

An Exploration of Perspectives on Authentic and Performative Diversity Statements  
from Black Applicants and Employees in the Corporate America, in the US Labor Market

A thesis submitted by:

Channa Bannis

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Leadership

Tufts University

May 2024

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Adviser: Dr. Maritsa Barros

## **Abstract**

As an increasing number of companies leverage diversity statements and other diversity signals to proclaim their DEI commitments, the ability to differentiate between performative and authentic declarations becomes blurred. This multiple-method study explored the perspective on authentic and performative diversity statements from Black applicants and employees in Corporate America, in the US labor market. I hypothesized that diversity statements influenced Black applicants' engagement with and diversity expectations of prospective employers, and that an employee's perception of a company's DEI maturity pre- and post-employment seldom aligned. Results indicated a high awareness and skepticism of diversity statements—where their presence or absence did not matter for 42%, they still moved the needle for over 35% of respondents. It also indicated that performative diversity statements were more common, and when compared to departments as a whole, executive leadership failed to reflect DEI values.

Key words: Corporate America, Diversity Statement, DEI Maturity

## **Acknowledgements**

I conclude the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice Leadership Master's program at Tufts in the same way I began, in gratitude. This program has been life changing for me. I came in hopeful but hesitant. I leave having learned the value of leaning into my own authenticity, embracing the values of self-love and owning the potential of my excellence. All values that I work to empower in my son daily. I'm also grateful for my peers, advisors and professors that I have met along the way who have taken the time through guidance, friendship and laughter to empower my journey. You are all appreciated beyond words.

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## 1.0 SECTION 3: REFLEXIVITY

Today, diversity statements are monotonous and monochromatic. They've been all the rage in Corporate America, even more so after George Floyd's murder—fashionable, progressive, and the newest shade of black to “wear” with pride and distinction, especially on job descriptions. As a marketer with well over 20 years of experience working in Corporate America, I've had courtside seats on diversity initiatives that range from authentic to outright performative. To say that it has been exhausting and disappointing would be an understatement. However, my story is not unique, I am one amongst many Black and minoritized candidates who have been exposed to and influenced by diversity branding signals, like diversity statements, as an applicant and an employee in the US labor market.

And in many cases I was the Black applicant who at times defied the odds, got beyond the gatekeepers, and embraced the portrayed perception of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), only to be yet again disappointed by a mislabeled ally. I've had a seat at the table, but no voice. And belonging continued to be the dream unfulfilled throughout my career. The reality is that

“...Black Americans make up 12% of the U.S. population. They're proportionately represented in entry-level professional jobs (12%), but underrepresented at the manager level (7%). Black professionals are even more severely underrepresented at the senior manager, VP and SVP levels (4%). On the other hand, Black workers are overrepresented (18%) in the low-paying jobs in food service, e-commerce and beyond that are on the pandemic front lines. If corporate America sticks to its current trajectory, it'll take Black professionals 95 years to get to 12% representation at the manager level, per McKinsey (Pandey, 2021).”

And that's why throughout my career management and C-level positions lacked a reflection of diversity, in any capacity, beyond the acceleration of progress via gender-based diversity goals—and on most, if not all occasions, women were still ridiculously outnumbered by men, and minority representation glaringly lacking. And I've lost count of the number of times that "gender" has been used as a DEI goal and objective, year-after-year-after-year.

Throughout my career notable experiences have helped to shape and define my path—none more so than during the Summer of 2020. As a result of the long overdue awakening around social and racial injustice as well as George Floyd's murder, I witnessed firsthand the distrust that ensues when companies verbalize intent without a real plan of action. I would go further to say trust becomes even further eroded when what is projected outside of the organization from a DEI lens is far from the picture within the company, but it fits a narrative that's good for a brand's market share, competitive positioning, recruitment and other bottom-line focused goals—diversity branding strategy and execution at its best. Collectively this helped me to find my voice, which continues to be a work in progress.

For the first time in my career, I raised my hand and asked the hard questions. And oftentimes those questions went unanswered. I challenged the status quo and broke some of the battle-tested norms that I've adhered to for a long time. For decades, I relied on my self-resilience and determination to maneuver through the system of Corporate America with minimal ripples—not unlike the tradition of Black candidates and other minoritized groups who have leveraged resume whitening to get their foot in the door (Kang et al., 2016). I learned how to maneuver through the system in a way to gain and/or maintain employment, and hoped for

gradual, just rewards in order to be a provider for myself and my family. As we know the economic gap of prosperity continues to widen, particularly for Blacks.

“According to a [2024] data [report] from the Federal Reserve’s Survey of Consumer Finances, the nation’s racial wealth gap increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Between 2019 and 2022, median wealth increased by \$51,800, but the racial wealth gap increased by \$49,950—adding up to a total difference of \$240,120 in wealth between the median white household and the median Black household” (as cited by Perry et al., 2024).

It took me decades to get to a place of confidence where I no longer resided in my own uncomfortable silence and my motivation had evolved, and my resolve strengthened to do something. My choices have not been without consequences, but those were foreseen and anticipated.

The longevity of my tenure in Corporate America as a marketer, applicant, and employee provides me with a multi-pronged perspective that I’ll need for this research endeavor. I have hope that change can happen, but not without more focused research and insight that drives actionable progress. This research is my way of reaching beyond my lived experience in Corporate America to gain understanding and insight into what could possibly be unique to me and what is ubiquitous to Black applicants and employees in general. I’d like to gain additional perspective into their lived experiences specific to how performative and authentic diversity statements are being perceived by other Black professionals in Corporate America, and their perception of authentic and performative DEI as it pertains to the DEI maturity of an organization. (DEI Maturity is defined as a relative measure of one’s own expectation of how well a current or former employer's DEI related statements align with their DEI related actions.)

Corporate America is not evil but there are inherent practices that continue to erode trust and access. For too long Corporate America was focused on compliance from a DEI perspective. It was not until the early 1970s that gender diversity was included in diversity education in the US, then expanded to include inclusion for other identity groups by the 1990s (Dobbin, 2009; Williams, 2020; Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000). There is obviously still a lot of room for growth to increase the positive impact of how Corporate America is leveraging diversity statements. Furthermore, companies should have no shame in reflecting where they truly are on its DEI journey, and we should all get to a place where that level of authenticity is embraced and applauded.

So, as I move forward on this research journey my intention is not to vilify specific companies or Corporate America, but to instead provide insight into the unintended impact and/or consequences of performative diversity statements and highlight the benefits of taking a more authentic path. Overall, I'm hoping to highlight opportunities for growth. If businesses can step out and be more authentic with their diversity statements and signals as a whole, I'm hoping that this authenticity will trickle down into more areas that are in need of measurement and accountability, like training their gatekeepers and more authentic employment evaluation processes. Ultimately, a more authentic system, hopefully provides a space where Blacks and other minoritized groups can also reflect as much of their authentic selves as they choose to reveal, as part of the employment-seeking and maintenance process.

Finding my voice is also what inspired my application to the Tufts Diversity and Inclusion MA program. It has allowed me to develop a more grounded understanding of DEI from many perspectives and disciplines. Today I wholeheartedly embrace the challenge of making a

difference within Corporate America. And this research continues my self-discovery to drive impactful change. It is a marathon rather than a race, but standing on the sidelines commentating isn't the same as having the courage to get off the starting block.

## **2.0 SECTION 4: BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The history of workplace diversity in Corporate America has deep-seated roots that go back to the early 1960s. The Civil Rights Movement was a strong influence that led to affirmative action programs aimed at increasing diversity in the workplace (Dobbin, 2009). There were also multiple anti-discrimination legislative actions—the Equal Pay Act of 1963, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (Williams, 2020). Beyond the strong emphasis on Affirmative Action and non-discrimination, diversity in terms of representation became a strong focal area, particularly for large US companies (Williams, 2020). However, corporate responses to diversity were primarily focused on legal compliance. Workforce diversity was often addressed “solely in terms of responding to governmental mandates rather than proactively creating programs that add[ed] organizational value” (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000). This insight has a familiarity with some of today's modern-day practices centered around diversity branding, where the focus can sometimes be too much on business image and competitive advantage, rather than a holistic view of implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Throughout the levels of leadership, there continues to be a lot more “noise” than accountability. And as an increasing number of companies leverage diversity branding

strategies to proclaim their commitments to DEI with diversity statements, high-profile initiatives, and appointments, the ability to differentiate between performative and authentic declarations blurs. This study will try to understand how pro-diversity statements are perceived by Black professionals. It is a much-needed opportunity to contribute to efforts around driving change across the accountability spectrum and to provide additional insight into authenticity and performative DEI signals to reverse the lack of accountability trend. Words do matter. Although this study is focused specifically on Corporate America in the US, diversity branding is a global strategy and concern. A 2023 study, *The Face of the Firm: The Impact of Employer Branding on Diversity*, explores how legal firms in the UK leverage the marketing of workforce diversity.

“A desire for successful employer branding still supersedes organizational commitment to equal opportunities and diversity management in practice. And Kele & Cassell (2023) argue that this commercialized approach leads to several contradictions, which in turn reproduce the market-based perspective of diversity, relegating employees primarily to the aesthetics of race and gender and the affiliated skills and resources” (Kele & Cassell 2023).

Companies and institutions, both large and small, are investing heavily in DEI, transforming it into a billion-dollar industry. Part of this transformation has fostered a new trend in which companies leverage multiple external resources and diversity signals, to “shout from the rooftops their pledges and promises to foster an equitable and inclusive environment” (Asare, 2020). While there are organizations whose diversity signals authentically reflect their actual DEI maturity, too often the opposite is also true. There are many instances where performative reflections are evident when evaluating DEI maturity, leaving a sizable gap

between verbal commitments and statements of DEI, resulting in a lack of prideful results and progress. Because “while the business of diversity is flourishing, diversity is not (Newkirk, 2019).

Diversity branding has now become a popular means by which organizations reflect their DEI philosophy external to their organization. “The concept of diversity, historically perceived as socially constructed differences among people, is now recognized from a business perspective as a branding strategy that is intended to create an organization’s competitive advantage” (Byrd, 2018). Businesses are essentially leveraging the power of marketing to project DEI maturity across the spectrum of authentic and performative. If this were related to consumer product marketing, accountability would be more clearly enforced. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) guidelines would be applied as ads: “must be truthful, not misleading, and, when appropriate, backed by scientific evidence” (Federal Trade Commission, n.d.). Regardless of what channels were leveraged, online, print, etc., these FTC rules would be enforceable. The standards are clearly different when it comes to DEI, and self-governance has left a consistent lack of accountability amongst those businesses that are leaning more heavily on the performative spectrum. “It is questionable why a valuing diversity philosophy does not contain language or terminology that implies a moral duty to be held accountable” (Byrd, 2018).

Some of the most basic DEI initiatives for organizations center around equity and inclusion specific to hiring and recruitment. When diversity statements are more performative than practice, are there unrealized consequences to applicants? And what groups, and/or identities are more negatively impacted by more fictionalized and over-aspirational diversity statements versus ones that are authentic and achievable? How can Blacks and other

minoritized applicants hold prospective and current employers more accountable to their professed DEI maturity? Because “while a branding strategy is used as a business competitive advantage to attract customers as well as talent, [Byrd, 2018 makes the] central argument ... that a diversity branding strategy conceals negative behaviors that are a detriment rather than a value to socially marginalized groups of people” (Byrd, 2018). Furthermore, as of 2017 “hiring discrimination against Black Americans [hadn’t] declined in 25 years” (Quillian et al., 2017).

The concept of DEI is not new. What continues to be missing are standards around measurement. This includes setting measurable goals and outcomes, and having a consistent process in place for measurement—ideally before kicking off initiatives, but definitely throughout the life of any program. The lack of focus and investment around measurable results also means that there is just not enough compelling research that specifically examines and measures DEI investments from a results perspective. DEI programs come in all shapes and sizes, and whether companies are just getting started with the basics, or widely investing in more developed programs, measurement should be an integral component. But history shows that has not been the case, then and now. No one is holding them accountable, and self-accountability is lacking as “roughly 80 percent of companies are just going through the motions [of DEI]” (The Josh Bersin Company, 2021). “If underrepresented applicants are more likely to represent themselves authentically when applying to an organization because that organization espouses egalitarian values in a public diversity statement, then the institution must ensure that the statement is backed up by real action to prevent bias and discrimination within the organization” (Carnes et al., 2020).

This proposed multiple-method study is intended to explore perspectives on authentic and performative diversity statements from Black applicants and employees in Corporate America in the US labor market. This study will also examine how an organization's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) maturity is perceived from an applicant and employee lens. It will focus specifically on examining diversity statements as one type of diversity signal, but other types of signals include but are not limited to DEI related high-profile initiatives, multi-racial and cultural imagery on websites and marketing materials, social media activities, and diversity leadership appointments. Ideally, it will help to add valuable insight that highlights standards of authenticity around diversity statements as well as improvement areas for performative diversity statement practices. Historically, Black applicants have always encountered some form of bias from employment gatekeepers: recruiters, hiring/people managers, and interviewers. However, the accountability expands to other leaders within organizations—C-level, HR, DEI, and Marketing leaders. Because in many cases these are also the leaders on the front lines of many DEI initiatives in Corporate America, particularly around diversity branding strategies.

Diversity statements, particularly its inclusion on job descriptions are a signal that all applicants, regardless of the intersection of their identities, are welcomed, included, respected, and valued. But that's not what's happening to Blacks and other minoritized applicants, particularly those who are more transparent about their racial and cultural identities on their applications for employment consideration (Kang et al., 2016). "Rather than simply making a commitment to valuing diversity, creating an atmosphere of inclusion requires change on many fronts, including fairness, empowerment, and openness, all of which can support an

organization's goal to be both competitive and progressive in its DEI goals" (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000).

