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Putting Climate into Context: How Culture and Composition Shape the Effects of Diversity Climate

Alison V. Hall,[a,*] Derek R. Avery,[b] Michele J. Gelfand,[c] Patrick F. McKay[d]

[a] College of Business, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas 76010; [b] Bauer College of Business, University of Houston, Houston, Texas 77204; [c] Stanford Graduate School of Business, Stanford University, Stanford, California 94305; [d] College of Business, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina 27858

*Corresponding author

Contact: alison.hall@uta.edu, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7315-0593 (AVH); davery@bauer.uh.edu, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7704-1666 (DRA); gelfand1@stanford.edu, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9780-9230 (MJG); mckaypa22@ecu.edu, https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0244-9744 (PFM)

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Abstract. Existing evidence demonstrates that an organization's diversity climate can enhance its bottom line. Though some scholars theorize potential mediators to explain these effects, recent meta-analytic and literature reviews conclude that much remains unknown regarding both why diversity climate influences outcomes and how sociocultural factors within and beyond the organization may shape its implications. We propose that unit-level diversity climate stands to produce more uniformly positive affective commitment levels (i.e., higher commitment mean and lower commitment dispersion), thereby optimizing the returns on human capital investments in the form of greater unit productivity. Data from 738 stores in 48 American states indicate a significant indirect effect of unit diversity climate on productivity through affective commitment mean and dispersion. Moreover, we apply the concept of climate context congruence to extend diversity climate theory and explore the influence of alignment among unit-level diversity climate, unit composition (i.e., racioethnic diversity), and cultural tightness–looseness (i.e., state tightness–looseness) in the geographic region within which the unit is operating. In doing so, we offer a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of the sociocultural conditions wherein supportive diversity climates may be differentially beneficial. Our results support the notion that organizations may reap greater benefits of diversity climate when state culture and unit composition align (i.e., tighter/homogenous, or looser/diverse) to accentuate diversity climate efficacy.

Keywords: diversity climate • racioethnic composition • state cultural tightness–looseness • organizational commitment • unit productivity

The utility of organizational diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) remains among the most contentious workplace issues in the United States. Staunch critics characterize DEI efforts as "immense public waste and shameful discrimination" (The White House 2025), and even some DEI champions may question whether the resources required to establish and maintain organizational DEI are worth the effort, particularly in less supportive workplaces (e.g., Weeks et al. 2024). Questions abound regarding whether DEI helps or hinders organizations even among organizational scientists (e.g., Levi and Fried 2025, Nittrouer et al. 2025). In what precise ways is DEI good for business? Do DEI policies primarily benefit traditionally marginalized employees to the detriment of employees from dominant groups? To what extent do the social and cultural dynamics beyond an organization influence how its personnel experience and react to the employer's DEI practices? In the absence of clear answers, it is unsurprising that some organizations reaffirm their DEI commitments as others withdraw their support (Jeyaretnam 2025). Ultimately, lacking evidence of how, why, when, and for whom DEI relates to key workplace outcomes such as *productivity* (i.e., the effectiveness of valuable work output) (Roczniewska et al. 2022), decision makers on both sides of the issue likely believe their choices to double down or disengage are uniformly good for their bottom lines.

Although mainstream attention and cultural turmoil surrounding DEI have surged recently, organizational scientists have been investigating the phenomenon since the Cox (1993) Interactional Model of Cultural Diversity introduced the concept of a diversity climate more than 30 years ago. *Diversity climate* reflects employees' collective agreement concerning how much their employer affords personnel from all demographic backgrounds (i.e., diversity) access to fair workforce practices (i.e., equity) and fosters social integration among them (i.e.,

inclusion) (McKay and Avery 2015). Its relationship with organizational effectiveness is multifaceted and multilevel, but employees and organizations generally benefit from perceived fairness and inclusion. Indeed, personnel tend to be more satisfied, committed, and engaged; exhibit less behavioral withdrawal; and perform better in more supportive diversity climates (see Holmes et al. 2021). Nevertheless, many questions about diversity climate remain unaddressed (McKay and Avery 2015, Dwertmann et al. 2016, Hatter et al. 2024).

First, despite widespread evidence that supportive diversity climates can influence the bottom line favorably (e.g., McKay et al. 2007, 2009; Gonzalez and DeNisi 2009; Kunze et al. 2011, 2013; Boehm et al. 2014; Reinwald et al. 2019), how they do so is less clear. Theory development has failed to keep pace with empirical investigation of the consequences of diversity climate, prompting McKay and Avery (2015, p. 224) to "encourage scholars to devote more theoretical effort to enhancing understanding of … why they exert the influence we have seen demonstrated … " A recent meta-analysis integrating 25 years of research clarified that diversity climate had more pronounced effects on employee attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment) than performance measures (Holmes et al. 2021). Still, they concluded that "additional work is necessary to better elucidate the mechanisms through which diversity climate relates to employees' behaviors" (Holmes et al. 2021, p. 1373) and clarify its impact on productivity.

Toward this end, we seek to explain further the affective mechanisms driving the effects of diversity climate on productivity. As performance outcomes may suffer in discriminatory work climates because of lower *collective affective commitment* (i.e., shared sentiments of loyalty and a desire to invest energy in helping the organization achieve its goals) (Gardner et al. 2011, Kunze et al. 2011), we examine the mediating role of collective affective commitment in the unit-level diversity climate–productivity relationship. Consistent with the recommendations of McKay and Avery (2015, p. 224) that scholars " … pay particular attention to identifying those processes that are universal (i.e., operate the same for everyone) and differentiating those from others that may differ depending on identity," we consider two distinct paths through which affective commitment may explain the unit-level diversity climate–productivity relationship. First, aligned with insights from the organizational commitment literature (Meyer et al. 2002), we describe how more supportive diversity climates are associated with higher unit-level means of affective commitment. Then, drawing on relative deprivation theory (Stouffer et al. 1949, Crosby 1984, Smith et al. 2012), we explain that less supportive diversity climates are associated with higher commitment dispersion (i.e., variability in affective commitment among unit members) as employees observe members from different identity groups having relatively more and less positive experiences in the unit. By enhancing the overall favorability of experiences and reducing the variability in experience quality, more supportive diversity climates may produce more uniformly high collective affective commitment (i.e., higher mean commitment and lower commitment dispersion), optimizing returns on human capital investments in the form of greater unit productivity.

Second, investigations of the diversity climate–productivity relationship often neglect the influence of sociocultural context (Perry and Li 2019), which a recent review regarded as a "major blind spot … providing a monolithic understanding of the … outcomes of diversity climate" (Cachat-Rosset et al. 2019, pp. 868–869). This is a curious omission, as Cox (1993) advises that the cultural context within and around a given diversity climate gives it meaning and informs the reactions of those working together within the unit. To date, diversity climate research focuses primarily internally, exploring how microcultural differences among unit personnel on characteristics such as racioethnicity and gender provide alternative norm systems that guide intergroup behavior and shape the relationships between diversity climate and its outcomes. In the ongoing DEI debate, racioethnicity is an especially prominent focus as many labor force participants share the assumption that DEI practices primarily benefit racioethnic minority (e.g., Black, Hispanic, and Asian) employees, and 47% of White adults say these policies hurt White men (Minkin 2024). Such beliefs remain a substantive impediment to advancing DEI as organizations with more racioethnically homogenous personnel may be less inclined to devote resources to establishing and maintaining supportive diversity climates. Whereas diversity climate–outcome relationships are generally more positive in more racioethnically diverse contexts (Holmes et al. 2021), recent research suggests that supportive diversity climates could incite relatively more positive affective reactions among White employees than their minority counterparts (e.g., Jiang 2024). So organizations opting out of DEI may limit their workforce effectiveness if the practices fostering supportive diversity climates benefit employees across racioethnic groups. As such, we consider how work unit racioethnic composition influences the diversity climate–productivity relationship through collective affective commitment (mean and dispersion).

Third, the lack of research collectively examining how societal and organizational contexts influence the outcomes of diversity climate prompts questions about external validity (e.g., Cachat-Rosset et al. 2019). In short, our theoretical understanding of organizational diversity

processes may be severely limited when we fail to consider them in light of their external environmental contexts and the complex cultural histories of intergroup relations that shape the employees who work and reside within them (Brief et al. 2005a, Stoermer et al. 2016). This oversight may be especially critical in a nation such as the United States, which has substantial cultural variation across its geographical divisions that may be highly relevant for understanding employee reactions to supportive diversity climates. For instance, people's proclivity to conform to social norms (i.e., *cultural tightness–looseness* (TL)) varies reliably across the 50 states comprising the United States and relates to several indicators of societal diversity, equity, and inclusion (Harrington and Gelfand 2014). Not surprisingly, stances on workplace DEI also vary considerably across the 50 states (Confessore 2024). For instance, the state of Washington advanced the Pro-Equity Anti-Racism (PEAR) Plan and Playbook to promote access to equitable opportunities among its employees (Washington State Office of Equity 2022). In contrast, the state of Alabama banned DEI programs in its institutions (Bunn 2024). Accordingly, although most Americans consider DEI a beneficial organizational priority (particularly when not explicitly mentioned by name) (Minkin 2024, Brodbeck et al. 2025), personnel reactions to DEI may be informed by more geographically nuanced cultural forces that influence how much organizations stand to gain or lose from their DEI investments.

