Empirical Research Paper

Context Norms Shape Perceived Motives of Organizational Diversity Statements

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Abstract

Diversity statements have become common practice for organizations; might this norm backfire for norm-adhering organizations? The present research examines if awareness of diversity statement norms across organizations leads to perceptions of an organization's diversity statement as mere norm adherence. Across four experiments recruiting Black and LGBTQ+ U.S. participants (N = 1,326), we find that when diversity statements are the norm across organizations, an organization's diversity statement is viewed as more externally motivated and marginalized group members report lower anticipated belonging and perceive the organization as less committed to diversity than when organizational diversity statements are not the norm. We further examine perceptions of organizations that violate a diversity statement norm and how the strength of the norm impacts perceptions. By incorporating research on attributions and egalitarian norm perceptions, the present research affords novel insights into perceptions of organizational diversity commitments with implications for marginalized group members' anticipated belonging.

Keywords

diversity, norms, organization, belonging, attribution theory

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Organizational diversity statements, public facing statements made by organizations indicating their support for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), can have a positive impact on marginalized group members' anticipated belonging and treatment at an organization (e.g., Derricks et al., 2023; Kruk & Matsick, 2021). Such feelings of (anticipated) belonging at an organization have been identified as impactful for promoting engagement, performance, and satisfaction among prospective employees (e.g., Cho & Mor Barak, 2008; Downey et al., 2015). While research has examined how a single organization is perceived when it has or does not have a diversity statement (e.g., Burrows et al., 2022; Chaney et al., 2016), this isolated approach does not consider the broader societal norms organizations exist within. For example, organizations increasingly state commitments to DEI (>87%, Jones & Donnelley, 2017). How does awareness of DEI commitments as the norm across organizations impact evaluations of an organization's stated diversity commitment?

We propose that when organizational diversity statements are presented as the norm across organizations, such diversity statements will be perceived as *mere norm adherence*. That is, we contend that marginalized group members may perceive an organization's diversity statement as more externally motivated (e.g., motivated by norm adherence pressure) when organizational diversity statements are the norm versus not the norm across organizations. In turn, we propose that when an organization's diversity statement is perceived as more externally motivated, marginalized group members will report diminished anticipated belonging and treatment relative to when diversity statements are perceived as less externally motivated.

Perceptions of Organizational Diversity Commitments

Research on organizational diversity statements has largely focused on the effects of statement language on perceived ideologies of an organization (e.g., colorblind vs multicultural statements; e.g., Kirby & Kaiser, 2021; Rattan & Ambady, 2013; endorsing equality and counter-dominance; Chaney et al., 2016), with implications for the anticipated

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belonging and treatment of marginalized group members. Other research has sought to examine the effects of diversity rationales communicated in a diversity statement, that is, the reasons why an organization may seek to promote diversity (Georgeac & Rattan, 2023; Starck et al., 2021). For example, a university may claim that they support DEI because of a moral imperative to offer opportunities to marginalized group members or because of an instrumental reason, such as increasing knowledge via the sharing of experiences from marginalized group members; marginalized group members report more positive anticipated outcomes from moral diversity rationales (Georgeac & Rattan, 2023; Starck et al., 2021). Finally, other research has focused on what *kind* of diversity is highlighted in a diversity statement. When diversity statements focus on diversity of ideologies, personality, and skills, marginalized group members experience less anticipated belonging and more negative treatment compared to when the statements focus on cultural and demographic diversity (Kirby et al., 2025). Critically, these lines of research demonstrate how the *language* of diversity statements communicates ideologies and rationales, with implications for marginalized group members' sense of belonging and anticipated treatment.

However, research has begun to consider how the broader context surrounding an organization's diversity statement impacts perceptions of the organization's commitment to DEI. For example, research has demonstrated that organizations that are more consistent across time in their support for Black employees are perceived as more authentic in their stated allyship (Ponce de Leon et al., 2024). Further, when an organization claims support for diversity but is homogeneously White (Wilton et al., 2020) or presents employee demographics as more diverse in promotional photos than the organization actually is (Kroeper et al., 2022), people perceive the organization's claimed commitment to diversity as dishonest (see also Ragland & Sommers, 2024). Importantly, only when organizational statements were perceived as "sincere" or "honest" did marginalized group members anticipate greater belonging and more positive treatment at an organization. While considering more than just the language of diversity statements, this research continues to examine only one organization at a time, rather than expanding to account for social norms across organizations.

Egalitarian Social Norms Impact Perceived Motivations of Egalitarian Behaviors

While research has begun to consider the role of the broader context surrounding an organization's diversity statement, including consistency across time (Ponce de Leon et al., 2024) and behaviors (Kroeper et al., 2022; Wilton et al., 2020), the role of egalitarian social norms has not been considered. Egalitarian social norms are powerful shapers of behavior (e.g., Meleady, 2021; Murrar et al., 2020; Stangor et al., 2001) and operate in part via norm enforcement (e.g., Bašić et al., 2020; Crandall et al., 2002). For example, when information is presented that inclusive behavior and ideologies are the norm on a college campus (i.e., 93% of students agreed with a university's message of inclusion), people reported less prejudiced attitudes and more motivation to confront discrimination (Murrar et al., 2020).