### **3.0 SECTION 5: LITERATURE REVIEW**

During the summer of 2020's social uprisings around the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and too many other Black citizens, companies big and small felt compelled to speak out. Many did and released diversity statements to denounce racism and re-affirmed and/or expressed their organizational commitment to DEI. As a result, there was a remarkable surge in the popularity of corporate diversity statements. In 2022, Wang et al (2022) did a 2-part study. Study 1 leveraged machine learning and evaluated over 500 DEI statements from Fortune 1000 companies to understand differences and commonalities around keywords. Study 2 leveraged millions of data points of employees' DEI ratings from Glassdoor.com, an employee review site, and tested the hypothesis that companies were more positively rated by their employees on organizational diversity and inclusion if they (1) released (vs. did not release) diversity statements and (2) emphasized identity-conscious (vs. identity-blind) topics in their diversity (Wang et al., 2022). Identity-blindness and identity-consciousness frameworks represent two different approaches to social justice and equity. While the former focuses on individuality and the removal of social identities as an evaluation factor, the latter recognizes the important role those social identities have on an individual's experiences and opportunities (Wang et al., 2022).

Wang et al., (2022) based their research on 2 hypotheses: 1. Companies that released a diversity statement tended to be rated more favorably on diversity and inclusion by their

employees than companies that did not release a statement, and 2. Identity-conscious text topics (e.g., supporting the Black community, acknowledging the Black community, committing to diversifying workforce) covered in a corporation diversity statement tended to be more strongly associated with employees' organizational diversity and inclusion ratings than identity-blind topics (i.e., general DEI terms) (Wang et al., 2022). They concluded that companies that released (vs. did not release) a diversity statement were more favorably rated on diversity and inclusion by their employees and that companies whose diversity statement emphasized identity-conscious (vs. identity-blind) topics were more positively rated by their employees (Wang et al., 2022). They went on to recommend that it was much more beneficial for companies to release a diversity statement in response to anti-racism with the inclusion of "identity-conscious topics" to optimize impact (Wang et al., 2022).

This recommendation does not go far enough. It lacks any insight and/or recommendations toward tying diversity statements to actual organizational DEI actions of substance. "Rather than simply making a commitment to valuing diversity, creating an atmosphere of inclusion requires change on many fronts, including fairness, empowerment, and openness, all of which support the diversity initiatives" (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000). Furthermore, their use of secondary data from Glassdoor.com does not provide enough insight and/or data points to differentiate what factors beyond diversity statements employees were leveraging to rate their respective employers. The presence of diversity statements was the key factor assessed. It would be a stretch to assume that most companies with a diversity statement after May 2020 and with a high or positive rating on Glassdoor.com received it primarily or solely because of the release of a diversity statement.

There's no assessment of whether there were additional organizational actions beyond the statements released that furthered DEI perception within the Fortune 1000 organizations reviewed. There is also no demographic insight shared on who predominantly shared these evaluations. Feedback from minoritized groups vs. non-minoritized groups may or may not generate the same results. The data analyzed was also within a short period of time between May 2020 and June 2020. An opportunity area would be to reassess whether these sentiments are maintained over time, say one year, for these companies. This would help to determine if their diversity statements were later perceived as authentic and/or performative.

Applicants and employees are more vocal about holding companies more accountable to walk the talk. It is not enough to release statements professing their commitment to DEI. In their study, Kroeper et al., (2020) examined how men and women perceived organizations that "counterfeit diversity." In general, counterfeit diversity can be described as exaggerated diversity in recruitment materials relative to an organization's actual DEI maturity. This research specifically explored gender related cues of diversity within the tech industry, but as Kroeper et al., (2020) noted, their research can be applicable to other groups and contexts. Three experiments evaluated perceptions and psychological consequences of counterfeit diversity compared to: (1) Authentic diversity: the sincere portrayal of a high degree of gender diversity in experiments 1–3; (2) Authentic non-diversity: the sincere portrayal a low degree of gender diversity in experiments 2–3; and (3) Aspirational diversity: acknowledgment of a lack of diversity in the present, combined with the aspiration to increase diversity in the future in experiment 3 (Kroeper et al., 2020).

Kroeper et al., (2020) explain that in the first experiment, all participants were exposed to a technology company's gender diverse recruitment website. Then one-third of participants were randomly exposed to information that informed them that the company's DEI maturity was less than depicted; counterfeit diversity condition. Another was informed that the company's DEI maturity was consistent with diversity reflected in the recruitment materials; authentic diversity condition. The final one-third of participants remained neutral with no additional information provided; control condition. Participants who learned that the gender diversity depicted on the website was an authentic portrayal, viewed the company to be more sincerely interested in diversity and, in turn, reported the least threats (among women) and the most company interest (among men and women). Overall results revealed that both women and men perceived counterfeit diversity as insincere. This perceived insincerity, in turn, decreased women's and men's interest in the organization and engendered identity threat concerns among women. Identity threats foster concerns about environments that are not welcoming and increase concerns about being singled out, marginalized, or disrespected (Kroeper et al., 2020).

The second experiment by Kroeper et al., (2020) duplicated the first experiment with the addition of an authentic non-diversity condition; a company sincerely portrayed a low degree of gender diversity in its recruitment materials. Participants in this experiment reviewed the same gender-balanced website used in the previous study that advertised an equal number of men and women (50% women, 50% men). Participants were also randomly assigned to the authentic non-diversity condition of a gender-unbalanced website that advertised an unequal number of men and women (25% women, 75% men). Participants in both conditions were also

evaluated on a few memory manipulation criteria and were then provided scenarios to evaluate both conditions (authentic non-diversity and counterfeit diversity) before they completed the same measures described in experiment 1 around sincerity perceptions, identity threat concerns, and company interest (subsequent interest) (Kroeper et al., 2020).

Similarly, to the counterfeit diversity company, an authentic non-diversity company in the Kroeper et al., (2020) study is perceived as less sincere than an authentic diversity company. This lack of perceived sincerity engenders greater identity threat among women and reduces the interest in joining the company among men and women. The authentic non-diversity company did not differ from the counterfeit diversity company, indicating that neither company is reliably construed to be more sincere than the other. Both companies are perceived as having an insincere commitment to gender diversity (Kroeper et al., 2020).

The third study by Kroeper et al., (2020) is also very similar to the first two experiments but with the addition of an aspirational diversity condition, in which the company was transparent about lacking gender diversity but aspired to increase it going forward. With all the diversity conditions present, Kroeper et al., (2020) key findings supported their hypothesis that aspirational diversity would be interpreted as a much more sincere way for companies that lacked DEI maturity to recruit women, when compared to non-action or counterfeiting diversity strategies (Kroeper et al., 2020).

The aspirational diversity company was perceived in the Kroeper et al., (2020) study findings to be more authentic than the counterfeit diversity and authentic non-diversity companies, but was still perceived to be less sincere than the authentic diversity company. Both men and women perceived the aspirational diversity company to be more sincerely interested

in promoting gender diversity than the counterfeit diversity and authentic non-diversity companies which, in turn, predicted lower rates of identity threat among women and more interest in joining the company among men and women (but more so for women) (Kroeper et al., 2020). It should be noted Kroeper et al., (2020) were surprised that a small portion of participants also perceived the counterfeit diversity company to be slightly more sincere than the authentic non-diversity company. However, this finding was inconsistent with the results of experiment 2, wherein sincerity perceptions did not meaningfully differ between the authentic non-diversity and counterfeit diversity companies. Kroeper et al., (2020) concluded that to some degree counterfeit diversity may sometimes signal a degree of sincerity to participants that authentic non-diversity does not.

A fourth experiment conducted by Kroeper et al., (2020) focused exclusively on the anticipation of identity threat for women. Consistent with the logic of the previous 3 studies, it was expected that women who learned the technology company was insincerely interested in promoting gender diversity would report the most identity threat, women who received no information about the company's sincerity would report less identity threat, and women who learned the company was sincerely interested in promoting gender diversity to report the least identity threat. Kroeper, et al., (2020) manipulated company sincerity experimentally in this fourth experiment by randomly presenting participants with one of three possible vignettes: (a) a sincere vignette, (b) an insincere vignette, or (c) a no information vignette. Participants were also randomly assigned to the sincere condition and learned that the company was sincerely interested in increasing its gender diversity. By contrast, people randomly assigned to the insincere condition learned that the company was not sincerely interested in increasing its

gender diversity. Participants randomly assigned to read the no-information control condition did not receive any additional information. And then participants completed the exact same measures described in experiments 1 through 3 (Kroeper et al., 2020).

The results of experiment 4 by Kroeper et al., (2020) were consistent with experiments 1 through 3 and provided evidence for the proposed psychological process model. Across all four of the experiments, consistent evidence showed that increased perceived sincerity decreased identity threat among women and increased company interest among men and women (but particularly women). These experimental findings increase confidence in the proposed psychological process model, wherein diversity cues—to the extent that they are construed as sincere (vs. insincere)—can alleviate identity threat and promote interest in joining a company, even in cases where that company lacks DEI maturity (Kroeper et al., 2020). Conversely, when diversity cues are perceived to be insincere, companies may unintentionally ramp up identity threat concerns and decrease people’s, particularly women’s interest in joining their organization (Kroeper, et al., 2020). Companies may not be holding themselves accountable, but these results indicate that applicants and employees are actively doing it for them.

The exploration of gender within the tech sector covers a very necessary and insightful area of research. The findings by Kroeper, et al., (2020) added additional voices to the concept and need around driving greater authenticity in diversity branding. It would definitely be interesting to expand this research leveraging Kimberle Crenshaw’s framework around intersectionality, which highlights that people fall into multiple social categories that can compound discrimination. Generating findings based on gender and race might help to reinforce the premise and drive greater understanding and importance around the view that

DEI initiatives should not be one-dimensional. It is a great goal to recruit women, but even better if we add an additional social construct. Overall, Kroeper et al., (2020) concluded that the most impactful recruitment method that preserved sincerity perceptions and interest in the company while simultaneously protecting women from identity threat was an authentic gender diversity approach.

In their article, Carnes et al., (2020) come to a similar conclusion based on experimental studies that explore the impact of diversity messages. They found that “medical schools, academic medical centers, and individual departments” were increasingly crafting leveraging diversity statements as a way to communicate their commitment to diversity, as a way to attract more diverse applicants (Carnes et al., 2020). The underrepresentation of racial and ethnic individuals from minoritized groups represents a glaring gap across many specialty areas. “As divisions, departments, and academic health centers strive to increase diversity and inclusion, creating an organizational diversity statement is often a first step” (Carnes et al., 2020). Although this strategy is not being discouraged, Carnes et al., (2020) are mindful of previous studies, some within the health industry, that explored the “impact of diversity statements on participants’ perception of” an organization. They found multiple studies that reinforced the concept of crafting diversity statements that were more aspirational and devoid of any impression that the level of DEI maturity reflected in these statements has already been achieved (Carnes et al., 2020).

The experimental study by Carnes et al, is specific to the academic medical field. There are a lot of benefits to expanding this research to other employment areas and industries to get a better and more broadened view of the potential impact. It would also be insightful to have

specific examples of organizations and or aspirational pro-diversity statements that reflect how companies can transition to a more authentic reflection.

Resume whitening, the limiting of racial transparency on job applications has commonly been leveraged by Blacks and other minoritized groups in response to inequitable job access—a key obstacle fueling the wealth gap between marginalized communities and their white counterparts. As of 2021, “the net wealth of a typical Black family in America is around one-tenth that of a white family” (Mineo, 2021). Furthermore, a recent study published by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis concluded, that no reduction of the racial wealth disparity between white and black households had occurred over the past 70 years (as cited by Mineo, 2021).

However, a 2016 survey found that diversity signals like diversity statements lead minority job applicants to construct less whitened resumes, resulting in more racial transparency, but not less discrimination (Kang et al., 2016). Blacks and other minoritized groups who respond to these DEI signals with more racial transparency are faced with inequitable job and wealth access from an unexpected source—a perceived ally. What Black and minoritized candidates are faced with is the use of branding terms that “might allow the organization to accumulate value, by rebranding itself as being diverse or even as being committed to diversity without, as it were, doing anything” (Byrd, 2018).

There were several areas for improvement in the 2016 published research by Kang, DeCelles, Tilcsik & Jun. The research took place in 3 phases: (1) in-depth interview, (2) laboratory experiments, and (3) resume audit study. In the first phase, they leveraged a very small sample size of 29 Blacks and 30 Asians. At a minimum, I would expect at least 50

participants from each race represented. In the second phase participants were predominantly Asians: 119 undergraduate business students (87 East Asian, 18 South Asian, and 14 Blacks). As a result, the findings in the second phase of the research should be loosely, if at all, attributed to Black job applicants in general. It should be attributed specifically to Asian job applicants since they were almost 90% of research participants. In the third phase, male first names were used across all conditions with the rationale that resume audit studies have not revealed significant gender differences. If there were no differences, why not use a combination of both? Throughout this study, males and females were included. I felt that omitting any reference to females in this portion was inconsistent since each phase was meant to complement each other. It was also not clear how many Black vs Asian names were leveraged to provide visibility into balanced sampling.

Phase three could also have benefited from a larger sampling. Only 80 job ads were sampled, 40 with diversity statements and 40 without, with just over 1600 applications submitted. In contrast, the research done by the National Bureau of Economic Research sampled 125 job applications, and each job application received 8 job applications with a total of over 84,000 applications submitted.

More recent research by the National Bureau of Economic Research explored hiring practices from the demand side of the U.S. labor industry— practices of employers (Kline et al., 2022). It concluded that “applicants with Black names were called back 10% fewer times across the board — and even less when it came to specific companies — despite having comparable applications to their white counterparts” (Young & McMahon, 2021). It should also be noted that employers targeted by this research were 108 Fortune 500 employers. And it can be

assumed that as some of the top employers in the countries, most if not all would likely have visible diversity statements.

There are some noted improvement areas for the research by the National Bureau of Economic Research which explored hiring practices from the demand side of the U.S. labor industry. The research noted that employers targeted by this research were 108 Fortune 500 employers. And that the largest percentage of discrimination against Black applicants were by a “small group of highly discriminatory firms.” However, the authors also noted that they could only confidently identify 21% of the targeted firms as discriminating against Black names (Kline et al., 2022). Although the authors note that industry patterns of racial discrimination may be hard to assess, it would be worth exploring. There’s also the opportunity to expand this research to medium and/or small company segments to see if there’s a pattern that aligns and/or contradicts the results of some of the largest US employers.