In the present research, we examine how societal and organizational contexts interactively influence the outcomes of supportive diversity climates. We integrate recent insights on climate context congruence (CCC) (Beus et al. 2021) to discuss how alignment between internal and external sociocultural factors shapes the relationship between unit diversity climate and unit productivity through collective affective commitment. Drawing from Cox's (1993) concepts of microculture (e.g., cultural norms varying by race, gender, nationality) and macroculture (e.g., national culture), we introduce the concept of mesoculture. We define mesoculture as a set of shared cultural norms and standards that guide patterns of social interaction within the regional environment nested within the national culture and examine how mesocultural TL might inform a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of the relevant conditions wherein supportive diversity climates are apt to be differentially beneficial.

Our work makes several valuable contributions to the organizational science literature. For instance, we demonstrate that collective affective commitment (mean and dispersion) is a critical mechanism through which diversity climate impacts unit productivity. An exclusive focus on average commitment levels could neglect the plight of the most marginalized unit members. Alternatively, simultaneously exploring mean commitment and commitment dispersion as distinct mechanisms allows us to evaluate shared affect alongside potentially divergent affective reactions, illuminating how these two processes independently and uniquely explain why supportive diversity climates facilitate productivity. Further, our focus on productivity as an outcome highlights what is at stake for organizations (re)considering their diversity management priorities. Ultimately, our data linking diversity climate to productivity through collective affective commitment (mean and dispersion) better supports theory about the affective processes that explain why supportive diversity climates are worth the effort required to establish and sustain them.

Perhaps more notably, we identify how contextual cues (composition and culture) condition the effects of climate, addressing potential apprehensions about who benefits from workplace DEI and revealing when organizations are best positioned to benefit from supportive diversity climates. We extend existing theory to explore the influence of congruence between internal diversity dynamics (i.e., climate and racioethnic composition) and regional factors in the external environment (i.e., mesocultural TL), continuing the recent trend of examining the impact of state-level factors on organizational phenomena (e.g., Jiang and Probst 2017, Probst et al. 2020, Zhang et al. 2023). In doing so, we address critiques about the acontextual nature of the diversity climate literature and its conclusions (e.g., Cachat-Rosset et al. 2019) and offer a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of the sociocultural conditions under which diversity climate is apt to be advantageous. Illuminating more nuanced responses to supportive diversity climates provides insights into an essential social problem with practical implications for organizations' decisions about DEI investments amid an ongoing culture war over its utility.

We also examine culture and climate concurrently, responding to ongoing calls for greater integration of the two constructs (e.g., Schneider et al. 2013, 2017; Chatman and O'Reilly 2016; Beus et al. 2021). Although it has long been acknowledged that contextual opportunities and constraints influence relationships among workplace variables (Johns 2006), the interplay of diversity climate with microcultural and mesocultural characteristics could enhance future research on organizational climate in general. Specifically, rather than conceptualizing climate as an organization's social context, organizational theory could be enriched by acknowledging that organizational climate reflects merely one level of the holistic social context with varying implications depending on who is represented in the environment (i.e., microcultural composition) and the regional norms directing their

preferences and behaviors across life and work domains (i.e., mesocultural TL).

Theory and Hypotheses

As unit members work together, they observe explicit and implicit standards that communicate the priority afforded to fostering diversity and eliminating discrimination within the unit (Gelfand et al. 2005). The unit's diversity climate reflects employees' shared observations of its norms regarding equitable treatment and social inclusion for all members (Leslie and Flynn 2024). Overall, supportive diversity climates benefit individuals and organizations (Holmes et al. 2021). When the unit's diversity climate is more supportive, members collectively agree that its norms and practices emphasize and encourage diversity, equity, and inclusion among them. Accordingly, employees from a broader range of backgrounds experience equal opportunities and are motivated to contribute at work (Cox 1993), which fosters more favorable affective reactions among unit members and has positive implications for unit effectiveness (e.g., Reinwald et al. 2019).

Alternatively, when a unit's diversity climate is less supportive, members collectively observe unit norms and practices that place a lower priority on ensuring members of all backgrounds are included and treated fairly. As unit members recognize workplace experiences vary across meaningful social groups, the dominant theories guiding diversity climate research suggest smaller factions have disparate reactions to their shared environment. Specifically, social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel and Turner 1986) and social exchange theory (e.g., Gouldner 1960) jointly predict that subgroups within a given unit may respond to their less supportive diversity climate in ways consistent with their divergent experiences (Leslie and Flynn 2024). When employees agree that the unit's practices fail to encourage diversity, equity, and inclusion among them, disadvantaged members (and potentially some advantaged members who value equity and justice for all) may be less motivated to invest their efforts, rendering the unit less effective (e.g., Gonzalez and DeNisi 2009, Zacher and Yang 2016, Moon 2018).

Climate and Commitment

Although empirical evidence is limited ($k = 2$), a recent meta-analysis of 221 units revealed a strong correlation ($\rho = 0.54$) between diversity climate and organizational commitment (Holmes et al. 2021), which may be central to explaining the diversity climate–productivity relationship at the unit level. Organizational commitment takes multiple forms (normative, calculative, affective), but affective commitment or the level of emotional attachment to and involvement in the organization (Meyer and Allen 1984) is the most impactful. Meta-analytic evidence indicates that work experiences account for a greater proportion of variance in affective commitment than personal characteristics (e.g., demographics, personality), and perceptions of organizational support are among the most significant determinants of affective commitment (Meyer et al. 2002, Hong et al. 2024). As workers interpret numerous environmental cues to assess how much they feel supported by their employers (Kurtessis et al. 2017), perceived fairness and inclusion could inspire a shared sense of loyalty and a mutual desire to help the organization achieve its goals or collective affective commitment (Gardner et al. 2011). As collective commitment reflects the average (i.e., mean) commitment level among unit members and the degree of variance (i.e., dispersion) in commitment across unit members, it offers two potential mechanisms explaining the unit-level diversity climate–productivity relationship.

We contend that ongoing efforts to establish and maintain supportive diversity climates may enhance the proportion of employees feeling supported at work with positive implications for collective affective commitment (mean and dispersion) and, in turn, unit productivity. Employees may be more attached to firms that are thought to value diversity, believing these organizations are fulfilling their responsibilities to their personnel (Hopkins et al. 2001, Jauhari and Singh 2013). In turn, they may repay the unit's positive initiating actions with higher affective commitment (Cropanzano et al. 2017). Indeed, evidence suggests that work units with practices, policies, and rewards supporting fair and nondiscriminatory treatment (e.g., more supportive diversity climates) benefit from a shared sense of mutual investment and concern between the unit and employer (e.g., Boehm et al. 2014) and higher collective positive affect among unit members (e.g., Reinwald et al. 2019). As work units with norms promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion among personnel foster more widely shared feelings of unit allegiance and a genuine collective desire among employees to help the unit succeed, we expect higher average levels of affective commitment in units with more supportive diversity climates.

Furthermore, unit productivity, which reflects members' collective willingness to invest individual resources in their interdependent tasks, should be particularly high in work climates that foster positive affective experiences (Parke and Seo 2017). Affectively committed personnel should exhibit higher levels of constructive discretionary effort and, consequently, be more productive. For instance, collective affective commitment correlates positively with unit-level performance quality and speed (Conway and Briner 2014) as well as client satisfaction (Bal and Boehm 2019). Hence, the more

employees believe that their employer supports them, the greater their commitment to the organization and its productivity goals. Accordingly, we predict that more supportive diversity climates foster higher mean affective commitment at the unit level, which has positive implications for how unit members work together to enhance unit productivity.

Hypothesis 1a. *Diversity climate relates to productivity indirectly through mean affective commitment such that more supportive diversity climates are associated with higher mean affective commitment, which, in turn, corresponds positively with productivity.*

Importantly, the mean level of affective commitment often does not reflect the full range of unit members' divergent experiences in less supportive diversity climates. For example, members of commonly marginalized groups (e.g., new hires, women, older employees, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ employees, racioethnic minorities) tend to be more sensitive to diversity climate (e.g., Kossek and Zonia 1993, Richard et al. 2019). As people from these groups are often numerically underrepresented in their work units, their less favorable affective reactions (i.e., lower commitment) could be offset by more favorable affective responses (i.e., higher commitment) among members of dominant groups who are overrepresented in the unit and potentially less attuned to disparate treatment or experiences among unit members. In these cases, less supportive diversity climates could still be associated with relatively high mean affective commitment, giving the false impression that commitment is universally high despite inequitable practices. This misunderstanding undermines the value of fostering supportive diversity climates; more critically, it renders the experiences of marginalized unit members invisible. As such, we integrate insights from relative deprivation theory (RDT) (Davis 1959, Crosby 1982, Smith et al. 2012) to explore commitment dispersion or group-level variability in affective commitment as a distinct mechanism explaining why supportive diversity climates relate positively to unit productivity.

According to RDT, people routinely make social comparisons regarding the relative treatment, access, resources, and outcomes among those represented in their valued social environments (Pettigrew 2015). When they appraise relative disadvantages (or advantages) for themselves or socially similar others and assess their position as unwarranted or illegitimate, they experience relative deprivation (or gratification) and the associated negative (or positive) affective reactions (Smith et al. 2012). As employees interpret social cues that signal varying degrees of organizational support for their coworkers, RDT predicts divergent affective reactions with corresponding behavioral implications.