Perceivers are aware that behaviors are impacted by social norms. Attributions about the causes of behaviors typically include perceived internal (i.e., personal values) and perceived external motives (i.e., norm adherence, performance; e.g., Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967, 1973). While attribution theories vary in what factors contribute to perceptions of motivations, the percentage of other people who engage in a behavior, that is, the social norm (consensus information; Kelley, 1967, 1973), is a key factor people consider when making attributions. When a behavior is perceived to be in line with the social norm, attribution theories argue that the behavior is more likely to be attributed to external motivations (e.g., perceived as mere norm adherence) and less likely to be attributed to internal motives, compared to when a behavior is counter to social norms or no social norm about the behavior exists.

At an individual actor level, people may attribute a person's *egalitarian* behavior to internal or external motivations, including perceptions of the egalitarian behavior as motivated by norm adherence (e.g., Benbow et al., 2023; LaCosse et al., 2015; Major et al., 2013, 2016; Mendes & Koslov, 2013). These attributions shape outcomes. When marginalized group members attribute White Americans' seemingly egalitarian behavior to stronger external motivations, such as a motivation driven by norm adherence, they report more negative outcomes (e.g., lower self-esteem; Major et al., 2016). Yet, research on perceived motives of egalitarian behavior has overwhelmingly examined differences of outcomes among perceivers who are more or less suspicious of motives (e.g., a perceiver's individual variance in tendency to attribute White Americans' behaviors to external, not internal, motives), but has not considered how the broader context, such as the presence of a social norm, may shape attributions of motives. That is, while people who are more suspicious of motives report that they generally believe egalitarian behavior is motivated more strongly by external motivations, including an actor's awareness of egalitarian social norms (e.g., LaCosse et al., 2015; Major et al., 2013, 2016), this research has not manipulated the presence (or absence) of an egalitarian social norm and assessed perceived motivations in order to demonstrate causal effects.

Organizational Egalitarian Norms Impact Perceived Motivations

While attribution theories and assessments of motives may most clearly align with perceptions of individuals, we propose such processes will similarly unfold when assessing organizations. First, people perceive organizations to endorse

ideologies (e.g., Chaney et al., 2016) and thus are likely to similarly perceive motivations. Second, past research has integrated other attribution theory components, such as the consistency of a behavior (e.g., years on a list for top companies committed to diversity), to examine attributions of organizations' "authentic" allyship to marginalized communities (e.g., Ponce de Leon et al., 2024). Third, while not directly assessing motives, past research has measured if an organization was perceived as "genuine" (Ponce de Leon et al., 2024) or if an "organization is not sincere about its pro-diversity messages" (Wilton et al., 2020, p. 1175), suggesting that perceiver's do consider why an organization may be stating a commitment to DEI.

We contend that assessments of perceived honesty and authenticity of an organization's commitment to DEI are indirectly assessing perceived motives. Thus, one aim of the present paper is to ground research on perceptions of organizational diversity statements in the literature on attribution theories by directly assessing perceptions of an organization's internal and external motivations for writing and sharing a diversity statement. In centering our research in attribution theories (e.g., Kelley, 1973), the present paper offers a unifying lens through which to examine research that has, to date, used a variety of terms, including "diversity honesty" (e.g., Ragland & Sommers, 2024; Wilton et al., 2020), "sincerity" (e.g., Burns & Granz, 2023;Moser & Wiley, 2024; Ponce de Leon et al., 2024), "genuine" (Chaney et al., 2024; Thai & Nylund, 2024), and "authentic" (e.g., Pietri et al., 2024) to refer to perceptions of an organization's or person's commitment to DEI as motivated by a desire to promote equality. While we contend that past research has indirectly examined perceived motivations, the present research aims to directly assess motivations, offering construct clarity to the literature (Bringmann et al., 2022), and acknowledging that perceptions of internal and external motivations are not inherently negatively correlated, but can, for example, both be perceived as high or low.

Thus, building on past research on perceived motives of White Americans' egalitarian behavior (e.g., Major et al., 2013, 2016), now at the organizational level, we contend that knowledge of diversity statement norms across organizations will impact perceptions of an organization's motivations for having a diversity statement, with implications for anticipated belonging of marginalized social groups. That is, just as past research has demonstrated that when an organization's commitment to diversity was perceived as more dishonest, people of color anticipated worse outcomes at work (Wilton et al., 2020), we contend perceptions of organizational diversity statements as merely adhering to norms (i.e., externally motivated) will lead to lower anticipated belonging and related negative outcomes, including perceptions that the organizations behaviors will not demonstrate a commitment to DEI. To our knowledge, this is the first research to examine the role of social norms of organizations' behaviors on perceptions of organizational diversity statements.