And inclusion matters! The research report by Deloitte & Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission (2013) found that when employees think that their organization is committed to and supportive of diversity, they'll report better business performance in terms of their “ability to innovate (83% uplift), responsiveness to changing customer needs (31% uplift) and team collaboration (42% uplift)” (Deloitte & Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission, 2013). This research also concluded that inclusion not only influences perceptions of business performance but is correlated to actual business performance as well (Deloitte & Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission, 2013). The more included an employee feels, the more likely they are to be at work (i.e., reducing the cost of

absenteeism) and to receive a higher performance rating (Deloitte & Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission, 2013).

#### **4.0 SECTION 6: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Previous studies present strong evidence that diversity signals matter. And signaling theory helps us to understand how organizations might influence their attractiveness among potential applicants and how these applicants, in turn, might interpret organizations' signals. At its core "Signaling theory is fundamentally concerned with reducing information asymmetry between two parties" (Connelly et al., 2011) (Spence, 2002). The origin of the Signaling theory is based on Spence's (1973) research specific to signaling in the job markets. However, it was from the angle of higher-quality applicants investing in higher education to leverage it as a competitive differentiator from other lower quality applicants, thereby sending a signal to prospective employers of their perceived value as a candidate (Spence, 1973). "Just as employers have less than perfect information about applicants, so also will applicants be imperfectly informed about the qualities of jobs and work environments" (Spence, 1973).

Today, businesses are leveraging the concept of the Signaling theoretical framework through the means of diversity branding. "The concept of diversity, historically perceived as socially constructed differences among people, is now recognized from a business perspective as a branding strategy that is intended to create an organization's competitive advantage" (Byrd, 2018). And as an increasing number of companies leverage diversity branding strategies to proclaim their commitments to DEI with diversity statements, high-profile initiatives, and appointments, it blurs the ability to differentiate between performative and authentic declarations, particularly for prospective job applicants.

Diversity statements, particularly its inclusion on job descriptions are a signal that all applicants, regardless of the intersection of their identities, are welcomed, included, respected, and valued. However, the concept of diversity dishonesty, where an organization's recruitment strategy "falsely or incorrectly inflating its actual diversity" has become a more common practice (Wilton, et al, 2020). However, the concept of signaling theory indicates that although organizations can try to manage their employer attractiveness by signaling specific attributes, perceptions of their attractiveness as employers are based not only on the messages and signals they send but also on "inferences drawn by the applicants receiving those signals" (Celani & Singh, 2011, p. 228; Windscheid et al., 2016). And these signals take on many forms. Other than Diversity statements, other types of signals include but are not limited to DEI related high-profile initiatives, multi-racial and cultural imagery on websites and marketing materials, social media activities, and diversity leadership appointments. And prospects may be evaluating these signals in part or in whole as part of their assessment of authentic vs. performative. That's another reason why companies should focus on leveraging diversity branding to represent their most authentic case because the opposite can have negative impacts and consequences.

The importance of Kimberle Crenshaw's Intersectionality framework and its emphasis on how multiple social categories can compound discrimination is also very relevant as a secondary theoretical framework reference. Intersectionality provides a strong argument against the practice of promoting one-dimensional DEI—particularly through the use of gender. Gender is simply not enough. Intersectionality is a reminder that "any consideration of a single identity, such as gender, must incorporate an analysis of the ways that other identities interact

with, and therefore qualitatively change, the experience of gender” (Warner and Shields, 2013, pp. 804-805) (Corlette & Mavin, 2014).

It is a great goal to recruit women, but even better if we add an additional social construct that goes beyond the status quo. Overall, Kroeper et al., (2020) in their conclusion that the most impactful recruitment method is one that preserved sincerity perceptions and interest in the company while simultaneously protecting women from identity threats was an authentic gender diversity approach.

The more authentic they are, the more companies are able to derive the key business benefits of actually walking the talk. There’s also no harm in just walking, and less talking. It should be noted that diversity in and of itself is a competitive strategy. A Harvard Business Review (2013) study “found that companies prioritizing diversity and inclusion were 70% more likely to capture new markets, both demographically and geographically, than their less inclusive competitors (as cited by Griffiths, 2022). And profitability can certainly also be a competitive advantage as well. A study by McKinsey (2019) found that companies ranked in the top quartile for gender diversity on their executive teams were 25% more likely to have above-average profitability than their competitors in the bottom quartile, (as cited by Griffiths, 2022). Furthermore, the same study found that companies in the lowest quartile for both gender and ethnic diversity were 27% more likely to underperform their profitability expectations than all other companies examined in the study (as cited by Griffiths, 2022).

## **5.0 SECTION 7: THE PRESENT STUDY**

### **Purpose Statement**

This multiple-method study explored perspectives on authentic and performative diversity statements from Black applicants and employees in Corporate America in the US labor market. This research also examined how an organization's DEI maturity is perceived from an applicant and employee lens.

## **Research Questions**

**RQ1: How do Black applicants in Corporate America view potential employer inclusion of diversity statements on job descriptions/advertisements?**

In 2022, Wang et al (2022) did a study that leveraged millions of data points of employees' DEI ratings from Glassdoor.com, an employee review site, and tested the hypothesis that companies were more positively rated by their employees on organizational diversity and inclusion if they (1) released (vs. did not release) diversity statements. Although not limited to Black participants, a similar study by Davis (2022) hypothesized that diversity statements that included race and action-oriented specifics that include what an organization does to promote diversity within their environment would be more attractive to potential candidates. Research Question 1 helped to determine specifically how much a subsection of Black/African American applicants are aware of diversity statements as well as their influence over their decision-making process when it comes to engaging with prospective employers.

**RQ2: To what extent do Black employees feel that their company's diversity branding reflects the level of DEI maturity within their organization?**

The Signaling theory helps us to understand how organizations might influence their attractiveness and/or perception among potential applicants and how these applicants in turn might interpret an organization's signals (Windscheid et al., 2016). Although organizations can

try to manage their employer attractiveness by signaling specific attributes, perceptions of their attractiveness as employers are based not only on the messages and signals they send but also on “inferences drawn by the applicants receiving those signals” (Celani & Singh, 2011, p. 228; Windscheid et al., 2016). Research Question 2 helped to evaluate how well an employee’s perceived DEI Maturity of an organization aligned with what was actually reflected within the organization..

### **Hypothesis**

Hypothesis #1: Diversity statements influence Black applicants’ engagement with and diversity expectations of prospective employers.

Hypothesis #2: Applicant and employee perception of a company’s DEI maturity pre- and post-employment are often misaligned.

### **Definition of terms**

Several terms used within the study could have multiple interpretations. Therefore, for consistency and clarity, they were defined for the participants as such:

- **Corporate America:** refers to the business community of small to large organizations across a wide range of industries.
- **Diversity Statements:** an expression of a company’s commitment to creating an equal, diverse, and inclusive working environment for people of all backgrounds.
- **DEI Maturity:** means whether your current or former employer's DEI related statements align with their DEI related actions.

## **6.0 SECTION 8: METHOD**

A multiple-method research design was leveraged for this study. Quantitative descriptive research design was used because it works well in collecting and interpreting large amounts of data to “provide a numeric description of attitudes or opinions of a population through an instrumental survey” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 12). A qualitative method was used to provide participants with the opportunity to share additional personalized context around specific responses to questions, as well as their perspectives as Black applicants and employees in the United States. Likert-type scale type questions were used throughout this multiple-methods study. And a quantitative descriptive study design was the primary format, outside of 4 qualitative questions.

This multiple-method research study explored perspectives on authentic and performative diversity statements from Black applicants and employees in Corporate America, in the US labor market. The survey questions explored perceptions of diversity statements and an employer’s diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) maturity from an applicant’s and employee’s lens.

The findings of this study, in combination with previous research, could build additional awareness around the need for more discovery focused on the impact and influence of diversity statements; particularly unintended consequences of diversity statements that lean more performative, with the ability to learn from those that lean more authentic. The results will contribute to a deeper understanding of the impact of diversity statements on Black professionals in Corporate America, with potential implications for organizations around DEI marketing initiatives.

### **Participant Recruitment and Sample Selection**

The study leveraged the principal investigator's social media networks on LinkedIn and Facebook for survey distribution to thousands of prospective participants (N=66) on both platforms with a digital posting, which requested professionals in the PI's network to share and participate if they met the study criteria. The survey was designed using the survey platform Qualtrics, which allowed participants easy access and flexibility to use any electronic device available to them to participate. In order to participate in the study, all participants were required to:

1. Identify as Black or African American
2. Be at least 18 years of age
3. Have 2 or more years of experience in Corporate America, in the United States
4. Read and write in English.

These participation criteria were selected because they match the demographic being studied.

The estimated sample size for this study is approximately 50 completed applications. It is estimated that Blacks make up less than 10% of the US working population, and this study's very specific target population narrows that number even further. Therefore, the targeted number of participants was realistic overall. The study garnered 66 qualified participants, well over the needed sample size of 50 to be considered legitimate.

The survey began with three key qualification questions positioned before the consent text, in order to identify prospective participants who identify as Black or African American racially, and are at least 18 years of age with at least 2 years of professional work experience

within Corporate America in the United States. Exit logic was used to transition anyone ineligible to participate to the end of the survey.

Data collection was exclusively conducted online through the survey platform Qualtrics. Participants were asked a mix of 25-30 Likert-type and closed-ended questions that gathered non-identifiable information on their demographic background, employment history, employment satisfaction, perceptions of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), exposure to diversity statements, and their perception of their current or most recent employer's DEI maturity. The study also included questions related to participants' experiences as Black/African American applicants and employees in Corporate America. The “anonymization” function was used in Qualtrics to ensure no identifiers were collected with the survey responses.

The anticipated duration of an individual participant's participation in the study varied based on their response time, but on average, it was estimated to take approximately 20 minutes to complete the survey. Participants had the flexibility to complete the survey at their convenience. The duration of the data collection period spanned between two and three months.

## **7.0 SECTION 9: DATA CLEANING AND ANALYSIS**

After all the data were collected through the Qualtrics platform, it was downloaded into Excel and thoroughly reviewed and scrubbed of inconsistencies, missing values and formatting errors. All qualified and completed submissions by participants were identified. There were thirteen participants whose submissions were incomplete because they did not meet the inclusion criteria for the study (e.g., did not racially identify as Black/African American, not

being at least 18 years old or not having at least 2 years of professional work experience within Corporate America). All data collected from the thirteen withdrawn participants up to the point of withdrawal were not retained and not included in the final analysis.

Once cleaned the quantitative data collected went through various stages of coding within Excel and once uploaded into the IBM SPSS software platform. The IBM SPSS software platform was used for quantitative coding and the iVivo software platform was used for qualitative coding. Participants raw responses was then entered into IBM SPSS and converted into statistical data and analyzed; descriptive analysis such as means, frequencies, and percentages, were used to summarize the demographic background, employment history, employment satisfaction, perceptions of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), exposure to diversity statements, and their perception of their employer's DEI maturity.

Demographic information included age, years of employment, gender, highest level of education, employment status, and industry. Other variables of interest included, satisfaction as a Black applicant and/or employee, satisfaction as an applicant/employee, awareness of diversity statements, influence of diversity statements, perceptions of diversity statements, and DEI maturity.

### **Demographics**

Demographics data collated included: age, race/ethnicity (all respondents are identified as Black/African American), years of employment, gender, highest level of education, employment status, and industry. Collectively participants (N=66) can be described as mature, experienced, higher-educated, and mostly women.

**Age Group.** The breakdown of 'Age Group' is reflected in Figure 1 (Appendix A). The largest age group was between 45-54 (35%). The second largest was over 55 years old (26%), which was closely followed by 35-44 years old (23%). The smallest age group representation was 25-34 (17%). In conclusion, there are 83% of respondents over 55 years of age and 61% over the age of 45. Overall, they can be characterized as mature.

**Years in Corporate America.** The breakdown of 'Years in Corporate America' is reflected in Figure 2 (Appendix A). The largest representation of experience is 'over 10 years' (76%). The second largest was 'over 5 years, but less than 10 years' (20%). And finally, 'more than 2, but less than 3 years', 'more than 3, but less than 4 years,' and 'more than 4, but less than 5 years,' are each represented by one participant (1.5% each). In conclusion, there are 96% of respondents with 5+ years of experience working in Corporate America, and 76% have over 10 years of experience. Overall, they can be characterized as experienced.

**Higher Education.** The breakdown of 'Highest Education Level' is reflected in Figure 3 (Appendix A). The education category with the highest representation is respondents with a Bachelor's degree (41%). This is followed very closely by those who hold a Master's degree (39%). Respondents with 'some college credit, but no degree' is the third highest category (9%), followed closely by respondents with a Doctorate/Ph.D. degree (8%). The lowest category of respondent representation is those with an Associate degree (3%). In conclusion, 88% of

respondents have a Bachelor's degree or higher, and an additional 8% with a Doctorate/Ph.D. degree. Overall, they can be categorized as higher-educated.

**Gender.** The breakdown of 'Gender' is reflected in Figure 4 (Appendix A). Women are by far the largest representation (80%). And men make up the smallest representation (20%).

## 8.0 SECTION 10: RESULTS

### Descriptive Analysis

Out of 79 individuals who attempted to participate in the survey 66 qualified. All of the qualified respondents identified as Black or African American racially, at least 18 years of age with at least 2 years of professional work experience within Corporate America, in the United States. Demographic results are reflected in Figure 1 through Figure 4.

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of age by the following categories: 25-34 (17%), 35-44 (23%), and 45 – 54 (35%), and over 55 years old (26%). Figure 2 shows the breakdown of years in Corporate America by the following categories: More than 2, but less than 3 years (1.5%), more than 3, but less than 4 years (1.5%), more than 4, but less than 5 years (1.5%), over 5 years, but less than 10 years (20%), and over 10 years (76%). Figure 3 shows the breakdown of the highest level of education for respondents by the following categories: Some college credit, but no degree (9%), Associate degree (3%), Bachelor's degree (41%), Master's degree (39%), and Doctorate/Ph.D. degree (8%). Figure 4 shows the breakdown of the respondents by the following gender categories: Women (80%), and men (20%).

Figure 5 (Appendix A) reflects whether respondents felt that their race or ethnicity was a barrier to success in Corporate America (N=60). Over 90% of respondents had a positive response that ranged from sometimes to always. Three percent (3%) of respondents said never.