In less supportive diversity climates, employees experience differential treatment. Members who assess their unit standing as unjustly less favorable are likely to experience negative affective reactions, observing peers receiving the support they want and believe they deserve but do not get (Davis 1959, Crosby 1982, Smith et al. 2012). As such, we anticipate lower affective commitment among those members. Still, others in the unit could discern their standing as comparatively favorable and experience relative gratification along with the associated positive affective reactions (e.g., Guimond and Dambrun 2002). Accordingly, we anticipate higher affective commitment among those members. Together, disparate workplace experiences among unit members in less supportive diversity climates should be related to more commitment dispersion as affective reactions vary across degrees of support.

Assessments of relative deprivation may also be group-based and involve feelings that the ingroup is unfairly deprived compared with relevant outgroups (Runciman 1966). As such, divergent experiences among work unit members often coincide with the existence of conflicting subgroups (Buengeler et al. 2021), which can undermine unit productivity as members from advantaged and disadvantaged subgroups struggle to work together effectively. Indeed, targets and profairness observers of subgroup-based disparities may (a) observe the favorable experiences enjoyed by the privileged subgroup(s), (b) compare their own experiences and those of other relevant subgroup members to those observations, and (c) downwardly adjust their contributions to the unit in response to perceived inequities (Adams 1965). Those who perceive more relative deprivation are generally less inclined to help others (e.g., Callan et al. 2017), which can be detrimental to unit productivity (e.g., Bachrach et al. 2006).

Alternatively, supportive diversity climates help mitigate common discrepancies in organizational experiences that often systematically advantage one group to the detriment of others, resulting in less variation in affective commitment with positive implications for how well unit members work together. For example, group-based differences in employee commitment, turnover intentions, absenteeism, and job performance are smaller in more supportive diversity climates (McKay and Avery 2015). Comparable commitment levels also may diminish the likelihood of unit members expecting unequal effort expenditure from their colleagues (i.e., not trying as hard), which tends to undermine coordination (Valentine 2018). Further, more supportive diversity climates establish the trust necessary for employees to feel safe being open with one another (Singh et al. 2013, Hofhuis et al. 2016), which should foster greater

cooperation and collaboration among coworkers and facilitate collective learning behavior (e.g., Edmondson 1999). Taken together, more supportive diversity climates diminish differences in affective commitment among unit members by enhancing the overall favorability of workplace experiences and minimizing variability in experience quality. More uniform levels of affective commitment (i.e., lower dispersion) should, in turn, correspond to higher productivity as discretionary contributions are apt to come from a wider array of employees working together for the good of the unit.

Hypothesis 1b. *Diversity climate relates to productivity indirectly through affective commitment dispersion such that more supportive diversity climates are associated with lower affective commitment dispersion, which, in turn, corresponds negatively with productivity.*

Putting Climate into Context

Diversity (e.g., Roberson 2019) and general organizational behavior scholars (e.g., Johns 2018) alike acknowledge that sociocultural context informs personnel perceptions of and reactions to their workplaces. Indeed, factors within the organization and its environment shape how employees make sense of interpersonal treatment (e.g., Avery et al. 2008) and diversity dynamics at work (e.g., Brief et al. 2005b, Pugh et al. 2008). To deepen our theoretical knowledge of how internal and external sociocultural conditions impact the efficacy of diversity climate, we integrate insights on climate context congruence (i.e., the degree of consistency between the internal and external environment) (Beus et al. 2021).

Diversity Climate in Microcultural Context. Across the United States, differences in nationality, gender, age, or racioethnicity, for example, often correspond with distinct patterns of values, norms, beliefs, and attitudes among demographic groups with divergent work and life experiences (e.g., Minkin 2024). Cox (1993) describes these distinctions as microcultures with alternative norm systems guiding intergroup behavior relevant to diversity climate and its outcomes. As representatives from more microcultures assume roles in a work unit, the unit's composition becomes more microculturally diverse with implications for how unit members react to their diversity climate.

Though various types of microcultural diversity can shape the impact of diversity climate within a given work unit (e.g., Boehm et al. 2014, Reinwald et al. 2019), racioethnic diversity persists as a focal point of concern within the ongoing DEI debate (Minkin 2024). Our research focuses on unit racioethnic composition for two theoretically important reasons. First, racioethnic diversity is a relatively stronger predictor of unit members' perceived dissimilarity from one another compared with diversity in age or sex (e.g., Harrison et al. 2002). This may be because cross-age and cross-sex relationships are typically more common in work and nonwork life than cross-race relationships. So racioethnic differences make cross-racial comparisons highly salient within a work unit, increasing the likelihood that unit practices promoting fairness across differences (i.e., the unit's diversity climate) are interpreted as fostering equality across racioethnic groups with more pronounced implications relative to other differences (e.g., gender) (Riffkin 2015). Second, because race is such a central component of social order in the United States (Bonilla-Silva 1997, 1999; Richeson and Sommers 2016; Leslie 2017), prioritizing (or failing to prioritize) fairness and inclusion may assume a different meaning when there is greater (versus less) racioethnic diversity in the social environment (Hero 2007).

Consistent with meta-analytic evidence that diversity climate–outcome relationships are generally more positive in contexts with greater racioethnic diversity (Holmes et al. 2021), we predict that increased racioethnic diversity among unit members magnifies the impact of diversity climate on productivity through affective commitment mean and dispersion. Racioethnicity is among the most visibly apparent social categorizations, and people are generally more attuned to the implications and management of diversity when the differences among them are more noticeable (Davis 1959, Williams 2017). Further, workplace fairness and social integration appear to vary across racioethnic groups (Avery et al. 2023). When treatment differences coincide with racioethnic differences in the status quo workplace, a given work unit has ample salient opportunities to emphasize norms that support diversity, equity, and inclusion among its members—or not—with consequences for how unit members react and work together. Nevertheless, more racioethnically diverse (homogenous) units have more (fewer) opportunities to demonstrate their commitment to fairness for all members. Accordingly, in diverse (homogeneous) units, supportive diversity climates should be more (less) indicative that a unit is fulfilling its responsibility to support its members, thereby fostering more (less) widely shared feelings of allegiance and a stronger (weaker) collective desire to help the unit succeed.

Hypothesis 2a. *The indirect effect of a supportive diversity climate on productivity through mean affective commitment is moderated by unit racioethnic composition such that the positive indirect effect is stronger when unit racioethnic diversity is higher.*

Unit racioethnic composition may also strengthen the association between unit diversity climate and productivity through affective commitment disparity. Indeed, racioethnicity can have a substantive influence on intergroup relations when the context is more

racioethnically diverse (Craig et al. 2018). As such, assessments of group-based relative deprivation and gratification may become especially salient in more racioethnically diverse units with divergent reactions across the unit's subgroups.

At its core, group-based relative deprivation involves a series of judgments that elicit affective reactions (Runciman 1966). People make social comparisons within a given environment (e.g., we are treated differently from others in this unit). Then, they appraise the relative disadvantage or advantage among the referents in that environment (e.g., we are treated worse than others in this unit). Finally, they assess whether observed disparities are fair, thereby prompting affective responses (e.g., we do not deserve this substandard treatment and are upset by it). This clarifies that affective reactions to group-based relative deprivation are closely linked to beliefs about relative deservingness or the perceived degree to which members of one social group are thought to have more or less rights to certain resources, treatment, and outcomes compared with another social group (Feather 2015). As the unit's microcultural composition informs the referents available for comparison and, thus, assessments of who can (and is believed to deserve to) benefit from equitable unit practices, racioethnic diversity could greatly influence the impact of a supportive diversity climate on productivity through affective commitment dispersion.

Notably, unit members may still encounter differential treatment, experiences, or outcomes in less supportive diversity climates that are racioethnically homogenous. However, when observed disparities are believed to reflect legitimate differences in perceived effort, need, contribution, or adherence to social norms, they are less likely to prompt dispersion in employees' affective reactions (Feather 2015). Alternatively, when greater diversity makes between-group differences more salient, beliefs about relative deservingness typically reflect biased standards of perceived relative worth, favoring the ingroup and disfavoring outgroups (Feather 1999). This, in turn, could prompt more pronounced and disparate affective reactions if relative differences in resources or experiences are attributed to identity-based (mis)treatment (e.g., racioethnic privilege or discrimination) (Richman and Leary 2009). In these contexts, unit members may be less likely to invest beyond the resources required to support the unit (e.g., Chung et al. 2015), and productivity suffers.

However, differences in affective and behavioral reactions can be minimized when unit members from all backgrounds have comparable positive experiences (e.g., Feather 1990). As such, supportive diversity climates should have greater influence in more racioethnically diverse units as norms and practices more consistently promote equal opportunity and motivation to contribute among employees of all backgrounds, thereby better positioning the unit for success (Hatter et al. 2024). Indeed, unit diversity climate is more positively related to productivity and return on profit when racioethnic diversity is higher (Gonzalez and DeNisi 2009). When unit members of all racioethnic backgrounds can contribute to and experience the unit favorably, members should be more uniformly inclined to repay that perceived support with higher affective commitment and interact in ways that facilitate unit productivity.