Current Research

In the present research, we proposed that perceived motives of organizational diversity statements are, in part, a product of perceived norms across organizations. By considering the perceived norms of organizational diversity statements, the present research examined when organizational diversity statements are perceived as internally and externally motivated. In four experimental studies (N = 1,326), we examined how organizational diversity statement norms impact the perceived motives of a single organization's diversity statement. We proposed that when diversity statements are seen as the norm across organizations, marginalized group members will perceive an organization's diversity statement as mere norm adherence (more externally motivated, and less internally motivated) relative to when diversity statements are not the norm across organizations.

We assessed outcomes related to marginalized group members' anticipated experiences at the organization, including anticipated belonging (Studies 3 and 4). While past research has suggested that marginalized group members report greater anticipated belonging at an organization with a diversity statement because of the conveyed ideology (e.g., Chaney et al., 2016; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008), the present research examined how perceived motivations of the diversity statement impact anticipated belonging. Further, we assessed two expected behavioral displays of the organization's commitment to DEI: manager racial diversity (Studies 1–4) and discipline of biased behavior (Studies 1 and 2). We hypothesize that organizations would be perceived as having fewer marginalized managers and as less likely to discipline biased behavior when organizational diversity statements are the norm (compared to not the norm), in part due to greater perceived external (and less internal) motivations to be egalitarian.

To further demonstrate the power of organizational diversity statement norms, we proposed that when diversity statements were the norm across organizations, concerns about DEI-related behaviors at the organization (e.g., managerial diversity) and one's expected experience at the organization (i.e., anticipated belonging) would be heightened if an organization violates this norm (Studies 3). That is, we proposed that social norms also impact attributions of an organization *without a diversity statement*, such that an organization with no diversity statement, despite the norm to have a statement, would be perceived as not committed to DEI due to the norm violation. Finally, we examine if the strength of the norm (i.e., if a large or small majority of organizations have diversity statements) differentially impacts perceptions of an organization's motivations for having a diversity statement and downstream outcomes (Study 4).

To demonstrate generalizability, Studies 1 and 3 examined Black Americans' outcomes, while Studies 2 and 4 examined LGBTQ+ Americans' outcomes to demonstrate that these effects can occur across marginalized social group

identities. As past research on perceived motives of egalitarian behaviors has focused only on racial attitudes and egalitarian claims (e.g., LaCosse et al., 2015; Major et al., 2016), integration of LGBTQ+ egalitarian claims is novel.

The data and materials for all studies reported here are available: https://osf.io/dvjt7/?view_only=f54ebd67d09d4d7dbffdfbd493c172db. Studies 1, 2, and 4 were pre-registered. Preregistrations are provided in the study descriptions.[1] We report all manipulations, measures, and exclusions for all studies.

Study 1

In Study 1, we recruited Black Americans who all reviewed three organizations and then provided their perceptions of the third, target organization that always had a diversity statement. Based on random assignment, the first two organizations either had diversity statements (norm condition) or did not have diversity statements (no norm condition). By exposing participants to a series of organizations and varying the presence of diversity statements, we aimed to manipulate norms in real time, in a fashion that might match how people learn such norms when, for example, viewing several organizations' websites during job applications. Study 1 was preregistered: https://osf.io/8c7wx/?view_only=90c9653f5fdb49c8ae2d7e818fabce10.

Method

Participants

An a priori power analysis for a two-cell between-subjects ANOVA indicated a desired sample size of 200 to detect a medium effect ($d = 0.40$) with 80% power. In all, 210 participants who identified as Black Americans were recruited from Prolific in exchange for compensation. Ten were excluded for failing multiple attention checks and one was excluded for identifying as White at the end of the survey, leaving an analytic sample of 199 participants ($M_{age} = 33.04$, $SD = 11.37$; Table 1).

Procedure

After providing consent, participants were presented with website profiles for three organizations. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: norm condition (all three organizations had diversity statements, including the target organization), or the no norm condition (first two organizations did not have diversity statements, but the target organization had a diversity statement). See below for description of organization website profiles.

After viewing all three organizations, participants were told that they would be answering questions about the third (target) organization, "EON Investments." Participants first completed measures of anticipated discipline for racist behavior and percentage of managers of color. Next, all participants were presented again with the diversity statement from the third (target) organization and completed a measure of perceived internal and external motivations.[2] After, as a manipulation check of perceived organizational diversity statement norms, participants indicated how many organizations they believe, out of 100, "state a commitment to diversity and inclusion on their website?" Participants then provided demographics and were debriefed.

Table 1. Participant Demographics by Study.