In addition, respondents were asked for one word to describe their experience as Black applicants and employees in Corporate America. Their responses were then coded as negative or positive. There was a total of 38 distinct words submitted. Table 1 (Appendix A) shows the 7 words coded as “Positive Black Experience.” And Table 2 shows those 31 words were coded as “Negative Black Experience.” Based on the words presented in Table 1 and Table 2 below, respondents predominantly described their experience as Black applicants and employees in Corporate America in negative terms.

### **Research Question 1 (RQ1): Diversity Statements**

The purpose of RQ1 was to gain an understanding of how Black applicants and employees in Corporate America viewed employer inclusion of diversity statements on job descriptions/ advertisements. This question was assessed from a diversity awareness and a diversity impact perspective. Respondents were asked to establish the level of awareness respondents had around their employer’s diversity statement.

Figure 6 (Appendix A) reflects the level of familiarity respondents had with their employer’s diversity statement. Over 82% of respondents had a level of familiarity that ranged from somewhat familiar to very familiar. Those who were not sure or were not familiar at all represented 17% of respondents. (N=57).

Respondents were asked to establish the impact of diversity statements being present or absent in a job description. Figure 7 (Appendix A) reflects the level of likelihood or unlikelihood that a respondent would apply for a job with a potential employer if a diversity statement was not included in their job description or advertisement. Over 40% of respondents were diversity statement neutral. They were neither likely nor unlikely to apply for a job with a

potential employer if a diversity statement was not included in their job description or advertisement. Respondents who were extremely unlikely nor somewhat unlikely were 37%. And 21% were extremely likely nor somewhat likely to still apply for a job with a potential employer if a diversity statement was not included in their job description or advertisement. (N=57)

### **Research Question 2 (RQ2): Alignment of Diversity Branding to DEI Maturity**

The purpose of RQ2 was to gain an understanding of how well Black employees felt that their company's diversity branding reflected the level of DEI maturity they observed and/or experienced within their organization. This question was assessed from multiple perspectives:

1. An alignment assessment of diversity statements to diversity efforts.
2. The level at which an organization talked about DEI values vs putting them into practice.
3. How well expectations were met around DEI related actions aligning with DEI related statements of an organization.
4. Whether a department reflected the DEI value of their organization, and
5. Whether the executive team leadership reflected the DEI values of their organization.

Respondents were asked to assess how well they felt that their employer's diversity statement accurately reflected the level of DEI effort within the organization. Figure 8 reflects the level of accuracy respondents felt when comparing the two views. More than half of respondents felt that their company's diversity statement was somewhat inaccurate to extremely inaccurate. (54%) Respondents who felt that their company's diversity statement was somewhat accurate to extremely accurate was 46%. (N=57)

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement nor disagreement with the following statement: My company talks about and promotes DEI values but does not actively

work towards incorporating them. Figure 9 (Appendix A) reflects how they felt on a range of strongly agree to strongly disagree. Almost half of respondents felt that their company was not walking the talk of DEI values, on a range of strongly agree to somewhat agree (49%).

Approximately 12% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. And 39% of respondents somewhat disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement. (N=57)

Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent their employer met their expectations in terms of their DEI related actions reflecting their DEI related statements. Figure 10 (Appendix A) reflects how well their organization met their expectations on a range of far exceeded expectations to far short of expectations. There was no major difference in sentiment around how employers met expectations of DEI related statements with actions. Participants scored almost them evenly as almost half responded that their organization fell between a range of short of expectations to far short of expectations (45%), and almost half responded indicated positive sentiment on a range of equaled expectations to far exceeded expectations (47%). Overall, 32% of respondents felt that their organization equaled expectations. And the question was not applicable to 7% of respondents. (N=55)

Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed nor disagreed with the following statement: My department reflects the company's internal and external stated DEI values. Figure 11 (Appendix A) shows the extent of their agreement which ranged from strongly agreed to strongly disagreed. Respondents who strongly disagreed to somewhat disagreed were 35%. And respondents who somewhat agreed to strongly agreed were 51%. Those who neither agreed nor disagreed were 14%. (N=57)

Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed nor disagreed with the following statement: The executive leadership team reflects my company's stated DEI values. Figure 12 (Appendix A) shows the extent of their agreement which ranged from strongly agreed to strongly disagreed. Respondents who strongly disagreed to somewhat disagreed were 41%. And respondents who somewhat agreed to strongly agreed were 36%. Those who neither agreed nor disagreed were 23%. (N=56)

Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed nor disagreed with the following statement: The executive leadership team reflects my company's stated DEI values. Figure 12 shows the extent of their agreement which ranged from strongly agreed to strongly disagreed. Respondents who strongly disagreed to somewhat disagreed were 41%. And respondents who somewhat agreed to strongly agreed were 36%. Those who neither agreed nor disagreed were 23%. (N=56)

## **9.0 SECTION 11: DISCUSSION**

The overall purpose of this multiple-method study was to explore perspectives on authentic and performative diversity statements from Black applicants and employees in Corporate America in the US labor market. This research was also intended to examine how an organization's DEI maturity was perceived from an employee lens. It focused specifically on examining diversity statements as one type of diversity signal, but other types of signals include

but are not limited to DEI related high-profile initiatives, multi-racial and cultural imagery on websites and marketing materials, social media activities, and diversity leadership appointments.

Diversity statements, particularly its inclusion on job descriptions is a signal that all applicants, regardless of the intersection of their identities, are welcomed, included, respected, and valued. It should reflect a company's commitment to valuing diversity, creating an atmosphere of inclusion, fairness, empowerment, and openness, all of which can support an organization's goal to be both competitive and progressive in its DEI goals. The reality is that today, Black and minoritized candidates are faced with the use of diversity branding terms, signals, and strategies which "might allow the organization to accumulate value, by rebranding itself as being diverse or even as being committed to diversity without, as it were, doing anything" (Byrd, 2018).

Because of the prevalence of diversity statements as well as past research which emphasized the important role that diversity statements have played in the journey of an applicant and employee, I hypothesized that diversity statements influence Black applicants' engagement with and diversity expectations of prospective employers. I also hypothesized that an employee's perception of a company's DEI maturity pre- and post-employment seldom aligned.

The demographic information of participants is an important component of this study as it provides additional validation of the experiences of the participants in the study. The myth of the unqualified Black candidate is pervasive in American society (Wiltz, 2023). The level of experience and education of respondents in this survey serves as a resounding counter

declaration to “the beliefs that qualified Black candidates are rare and that Black employees are not as qualified for promotion as their white colleagues” (McDonald, 2021).

Demographics data collated included: age, race/ethnicity (all respondents are identified as Black/African American), years of employment, gender, highest level of education, employment status, and industry. Collectively participants (N=66) can be described as very mature, experienced, higher-educated, and mostly women.

**Age Group.** The breakdown of ‘Age Group’ is reflected in Figure 1. The largest age group was between 45-54 (35%). The second largest was over 55 years old (26%), which was closely followed by 35-44 years old (23%). The smallest age group representation was 25-34 (17%). In conclusion, there are 83% of respondents over 55 years of age and 61% over the age of 45.

**Years in Corporate America.** The breakdown of ‘Years in Corporate America’ is reflected in Figure 2. The largest representation of experience is ‘over 10 years’ (76%). The second largest was ‘over 5 years, but less than 10 years’ (20%). And finally, ‘more than 2, but less than 3 years’, ‘more than 3, but less than 4 years,’ and ‘more than 4, but less than 5 years,’ are each represented by one participant (1.5% each). In conclusion, there are 96% of respondents with 5+ years of experience working in Corporate America, and 76% have over 10 years of experience.

**Highest Education Level.** The breakdown of ‘Highest Education Level’ is reflected in Figure 3. The education category with the highest representation are respondents with a Bachelor’s degree (41%). This is followed very closely by those who hold a Master’s degree (39%). Respondents with ‘some college credit, but no degree’ is the third highest category (9%), followed closely by respondents with a Doctorate/Ph.D. degree (8%). The lowest category

of respondent representation is those with an Associate degree (3%). In conclusion, 88% of respondents have a Bachelor's degree or higher and an additional 8% with a Doctorate/Ph.D. degree.

**Gender.** The breakdown of 'Gender' is reflected in Figure 4. Women are by far the largest representation (80%). And men make up the smallest representation (20%).

**Their Lived Experience.** Participants overwhelmingly affirmed that they felt that their race and gender was a barrier to their success in Corporate America. Figure 5 reflects the breakdown of their responses. Over 90% of respondents had a positive response that ranged from sometimes to always. Three percent (3%) of respondents said never.

In addition, respondents were asked for one word to describe their experience as Black applicants and employees in Corporate America. Their responses were then coded as negative or positive. There was a total of 38 distinct words submitted. Table 1 shows the 7 words coded as "Positive Black Experience." And Table 2 shows those 31 words were coded as "Negative Black Experience." Based on the words presented in Table 1 and Table 2 below, respondents predominantly described their experience as Black applicants and employees in Corporate America in negative terms.

Through the lens of the Signaling theoretical framework (Spence, 1973), which helps us to understand how organizations might use diversity branding (i.e., diversity statements) to influence their attractiveness among potential applicants, and how these applicants in turn might interpret organizations' signals, I examined the responses to RQ1 and RQ2 (Windscheid et al., 2016). Three (3) emergent themes from evaluating the experiences of respondents as Black applicants and employees in Corporate America:

1. Diversity Statement Awareness and Skepticism are Prevalent
2. Performative DEI Statements and Branding are More Common
3. Executive Leadership is Failing to Reflect Company's DEI Values

**Diversity Statement Awareness and Skepticism are Prevalent.** The purpose of RQ1 was to gain an understanding of how Black applicants and employees in Corporate America viewed employer inclusion of diversity statements on job descriptions/ advertisements. This question was assessed from a diversity awareness and a diversity impact perspective.

From a diversity awareness perspective, respondents were asked to establish the level of awareness of their employer's diversity statement. Over 82% of respondents had a level of familiarity that ranged from somewhat familiar to very familiar. Those who were not sure or were not familiar at all represented 17% of respondents. Figure 6 reflects the level of familiarity respondents had with their employer's diversity statement. (N=57).

From a diversity impact perspective, respondents were asked to establish the impact of diversity statements being present or absent on a job description. Figure 7 reflects the level of likeliness or unlikeliness that a respondent would apply for a job with a potential employer if a diversity statement was not included in their job description or advertisement. Over 40% of respondents were diversity statement neutral. They were neither likely nor unlikely to apply for a job with a potential employer if a diversity statement was not included in their job description or advertisement. Respondents who were extremely unlikely nor somewhat unlikely were 37%. And 21% were extremely likely nor somewhat likely to still apply for a job with a potential employer if a diversity statement was not included in their job description or advertisement. (N=57)

Overall respondents had a high awareness of diversity statements (82%) and 42% displayed 'diversity skepticism' with their response that they were neither likely nor unlikely to apply for a job with a potential employer if a diversity statement was not included in their job description or advertisement. Diversity statement signals were not moving the needle or making an impact on prospective employer evaluation decisions, positively or negatively. This contradicted the findings of a study done by Wang et al (2022) which concluded that companies that released (vs. did not release) a diversity statement were more favorably rated on diversity and inclusion by their employees (Wang et al., 2022). However, it should be noted that findings that did align with the finding of Wang et al (2022) is that 37% of respondents indicated that they were extremely unlikely nor somewhat unlikely to apply for a job if an employer did not have a diversity statement present.

As a result, even though diversity statement's monotonous and monochromatic tendencies have driven a high level of skepticism, it is still very relevant and impactful to a large percentage of the respondents surveyed. My hypothesis that diversity statements influenced Black applicants' engagement with and diversity expectations of prospective employers was not supported by 42% of respondents who indicated that they would be neither likely nor unlikely to apply to a job with an employer that did not have a diversity statement. Furthermore, it was supported by 37% of respondents who indicated that they would be extremely likely nor somewhat unlikely to apply for a job with an employer that did not have a diversity statement.

**Performative DEI Statements and Branding are More Common.** The purpose of RQ2 was to gain an understanding of how well Black employees felt that their company's diversity branding reflected the level of DEI maturity they observed and/or experienced within their

organization. This question was assessed from multiple perspectives: 1. An alignment assessment of diversity statements to diversity efforts. 2. The level at which an organization talked about DEI values vs putting them into practice. 3. How well expectations were met around DEI related actions aligning with DEI related statements of an organization.

*An alignment assessment of diversity statements to diversity efforts:* Respondents were asked to assess how well they felt that their employer's diversity statement accurately reflected the level of DEI effort within the organization. Figure 8 reflects the level of accuracy respondents felt when comparing the two views. More than half of respondents felt that their company's diversity statement was somewhat inaccurate to extremely inaccurate (54%). Respondents who felt that their company's diversity statement was somewhat accurate to extremely accurate was 46%. (N=57)

*The level at which an organization talked about DEI values vs putting them into practice:* Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement nor disagreement with the following statement: My company talks about and promotes DEI values but does not actively work towards incorporating them. Figure 9 reflects how they felt on a range of strongly agree to strongly disagree. Almost half of respondents felt that their company was not walking the talk of DEI values, on a range of strongly agree to somewhat agree (49%). Approximately 12% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. And 39% of respondents somewhat disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement. (N=57)

*How well expectations were met around DEI related actions aligning with DEI related statements of an organization:* Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent their employer met their expectations in terms of their DEI related actions reflecting their DEI related

statements. Figure 10 reflects how well their organization met their expectations on a range of far exceeds expectations to far short of expectations. There was no major difference in sentiment around how employers met expectations of DEI related statements with actions. Participants scored them almost evenly as almost half responded that their organization fell between a range of short of expectations to far short of expectations (45%), and almost half responded indicated positive sentiment on a range of equaled expectations to far exceeded expectations (47%). Overall, 32% of respondents felt that their organization equaled expectations. And the question was not applicable to 7% of respondents. (N=55)

The 3 survey questions for RQ2 were related to performative and authenticity in terms of diversity statements to DEI efforts, actioning stated DEI values, and expectations around DEI actions reflecting DEI statements. Almost half of respondents consistently rated their employer as more performative than authentic, 54% vs 46%, 49% vs. 39%, and 45% vs. 47%, respectively. The only category where authenticity slightly edged out performative is related to what extent that employer met their expectations in terms of their DEI related actions reflecting their DEI related statements. This question did not ask respondents to elaborate as to whether they had high or low expectations, which would be an opportunity for future research.