Hypothesis 2b. *The indirect effect of a supportive diversity climate on productivity through affective commitment dispersion is moderated by unit racioethnic composition such that the conditional indirect effect is stronger when unit racioethnic diversity is higher.*

State Tightness–Looseness as Mesocultural Context. Extraorganizational factors, such as cultural TL—the overall strength of social norms and tolerance for deviance from those norms (Gelfand et al. 2011)—may also inform how various groups in the broader sociocultural context typically interact. TL is an essential dimension of culture (Triandis 1998), representing the extent to which social interaction norms are more well-defined (i.e., tightness) or less clear (i.e., looseness). Gelfand et al. (2011) demonstrate wide variation in TL across 33 nations with tighter (versus looser) nations having stronger norms and more severe punishments for deviant behavior. For example, tighter (versus looser) nations have fewer civil liberties and more authoritarian governments (Gelfand 2018). Importantly, cultural tightness is generally considered an adaptive social response to prior or existing environmental threats with significant implications for what people within the culture expect and prefer in their relationships with institutions and socially significant others (Atkas et al. 2016). As such, TL could shape unit members' appetites for supportive diversity climates in some work contexts.

As the United States has considerable variation in TL across its 50 states (Harrington and Gelfand 2014), we argue that mesocultural TL (i.e., state TL), which reflects the strength of long-standing regional norms guiding patterns of intergroup interaction, may inform a work unit's general inclination to support equality and fairness across meaningful differences. Thus, the impact of a supportive diversity climate should be more intensely positive when the microculture of the work unit (i.e., racioethnic composition) and the social preferences inherent in the mesoculture (i.e., state TL) are optimally aligned to facilitate both opportunity and appetite to endorse fairness and social inclusion among all unit personnel. When the unit's climate and context are well-aligned, the climate's governing standards are reinforced by the prevailing norms of the environment within which the unit is embedded, thereby

optimizing the climate's impact on outcomes (Beus et al. 2021). Alternatively, when climate and context are more incongruent, the climate's standards contradict those in the environment, potentially suppressing the effect of climate on organizational behavior. We argue that optimal CCC occurs when the internal microculture and external mesoculture correspond such that equality and fairness across meaningful social differences (i.e., a supportive diversity climate) are more uniformly desirable within the unit.

In tighter mesocultures (e.g., Mississippi and Alabama), the social order is rigid, and intense cultural pressures exist to maintain the status quo social expectations (Gelfand 2018). For example, tighter states exhibit more dogmatic notions of morality, hold stronger isolationist beliefs, desire stricter law enforcement, and are likelier to endorse the use of "any force necessary to maintain law and order" (Harrington and Gelfand 2014, p. 7992). As more people in tighter cultures hold strong beliefs about their own cultural superiority (Gelfand 2018), it is also normative to treat people differently based on their social group memberships (Gelfand et al. 2017). Indeed, citizens are more likely to engage in hierarchy-enhancing behaviors and espouse beliefs that some groups are inherently more deserving than others when there is greater group-based inequality in their state (Kunst et al. 2017). So, unsurprisingly, tighter states are less receptive to social equality (Gelfand 2018). Consequently, tighter state norms reflect an enduring social order that advantages people from dominant groups and disadvantages those from nondominant groups, sustaining group-based access and treatment disparities (e.g., Harrington and Gelfand 2014, Jackson et al. 2019).

Alternatively, looser mesocultures (e.g., California and Oregon) encourage more universalistic standards of fairness, and their citizens tend to be more progressive in their social expectations and preferences. Looser state norms promote more hierarchy-attenuating ideals with moral codes that emphasize preventing harm to groups across various demographics, including race, language, religion, sexual orientation, nationality, and immigration status (Gelfand 2018). These standards support social arrangements prioritizing equality across microcultures (Levin et al. 1998). Citizens in looser cultures are also less likely to define themselves in hierarchical terms (Carpenter 2000) and are more receptive to social change (Gelfand et al. 2017). Overall, looser state norms reflect more egalitarian ideals.

The preceding discussion suggests more uniformly positive reactions to supportive diversity climates in looser states (versus tighter states). However, even subtle reminders of racioethnic differences can prompt people to endorse diversity management approaches that validate or reinforce their existing beliefs about the prevailing social hierarchy (e.g., Knowles et al. 2009). Consequently, affective reactions to supportive diversity climates likely vary as a function of racioethnic salience within the unit and the extent to which equal treatment across racioethnic groups deviates from socially accepted state norms.

In tighter states, racioethnic minorities are more commonly regarded and treated as less deserving of fairness and social integration. Tighter states have higher levels of explicit prejudice against Black, Asian, and Hispanic people and higher levels of implicit racism (Jackson et al. 2019). Tighter states also have more formal discrimination charges filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and fewer minority-owned firms (Harrington and Gelfand 2014). Further, people who subscribe to hierarchy-enhancing ideals, such as those prevalent in tighter cultures, may be more insensitive to racial inequality and less supportive of organizational policies that promote fairness across racioethnic groups (e.g., Kteily et al. 2017). More racioethnically diverse contexts may also elicit more intense adverse reactions among those already prone to prejudice (e.g., Brown et al. 2022). Hence, a climate that seeks to establish equity and inclusion across racioethnic groups is incongruent with widely accepted state norms wherein people are encouraged and expected to conform to a more hierarchy-enhancing standard. As climate and context are misaligned, we anticipate that the impact of unit-level diversity climate on collective affective commitment (mean and dispersion) is suppressed in more racioethnically diverse units within tighter states.

Alternatively, a more racioethnically homogenous unit within a tighter state may find that its members have a greater appetite for workplace equality. When racioethnic diversity is less salient, people generally focus on other, less polarizing areas of difference to distinguish themselves and affirm their identities (Brewer 1991, Unzueta et al. 2012). Accordingly, tighter states may be uniquely averse to unit norms supporting racioethnic equality but more amenable to norms supporting fairness across other differences (e.g., gender, age). Indeed, state-level tightness is unrelated to gender-based economic inequality or the percentage of women-owned firms in a state but negatively associated with the percentage of racioethnic minority-owned firms (Harrington and Gelfand 2014). This suggests that more racioethnically homogenous units in tighter states may find that supportive diversity climates help them facilitate commitment and constructively leverage their less threatening differences. Demographic similarity also influences the standards for who is deemed to deserve fairness, affording greater preference to ingroup members (Feather 1999). As such, unit members may consider more of their colleagues equally worthy of fair treatment and social inclusion when the unit's composition is more racioethnically homogenous. Additionally,

as people tend to infer that racioethnic similarity corresponds with deeper level similarity (e.g., Phillips et al. 2006), higher racioethnic homogeneity should enhance perceptions of value alignment in ways that are uniquely beneficial in a tighter culture in which there is little tolerance for norm deviance. Thus, in racioethnically homogenous units in tighter states, the impact of a supportive diversity climate may be greater because efforts to treat everyone fairly are seen as warranted and communally beneficial, thereby coinciding with higher mean commitment, lower commitment dispersion, and, in turn, higher productivity. In short, composition and culture are more congruent with a supportive diversity climate when unit racioethnic diversity is lower (versus higher) in tighter states.

Within looser states, culture enacts substantial pressures to promote a universal code of tolerance across group differences (Gelfand 2018). As racioethnicity remains a highly meaningful area of difference in U.S. workplaces (e.g., Leslie 2017), hierarchy-attenuating norms and expectations within looser states may render organizational efforts that promote fairness and inclusion across racioethnic groups as relatively more valuable than similar efforts focused on less polarizing differences (e.g., personality). Indeed, research suggests that upholders of egalitarian ideals, such as those prevalent in looser states, may be especially sensitive to racioethnic inequality (e.g., Kteily et al. 2017), viewing efforts to support racioethnic minorities as part of a larger moral mandate to which they subscribe (Skitka 2002, Unzueta et al. 2012). Those with less prejudice-prone tendencies tend to exhibit increased outgroup support when racioethnic diversity is more salient (e.g., Hodson et al. 2002, Costello and Hodson 2011). Thus, citizens in looser states may find opportunities to foster racioethnic equality particularly desirable.

Indeed, people in looser states generally hold fewer negative attitudes toward minorities and express less xenophobia (Harrington and Gelfand 2014). Cultural norms are less permissive of practices that single out any racioethnic group for substandard treatment, and racioethnic minorities and majorities are generally regarded and treated as more similarly deserving of fairness. As such, a unit climate that seeks to establish equity and inclusion across the various represented racioethnic groups is more congruent with mesocultural norms encouraging conformity to racioethnic hierarchy attenuation. Thus, we expect stronger and more uniform positive affective reactions among personnel in looser states working in more racioethnically diverse (versus homogeneous) units in which racioethnicity is a more (versus less) socially relevant dimension of difference. Overall, a supportive diversity climate leverages racioethnic differences among unit personnel by leveling the proverbial playing field (i.e., fostering fairness and inclusion), which is more desirable in looser states in which it is seen as merited and legitimate and less desirable in tighter states in which it is seen as undeserved and illegitimate. When culture and composition align to foster stronger positive reactions to supportive diversity climates, the context is more ripe for climate to facilitate higher mean commitment and lower commitment dispersion and, in turn, higher productivity.

