our theorizing, we did not expect differences between men and women in the context of our study. To examine this empirically, we conducted exploratory analyses to determine if there were sub-group differences based on gender and race. Specifically, we re-ran the SEM analysis with eight race \times gender groups using seven dummy variables. All of the parameters were freely estimated in the baseline model. Then, we constrained the parameters for males and females of each racial group to be equivalent in four constrained models (for four racial groups). The differences in loglikelihood values between the constrained and unconstrained models were examined for statistical significance to test differences in the estimated parameters between gender in each racial group. Results show no gender differences in the estimated parameters in our hypothesized model in all racial groups (Black: $\Delta\chi^2(7) = 6.03, p = .536$; White: $\Delta\chi^2(7) = 7.25, p = .403$; Hispanic: $\Delta\chi^2(7) = 4.58, p = .712$; Asian: $\Delta\chi^2(7) = 2.84, p = .899$). These results support our hypotheses and contention that self-promotion by men and women of a racial group is perceived similarly by others. However, in support of our hypotheses, there are differences between Black employees and other racial groups.

Because we did not find differences between Black women and Black men in terms of negative consequences associated with self-promotion, our findings might be viewed as contrary to intersectionality research (Hall et al., 2019). However, studies based on an intersectionality paradigm suggest that there are *specific situations depending on the nature of the stereotype of interest* that determines whether there will be differences for certain sub-groups such as between Black women and Black men. Given that prior research on stereotypes indicates that both Black

women and Black men experience biases of low competence (i.e., a race-based bias), we expected that self-promotion and resulting racial backlash would operate in a similar way for both groups. These findings highlight the backlash effects Black men experience due to stereotypes as well. Another explanation for the lack of differences between Black men and Black women in our study is grounded in research that suggests a category activation and inhibition process (also termed salient categorization model) (Macrae et al., 1995; Kulik et al., 2007). This perspective proposes that when an individual belongs to two social categories (i.e., Black female), one category of stereotypes (i.e., Black) may be activated over another category of stereotypes (i.e., women) based on factors such as the task, environment, or broader social context (Kulik et al., 2007). Thus, when a perceiver engages in stereotyping, the dimension of race may be more salient than the dimension of gender. In the context of our study—the financial services industry where Blacks, but not women, have been historically underrepresented—race may have been salient, impacting managers’ stereotyped impressions of Black women and Black men. We recommend that future research explore when and why sub-groups including Black men and Black women, have similar and different experiences due to backlash in the workplace.

Our study was conducted in the U.S. and is exclusive to the potential biases of White managers. Because stereotypes are impacted by culture and societal norms, future research should assess the potential bias of White managers in other countries outside the U.S. Research should also explore whether such bias exists for Black, Hispanic, and/or Asian managers. We found significant differences in employee self-promotion when testing for differences between followers of White and non-White managers, such that employees engaged in less self-promotion when reporting to non-White managers. Future research should investigate when and why employees engage in differential behaviors based on the race of their manager. Related, not

all managers are likely to exhibit the same level of bias. Future research should explore individual and cultural factors that lead to less bias on the part of managers.

Though the stratified sampling approach and multisource nature of our research design are strengths, our study design is limited regarding causal inference. There is less of a concern for race as it is an immutable endogenous variable, but future research should rule out the potential for a recursive relationship between our mediators and outcomes.

Future research is needed to uncover effective approaches for Black employees to overcome managers' negative stereotypes, especially in the occupations in which Blacks are under-represented. Due to low expectations of Black employees, Biernat and Kobrynowicz (1997) suggest that they have to work "twice as hard" to be considered as good. That is, equal levels of performance may not be sufficient to garner a positive performance evaluation. Conversely, other perspectives suggest the opposite, such that "a flower blooming in winter" may result in more positive evaluations of high-performing Black employees when expectations are low (Foschi, 2000; Ubaka et al., in press). These suggestions need to be examined by more empirical research in the future. Although our suggestions focus on Black employees, studies that explore leaders' role in overcoming the negative impact of racial backlash is essential.

Finally, future studies should extend the racial backlash effects to other marginalized groups. For example, although Asian are stereotypically viewed as being posited in some high-status and high-wage occupations, such as health and high-tech industries (Koenig & Eagly, 2014), preliminary evidence has shown the discrimination toward Asian employees are shown in different formats (Jun & Wu, 2021). Apply the EVT, the negative stereotypes related to warmth and foreignness for Asian employees may cause racial backlashes when they engage in relationship-focused impression management tactics. Future research should focus on the

nuances of the backlash effects on different racial groups and its intersectional categories with gender, age, nationality, and others.