Furthermore, these results align with the concept of diversity dishonesty, where an organization's recruitment strategy "falsely or incorrectly inflating its actual diversity" has become a more common practice (Wilton, et al, 2020). However, the concept of signaling theory indicates that although organizations can try to manage their employer attractiveness by signaling specific attributes, perceptions of their attractiveness as employers are based not only on the messages and signals they send, but also on "inferences drawn by the applicants

receiving those signals” (Celani & Singh, 2011, p. 228; Windscheid et al., 2016). Black professionals have become more perceptive in interpreting these signals, as both applicants and employees.

My hypothesis that Black applicants and employees’ perception of a company’s DEI maturity pre- and post-employment are often misaligned is supported by these 2 perspectives:

1. An alignment assessment of diversity statements to diversity efforts.
2. The level at which an organization talked about DEI values vs putting them into practice. And although it is not entirely unsupported from the third perspective: 3. How well expectations were met around DEI related actions aligning with DEI related statements of an organization; DEI actions did more authentically align with DEI related 47% vs. 45%.

**Executive Leadership is Failing to Reflect Company’s DEI Values:** A surprising and additional finding from the research centers around department and executive leadership reflections of their company’s DEI Values. Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed nor disagreed with the following statement: My department reflects the company’s internal and external stated DEI values. Figure 11 shows the extent of their agreement which ranged from strongly agreed to strongly disagreed. Respondents who strongly disagreed to somewhat disagreed were 35%. And respondents who somewhat agreed to strongly agreed were 51%. Those who neither agreed nor disagreed were 14%. (N=57)

Respondents were also asked to indicate to what extent they agreed nor disagreed with the following statement: The executive leadership team reflects my company’s stated DEI values. Figure 12 shows the extent of their agreement which ranged from strongly agreed to strongly disagreed. Respondents who strongly disagreed to somewhat disagreed were 41%.

And respondents who somewhat agreed to strongly agreed were 36%. Those who neither agreed nor disagreed were 23%. (N=56)

There is a notable 15% decrease in ‘strongly agree to somewhat agree’ between a department’s reflection of the company’s internal and external DEI values (51%), and executive leadership’s reflection of the company’s internal and external DEI values (36%). The accountability for performative and authentic DEI rests with leaders within organizations—C-level, HR, DEI, and Marketing leaders (particularly for Diversity Branding initiatives). In many cases these are also the leaders on the front lines of hiring decisions, and if they are not authentically doing the work that’s a problem. “Rather than simply making a commitment to valuing diversity, creating an atmosphere of inclusion requires change on many fronts, including fairness, empowerment, and openness, all of which can support an organization’s goal to be both competitive and progressive in its DEI goals” (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000). “If underrepresented applicants are more likely to represent themselves authentically when applying to an organization because that organization espouses egalitarian values in a public diversity statement, then the institution [and its leadership] must ensure that the statement is backed up by real action to prevent bias and discrimination within the organization” (Carnes et al., 2020).

## **10.0 SECTION 12: LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

**Limitations.** This study represents the voice and lived experiences of a small sampling of Black applicants and employees in Corporate America. One limitation was the dependency of the primary researcher’s personal and professional network as the sole resource to recruit

participants. Although the number of participants exceeded the target sample of 50. (Actual survey participants =66), having the resources to leverage Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a crowdsourcing marketplace, would have certainly garnered a larger and more segmented participant selection.

As such, this limitation contributed to the participant sample being highly educated and mostly female. The number of women participants (80%) was significantly larger than men participants (20%). As a result, the findings of this study leaned more heavily as a representation of the lived experiences of Black women in Corporate America more so than Black men, although it is inclusive of their voice.

**Future Research.** As a result, future research should consider delving into similar topics with a more balanced perspective between Black men and women applicants and employees in Corporate America in order to be able to see where their experiences may align or differ by gender. Taking the opportunity to reflect on data findings based on Kimberle Crenshaw's framework around intersectionality, which highlights that people fall into multiple social categories that can compound discrimination, might uncover additional key findings.

Furthermore, it would be worthwhile to delve into these topics with a highlight around retention. Since the present study's findings indicated that performative DEI statements and branding are more common than authentic, companies may have a hard time retaining Black employees. It should be noted that 65% of respondents had been with their current or most recent employer for less than 3 years (19% less than 1 year), the remainder 20% were between 5 and 10 years, and 15% over 10 years. (N=54) (See Figure 13 in Appendix A) Note: Eighty percent of respondents were employed at the time they took this survey.

Another significant area to explore in future research would be around what's worked for those applicants and employees who have had a positive experience in Corporate America. The qualitative data overwhelmingly reflected the impact of the negative lived experiences of Black applicants and employees. Having research that provides much-needed insight into how to navigate, survive, and thrive would provide much-needed direction that could be actionable.

Lastly, in the current climate where DEI initiatives are being blatantly rolled back and laws enacted to band diversity statements, it would be worth exploring qualitatively how respondents like the 37% who indicated that they would be somewhat to extremely unlikely to apply for a job with a company that did not have a diversity statement, are adapting at the front lines of the US labor market. Because the reality is that...

“Black Americans make up 12% of the U.S. population. They're proportionately represented in entry-level professional jobs (12%), but underrepresented at the manager level (7%). Black professionals are even more severely underrepresented at the senior manager, VP and SVP levels (4%). On the other hand, Black workers are overrepresented (18%) in the low-paying jobs in food service, e-commerce and beyond that are on the pandemic front lines (Pandey, 2021).”

## **11.0 SECTION 13: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD**

The main audience for this research would be executive leadership, DEI leaders, HR leaders, and Marketing leaders including administrators around recruitment. There's an educational opportunity for company leaders who are requesting, facilitating, and crafting diversity statements to understand perception and impact around authentic and performative diversity branding—adapting how diversity branding strategies incorporate competitive

advantage as well as its intended value of increased diversity. It is a critical and necessary step in not only increasing diversity but also realizing the additional benefit of reducing the wealth gap. Keep in mind that there isn't just one specific thing that can be done because every organization is unique, and DEI is not one-size-fits-all. However, there are benefits, both short-term and long-term, to a company leaning into the authenticity of its DEI maturity—small steps can make a big difference.

One small step can be to incorporate DEI questions into an organization's employee survey, and action key findings. The qualitative feedback on how Black applicants and employees described their lived experience in Corporate America leaned more negative than positive. When asked, participants were more than willing to share in detail about their experiences. As long as an organization's survey is 100% anonymous, applicants and employees might be willing to be more candid about their lived experiences specific to their organization. The key here would be that any ask for information should be followed up with actionable next steps that provide transparency and clarity about the goals and benefits to individuals, teams, and the entire organization. Regardless of where a company is on its DEI journey, every step towards authentically building stronger diversity, equity, and inclusion within the core culture of an organization creates a level of psychological safety that builds dividends.

## **12.0 SECTION 14: CONCLUSION**

This multiple-method study explored perspectives on authentic and performative diversity statements from Black applicants and employees in Corporate America, in the US labor market. It also examined how an organization's DEI maturity is perceived from an applicant and

employee lens. The prevalent use of monotonous and monochromatic diversity statements largely driven by competitive positioning, leans more performative and has an impact on Black applicants and employees—and some unforeseen impact on organizations.

Study results indicated a high awareness and skepticism of diversity statements. Diversity statement skepticism has set in, to the point where their presence or absence did not matter for 42% of respondents. However, at the same time, they are still moving the needle for over 35% of respondents. It also indicated that performative diversity statements were more common than authentic diversity statements, and when compared to departments as a whole, more executive leadership failed to reflect DEI values. Furthermore, results also highlighted signs on retention.

The commonality of performative DEI statements and branding may be triggering lower retention of Black employees. It should be noted that 65% of respondents had been with their current or most recent employer for less than 3 years (19% less than 1 year), the remainder 20% were between 5 and 10 years, and 15% over 10 years. (N=54) (See Figure 13) Note: Eighty percent of respondents were employed at the time they took this survey. Although companies might see and receive short-term benefits to diversity branding up front, they should probably also be mindful of the bottom-line long-term impact of losing Black employees as well as the cost of replacement.