Hypothesis 3. *There is a three-way interaction among diversity climate, state cultural tightness–looseness, and unit racioethnic composition on productivity through* (a) *mean affective commitment and* (b) *affective commitment dispersion such that the impact of a supportive diversity climate is stronger in contexts in which culture and composition are congruent (looser state/diverse unit or tighter state/homogenous unit) as opposed to incongruent (looser state/homogenous unit or tighter state/diverse unit).*

Methods

Sample

We used multisource, two-wave panel data to test our hypotheses. Demographic variables were taken from a large department store retailer's human resource records, financials were obtained from the company's accounting records, and the attitudinal measures (commitment and climate) came from the company's annual surveys in 2005 and 2006. To maximize comparability, we included only those units (i.e., stores) with more than 50 employees that existed at both time points, yielding a final usable sample size of 741 units. The average unit composition was fairly racioethnically diverse (69.85% White, 15.55% Black, 10.50% Hispanic, 3.34% Asian, and 0.76% Native American) and predominantly female (85.44%) with employees of mean age of 37.60 (standard deviation (SD) = 3.93) and 1.55 years of experience in their current positions (SD = 0.46). State tightness–looseness ranged from 27.37 to 78.86 (mean = 50.21, SD = 12.62). Although using store units within one company likely attenuates between-unit variance, it also controls for several between-company and industry confounds that could bias our results (Becker and Gerhart 1996).

Measures

Productivity. Following standard practice (e.g., Avery et al. 2012, Kim and Ployhart 2014, Neckebrouck et al. 2018, Han et al. 2020), we used the ratio of store financial performance (i.e., earnings before interest and taxes) to the number of employees to capture productivity.

Affective Commitment Mean and Dispersion. To capture individual assessments of affective organizational commitment, we used three items (sample: "The company inspires me to do my best work every day") introduced and validated by McKay et al. (2007). These items demonstrated sufficient internal consistency

(Cronbach's alpha = 0.83). We operationalized mean commitment as an additive unit-level construct, averaging individual-level scores within each respective unit (Chan 1998). Then, consistent with prevailing guidance on measuring attitudinal dissimilarity among unit members (Harrison and Klein 2007), we used the standard deviation to capture commitment dispersion. Prior authors employ a similar approach to exploring dispersion in work unit job attitudes (e.g., job satisfaction) (Dineen et al. 2007).

Diversity Climate. We used the four-item scale introduced by McKay et al. (2008) to capture diversity climate (sample: "The company maintains a diversity-friendly work environment"), assessing the degree to which employees agree that personnel are treated equally and fairly, top leaders support diversity, and diverse perspectives are recognized. Employees responded on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), so higher scores reflect more supportive diversity climates. A one-way analysis of variance showed that the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC)(1) was significant ($F(744, 83{,}761) = 4.34$, $p < 0.01$); ICC(2) indicated a sufficient level of reliability (0.78), and interrater agreement was also statistically significant (mean $r_{wgj} = 0.57$).

Tightness–Looseness. We used the nine-item measure developed and employed by Harrington and Gelfand (2014) to capture cultural tightness–looseness at the state level. Four items reflect the strength of punishment (the legality of corporal punishment in schools, the percentage of students hit/punished in schools, the execution rate from 1976 to 2011, and the severity of criminal punishment), two reflect latitude/permissiveness (access to alcohol and the legality of same-sex civil unions), two assessed the degree to which institutions reinforce moral order and constrain behavior (state-level religiosity and the percentage of individuals claiming no religious affiliation), and one assessed international diversity (i.e., the percentage of the total population that is from another country). These items proved unidimensional (a single factor accounted for 46.45% of variance) and demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.84$). Moreover, these composites were divided by nine, multiplied by 20, and added to 50 to produce easily interpretable scores in which higher values indicated greater tightness (e.g., Harrington and Gelfand 2014). We imputed the tightness–looseness values calculated by Harrington and Gelfand (2014) for each of the 48 states represented in our data.

Unit Racioethnic Diversity. We used human resource data on employees' self-reported racioethnicity to determine the racioethnic composition for each unit (i.e., store) included in our sample. As in most prior studies, we computed diversity as variety using Blau's (1977) index, which indicates the amount of variety present along a certain dimension (e.g., racioethnicity). Variety refers to the relative representation of members from different groups within the focal unit (Harrison and Klein 2007). Blau's index ranges from zero to one with higher values indicating greater racioethnic diversity. More specifically, the maximal value (i.e., one) occurs when there is equal representation of the most possible racioethnic groups, and the minimum value (i.e., zero) occurs when all members belong to the same racioethnic group.

Controls. First, we accounted for workforce human capital (mean employee age, position tenure, and job tenure) because higher average levels could coincide with climate perceptions, affective commitment, and performance (e.g., Kunze et al. 2013, Boehm et al. 2014). Second, we controlled for manager human capital (mean age, position tenure, and job tenure) because more effective managers are more likely to be retained longer and could influence diversity climate, commitment, and performance (e.g., Randel et al. 2018). Third, we included a dummy variable for time to ensure that the observed effects were not somehow distorted by any differences between the two years in the panel.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for the study variables are presented in Table 1. Because our sample consists of two-wave panel data, ordinary least squares analysis is inappropriate. As such, we tested our hypotheses using the PLM package in R, which is specifically designed for panel data (see Table 2 for a summary). We had two analytical options because state TL is time-invariant in our data. The first involved using store fixed effects, which would preclude us from modeling the main effect of TL (though we could still capture its moderating effects with composite terms). Alternatively, we could use a random effects model to account for the dependence in the data, assuming that this more efficient approach yields similar results as indicated by a nonsignificant Hausman test. Because the Hausman test comparing fixed and random effects models was not statistically significant, we opted to use random effects. Notably, the fixed effects approach yields an identical pattern of results to those reported.

Hypothesis 1 predicts that diversity climate relates to productivity indirectly through affective commitment (a) mean and (b) dispersion. Namely, we anticipated that more supportive diversity climates would coincide with higher mean commitment and less commitment dispersion with beneficial implications for productivity. As shown in Models 1 and 2, diversity climate is

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. *Emp Age*	37.56	3.58											
2. *Emp Position Tenure*	1.68	0.50	0.55**										
3. *Emp Org Tenure*	4.85	1.28	0.55**	0.71**									
4. *Mgr Age*	44.94	5.34	0.09**	0.09**	0.09**								
5. *Mgr Position Tenure*	3.42	2.61	0.09**	0.18**	0.14**	0.52**							
6. *Mgr Org Tenure*	17.89	6.21	0.07**	0.14**	0.18**	0.69**	0.59**						
7. *Racioethnic Diversity*	0.36	0.21	−0.05*	−0.24**	−0.23**	−0.10**	−0.22**	−0.21**					
8. *Tightness–Looseness*	50.39	12.85	0.07**	−0.05*	−0.05	0.03	0.08**	0.09**	−0.04				
9. *Diversity Climate*	3.76	0.18	−0.09**	−0.07**	−0.23**	0.03	0.04	0.01	0.07**	−0.01			
10. *Mean Commitment*	3.72	0.21	−0.03	−0.02	−0.18**	0.05	0.08**	0.03	0.06*	0.12**	0.90**		
11. *Commitment Dispersion*	0.77	0.11	−0.07**	−0.19**	−0.01	−0.12**	−0.16**	−0.14**	0.20**	−0.07**	−0.56**	−0.62**	
12. *Employee Productivity*	9,754.61	5,984.34	−0.13**	0.00	−0.23**	0.05*	0.09**	0.02	−0.04	0.08**	0.40**	0.48**	−0.38**

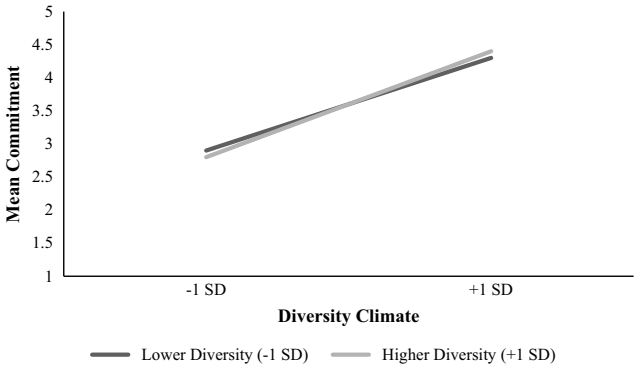
Note. $N = 1{,}482$ observations.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

Table 2. Summary of Random Effects Panel Analyses

Variable	Model 1 Dependent variable: Mean	Model 2 Dependent variable: Dispersion	Model 3 Dependent variable: Mean	Model 4 Dependent variable: Dispersion	Model 5 Dependent variable: Mean	Model 6 Dependent variable: Dispersion	Model 7 Dependent variable: Prod
Intercept	3.693**	0.791**	3.693**	0.791**	3.693**	0.791**	6,125.730**
	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(184.548)
Time	0.051**	−0.035**	0.050**	−0.035**	0.050**	−0.035**	7,275.785**
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(223.285)
Employee Age	0.002*	−0.001	0.002**	−0.001	0.002**	−0.001	−43.487
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(45.948)
Employee Position Tenure	−0.004	−0.024**	−0.004	−0.024**	−0.004	−0.023**	−1,619.388**
	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(445.935)
Employee Org. Tenure	0.002	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.0004	−373.254*
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(172.909)
Manager Age	0.001	−0.0004	0.001	−0.0004	0.001	−0.0004	38.893
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(30.442)
Manager Position Tenure	0.002	−0.001	0.001	−0.0004	0.001	−0.0004	88.468
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(62.039)
Manager Org. Tenure	−0.001	−0.001	−0.001	−0.001	−0.001	−0.001	−44.436
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(27.641)
Racioethnic Diversity (DIV)	0.007	0.099**	0.002	0.097**	0.002	0.096**	−2,921.777**
	(0.014)	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.012)	(739.479)
State Tightness-Looseness (TL)	0.002**	−0.001**	0.002**	−0.0004	0.002**	−0.0004	20.781
	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(0.0002)	(12.603)
Diversity Climate (CLIM)	0.970**	−0.299**	0.975**	−0.301**	0.975**	−0.301**	−3,435.353**
	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(1,183.388)
DIV × CLIM			0.174**	−0.082	0.173**	−0.073	3,444.101
			(0.058)	(0.057)	(0.058)	(0.057)	(2,313.303)
DIV × TL			−0.001	−0.002	−0.001	−0.002**	14.092
			(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(57.715)
CLIM × TL			−0.002*	−0.0001	−0.002*	−0.001	34.020
			(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(38.062)
DIV × CLIM × TL					−0.002	0.013**	−166.279
					(0.005)	(0.005)	(193.508)
Mean Commitment							4,191.265**
							(1,124.741)
Commitment Dispersion							−3,178.404**
							(1,107.151)
R^2	0.856	0.448	0.857	0.450	0.857	0.453	0.742
F statistic	8,375.81**	1,174.60**	8,472.24**	1,181.98**	8,467.21**	1,194.49**	4,212.56**