Demographic	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3	Study 4
Race (*n*)				
Black	196	31	348	93
White	0	214	0	250
Asian	0	16	0	17
Latine/Hispanic	0	37	0	15
Multiracial	3	49	4	49
Another identity	0	2	0	2
Gender (*n*)				
Cisgender women	121	176	172	151
Cisgender men	74	118	181	232
Transgender women	0	2	0	29
Transgender men	1	11	0	6
Non-Binary	2	39	1	6
Another identity	1	3	1	2
Sexual orientation (*n*)				
Heterosexual	160	0	270	2
Gay/Lesbian	12	74	26	107
Bisexual	23	191	49	246
Pansexual	0	45	0	36
Queer	0	8	0	5
Another identity	4	31	9	25

Organization Profiles. The three organization profiles and multicultural diversity statements were adapted from past research (Chaney & Sanchez, 2018; Cipollina & Sanchez, 2022; Kirby & Kaiser, 2021; Wilton et al., 2020). For example, one diversity statement said: ". . . We strive to create a work environment that enables all employees—including those from diverse cultural, racial, or gender backgrounds—the opportunity to develop, succeed, and grow with [organization]." All organizations were presented as investment and finance companies. Full statements and materials are provided in the Supplement. Note that the target organization's diversity statement was randomized across participants to be one of two different statements to ensure effects were not specific to a single statement.

Anticipated Discipline. Participants were asked to consider how the organization would handle employees involved in 12 different scenarios and responded on a scale from 1(*Do nothing*) to 6(*Fire the employee*).[3] Nine of the PI-developed scenarios included non-racism-related behaviors such as "made disparaging comments about the company online." Three of the scenarios reflected racism, such as "posted a racist tweet about Black Americans on Twitter." Responses

Table 2. Exploratory Factor Analysis for Perceived Motivations, Study 1.

Scale Item	Factor 1 External Motive	Factor 2 Internal Motive
1 Because they value diversity and inclusion	−.08	**.89**
2 Because they believe it is morally right to have a diverse workforce	.04	**.87**
3 Because they believe diversity can improve the company's bottom line	.09	**.67**
4 Because they are a diverse company that values their employees	−.08	**.87**
5 Because they want to appear more social progressive	**.54**	−.04
6 Because their competitors state commitments to diversity and inclusion	**.86**	.11
7 Because other investment companies publicly state a commitment to diversity	**.87**	.02
8 Because of social pressure to value diversity and inclusion	**.85**	−.07
9 Because such statements protect the company from discrimination lawsuits	**.71**	−.01

Note: Bolding indicates item fell on factor > .60.

on these three items were averaged. Higher values indicate more severe anticipated discipline ($\alpha = .65$).

Organization Diversity. Participants responded to, "What percentage of the executives and managers at EON Investments do you believe are people of color?" on a scale from 0% to 100%. Participants completed an identical question that instead assessed the percentage of "employees at EON Investments" who participants believed were people of color.

Perceived Motivations for Diversity Statement. Participants completed a nine-item, PI-developed measure of perceived motivations for including a diversity statement on the organization's website. The scale was adapted from the Perceived Internal and External Motivation to Avoid Prejudice Scale assessing perceived motives of individuals (Major et al., 2013). With the diversity statement presented to participants again, participants indicated "how likely it is that [organization] included this statement on their website for the following reasons." Responses were provided on a scale from 1(*Very Unlikely*) to 7(*Very Likely*).

An exploratory factor analysis with a Direct Oblimin rotation revealed two factors (Factor 1 Eigenvalue = 3.11, Factor 2 Eigenvalue = 2.68). The pattern matrix revealed five items loaded on Factor 1 ($\alpha = .82$) that were related to external motivations and four items loaded on Factor 2 ($\alpha = .85$) that were related to internal motivation (see Table 2).[4]

Results

All analyses were conducted as one-way ANOVAs with two between-subject conditions. Results are reported in Table 3 with condition descriptive statistics. Demonstrating successful manipulation of diversity statement norms, participants in the no norm condition rated diversity statements as less common than participants in the norm condition. As hypothesized, participants in the norm condition anticipated less discipline for racist behavior, perceived greater external motivations, and anticipated less manager diversity at the company compared to the no norm condition. There was no effect of condition on perceived internal motivations.[5] There was no effect on employee diversity.

Mediations

Pre-registered exploratory mediation analyses were conducted examining the effect of condition (1 = No Norm; 0 = Norm) on perceived external motivations, and, in turn, perceived external motivations effect on discipline and employee and manager diversity. Across models, condition significantly predicted external motivation, $B = -0.51$, $SE = 0.16$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [−0.81, −0.20]. In turn, external motivation significantly predicted discipline, $B = -0.15$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = .042$, 95% CI [−0.29, −0.01], employee diversity, $B = -3.01$, $SE = 1.09$, $p = .006$, 95% CI [−5.15, −0.87], and manager diversity, $B = -3.06$, $SE = 0.97$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [−4.98, −1.14]. The indirect effect was significant on employee diversity, $B = 1.53$, $SE = 0.76$, 95% CI_{boot} [0.33, 3.33], and manager diversity, $B = 1.55$, $SE = 0.70$, 95% CI_{boot} [0.43, 3.14], but not discipline, $B = 0.07$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI_{boot} [−0.01, 0.18].