### 13.0 SECTION 15: APPENDIX A

Figure 1: Age range for respondents

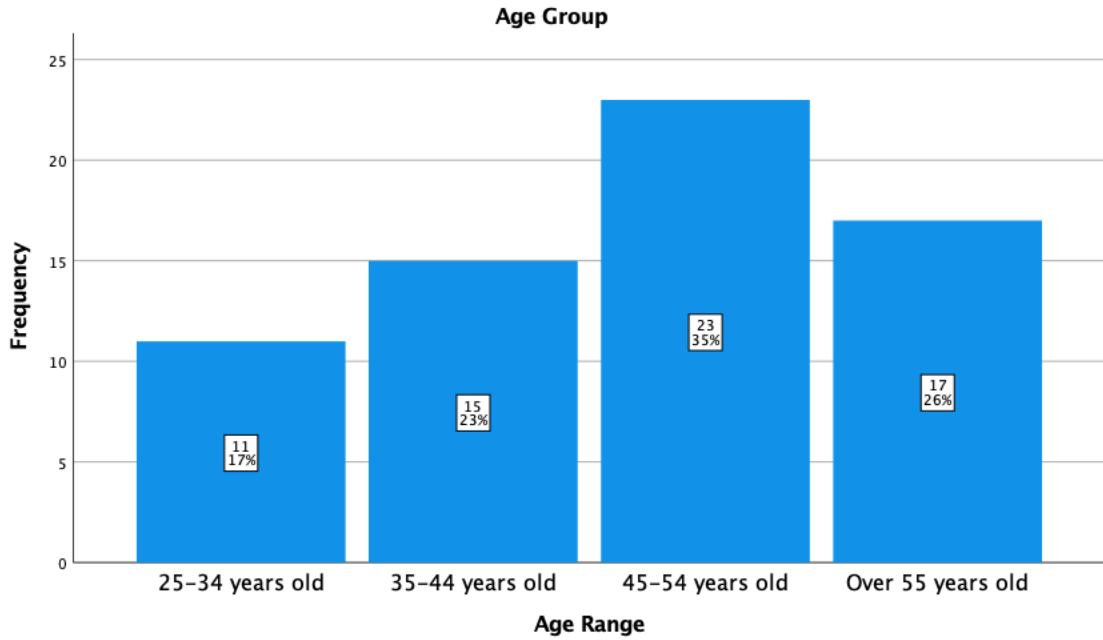


Figure 2: Years in Corporate America categories for respondents

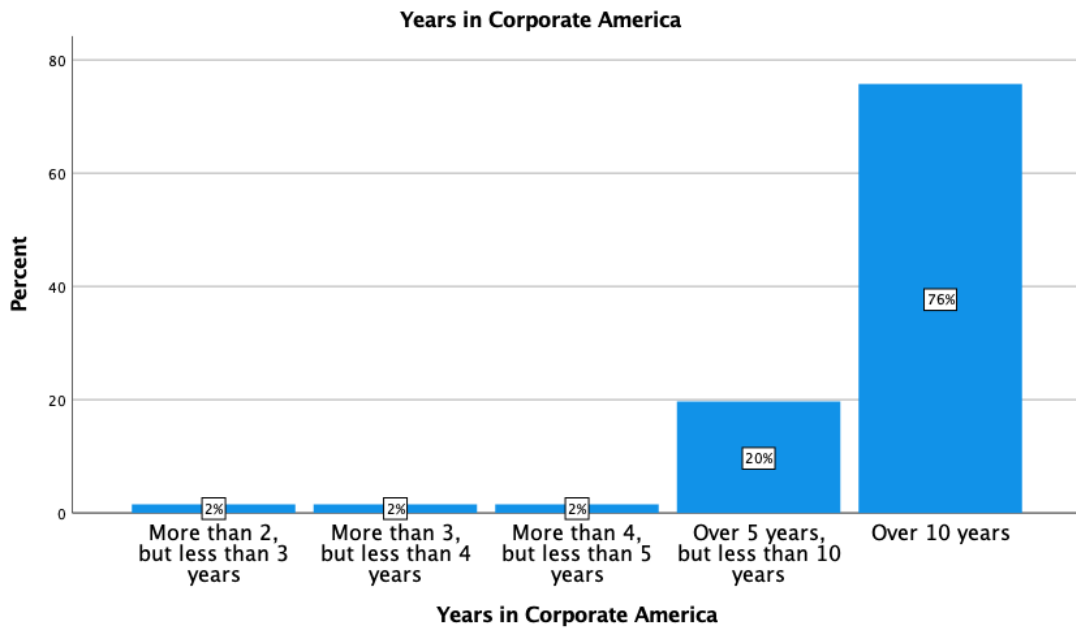


Figure 3: Higher education level categories for respondents

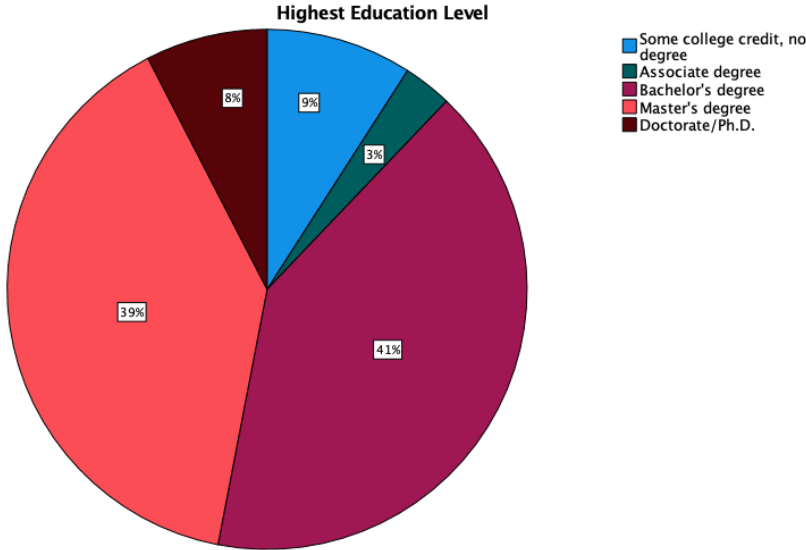


Figure 4: Gender categories for all respondents

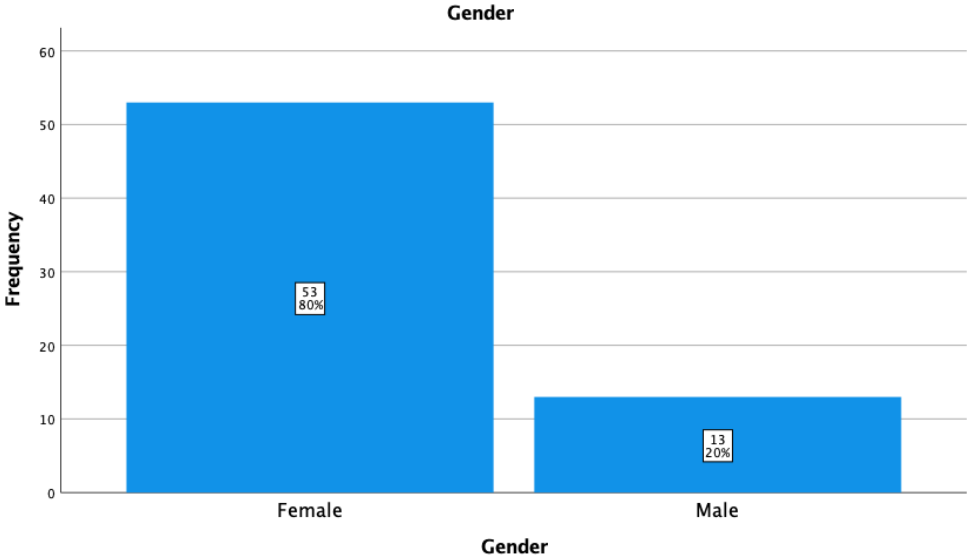


Figure 5: Whether race or ethnicity was a barrier to success

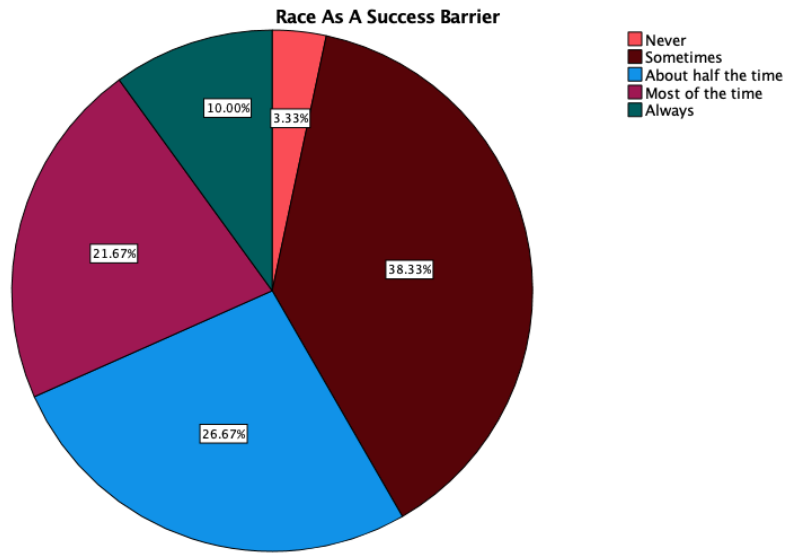


Figure 6: The level of diversity statement awareness

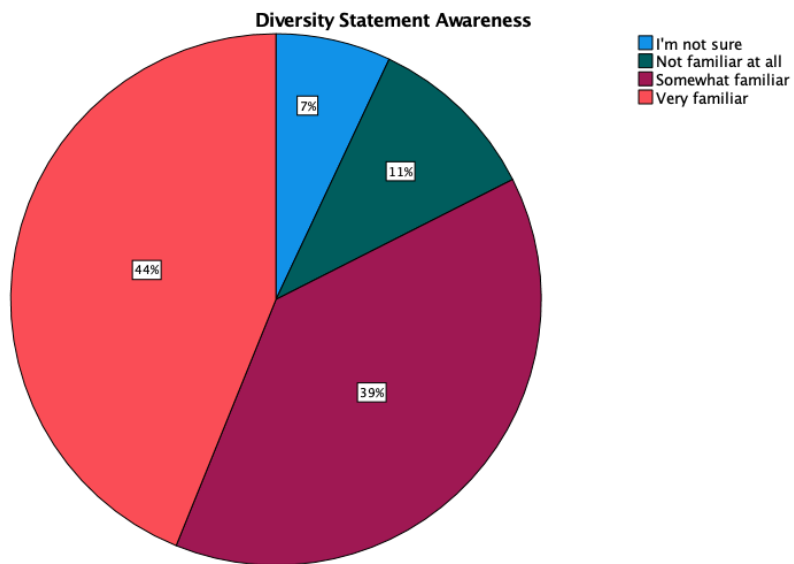


Figure 7: Likelihood of applying for a job with no diversity statement

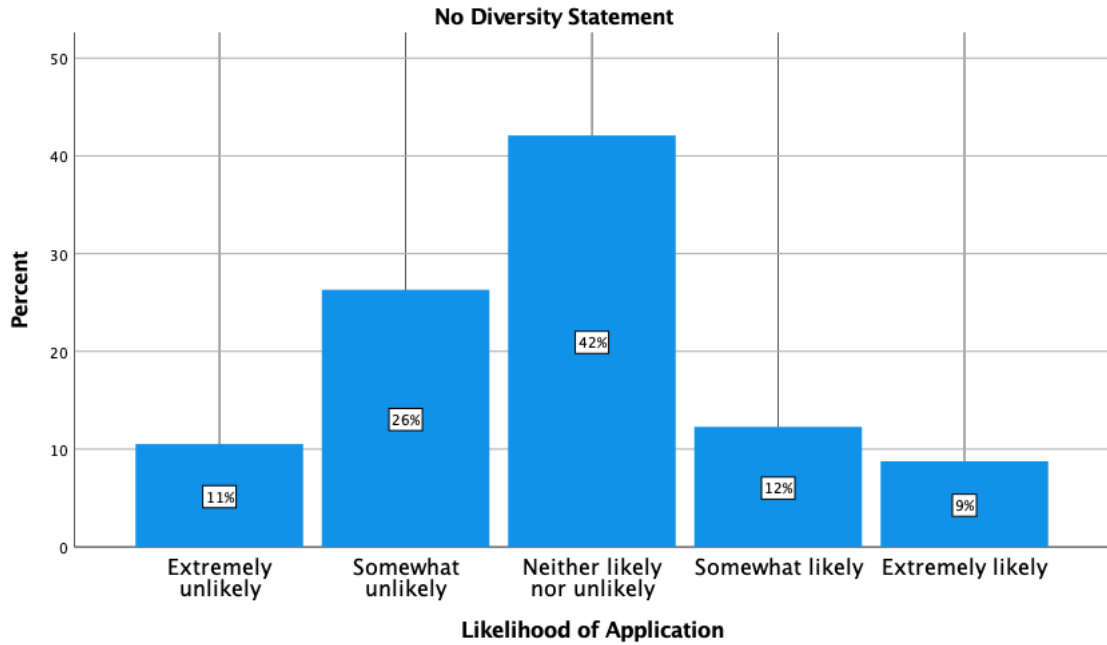


Figure 8: Alignment of diversity statement to diversity efforts

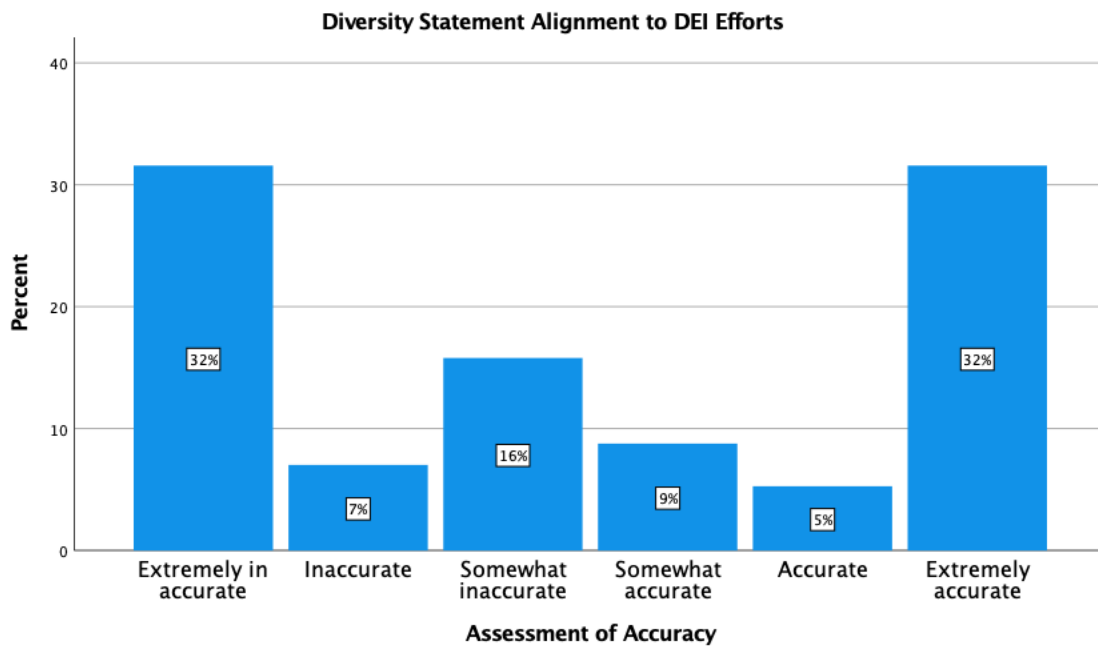


Figure 9: Level of agreement to company talking vs. walking DEI value

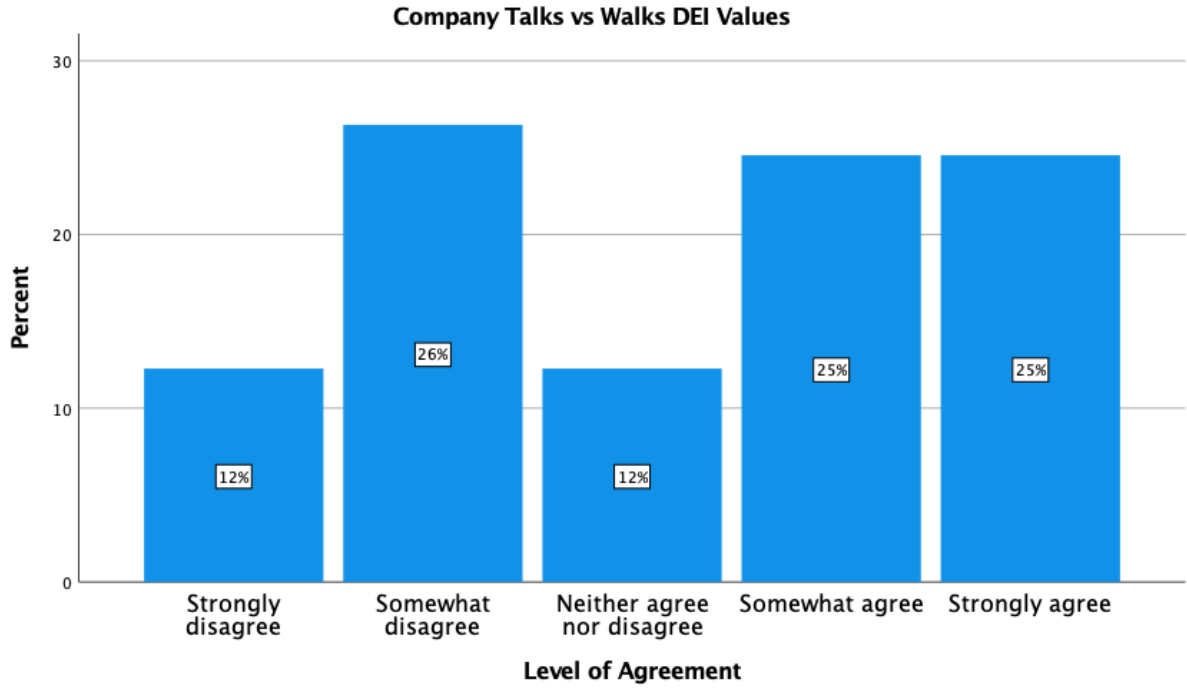


Figure 10: Expectations of DEI related actions reflecting DEI related statements

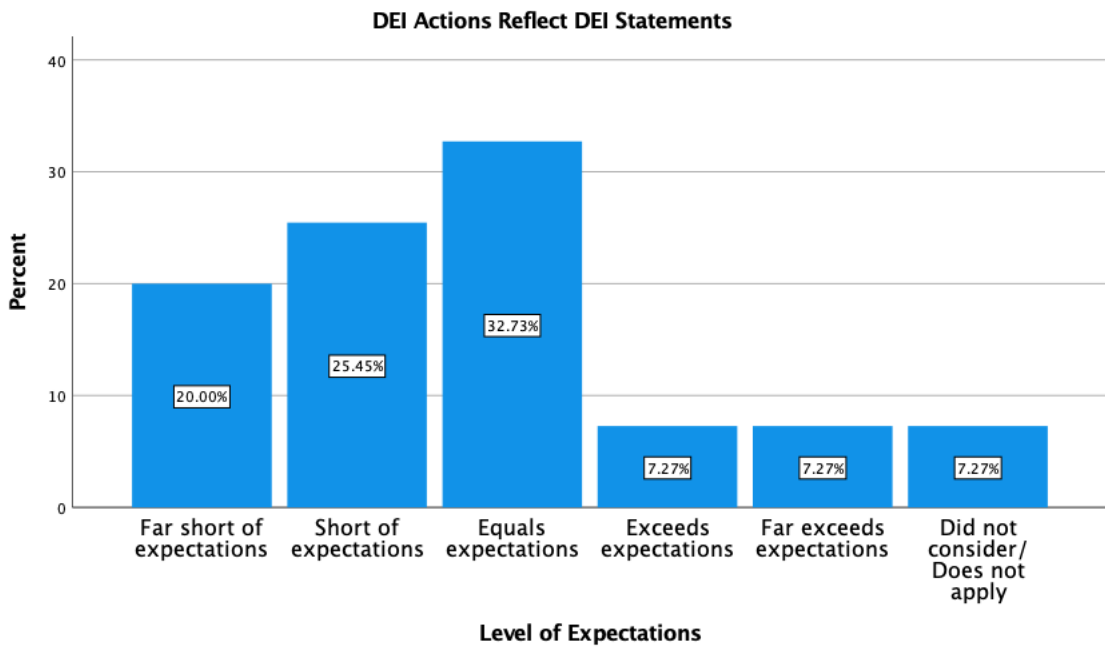


Figure 11: Department reflects company's internal and external DEI values

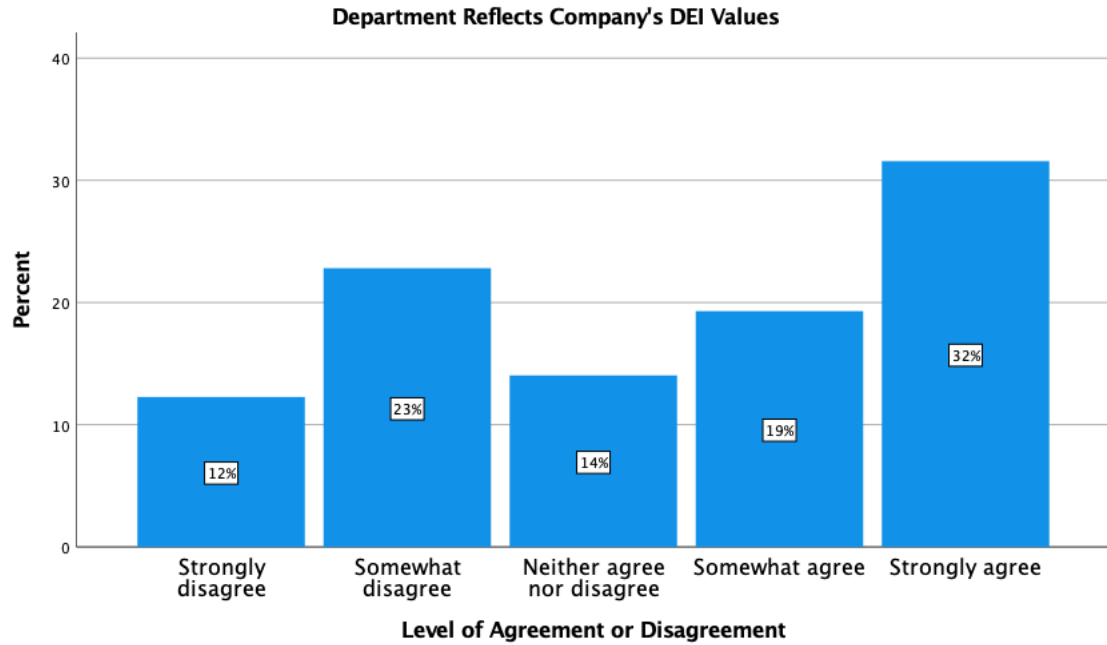


Figure 12: Executive leadership reflects company's internal and external DEI values

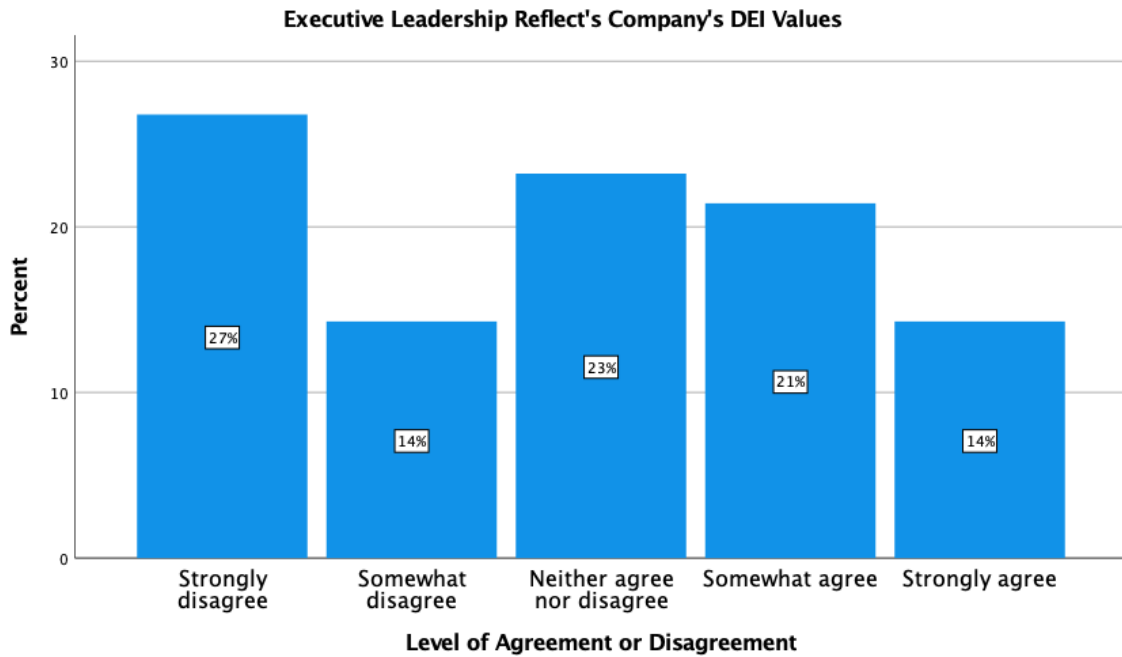


Figure 13: Years employed at current or most recent organization

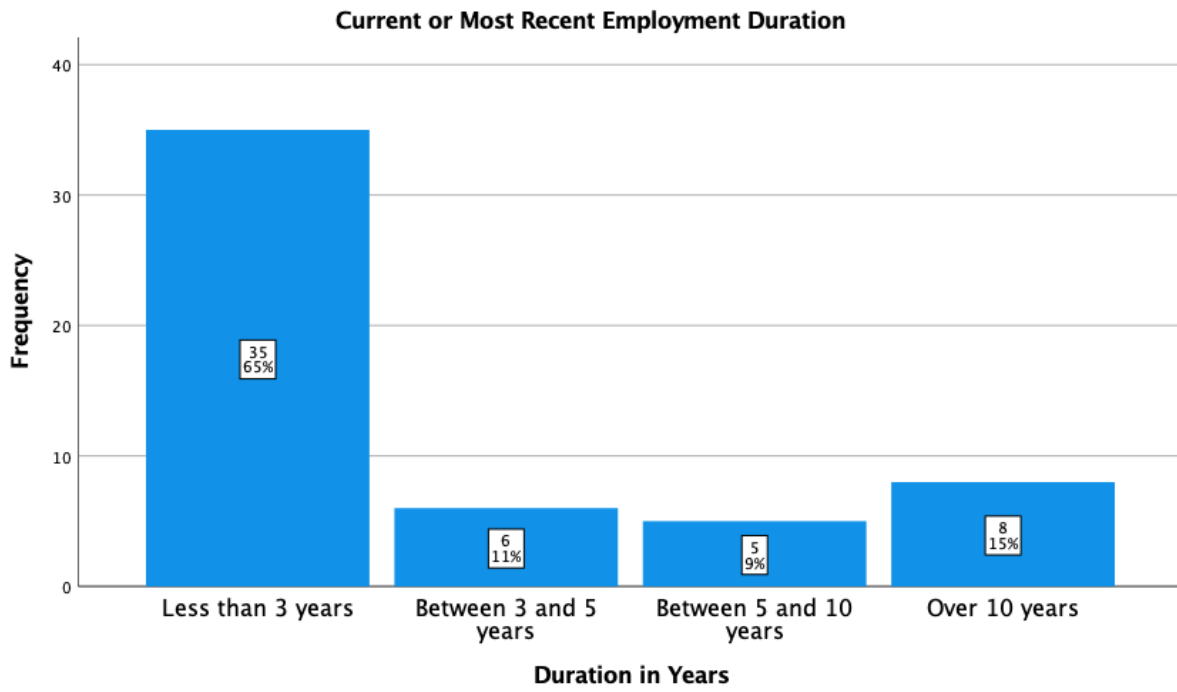


Table 1: Positive Black experience

Appreciation Fortunate Hopeful (2) Positive Limited Problems Diligence Balance
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Table 2: Negative Black experience

Balance Bleak Challenging Challenging Complicated Conflicted Disappointed (2) Disappointment Disenfranchised Double-consciousness Expected For show Insecure Jaded Laborious Limited	Mediocre Minority Misunderstood Not a good fit Performative Quotas Satisfied Stressful Struggle (2) Suboptimal Token Uncomfortable Underestimated (2) Undervalued Unequal
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## 14.0 SECTION 16: APPENDIX B

Demographic Questions		
Variable Name		Response
Race	Do you identify as Black or African American?	No Yes
Age	What is your age?	25-34 years old 35-44 years old 45-54 years old Over 55 years old
Gender	What is your gender?	Female Male
Highest Education Level	What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed? If currently enrolled, the highest degree received. (Please select one)	Some college credit, no degree Associate degree Bachelor's degree Master's degree Doctorate/Ph.D.
Employment Status	What is your current employment status?	Employed full-time Employed part-time Unemployed Other
Current Employment Duration	How long have you worked for your current employer?	Over 10 years Over 5 years, but less than 10 years More than 4, but less than 5 years More than 3, but less than 4 years More than 2, but less than 3 years More than 1, but less than 2 years Less than 1 year
Last Employment Duration	How long have you worked for your last employer?	Over 10 years Over 5 years, but less than 10 years More than 4, but less than 5 years More than 3, but less than 4 years More than 2, but less than 3 years More than 1, but less than 2 years Less than 1 year

Lived Experience		
Variable Name		Response
Race Success Barrier	Have you ever felt that your race or ethnicity was a barrier to your success in Corporate America?	About half the time Always Most of the time Sometimes Never
Positive or Negative Black Experience	What word do you think accurately sums up your experience as a Black applicant and employee in Corporate America? And please explain why?	Open-ended

Diversity Statement		
Variable Name		Response
Diversity Statement	How familiar are you with your current employer's diversity statement?	I'm not sure Not familiar at all Somewhat familiar Very familiar
Last Diversity Statement	How familiar are you with your last employer's diversity statement?	I'm not sure Not familiar at all Somewhat familiar Very familiar
No Diversity Statement	How likely are you to apply for a job with a potential employer if a diversity statement was not included in their job description or advertisement?	Extremely unlikely Somewhat unlikely Neither likely no unlikely Somewhat likely Extremely likely
Diversity Statement Accurate 1	How well do you feel that your current employer's diversity statement accurately reflects the level of DEI effort within the organization?	Extremely inaccurate Inaccurate Somewhat inaccurate Very accurate Somewhat accurate Accurate Extremely accurate