Note. $N = 1{,}482$ observations.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

Figure 1. The Moderating Effect of Unit Racioethnic Diversity on the Diversity Climate–Mean Organizational Commitment Relationship



positively related to commitment mean and negatively related to commitment dispersion (see Table 2). Notably, the effects were in the predicted direction ($b = 0.970$ and $b = -0.299$, $p < 0.01$, respectively), indicating that, as the diversity climate became increasingly supportive, mean affective commitment was higher, and there was less dispersion in affective commitment. Moreover, commitment mean ($b = 4{,}278.83$, $p < 0.01$) and dispersion ($b = -3{,}348.96$, $p < 0.01$) significantly predicted productivity, indicating that employee productivity increased as the unit average increased or dispersion decreased. To assess mediation, we used the Monte Carlo method, which involves simulating a data set that incorporates the observed effects at each stage and using this data to compute the indirect effect and corresponding confidence intervals (Preacher and Selig 2012). The results indicated significant indirect effects of diversity climate on productivity through both commitment mean (4,153.68, confidence interval (CI) 95% (2,027.49, 6,289.90)) and dispersion (1,000.89, CI 95% (351.44, 1,659.93)). Thus, Hypothesis 1 (both (a) and (b)) is supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicts that racioethnic diversity moderates the indirect effects of diversity climate on productivity through affective commitment (a) mean and (b) dispersion. The diversity climate × racioethnic diversity interaction significantly predicted commitment mean ($b = 0.174$, $p < 0.01$) but not commitment dispersion ($b = -0.082$, $p = 0.16$). Looking at the conditional effects for the former (see Figure 1 for an illustration), we see that the effect of diversity climate on mean commitment is stronger when diversity is higher ($b = 1.068$, $p < 0.01$) than when it is lower ($b = 0.996$, $p < 0.01$). In conjunction with a significant effect of mean commitment on employee productivity ($b = 4{,}161.80$, $p < 0.01$), this interaction produced a significant index of moderated mediation (719.71, CI 95% (193.35, 1,421.74)). The indirect effect of diversity climate on productivity was stronger when diversity was higher (4,207.88, CI 95% (1,970.44, 6,466.92)) than when it was lower (3,908.31, CI 95% (1,831.57, 5,977.97)). Hence, Hypothesis 2a is supported, but Hypothesis 2b is not.

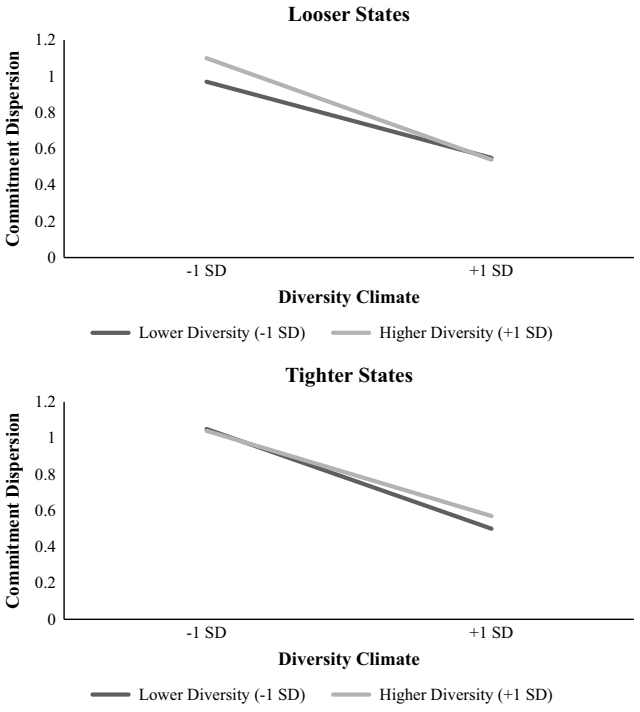
Though not predicted, we also observed a significant two-way interaction between diversity climate and state tightness–looseness ($b = -0.002$, $p = 0.014$). Examination of the simple slopes indicates that the effect of diversity climate on mean commitment was significantly stronger in looser ($b = 1.004$, $p < 0.01$) than in tighter states ($b = 0.946$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests the indirect effect of diversity climate on productivity through mean commitment (Hypothesis 1a) is independently conditional on the store's racioethnic diversity (Hypothesis 2a) and the state's culture.

The third hypothesis predicts that the moderating effects of state tightness–looseness and unit racioethnic diversity operate collectively. Namely, we anticipated that the effects of climate are attenuated when culture and composition interactively legitimized (i.e., diverse stores in tighter states) or minimized attention to (i.e., homogenous stores in looser states) racioethnic differences in workplace experiences among employees. In the former, promoting fairness and inclusion may be perceived by many as undesirable, and it may be deemed unnecessary in the latter. The anticipated three-way interaction between culture, composition, and climate was statistically significant, predicting commitment dispersion ($\gamma = 0.013$, $p < 0.01$) but not mean ($\gamma = -0.002$, $p = 0.74$). Analysis of the simple slopes shows that the effects of diversity climate related significantly to commitment dispersion in all contexts. Nevertheless, the effects were roughly 1.5 times more pronounced in diverse stores located in looser states or in homogenous stores in tighter states than in homogenous stores based in looser states or in diverse stores in tighter states (see Table 3 for a

Table 3. Summary of Moderated Mediation Analyses Predicting Employee Productivity

Unit affective commitment		Loose–homogenous	Loose–diverse	Tight–homogenous	Tight–diverse	Index
Mean	*b* (se)	0.963 (0.027)	1.043 (0.025)	0.916 (0.027)	0.979 (0.024)	
	Indirect	4,035.27	4,370.84	3,838.33	4,103.36	−8.42
	95% CI	1,908.12 to 6,189.60	2,068.75 to 6,711.53	1,816.54 to 5,896.50	1,940.64 to 6,296.74	−53.65 to 33.91
Standard deviation	*b* (se)	−0.240 (0.027)	−0.339 (0.024)	−0.332 (0.027)	−0.293 (0.023)	
	Indirect	765.41	1,081.18	1,059.15	934.56	−41.38
	95% CI	237.94 to 1,337.13	342.45 to 1,849.08	334.43 to 1,823.25	295.96 to 1,606.88	−91.72 to −6.30

Figure 2. The Moderating Effects of Unit Racioethnic Diversity and State Tightness–Looseness on the Diversity Climate–Organizational Commitment Dispersion Relationship



summary). Notably, the conditional indirect effect of diversity climate on productivity through commitment dispersion was approximately 40% higher in diverse units in loose states than in homogeneous units in loose states. Figure 2 provides a graphic illustration of the stage 1 interaction for commitment dispersion. At stage 2, the effects of commitment mean ($b = 4{,}191.27$, $p < 0.01$) and dispersion ($b = -3{,}178.40$, $p < 0.01$) on productivity were significant. Collectively, this indicates that the indirect effect of diversity climate on productivity through commitment dispersion was significant across conditions but less pronounced when culture and composition combine to minimize or legitimize group-based differences. This pattern is consistent with our predictions, but a formal test of our third hypothesis involves an examination of the indirect effect of the stage 1 interaction on the dependent variable through the mediator (i.e., computing the product of the stage 1 interaction and the stage 2 effect of the mediator known as the index of moderated mediation) (Hayes 2015) and its corresponding bias-corrected confidence interval. The results indicate a significant index of moderated mediation through affective commitment dispersion (−41.38, CI 95% (−91.72, −6.30)), thereby supporting Hypothesis 3b but not Hypothesis 3a.

Supplemental Analyses

We conducted several additional analyses to bolster confidence in our proposed causal sequence. Because retail is a notoriously high-turnover industry, we began by assessing whether this turnover could have impacted our results by decreasing the likelihood that the employees assessing diversity climate were indicating their commitment a year later. All relationships between diversity climate and organizational commitment (mean and dispersion) were invariant across levels of store turnover. Moreover, there were moderate-sized, significant year-to-year correlations between diversity climate and organizational commitment, indicating some stability within stores. Relationships between the variables at times 1 and 2 did not vary significantly as a function of store turnover. Collectively, this suggests that the relatively high turnover was unlikely to have impacted our analyses.