Discussion

Study 1 offered the first evidence that norms of organizational diversity statements impact Black Americans' perceptions of an organization with a diversity statement. When diversity statements were the norm across organizations, Black Americans perceived greater external motivations, anticipated less discipline for racism, and less manager diversity compared to when diversity statements were the norm. These findings suggest that when diversity statements are perceived as mere norm adherence, Black Americans perceive the company as less likely to demonstrate behavioral commitment to Black employees. Notably, a condition effect emerged for manager, but not employee, diversity, although the indirect effect via perceived external motivations was significant for both outcomes. These findings may suggest that a commitment to DEI that is not merely norm adherence is primarily associated with

Table 3. ANOVA Results and Descriptive Statistics by Condition, Study 1.

	Condition			No norm		Norm	
Variable	*F*(1,197)	*p*	*d*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Norm manipulation check	5.90	.016	0.35	52.84	26.20	61.87	26.18
Anticipated discipline	7.88	.006	0.40	4.50	1.09	4.06	1.11
Perceived external motivation	10.66	.001	0.46	4.99	1.15	5.50	1.03
Perceived internal motivation	0.05	.832	0.05	4.73	1.25	4.69	1.22
Employee diversity	0.12	.732	0.06	35.83	15.96	35.01	17.94
Manager diversity	6.55	.011	0.36	21.07	17.59	15.52	12.43

marginalized employees being promoted and given power, not merely hired (e.g., Unzueta & Binning, 2012).

Study 2

Study 2 sought to replicate Study 1 effects with a sample of LGBTQ+ people and a new manipulation of organizational diversity statement norms. We recruited LGBTQ+ participants *who were actively seeking employment* to examine if diversity statement norms impacted interest in applying to a position at an organization with a diversity statement. Further, participants were exposed to information that indicated either diversity statements were a norm across organizations, or not, in the form of an ostensible news article. Then, all participants viewed an organization that had a diversity statement located in a job advertisement. We hypothesized that when diversity statements were the norm, LGBTQ+ job seekers would indicate lower intentions to apply to a position at that company, and in line with Study 1, perceive greater external motivations, less anticipated discipline of anti-LGBTQ+ behavior at the company, and fewer LGBTQ+ people at the company compared to when diversity statements were not the norm. While Study 1 focused on outcomes related to how other people might be treated at the company, in Study 2, we assessed intention to apply to work at the organization and likelihood of disclosing one's LGBTQ+ identity if working at the company. Past research has demonstrated that LGBTQ+ people's identity disclosure intentions are impacted by diversity structures such as diversity statements (Cipollina & Sanchez, 2022) (pre-registration: https://osf.io/m3ed4/?view_only=e0313ac9ee7b42279477ca8ffd6e1587).

Method

Participants

An a priori power analysis for a two-cell between-subjects ANOVA to detect a small–medium effect ($d = 0.30$) with 80% power revealed a desired sample size of 352. To account for exclusions, 360 participants who identified as LGBTQ+ in the United States and were actively seeking employment were recruited via Prolific in exchange for compensation. Eleven participants were excluded for failing instructional attention checks or not currently seeking a job, leaving an analytic sample of 349 ($M_{age} = 29.03$, $SD = 8.62$). The sample was predominately bisexual, cisgender women, and White (see Table 1).

Procedure

This study was a two-condition (norm, no norm) between-subjects design in which all participants evaluated an organization with a diversity statement. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the norm condition, participants read a PI-developed news article detailing high rates of diversity statements on organization websites (87%). In the no norm condition, participants read an article that indicated low rates of diversity statements on organization websites (20%). As a manipulation check, participants then indicated agreement with the statement, "The majority of companies include statements regarding a commitment to diversity on their websites" on a scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*). Next, participants were presented with an image of a LinkedIn job search for sales associate positions showing the advertisement for a "Sales Development Representative" for an organization "Brafton." In addition to information about the role, the advertisement included a "What We Value" section that included a diversity statement (full stimuli presented in Supplement).

After reviewing the advertisement, participants indicated how likely they would be to apply for this job on a scale from 1(*Not at all likely*) to 7(*Very Likely*). Then, participants completed a new measure of anticipated disclosure, followed by the Study 1 measures of perceived internal ($\alpha = .85$) and external motivations ($\alpha = .86$), manager and employee diversity (adapted to LGBTQ+ people), and anticipated discipline for anti-LGBTQ+ behavior (adapted from Study 1, $\alpha = .73$). Afterward, participants completed demographics and were debriefed.