Conclusion

Our article sheds light on one unique form of discrimination faced by Black employees, indicating that Black employees are more likely to face discrimination in the workplace than other racial groups when engaging in self-promotion. Our results suggest that Black employees' self-promotion may be viewed as violations of stereotypical behavior, impacting managers' judgments of their agentic and communal traits and having detrimental consequences or a "backlash" effect on outcomes that are often precursors of upward mobility in organizations. Through this research, our findings emphasize the importance of moving beyond investigating racial bias in terms of White versus minority group differences. Instead, examining the process through which bias toward a particular racial group occurs enhances understanding of how to minimize the unique barriers they face in the workplace. We hope our findings inspire future exploration of racial bias in terms of why managers may treat minority groups differently in the workplace.

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Table 1*Results of Measurement Invariance Tests*

Model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	$\Delta\chi^2$	Δdf	$p(\Delta\chi^2)$	RMSEA	90% CI (RMSEA)	p (RMSEA < .05)	CFI
<i>Model A (Communal traits and developmental i-deals)</i>									
Configural invariance	252.90	172				.087	.063, .109	.059	.956
Metric invariance	278.93	199	26.82	27	.47	.080	.057, .102	.119	.956
Scalar invariance	304.29	226	25.50	27	.55	.075	.051, .095	.129	.957
<i>Model B (Self-promotion and P-O fit)</i>									
Configural invariance	73.00	52				.081	.027, .121	.057	.973
Metric invariance	101.05	67	26.95	15	.03	.090	.051, .125	.147	.956
Scalar invariance	120.29	82	19.71	15	.18	.087	.050, .118	.149	.950
<i>Model C (Agentic traits)</i>									
Configural invariance	51.90	36				.084	.017, .132	.045	.966
Metric invariance	78.93	51	26.88	15	.03	.094	.049, .133	.150	.940
Scalar invariance	90.33	66	10.56	15	.78	.077	.029, .114	.150	.948

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, Average Variance Extracted, Composite Reliability and Correlation Coefficients

	Mean	s.d.	AVE	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. Race D1 – White	0.28	-	-											
2. Race D2 – Hispanic	0.31	-	-	-										
3. Race D3 – Asian	0.19	-	-	-	-									
4. Self-promotion	3.55	0.60	0.70	-.18 **	.07	.04	(.90)							
5. Agentic Traits	3.89	0.71	0.51	.14 *	-.12	.14 *	-.07	(.86)						
6. Communal Traits	4.07	0.60	0.65	-.06	-.02	.08	.01	.42 ***	(.93)					
7. P-O Fit	4.25	0.65	0.90	.13 *	-.03	-.05	-.01	.46 ***	.51 ***	(.97)				
8. Developmental I-deals	2.92	1.15	0.76	-.07	-.01	.08	.36 ***	.14 *	.26 ***	.15	(.93)			
9. Performance Ratings	3.41	0.59	-	.04	-.06	.18 **	-.07	.39 ***	.16 **	.17 **	.04			
10. Company Tenure	9.05	8.12	-	.01	.09	-.13 *	.04	.01	.01	.05	-.10	.01		
11. Gender (Male = 0)	0.49	-	-	.03	.02	-.03	-.05	-.00	.05	.08	-.14 *	-.04	.23 ***	
12. Education D1 – Associate	0.13	-	-	-.08	.15 *	.05	.22 **	-.02	.02	-.01	-.00	-.05	.00	.05
13. Education D2 – Bachelor	0.43	-	-	.20 **	-.03	-.10	-.08	.10	.03	.10	.02	.03	-.02	-.02
14. Education D3 – Master	0.23	-	-	-.10	-.14 *	.07	.02	.08	-.03	.06	-.01	-.03	-.09	-.08
15. Education D4 - Doctorate	0.04	-	-	-.08	-.08	.01	.04	.02	.04	.00	.07	.12	-.11 *	-.02

Note: N = 249 (69 White, 56 Black, 76 Hispanic, and 48 Asian employees); Race – Black employees as the reference group; Education – High school diploma as the reference group; n = 237-242; P-O Fit = Person-Organization Fit; I-deals = Idiosyncratic Deals. AVE = Average Variance Extracted; Diagonal elements are construct reliability.

p* < .05, *p* < .01; ****p* < .001.

