

Background

When teams seek to diversify their workforce, a critical question is whether (and how) to justify diversity objectives when hiring new members. A common way of doing so is the “business case for diversity,” which has recently been shown to have ill effects on minority individuals’ views, relative to the “moral case for diversity” (Georgeac, 2020, Starck, Sinclair, and Shelton 2021).

We examine the downstream work implications of minority hires when given different diversity justifications. We show that **new hires are averse to being labeled the “diversity hire” for any reason**, and do not find evidence that the “moral case” ameliorates the harm of being told one is a diversity hire.

Methods

We conduct a preregistered scenario study (N = 659) in which a woman imagines that she is recruited for an all-male team. She is then randomized into one of 5 conditions: (1) being told she is the best candidate (“Control-Best Candidate”), (2) being told no specific information (“Control-No Info”), or being told that she is a diversity hire, because of (3) the “Business,” (4) the “Moral”, or (5) no additional justification (“Diversity-No Info”).

Making the Case for Diversity: How Diversity Narratives Influence Team Performance

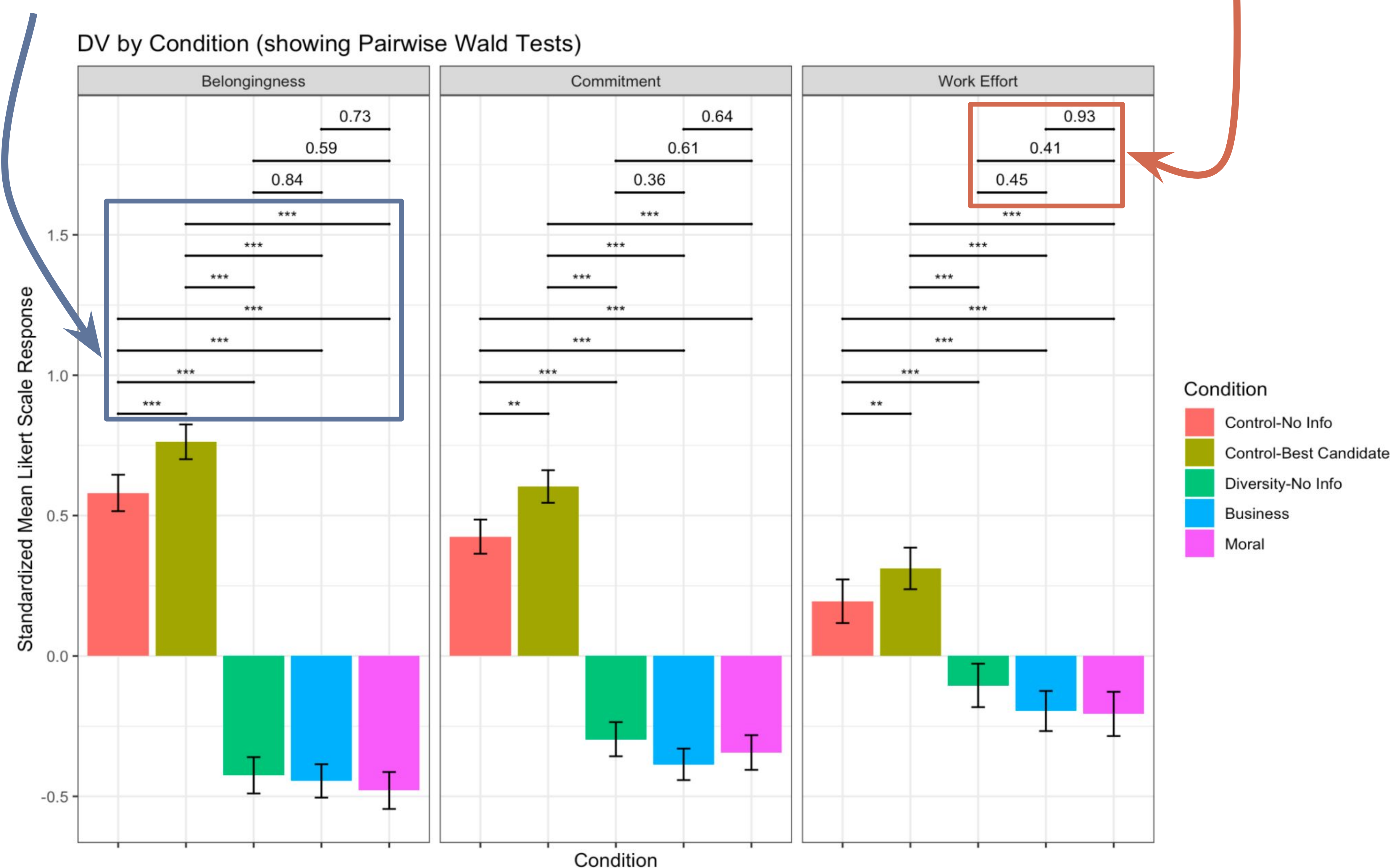
Xinlan Emily Hu¹, Linda W. Chang¹, Katherine L. Milkman¹
¹The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania

How does a team’s diversity justification impact new members’ belongingness, team commitment, and desire to put forth work effort?

Better No Information Than Being a Diversity Hire: Compared to being told they’re a diversity hire (for any reason), telling people no information led to better outcomes across all three DV’s.

It Feels Good to Be the Best: Telling people that they were the “best candidate” led people to feel the most belongingness, team commitment, and desire to work hard.

Diversity Justifications Do Not Matter: None of the diversity justifications significantly differed from one another.



Dependent Variables

DV’s for the scenario study were measured using three 7-point Likert scales:

- **Belongingness:** Georgeac (2020).
- **Team Commitment:** Porter et al. (1974)
- **Work Effort:** Kuvaas and Dysvik (2009)

Results

Coefficients for all 3 DV’s are significantly negative for all diversity justifications.

	Belongingness	Commitment	Work Effort
(Intercept)	0.581*** (0.054)	0.425*** (0.045)	0.195*** (0.057)
Control-Best Candidate	0.182* (0.073)	0.179** (0.065)	0.117 (0.081)
Diversity-No Info	-1.006*** (0.090)	-0.721*** (0.084)	-0.300** (0.105)
Business	-1.026*** (0.087)	-0.811*** (0.080)	-0.391*** (0.101)
Moral	-1.060*** (0.089)	-0.769*** (0.077)	-0.401*** (0.103)
R ² Adj.	0.366	0.280	0.052

*p < 0.05, **p < .01, ***p < 0.001

In robustness checks, we found neither significant order effects nor effects by race.

Future Work

Behavioral Study: We piloted an incentive-compatible behavioral study to examine downstream work performance.

Mechanism: Individual differences or other moderators may explain the mechanism — especially why we didn’t replicate a Business-Moral difference.