Materials

Anticipated Disclosure. Participants were asked to imagine they were applying to work at Brafton and to complete three items assessing how likely they would be to disclose their sexual orientation to colleagues (adapted from Cipollina &

Table 4. Results of ANOVA and Descriptive Statistics, Study 2.

Variable	$F(1,347)$	p	d	No norm condition M (SD)	Norm condition M (SD)
Manipulation check	33.85	<.001	0.63	3.40 (1.66)	4.445 (1.68)
Apply	10.32	.001	0.35	4.33 (1.68)	3.75 (1.69)
Anticipated disclosure	6.95	.009	0.29	3.83 (1.63)	3.38 (1.55)
Employee diversity	0.01	.972	0.01	21.03 (13.63)	20.98 (13.52)
Manager diversity	4.17	.042	0.22	12.71 (11.70)	9.69 (10.92)
Anticipated discipline	4.22	.041	0.23	3.14 (1.09)	2.89 (1.10)
Perceived external motives	5.33	.028	0.25	5.38 (1.16)	5.63 (0.95)
Perceived internal motives	0.02	.886	0.02	4.32 (1.34)	4.32 (1.32)

Sanchez, 2022; $\alpha = .83$). For example, participants responded to "I would feel comfortable sharing my sexual orientation at Brafton" on a scale from 1(*Strongly Disagree*) to 7(*Strongly Agree*).

Results

All analyses were conducted as one-way ANOVAs and are reported in Table 4. Demonstrating successful manipulation, participants in the norm condition viewed diversity statements as more normative than participants in the no norm condition. In line with hypotheses, when diversity statements were the norm, LGBTQ+ participants perceived greater organizational external motivations, but not internal motivations, indicated that they would be *less* likely to apply to the organization, anticipated being less likely to disclose their sexual orientation if working at the organization, expected less discipline for anti-LGBTQ+ behavior, and expected less manager diversity compared to when diversity statements were not the norm. Organizational diversity statement norms again had no effect on anticipated employee diversity.

Mediation

Pre-registered exploratory mediation analyses were conducted examining the effect of condition (1 = No Norm; 0 = Norm) on perceived external motivations, and, in turn, the effect of external motivations on outcomes. The indirect effect was significant on disclosure intentions, $B = -0.05$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI_{boot}[−0.13, −0.01], and manager diversity, $B = -0.50$, $SE = 0.26$, 95% CI_{boot}[−1.09, −0.05], but not application intention, $B = -0.01$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI_{boot}[−0.06, 0.05], anticipated discipline, $B = -0.02$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI_{boot}[−0.07, 0.01], or employee diversity, $B = -0.39$, $SE = 0.25$, 95% CI_{boot}[−0.99, 0.01].

Discussion

Study 2 replicated Study 1's demonstration of perceptions of mere norm adherence with diversity statement norms stated explicitly, rather than learned as in Study 1, and demonstrated that diversity statement norms also impacted interest in applying to an organization and identity disclosure intentions among LGBTQ+ U.S. people seeking employment. Supporting our hypotheses and replicating Study 1, when diversity statements were the norm, participants viewed a company with a diversity statement as engaging in mere norm adherence, evidenced by greater perceptions of external motivations for the diversity statement compared to when diversity statements were not the norm. In turn, greater perceptions of external motivations were associated with lower likelihood of disclosing one's LGBTQ+ identity if they joined the company, as well as beliefs that the company did not demonstrate a commitment to diversity in other ways, including fewer LGBTQ+ managers; perceived external motivations did not significantly mediate other outcomes. As in Study 1, a diversity statement norm across organizations did not impact perceptions of employee diversity or perceived internal motivations.

Study 3

While Studies 1 and 2 offered initial demonstration that knowledge of diversity statement norms across organizations impacts perceived external motivations for organizations with a diversity statement, these studies did not allow a comparison of outcomes at an organization that had no diversity statement. That is, when having a diversity statement is the norm, does an organization *not* having a diversity statement elicit less negative perceptions of organizational motives and outcomes compared to an organization with a diversity statement?

First, we hypothesized that when diversity statements were *not* the norm, findings would replicate past research on the benefits of diversity statements for members of marginalized groups (e.g., Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008): participants would anticipate greater belonging and perceive the organization as more racially diverse (based on Studies 1-2, at only the level of managers) when there was a diversity statement compared to when there was not. Novel to the present research, we hypothesized that participants would anticipate

less belonging and manager diversity when an organization *did not* have a diversity statement and diversity statements were the norm compared to when diversity statements were not the norm. Said another way, we hypothesized that organizations perceived as violating a norm of diversity statements would be perceived more negatively than an organization that had no diversity statement but was not violating the norm. We made no hypotheses regarding perceived motivations between organizations that did and did not have diversity statements as the lack of a public diversity statement may make motivation attributions challenging for lay perceivers. Study 3 returned to Black Americans and was not pre-registered.