To further strengthen causal inference and confidence in our fundamental arguments about diversity climate and collective affective commitment, we also assembled panel data from the publicly available Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, which the Office of Personnel Management conducts annually for federal government employees. This survey has been used fairly extensively by public administration scholars (see Resh et al. 2021 for a review) but almost never by those in the organizational sciences (see Jiang et al. 2022 for a recent exception). This data set is well-suited for our purposes because it is fielded annually, solicits individual responses from all federal employees in the United States, and can be aggregated to the federal agency level. Because it is panel data, it also allows us to examine how changes in diversity climate relate to changes in commitment over time. Moreover, scholars have previously operationalized our independent (three-item diversity climate scale) (e.g., Pitts 2009, Moon 2018) and mediator (three-item organizational commitment scale) (Moldogaziev and Silvia 2015) variables. The number of survey respondents ranged from 184,723 to 687,680 with an annual average of 410,258.30. A representative item from the diversity climate scale is "Policies and programs promote diversity in the workplace (e.g., recruiting minorities and women, training in awareness of diversity issues, mentoring)." A representative item from the commitment scale is "I recommend my organization as a good place to work." This resulted in an unbalanced panel of 80 agencies between 2010 and 2019 (total $n = 396$), allowing us to assess the strength of our arguments in a broader sample in a different sector during a more recent period. We conducted panel analyses using the R package PLM to test the diversity climate–commitment relationships. A Hausman test indicated that fixed effects were more appropriate than random effects. We ran two series of models. The first examined the effect of lagged diversity climate on organizational commitment mean and

dispersion. The second reversed the causal sequence and assessed the effects of lagged organizational commitment mean and dispersion on diversity climate.

Results from the first set proved consistent with our theorizing and primary analyses as diversity climate significantly predicted both the mean ($b = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.09$) and dispersion ($b = -1.04$, $p = 0.01$, $R^2 = 0.02$) of unit affective commitment. These findings indicate that increases in an agency's diversity climate from the prior year to the present year corresponded with significant increases (decreases) in mean commitment (commitment dispersion) from one year to the next. The second set produced a significant effect of lagged commitment mean on diversity climate ($b = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$, $R^2 = 0.05$) but not commitment dispersion ($b = -0.01$, $p = 0.78$, $R^2 < 0.001$). The variance explained by the reversed sequence was roughly half as much in the former case and less than half as much in the latter case.

Discussion

Our research identifies an intervening mechanism—collective affective organizational commitment—that helps explain how, why, when, and for whom diversity climate positively impacts unit productivity. We demonstrate that supportive diversity climates foster more uniformly high affective commitment among unit members (higher mean with lower dispersion), which, in turn, facilitates greater productivity. Additionally, we considered how sociocultural factors—unit-level racioethnic diversity and state-level cultural tightness–looseness—interactively amplify or constrain the positive influence of supportive diversity climates. Consistent with prior research and foundational theory on diversity climate (Cox 1993), we demonstrate that racioethnic diversity is an important boundary condition of the diversity climate–productivity relationship through mean affective commitment. Still, by demonstrating how mesocultural TL nuances the interactive effects of diversity climate and racioethnic diversity on affective commitment dispersion, we deepen our understanding of the diversity climate–productivity relationship through affective processes. Ultimately, our research upholds the notion that supportive diversity climates are better equipped to level the organizational playing field (via less dispersion in affective reactions among unit members) when state culture and unit composition are congruent (i.e., tighter/homogenous or looser/diverse) with both the desire and opportunity to foster fairness across salient personnel differences. When climate, composition, and culture align, organizations ultimately benefit from more committed and productive units. We now consider the implications of these findings.

Theoretical Implications

Whereas it is well-established that a supportive diversity climate can positively impact an organization's bottom line, how it does so is far less obvious (McKay and Avery 2015, Holmes et al. 2021). Furthermore, questions about who benefits from supportive diversity climates and when those benefits likely materialize linger unanswered. Our limited understanding is likely, at least in part, because the organizational consequences of diversity management involve a long-acknowledged (e.g., Cox 1993, Brief 1998) yet understudied interplay between organizations and their sociocultural environments. Accordingly, our study contributes to scholarship in several fundamental ways.

Most importantly, we provide a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions under which supportive diversity climates are more or less likely to be associated with higher productivity. Specifically, our research demonstrates the importance of alignment between the internal and external sociocultural environments wherein organizations may attempt to foster supportive diversity climates. The limited research on diversity context shows that social relations in the immediate external environment can shape diversity-relevant organizational behavior (Brief et al. 2005b, Pugh et al. 2008, Ragins et al. 2012, Singh and Selvarajan 2013, Wilk and Makarius 2015). Extending this literature, we integrate insights on climate context congruence (Beus et al. 2021) to illustrate how state TL and unit racioethnic composition interactively shape the diversity climate–productivity relationship through collective affective commitment. To our knowledge, our work is the first to consider how mesocultural TL shapes workplace behavior across the United States. In doing so, we exemplify how the external and internal contexts jointly inform employees' reactions to organizational efforts to promote diversity and inclusion.

Essentially, our results demonstrate that some configurations of composition and culture are more conducive to facilitating more pronounced effects of supportive diversity climates than others and in potentially different ways. On the one hand, the positive relationship between diversity climate and mean affective commitment is significantly stronger in states with looser (compared with tighter) cultures irrespective of unit racioethnic composition. This suggests that, on average, employees across racioethnic backgrounds could respond more positively to organizational efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion within their work units when these ideals are normative in their social environments beyond the workplace. More plainly, whether there is more or less racioethnic diversity among them, work units within looser states appear to have higher (lower) average levels of affective organizational commitment when climates are more (less) supportive of diversity, which supports (hinders) their productivity. On the other hand, dispersion in attitudinal reactions to fairness and inclusion appears to shift depending on the presumed beneficiaries and cultural

standards that signal the relative deservingness of those presumed beneficiaries. As culture and composition jointly inform the meaning attached to affording everyone access to fair workforce practices and fostering social integration among all unit members, some members react more favorably to supportive diversity climates, whereas others may react less favorably (or more adversely). Indeed, our research elucidates that alignment between prevailing norms in the mesocultural context and the microcultural composition of the unit context appears to provide the appetite and opportunity for supporting fairness and inclusion. As such, a supportive diversity climate is better suited to promote more comparable affective reactions among employees and, in turn, increase productivity when local norms signal that more people in the unit are similarly deserving of fair treatment based on their racioethnic demographics.

Our results also suggest that mesocultural TL—a seemingly key determinant of positioning in the ongoing DEI war—may be an essential boundary condition for examining how unit racioethnic composition shapes organizational diversity dynamics. As some organizations may be considering racial equity more intentionally and explicitly within their DEI efforts, understanding these interactive relationships is paramount. Considering their combined effects on the influence of diversity climate on commitment dispersion (but not mean), scholars should further investigate the extent to which alignment of mesocultural preferences and microcultural composition could be vital contingencies for the success of other human resources best practices that we take for granted (e.g., targeted recruitment). Our results provide evidence that the positive implications of a supportive diversity climate may be stronger or weaker depending on the interplay between internal and external sociocultural dynamics, echoing the importance of integrating climate, culture, and composition more effectively (e.g., Chatman and O'Reilly 2016, Hajro et al. 2017). Exploring workplace outcomes as the products of complex systems involving workplace climates, mesocultural norms/preferences, and microcultural composition reflects an important step toward understanding broader organizational effectiveness criteria (Schneider et al. 2017). Thus, advancing the concept of mesoculture adds greater precision and specification for future research conducted within focal firms operating across any nation with substantial cultural diversity across geographical regions and among organizational personnel.

We also clarify what supportive diversity climates do and why they benefit work units. Integrating insights from organizational commitment theory (Meyer et al. 2002) and relative deprivation theory (Crosby 1984), we establish that supportive diversity climates make more employees feel supported and foster more positive workplace experiences across meaningful differences. We explore affective commitment as a universal process shared among all members in a unit (i.e., mean commitment), also considering how it might diverge profoundly across staff with more or less favorable experiences in the unit (i.e., commitment dispersion). Our results demonstrate that both mean commitment and commitment dispersion are mechanisms underlying the unit-level diversity climate–productivity relationship. However, considering these affective mechanisms in context also reveals that the two processes are not interchangeable. Specifically, microcultural composition seems to be a critical internal consideration affecting the relationship between diversity climate and average commitment level. Yet it does not exhibit the same influence on commitment dispersion among unit members. Alternatively, mesocultural TL emerges as a vital external factor affecting the joint climate–composition relationship, specifically with commitment dispersion but not with the average commitment level. This could suggest that assessments of group-based relative deprivation (Runciman 1966) and deservingness (Feather 1999) are informed by prevailing cultural norms that encourage or discourage the differential treatment of various racioethnic groups as people interact across valued social contexts, including work. Future research should investigate the role of relative deservingness perceptions in the diversity climate–productivity relationship through affective commitment dispersion.