Diversity Statement Accurate 2	How well do you feel that your last employer's diversity statement accurately reflects the level of DEI effort within the organization?	Extremely inaccurate Inaccurate Somewhat inaccurate Very accurate Somewhat accurate Accurate Extremely accurate

DEI Maturity		
Variable Name		Response
DEI Actions Reflect DEI Statement 1	How well does your employer's DEI related actions reflect their DEI related statements.	Far short of expectations Short of expectations Equals expectations Exceeds expectations Far exceeds expectations Did not consider/Does not apply
DEI Actions Reflect DEI Statement 2	How well does last employer's DEI related actions reflect their DEI related statements.?	Far short of expectations Short of expectations Equals expectations Exceeds expectations Far exceeds expectations Did not consider/Does not apply
Department Reflect DEI 1	My department reflects the company's internal and external stated DEI values.	Strongly agree Somewhat agree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat disagree Somewhat agree
Department Reflect DEI 2	My department reflected the company's internal and external stated DEI values.	Strongly agree Somewhat agree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat disagree Somewhat agree
Executive Leadership Reflects 1	The executive leadership team reflects my company's stated DEI values.	Strongly agree Somewhat agree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat disagree Somewhat agree
Executive Leadership Reflects 2	The executive leadership team reflected the company's stated DEI values.	Strongly agree Somewhat agree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat disagree Somewhat agree

<p>Company Talks Promotes 1</p>	<p>My company talks about and promotes DEI values but does not actively work towards incorporating them.</p>	<p>Strongly agree Somewhat agree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat disagree Somewhat agree</p>
<p>Company Talks Promotes 2</p>	<p>My former employer talked about and promoted DEI values but did not actively work towards incorporating them.</p>	<p>Strongly agree Somewhat agree Neither agree nor disagree Somewhat disagree Somewhat agree</p>

Coded responses to survey question: What word do you think accurately sums up your experience as a Black applicant and employee in Corporate America? And please explain why?

<b>Positive Black Experience</b>	<b>Negative Black</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Appreciation</li> <li>2. Fortunate</li> <li>3. Hopeful (2)</li> <li>4. Positive</li> <li>5. Limited Problems</li> <li>6. Diligence</li> <li>7. Balance</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Balance</li> <li>2. Bleak</li> <li>3. Challenging</li> <li>4. Challenging</li> <li>5. Complicated</li> <li>6. Conflicted</li> <li>7. Disappointed (2)</li> <li>8. Disappointment</li> <li>9. Disenfranchised</li> <li>10. Double-consciousness</li> <li>11. Expected</li> <li>12. For show</li> <li>13. Insecure</li> <li>14. Jaded</li> <li>15. Laborious</li> <li>16. Limited</li> <li>17. Mediocre</li> <li>18. Minority</li> <li>19. Misunderstood</li> <li>20. Not a good fit</li> <li>21. Performative</li> <li>22. Quotas</li> <li>23. Satisfied</li> <li>24. Stressful</li> <li>25. Struggle (2)</li> <li>26. Suboptimal</li> <li>27. Token</li> <li>28. Uncomfortable</li> <li>29. Underestimated (2)</li> <li>30. Undervalued</li> <li>31. Unequal</li> </ol>

## SECTION 17: APPENDIX C

### Consent

Consent for participation in this study was obtained through an informed consent process that prioritized transparency and respect for participants' autonomy. It leveraged the Tufts SBER IRB Consent Template as a guide. At the beginning of the study a clear and concise explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits were provided, as well as the contact information of the PI and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) overseeing the research. To confirm their voluntary agreement to participate, participants were asked to check a “yes” or “no” box to indicate whether they consented. If “no” was checked, the participants were transitioned out of the survey. Participants were reminded that no identifiable information was to be collected and that their participation was entirely voluntary, and they could choose to withdraw at any point without any penalty or loss of benefits. This consent process ensured that participants were well-informed prior to their informed consent being requested.