Method

Participants

An a priori power analysis for 2×2 between-subjects ANOVAs indicated a desired sample size of 351 to detect a small–medium effect ($d = 0.30$) with 80% power. To account for exclusions, 375 participants were recruited from Prolific. Eleven participants were excluded for not identifying as Black during the survey and 12 were excluded for low data quality leaving an analytic sample of 352 ($M_{age} = 31.19$, $SD = 12.20$). See Table 1 for demographics.

Procedure

Upon providing consent, participants were randomly assigned to read either the norm or no norm articles from Study 2. Afterward, participants were presented with a screenshot of an organization's website. This was adapted from a Study 1 company profile of an investment company, "investorsCorp." All participants saw information from the company about "What we do," "Who we are," and "Where we are," that was identical across conditions. Based on random assignment, participants also saw a section titled, "What we value" that either indicated "our employees are at the heart of our business," (diversity statement absent condition) or "diversity is at the heart of our business" (diversity statement present condition). Each section included further descriptions of employee support (see Supplement for full materials). The study was thus a 2(Norm: Norm, No Norm) $\times$ 2(Diversity Statement: Present, Absent) between-subjects design.

Afterward, participants completed the measure of perceived internal ($\alpha = .85$) and external ($\alpha = .84$) motives from Studies 1 and 2, although the instructions were adapted to state: "If investorsCorp stated a commitment to supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion, how likely would it be because. . ." This edit was made as half of participants did not see a diversity statement made by investorsCorp. Participants then indicated the percentage of employees and managers that they believed were people of color at investorsCorp, completed a new measure of anticipated belonging at the company, the Study 2 manipulation check, demographics, and were debriefed.

Materials

Anticipated Belonging. Participants were asked to "take a minute to imagine you are an employee at investorsCorp" and to indicate agreement to 10 statements assessing anticipated belonging (from Chaney et al., 2016; integrating measures of anticipated fit, trust, and comfort, Cook et al., 2012; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008). On a scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*) participants responded to items such as, "I would feel comfortable working at investorsCorp" ($\alpha = .92$).

Results

Analyses were conducted as 2×2 ANOVAs. Confirming successful manipulation of diversity statement norms, a main effect of norm condition emerged. Participants in the norm condition reported that a greater number of organizations have diversity statements ($M = 61.53$, $SD = 21.94$) compared to the no norm condition ($M = 50.57$, $SD = 21.51$). No main effect of statement condition ($M_{statement} = 54.37$, $SD = 22.14$; $M_{no\ statement} = 57.93$, $SD = 22.54$), and no interaction emerged. See Table 5 for ANOVA results for all outcomes and Table 6 for cell means.

Perceived Motives

An ANOVA for perceived external motives revealed no main effect of norm condition, no main effect of statement condition, and a significant interaction. Simple effect analyses revealed no effect of norm condition when the organization did not have a diversity statement on their website, $F(1,350) = 1.54$, $p = .216$, $d = 0.13$. Yet, when an organization had a diversity statement, participants perceived greater external motivations in the norm condition compared to the no norm condition, $F(1,350) = 7.76$, $p = .006$, $d = 0.30$. When instead examining simple effects by norm condition, the effect of statement condition was significant when diversity statements were the norm, $F(1,350) = 7.84$, $p = .005$, $d = 0.31$. An organization was perceived as having greater external motivations for DEI efforts when diversity statements were the norm across organizations and the organization had a diversity statement versus did not have a statement. No simple effect emerged in the no norm condition, $F(1,350) = 1.45$, $p = .229$, $d = 0.13$. These findings are in line with hypotheses.

The ANOVA for perceived internal motives revealed no main effect of norm condition, no main effect of statement condition, and no significant interaction. Participants perceived relatively high levels of internal motivations across conditions.

Table 5. Study 3 ANOVA Results.

	Norm condition Main effect			Statement condition Main effect			Interaction		
Variable	*F*(1,351)	*p*	*d*	*F*(1,351)	*p*	*d*	*F*(1,351)	*p*	*d*
Manipulation check	21.84	<.001	0.50	1.77	.184	0.14	0.66	.184	0.09
Perceived internal motives	0.80	.373	0.09	0.01	.992	0.01	1.26	.262	0.13
Perceived external motives	1.12	.292	0.11	1.23	.268	0.11	7.98	.005	0.03
Manager diversity	8.62	.004	0.31	0.21	.646	0.06	1.35	.247	0.13
Employee diversity	1.44	.232	0.13	1.93	.166	0.14	0.01	.927	0.02
Anticipated Belonging	2.46	.118	0.17	0.09	.771	0.02	7.87	.005	0.30

Table 6. Study 3 Cell Means and Standard Deviations.