Table 3*Results of Latent Moderated Structural Equation Model*

	Model 3				
	Agentic Traits	Communal Traits	Performance Ratings	P-O Fit	Developmental I-deals
Company Tenure	.01	.00	.00	.00	-.01
Employee Gender	-.02	.02	-.05	.08	-.28
Education D1	.39 *	.09	-.16	.14	-.00
Education D2	.48 ***	.09	-.08	.19	.05
Education D3	.55 ***	-.00	-.13	.29 *	.01
Education D4	.62 *	.13	.30	.19	.32
White	.33 *	-.13	.10	.19	-.09
Hispanic	.11	-.12	.09	.08	.01
Asian	.42 **	.02	.25 *	-.10	.13
Self-promotion	-.63 **	-.44 *			
Agentic Traits			.31 ***	.22 **	
Communal Traits				.45 ***	.50 **
White x Self-promotion	.56 *	.61 **			
Hispanic x Self-promotion	.68 *	.42 *			
Asian x Self-promotion	.60 *	.48 *			
R ²	.170	.065	.194	.372	.100
R ² change with interaction effects	.045	.047	.001	.003	.000

Note: P-O Fit = Person-Organization Fit; I-deals = Idiosyncratic Deals. Entries are unstandardized coefficients.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 4*Mediating Effects of Race on Performance Ratings, P-O Fit and Developmental I-deals Moderated by Self-Promotion (H5 and H6)*

	Performance Ratings through Agentic Traits	P-O Fit through Agentic Traits	P-O Fit through Communal Traits	Developmental I-deals through Communal Traits
Index MM: (Black vs. White) x SP	-.18* [-.36, -.02]	-.12* [-.30, -.02]	-.28** [-.51, -.09]	-.31** [-.71, -.07]
Lo SP: Black vs White	.00 [-.13, .12]	.00 [-.11, .08]	.22** [.09, .40]	.24** [.07, .53]
Hi SP: Black vs. White	-.21** [-.37, -.08]	-.15** [-.32, -.04]	-.10 [-.29, .06]	-.12 [-.39, .05]
Index MM: (Black vs. Hispanic) x SP	-.21* [-.41, -.05]	-.15** [-.34, -.04]	-.19* [-.39, -.02]	-.21* [-.55, -.02]
Lo SP: Black vs. Hispanic	.09 [-.04, .24]	.06 [-.02, .19]	.16* [.03, .34]	.18* [.03, .44]
Hi SP: Black vs. Hispanic	-.16** [-.30, -.05]	-.11** [-.26, -.03]	-.06 [-.22, .09]	-.07 [-.31, .09]
Index MM: (Black vs. Asian) x SP	-.19* [-.36, -.04]	-.13** [-.31, -.03]	-.22* [-.47, -.02]	-.24* [-.65, -.02]
Lo SP: Black vs. Asian	-.02 [-.15, .10]	-.01 [-.13, .07]	.12 ⁺ [-.02, .32]	.13 ⁺ [-.01, .40]
Hi SP: Black vs. Asian	-.24** [-.39, -.13]	-.17** [-.35, -.06]	-.13 ⁺ [-.32, .02]	-.15 ⁺ [-.44, .01]