**Title of the Study:** An exploration of diversity statements on Black applicants and employees in Corporate America in the US labor market.

**Principal Investigator:** Channa Bannis, Tufts University

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Maritsa Barros, DEIJ Leadership Program Professor, Tufts University

**Field Advisor:** Cheryl Jamison, J.D., DEIJ Leadership Program Professor, Tufts University

**Tufts University Email:** channa.bannis@tufts.edu

You are being asked to volunteer in a research study. Please find information below about this study for you to carefully consider when deciding whether to participate. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand. There will be no penalty or loss of benefit if you choose not to participate or stop at any time.

The purpose of this research study is to explore the effects and perspectives of diversity branding on Black applicants and employees in Corporate America in the US. The study asks a series of questions relating to your professional experiences as a Black applicant and employee in Corporate America, as well as demographic questions about you. The objective of the survey questions is to explore perceptions of pro-diversity statements and DEI maturity from an applicant's and employee's lens.

If you agree to participate in this research, you will be asked to complete 25-30 survey questions, which could take approximately 20 minutes. Your responses to the survey questions should be reflective of your experiences as an applicant and as an employee in the US. You should respond to all of these questions with your current employer or most recent employer in mind.

Your participation and responses will be strictly confidential and no individually identifiable information will be connected to your survey responses. All data will be stored in a password-protected electronic format. The results of the survey may be published. You must be at least 18 years of age with at least 2 years of professional work experience within Corporate America. Corporate America refers to the business community of small to large organizations across a wide-range of industries. This survey is voluntary and participants should identify as Black in terms of race. You can choose to skip any questions and/or stop participating at any time. There is no penalty for withdrawing your participation.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating. Your view and experiences as a Black applicant and employee may provide invaluable data about diversity branding and its effects on the Black professional community. Risks may include emotional distress as questions about race can be emotionally challenging. Re-traumatization is another risk as participants who have experienced work-related trauma may be re-traumatized by the research questions. You can choose to skip any questions and/or stop participating at any time.

This survey is made possible by the DEI-J Department of Tufts University. If you have any questions, please contact channa.bannis@tufts.edu. Your candid participation would be appreciated throughout the survey process. As compensation for participation, you have the option to enter a raffle to receive career coaching sessions. At the end of the survey, a link will be provided to a separate form where more details will be provided, and you can opt-in to the raffle, if you so choose.

An Institutional Review Board ("IRB") is overseeing this research. An IRB is a group of people who perform independent review of research studies to ensure that rights and welfare of participants are protected. If you have questions about your rights or wish to speak with someone other than the research team, you may contact:

Tufts Social, Behavioral, and Educational Research IRB  
75 Kneeland Street, Suite 623  
Boston, MA 02111  
617-627-8804  
SBER@tufts.edu

**Statement of Content:** I have read and considered the information presented in this form. I confirm that I understand the purpose of the research and the study procedures. I understand that I may ask questions at any time and can withdraw my participation without prejudice. I have read this consent form.

Please select your participation choice:

- Yes, I would like to participate.
- No, I would not like to participate.

## **Compensation**

### ***Rationale for compensation structure and value:***

This study asks participants who racially identify as Black or African American to answer questions related to their experiences in Corporate America. Questions about race can be emotionally challenging, particularly for minoritized groups. There's also a long history of mistreatment of Black/African American participants in studies. "Mistrust of academic and research institutions and investigators is the most significant attitudinal barrier to research participation reported by African Americans." (Scharff et al., 2010) This distrust is well-founded. The Tuskegee syphilis study was conducted 1932 – 1972, however modern research practices are still questionable. A 2018 article evaluated research findings which concluded that "African-Americans are disproportionately enrolled in studies that don't require informed consent." Although not illegal, these findings do present more ethical questions than answers. (Swetlitz, 2018)

The coaching industry, at least in North America, is primarily white and female. In addition, the cost for coaching services is often out of reach to the majority of the population. This research study seeks to provide a unique opportunity for a small subsection of the BIPOC professionals, Blacks/African Americans, to access coaching services free of charge. We hope that by providing culturally-responsive coaching to participants in this study, we will empower them to lead in a way that honors their brilliance, background, and experiences while empowering those around them to create positive, lasting change.

The unique compensation offered and monetary value outlined below, is a conscious effort to highlight, reflect, and respect the important value of their participation in this study.

Rather than a basic token of appreciation, this study's compensation aimed to positively impact participant's lives in a way that counters the history of how Blacks/African American study participants are too often mistreated and undervalued. And because there is not enough research around the perception and experiences of Black/African American applicants and employees in Corporate America, specifically about the impact of diversity branding, their participation was beyond critical.

### ***Undue Influence of Compensation Type & Value***

The compensation type and value did not unduly influence potential participants to participate in this study because compensation type and value were not leveraged in any materials as a primary incentive. The recruitment plan was strategically designed in a manner that upheld the study's value without disproportionately influencing the decision-making process of potential participants. As such, all social media advertisements excluded any mention of compensation. The consent text provided general information about the compensation being offered without going into detail. Information that detailed the value of the compensation was only available after participants had already completed the survey—accessible only at the end of the survey via a link to a separate form where participants could choose to opt-in.

### ***Compensation structure:***

In total up to 30 participants could be compensated for their participation in this study. However, the following compensation was awarded to 10 participants: Each of the 10 participants received a professional coaching package session from Eric Polite & Associates. Each package included three sessions (three-biweekly 45-minute sessions) and a self-

assessment. Each package was estimated at a value of \$500. (4.25 coaching hours + assessments + administrative time) The total market value for all 10 coaching packages was \$5,000. (\$500\*10). Note: All 10 packages were donated in full by Eric Polite II, CDE, the founder and Chief Transformation Officer at Eric Polite & Associates. Eric Polite II, CDE was also an external/informal field advisor on this study.

Compensation participants had the option to enter a raffle to receive career coaching sessions. At the end of the survey, a link was provided to a separate form with detailed information on how they could opt-in to the raffle, if they so choose. The separate form asked participants for their first name, last name and personal email address if they wanted to be included in the random drawings. There was no connection of their information to the survey data which did not collect any identifiable information.

All participants were entered into the raffle for the 30 consulting packages. The odds of winning a raffle depended on the number of individuals participating, which was anticipated to be approximately 50, N. There were 30 raffle prizes, if N = 50. With greater and greater values of N, the odds of an individual winning a raffle decreased, as shown below:

Odds of winning one of the first 30 raffle prizes:  $30/N$

The anticipated odds of winning in the raffle is .6 in 50. And as the number of participants increased the odds of winning the raffle would decrease. Because N=10 all participants were awarded a package. In the event that N exceeded the number of consulting packages, the

selection of winners would have been conducted using a Python script where each participant would have been assigned a unique ID number. Then a list of these unique IDs

would have been randomly shuffled, and the first 30 members of the list would have been awarded the 30 prizes.

Within 2-weeks of the closing of the study, the ten selected awardees were emailed by the primary investigator with the contact information for Eric Polite & Associates to redeem their coaching package. Eric Polite & Associates will be cc'd on each email communication sent to awardees. Awardees were given 14-days to confirm acceptance directly with Eric Polite & Associates. Regardless of whether a participant withdraws or completes the study, their email address was included in the drawing if they opted in by providing their contact information.

## Compensation Entry for Study

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Start of Block: Study Compensation

OVERVIEW Principal Investigator: Channa Bannis, Tufts University  
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Maritsa Barros, DEI Leadership Program Professor, Tufts University  
Field Advisor: Cheryl Jamison, J.D., DEI Leadership Program Professor, Tufts University  
Tufts University Email: [channa.bannis@tufts.edu](mailto:channa.bannis@tufts.edu)

In total, 30 participants will be compensated for their participation in this study. Thirty participants will receive a professional coaching package estimated at a value of \$500. It will include three-biweekly 45-minute sessions and a self-assessment. The professional coaching sessions will be conducted by a skilled facilitator, consultant, and coach with over 20 years of experience. We anticipate approximately 50 participants, so the odds of winning the raffle are anticipated to be approximately .6 in 50.

All participants will be entered into the raffle for the 30 coaching packages. Within 2-weeks of the study closing, selected awardees will be emailed by the principal investigator with the contact information of the coaching agency to redeem their coaching package. Awardees will have 14-days to confirm acceptance by contacting the coaching agency directly.

---

Q17 Please complete the following fields to be entered into the random drawings for the professional coaching packages.

- First Name (5) \_\_\_\_\_
- Last Name (12) \_\_\_\_\_
- Personal Email Address (8) \_\_\_\_\_

---

Page Break

End of Block: Study Compensation

Email to the 10 Awardees of the Professional Coaching Sessions

Subject line: Your Compensation for Study Participation

Cc: [eric@ericpolite.com](mailto:eric@ericpolite.com)

Dear [First Name],

You recently participated in the study, *An exploration of pro-diversity statements on Black applicants and employees in Corporate America in the US labor market*. At the end of the study, you opted to be included in the random drawing for professional coaching.

**Congratulations! I am thrilled to inform you that you were randomly selected to receive one of the 30 packages which includes three biweekly 45-minute professional coaching sessions and a self-assessment, valued at \$500.**

Your partner in unlocking your unrealized potential and catalyzing change in your work and life is [Eric Polite II](#). Eric is a trusted advisor to aspiring, emerging, and experienced leaders, most notably those leading through change and complexity to build high-performing, human-centered, inclusive cultures. His expertise is in helping leaders at all levels, especially *firsts* and *onlys* – the first from their family or community or the only one like them in the room – to do the inner work and gain the clarity, confidence, and courage to move through their workplace and world with more authenticity, power, and purpose.

Please email Eric directly at [eric@ericpolite.com](mailto:eric@ericpolite.com) to confirm acceptance of your coaching sessions, or simply 'reply-all' to this email. **You have 14-days from the date of this email to accept.**

Your coaching journey starts by completing a best-in-class emotional intelligence assessment. The Six Seconds Emotional Intelligence Assessment (SEI) will provide a clear picture of your emotional intelligence and how to develop these competencies to improve interpersonal and professional effectiveness. Each of the three sessions will build on your assessment results. Here's an overview of what you should expect:

- Session 1 (Debrief) - You'll start with a 45-minute session to explore your current work context, discuss your leadership style, and review your self-assessment results.
- Session 2 (Co-creation) - After reflecting on your results and clarifying your meaningful mission, you'll meet to co-create a focused development plan.
- Session 3 (Calibration) - After two or three weeks, you will have a 45-minute calibration session to discuss what has been working well, where adjustments need to be made and to celebrate progress towards greater impact.

Prior to starting your complimentary professional coaching sessions, you will be asked to sign a non-monetary coaching agreement. At the end of your complimentary sessions, you are under no ethical, moral or monetary obligation to continue the sessions, nor will you be solicited by any representative on behalf of Eric Polite & Associates to continue your professional coaching sessions. You may of your own free will inquiry about continuing the sessions at your own expense if that is your preference, but you have no obligation to continue once your complimentary coaching sessions have concluded.

Please note that you will be required to adhere to Eric Polite & Associates' cancelation policy or forfeit any coaching session that violates their cancellation policy of at least 24-hours cancellation notice.

Again, congratulations and thank you very much for your participation in the study.

Channa Bannis  
DEIJ Leadership Masters Candidate  
Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, Tufts University

## Recruitment Material

### *For Participants via Facebook and LinkedIn Posting*

t's Thesis Time: I'm on the final leg of my journey to attain a master's degree in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Leadership at [Tufts University](https://www.tufts.edu). I'm looking for at least 50 Black professionals to complete my 20-minute online survey. Your support would be appreciated by taking the study and/or sharing this post for greater reach! Survey link: <http://bit.ly/3uH1kjr>

[#diversitybranding](#) [#diversitystatements](#) [#blackincorporateamerica](#)

**20**  
min

**Channa's**  
**THESIS STUDY:**  
An exploration of diversity statements on Black applicants and employees in Corporate America

**Like**  
**Share**

**WE WANT YOU**

Black professionals over 18 years of age with 2 or more years of US-based work experience in Corporate America.  
Contact: [Channa.bannis@tufts.edu](mailto:Channa.bannis@tufts.edu) for more info.

EXEMPT DETERMINATION

November 17, 2023

Channa Bannis  
Tufts University  
Channa.Bannis@tufts.edu

Dear Channa Bannis:

On 11/17/2023 the IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	An exploration of diversity statements on Black applicants and employees in Corporate America in the US labor market.
Investigator:	Channa Bannis
IRB ID:	STUDY00004323
Funding:	TU Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice Leadership Program
Documents Reviewed:	Bannis 4323 Comp Qualtrics Response 11-16-23 v3.docx, Category: Other;• Bannis 4323 Consent-Survey Response 11-16-23 v3.pdf, Category: Consent Form;• Bannis 4323 Protocol Response 11-16-23 v3.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;• Bannis 4323 Recruitment Comments 11-03-23 v2.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;• Channa Bannis Budget, Category: Sponsor Attachment

The IRB determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under category 2(i).

The Exempt Status of the protocol does not relieve the investigator of any responsibilities related to the research participants. In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. Before making changes to the study procedures or documents, please submit a Modification to ensure that the regulatory status of the study has not changed. Changes in study personnel must also be submitted to the IRB through a modification.

Annual continuing review and approval by this organization is not required.

Sincerely,

*Christine Pelletier*  
IRB Analyst II

#### 4. SECTION 18: REFERENCES

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