Our work also advances unit-level theory on diversity climate, addressing an ongoing limitation highlighted by leading diversity climate scholars (e.g., McKay and Avery 2015, Dwertmann et al. 2016, Cachat-Rosset et al. 2019, Perry and Li 2019, Holmes et al. 2021). Insights primarily garnered from theory and empirical investigations at the individual level dominate the diversity climate literature. Whereas these insights are invaluable, they fall short of presenting a comprehensive view of this multilevel phenomenon and its mechanisms. Commitment dispersion, which we demonstrate to be a significant pathway through which diversity climate relates to productivity, is inherently a group-level phenomenon. Thus, our findings imply that considering different forms of attitudinal and behavioral diversity (i.e., disparity, separation, and variety) (Harrison and Klein 2007) may prove useful in further explaining the effects of unit-level diversity climate on outcomes. Indeed, nearly 20 years ago, Dineen et al. (2007) notes that "few studies simultaneously examine mean levels and dispersion of team characteristics, despite growing recognition that models may be under-specified if both are not incorporated" (p. 625). This oversight remains a barrier to a comprehensive understanding of the nature and nuances of unit-level organizational behavior. However, our results underscore the importance of considering

both the mean and dispersion when examining the antecedents and consequences of collective commitment. In fact, focusing exclusively on one or the other leads to different conclusions about the boundary conditions of the effects of diversity climate on unit commitment. We, therefore, encourage subsequent scholarship focusing on collective attitudes in organizations to consider dispersion in addition to the mean level. As we might observe similar dispersion patterns in job satisfaction, organizational identification, organizational justice perceptions, perceived organizational support, and job involvement as explanations of the unit-level diversity climate–productivity relationship, we encourage scholars to explore more mechanisms along these lines as well.

From a practical standpoint, our findings further demonstrate the utility of developing and maintaining an organizational climate that promotes fairness and inclusion as this leads to more universally committed workforces (higher mean and less dispersion) and, ultimately, greater productivity. Though the prospective benefits were not equally pronounced in all contexts, there was potential upside in states of all cultures and stores of all compositions. Moreover, it is essential to highlight that our results should not be misinterpreted to conclude that promoting a supportive diversity climate could backfire, depressing mean commitment or magnifying commitment dispersion. Our results clearly show that more supportive diversity climates are never counterproductive. Still, some units may be better positioned to realize the rewards of promoting fairness and social integration, and there is substantial practical significance to managers being aware that the yield of their diversity climate efforts may be up to 40% higher (or lower), depending on their unit's composition and their state's culture. Though culture is slow to shift (Gelfand et al. 2011), organizations in tighter states that seek to establish and support a racioethnically diverse workforce may find advocating for progressive state policies to be a business necessity for their longevity. If regional policies in states such as Texas and Mississippi reinforce norms inconsistent with the organization's ideals, internal change efforts may be undermined by the social norms directing extraorganizational behavior. Future work should consider ways to better leverage supportive diversity climates in contexts with sociocultural dynamics that constrain their positive impact.

Limitations, Future Directions, and Conclusions

Whereas our research is the first to consider the interactive impact of state-level TL and unit-level racioethnic composition on the diversity climate–productivity relationship, we note that our primary data source may be a potential limitation to the generalizability of our findings. Though we are confident that data from 741 stores in 48 American states offer substantial support for our results, we recognize the limitation of collecting our primary data from one company in one industry. However, supplemental analysis of panel data from the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey of government employees between 2010 and 2019 proved consistent with our theorizing and primary analyses, evidencing the robustness of our findings and rendering greater confidence in our fundamental theorizing about the implications of diversity climate for affective reactions among personnel in a more recent time.

Additionally, both data sets reflect assessments of diversity climate before the occurrence of a racist mega-threat (Leigh and Melwani 2019) that prompted a large-scale increase in attention to racial dynamics in the United States and its organizations (i.e., the 2020 murder of George Floyd). Indeed, an ongoing national poll assessing various sociocultural issues in the United States reported a 15% increase in the number of respondents reporting at least a "fair amount" of concern about race relations the year after (versus two months before) that mega-threat (Gallup 2024). This could prompt concerns that the timing of our primary data does not adequately reflect current sensitivity to racial dynamics at and away from work with implications for how personnel would react to supportive diversity climates in the context of both unit racioethnic composition and mesocultural TL. However, a strikingly similar shift in concern about race relations emerged during our primary data collection. Between 2005 and 2006, Gallup documented a 16% increase in respondents reporting at least a "fair amount" of concern as reactions to the U.S. government's response to Hurricane Katrina were starkly divided along racial lines. This means our primary data were collected around one of the most salient race-related mega-threats of the pre-George Floyd 21st century, which underscores the robustness of our findings demonstrating a three-way interaction on productivity through affective commitment dispersion at a time when racial issues appeared similarly salient and states were similarly tight or loose (Gelfand et al. 2011). For our supplemental analysis, an average of 53.2% of Gallup respondents reported angst about race relations between 2010 and 2019. Sentiments around the close of that window (March 2019) and more recently (March 2024) both show 66% of respondents being concerned about race relations at least a fair amount. The consistency across our analyses, along with varying degrees of societal racial salience, supports the present validity of our findings and the ongoing relevance of our theorizing. Overall, we are confident that our findings provide a valuable starting point for developing a more comprehensive

understanding of the diversity climate in context. Still, future research should examine how recent societal events surrounding diversity in general and racioethnicity in particular may impact the nature and magnitude of the relationships we observed.

Though our findings are consistent with prior research showing that people seem to express more complicated understandings of and intense reactions to diversity and the practices and policies that foster it when race is salient (e.g., Hero 2007, Wilson et al. 2008, Holmes et al. 2021), we also acknowledge that racioethnic composition may be less consequential in nations with less racial animus or less racioethnic diversity than the United States. Still, our general theoretical expectations should persist. Our research suggests that organizations seeking to reap the benefits of supportive diversity climates should be attentive to both internal diversity dynamics and the external cultural preferences that give those dynamics meaning. It underscores the importance of considering the surrounding environments and the complex histories of social relations that shape the people who labor and live within them (Cox 1993, Brief et al. 2005a). Though all nations are not geographically divided into states, other large macrocultures likely have regional variance in cultural TL (e.g., China) (Chua et al. 2019). Thus, we still expect the diversity climate–productivity relationship through collective affective commitment to be interactively influenced by mesocultural TL and other culturally relevant forms of unit diversity (e.g., geographic origin, religion, caste, gender) that distinguish the microcultural groups in those contexts. Future research should explore the most relevant contingencies of the diversity climate–productivity relationship in other nations.

Finally, we adopt the ambient view of climate context congruence (Beus et al. 2021), looking outward to explore how widely shared cultural values in the state shape diversity dynamics within work units. However, future research might look more inward and directly assess the influence of diversity-relevant value congruence or the degree of similarity between individual unit members' diversity values and those signaled by a supportive unit diversity climate. That likely has substantial implications for individual assessments of relative deservingness within a given unit but is beyond the scope of our macro-oriented research questions and data. Still, future work exploring value congruence and relative deservingness beliefs could expand our knowledge of how microlevel processes influence the impact of unit-level diversity climate on unit outcomes. It might also be useful to examine how these beliefs differ across demographic identities (microcultures) and geographical regions (mesocultures) with implications for employee reactions to employers emphasizing DEI and attempting to foster supportive diversity climates.

As Elon Musk (2023) declares, "DEI must DIE" and Mark Cuban (2024) proclaims, "The loss of DEI-phobic companies is my gain … ," we offer evidence that organizational leaders should approach diversity management with more nuanced insights. Consistent with Cuban's stance, our results clarify that supportive diversity climates facilitate unit productivity by boosting collective affective commitment among unit personnel. To varying degrees, both more and less racioethnically diverse units benefit from higher average affective commitment when their diversity climates are more supportive. So there is much to gain from establishing and maintaining supportive diversity climates. Still, leaders should recognize that work units may be more or less amenable to their efforts to foster supportive diversity climates because of strong mesocultural preferences that may inform beliefs about the relative deservingness of the represented coworkers and the appetite for opportunities to promote fairness and inclusion among them. Supportive diversity climates may help establish more uniformly committed and productive workforces in both more racioethnically diverse units situated in looser states and more racioethnically homogenous units located in tighter states. These more nuanced responses to supportive diversity climates counter the concern that organizational DEI primarily benefits personnel from marginalized racioethnic groups. As the DEI war rages on across the United States and globally, we hope that our insights will guide forthcoming research and that future exploration of the diversity climate, its mechanisms, and its consequences will pose thoughtful questions that help continue to put climate into context.

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Alison V. Hall is an associate professor in the College of Business at the University of Texas at Arlington. Her research examines how demographics (e.g., race, gender, class) interact with contextual factors to produce (or inhibit) biased evaluations or disparate experiences, consequently, limiting (or enabling) career advancement for marginalized groups. Alison is passionate about social justice and aspires to use her research to examine timely issues that concern everyone.

Derek R. Avery is the C. T. Bauer Chair of Inclusive Leadership in the Bauer College of Business at the University of Houston. His primary research interests are in workforce diversity (racioethnicity, sex, age, experience, religion, and culture). His work on diversity climates establishes them as (a) instrumental in reducing demographic differences in employee engagement, absenteeism, turnover, and individual performance and (b) key drivers of unit-level customer satisfaction and sales growth.

Michele Gelfand is the John H. Scully Professor of Cross-Cultural Management and professor of organizational behavior at the Stanford Graduate School of Business School and professor of psychology by courtesy. She uses field, experimental, computational, and neuroscience methods to understand the evolution of culture and its multilevel consequences. She published *Rule Makers, Rule Breakers: How Tight and Loose Cultures Wire the World* in 2018.

Patrick F. McKay is a professor of management in the College of Business at East Carolina University. His research interests include demographic disparities in worker outcomes, diversity, diversity climate, organizational demography, worker attitudes and retention, and job- and organizational-level performance. Dr. McKay is an associate editor for the *Journal of Management* and a former associate editor for *Personnel Psychology* and the *International Journal of Human Resource Management*.