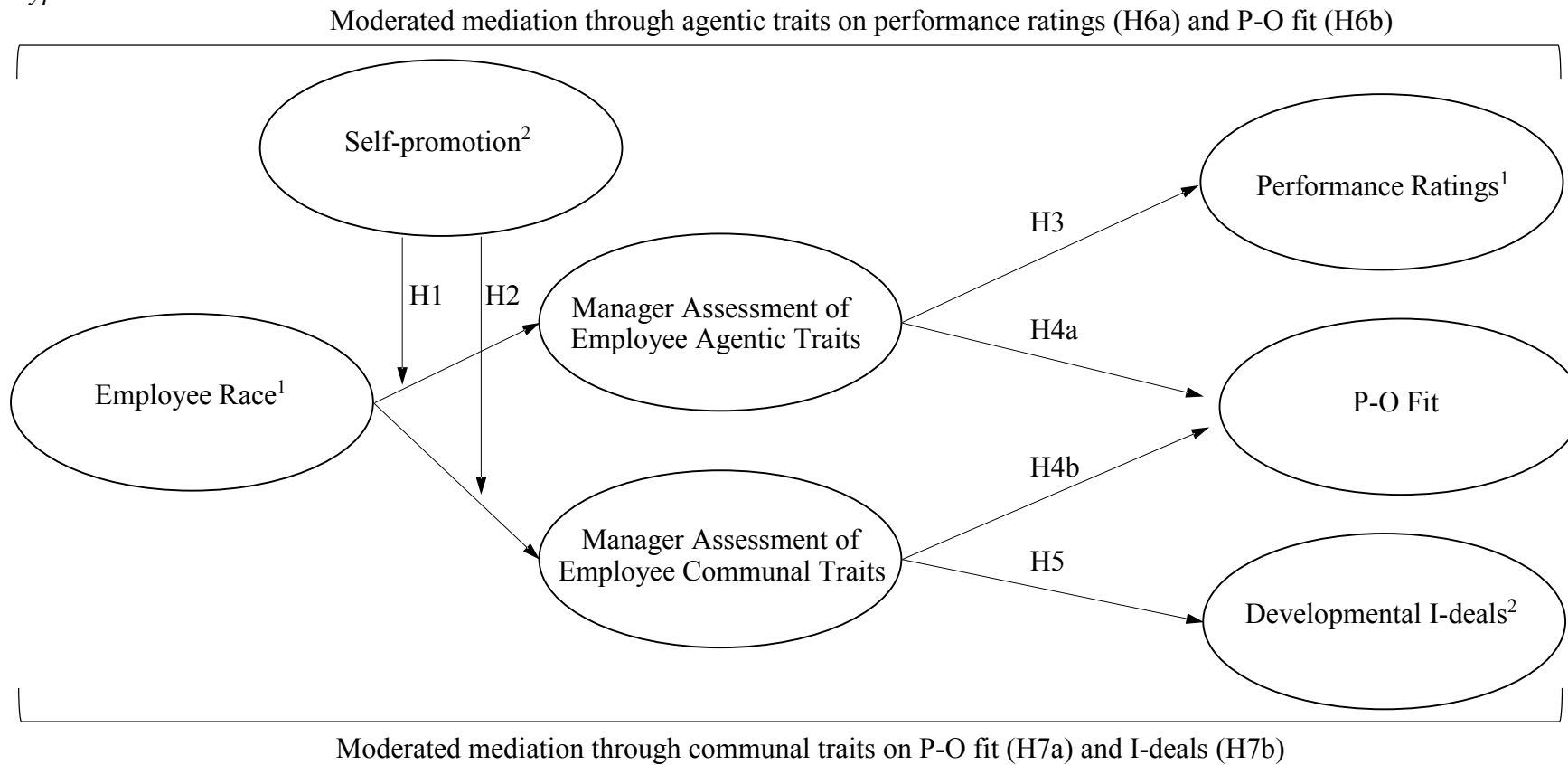
Note: P-O Fit = Person-Organization Fit; I-deals = Idiosyncratic Deals; SP = Self-promotion; Index MM = Index of Moderated Mediation.

Entries are unstandardized coefficients with 95% confidence intervals. A positive value implies Black employees have higher ratings, whereas a negative value implies Black employees have lower ratings.

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; ⁺ $p < .10$.

Figure 1

Hypothesized Model



Note: P-O Fit = Person-Organization Fit; I-deals = Idiosyncratic Deals. Direct paths from employee race to performance ratings, P-O fit, and i-deals were included in model testing, but are not shown for clarity. The control variables of gender, education, and company tenure are also not shown for clarity.

¹Obtained from the company's Human Resource Information System.

²Reported by employees.

Figure 2a

Ratings on Agentic Traits Conditional on Self-Promotion (H1)

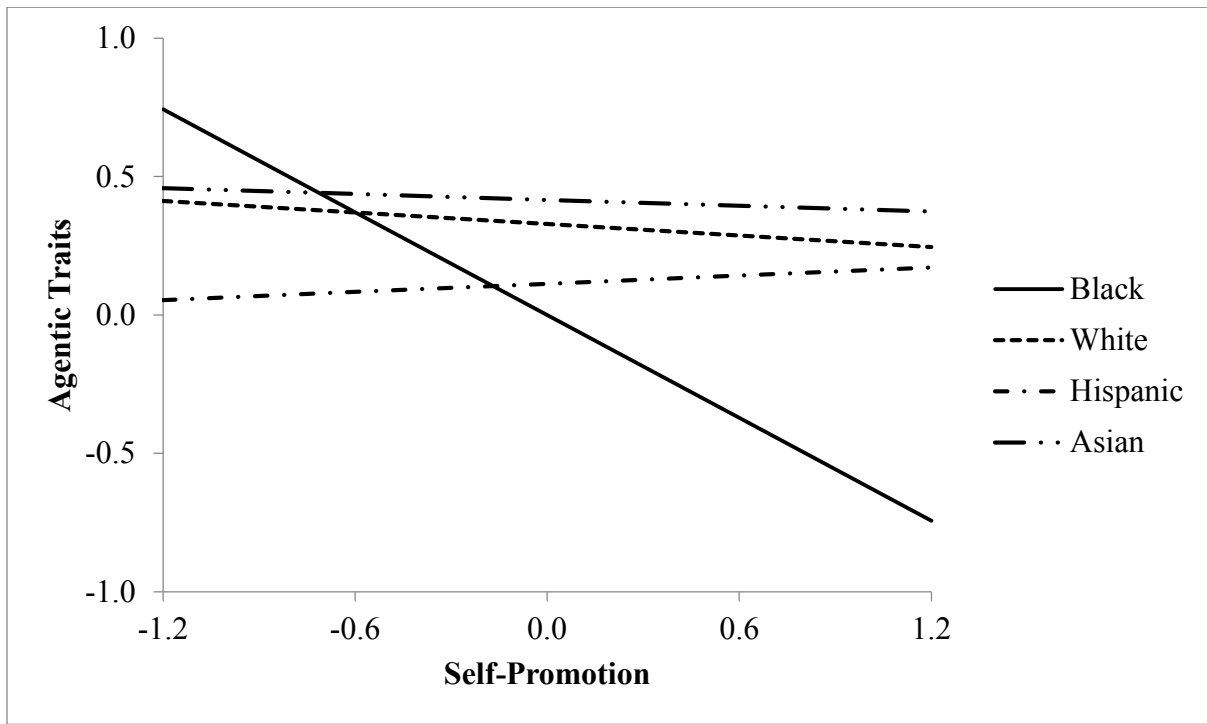


Figure 2b

Ratings on Communal Traits Conditional on Self-Promotion (H2)

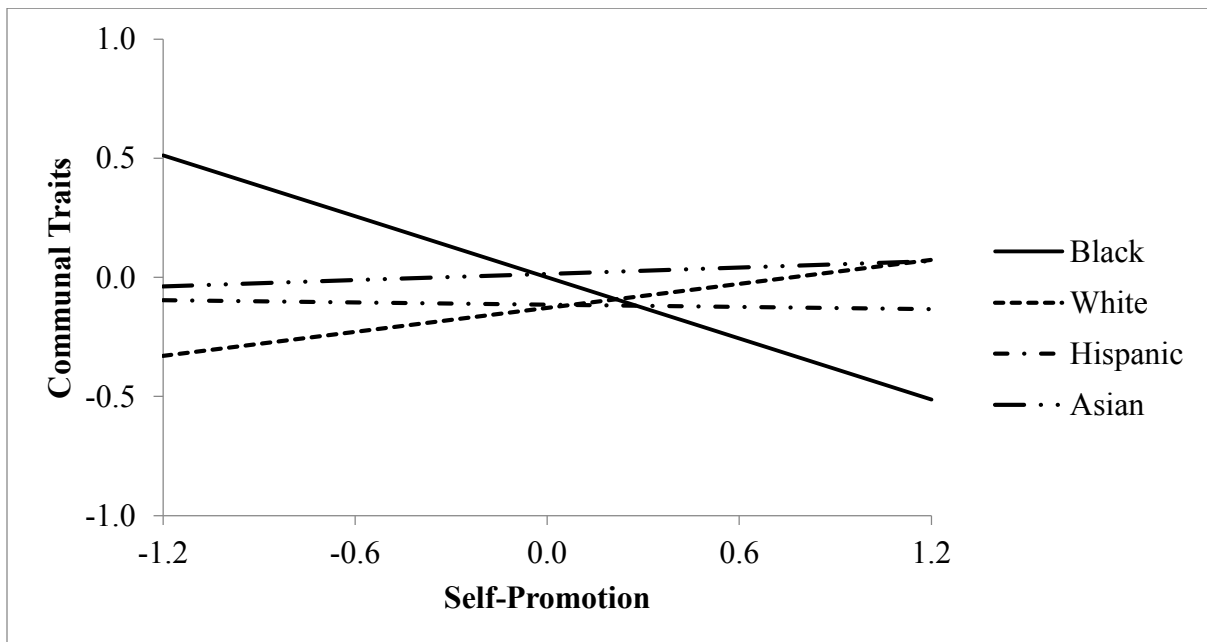


Figure 3a

Difference in Performance Ratings through Agentic Traits Comparing with Black (H6a)

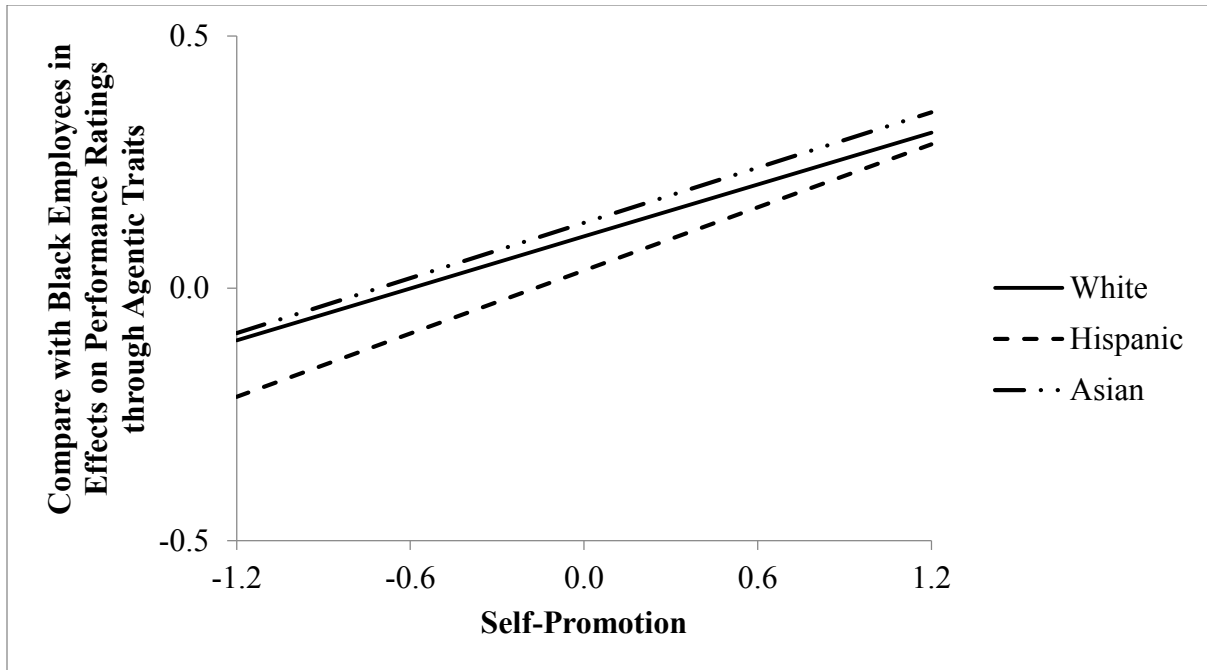


Figure 3b

Difference in P-O Fit through Agentic Traits Comparing with Black (H6b)

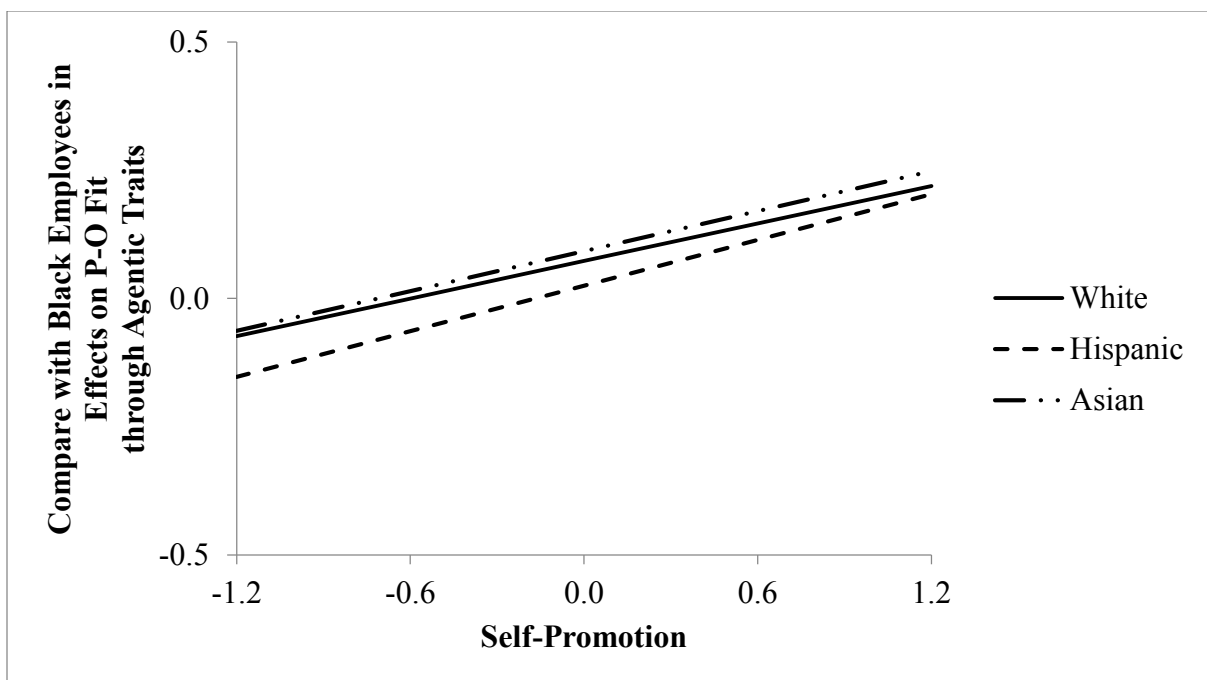


Figure 3c

Difference in P-O Fit through Communal Traits Comparing with Black (H7a)

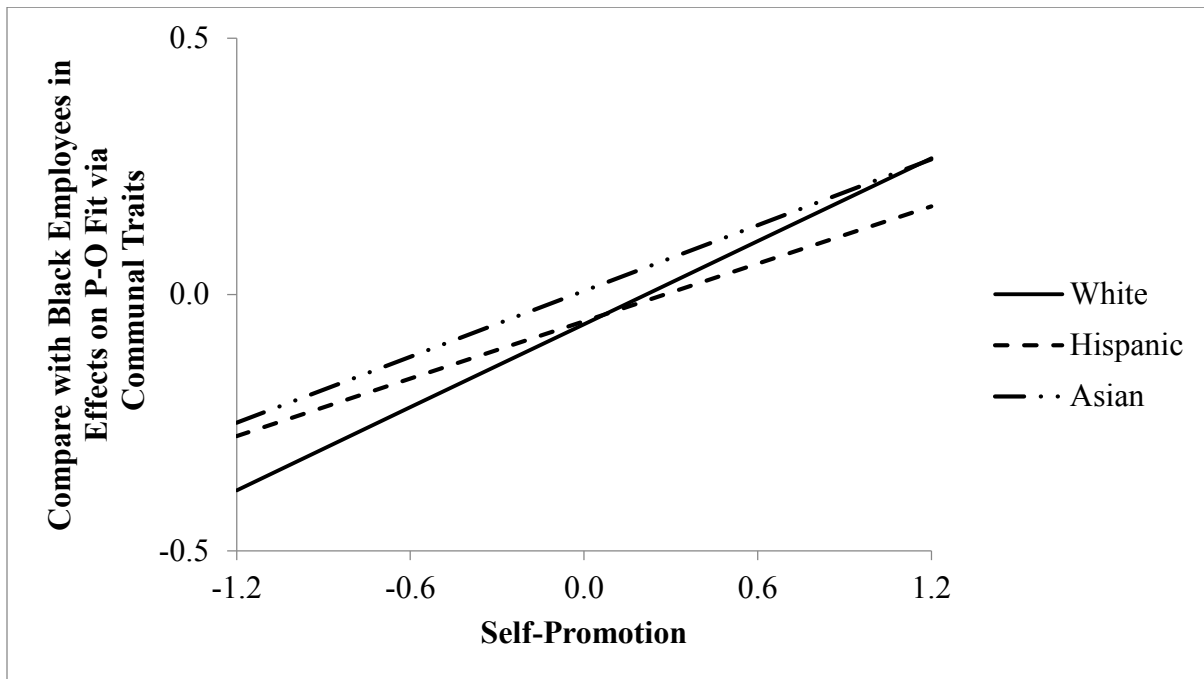


Figure 3d

Difference in Developmental I-deals through Communal Traits Comparing with Black (H7b)