	Diversity statement absent		Diversity statement present	
Variable	No norm *M* (*SD*)	Norm *M* (*SD*)	No norm *M* (*SD*)	Norm *M* (*SD*)
Manipulation check	53.19 (22.26)	62.11 (22.07)	48.24 (20.66)	60.91 (21.90)
Perceived internal motives	5.49 (1.06)	5.26 (1.16)	5.36 (1.10)	5.39 (1.09)
Perceived external motives	4.95 (1.16)	4.73 (1.22)	4.74 (1.08)	5.21 (1.06)
Manager diversity	36.83 (22.82)	32.54 (23.00)	40.74 (23.23)	30.85 (21.37)
Employee diversity	46.39 (19.69)	49.12 (20.25)	43.65 (20.52)	45.99 (18.98)
Anticipated Belonging	4.95 (0.84)	5.08 (1.10)	5.28 (1.03)	4.81 (1.05)

Organizational Diversity

An ANOVA for estimated managers of color revealed a main effect of norm condition. Participants expected fewer managers of color in the norm condition ($M = 31.72$, $SD = 22.18$) than in the no norm condition ($M = 38.91$, $SD = 23.06$). There was no main effect of statement condition (Statement: $M = 35.99$, $SD = 22.84$; No Statement: $M = 34.57$, $SD = 22.95$), and counter to hypotheses, no significant interaction.

An ANOVA for estimated employees of color revealed no main effect of norm condition, no main effect of statement condition, and no significant interaction. Participants estimated a high percentage of employees of color across conditions.

Belonging

The ANOVA revealed no main effect of norm condition, no main effect of statement condition, and a significant interaction. In line with hypotheses, participants anticipated less belonging when a diversity statement was present, and there was a norm of diversity statements compared to when there was no norm of diversity statements, $F(1,351) = 9.72$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.33$. No effect of norm condition emerged when organizations did not have a statement, $F(1,351) = 0.75$, $p = .386$, $d = 0.09$. The absence of a diversity statement was not perceived more negatively, regardless of a norm of diversity statements or not, countering our hypothesis that norm violation would be associated with more negative outcomes.

Examined another way, when diversity statements were not the norm across organizations, participants reported greater anticipated belonging when the organization had a diversity statement compared to when the organization did not have a diversity statement, $F(1,351) = 4.72$, $p = .030$, $d = 0.23$. Yet, when diversity statements were the norm, participants anticipated moderate belonging whether or not the organization had a diversity statement, $F(1,351) = 3.21$, $p = .074$, $d = 0.19$.

Mediation

Moderated mediation analyses were conducted examining the effect of norm condition on anticipated belonging and manager diversity via perceived external motives, with statement condition moderating the path from norm condition to perceived external motives. Norm condition (1 = Norm; 0 = No Norm) did not significantly predict perceived external motivations, but the interactive effect of norm condition x statement condition (1 = Statement; 0 = No Statement) was a significant predictor, $B = 0.68$, $SE = 0.24$, $p = .005$, 95% CI[0.21, 1.15]. The effect of norm condition on perceived external motivations was significant only in the statement condition, $B = 0.47$, $SE = 0.17$, $p = .006$, not the no statement condition, $B = -0.21$, $SE = 0.17$, $p = .216$. In turn, greater perceived external motives significantly predicted lower belonging, $B = -0.11$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = .021$, 95% CI[−0.20, −0.02], and less manager diversity, $B = -2.26$, $SE = 1.05$, $p = .033$, 95% CI[−4.34, −0.19]. The indirect effect

of norm condition on belonging was significant when a diversity statement was present, $B = -0.05$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% $CI_{boot}[-0.13, -0.01]$, as was the indirect effect on manager diversity, $B = -1.01$, $SE = 0.62$, 95% $CI_{boot}[-2.41, -0.04]$.

Discussion

Study 3 largely replicated and extended findings from Studies 1 and 2: when an organization had a diversity statement, that statement was perceived as more externally motivated and participants anticipated less belonging if organizational diversity statements were the norm, versus not. Importantly, the fully crossed design employed in Study 3 made evident that, descriptively, anticipated belonging was lowest when an organization had a diversity statement and diversity statements were the norm, indicating the backfiring effect of the social norm. Further, in line with past research on the presence or absence of diversity statements (e.g., Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008), when diversity statements were not the norm across organizations, the presence of a diversity statement led to greater anticipated belonging compared to the absence of a diversity statement.

Novel to Study 3, when an organization violated a diversity statement norm (i.e., did not have a diversity statement despite the norm), participants' anticipated belonging did not significantly differ from organizations that adhered to the norm or compared to when no norm was present, counter to hypotheses. Rather, when an organization did not have a diversity statement, participants perceived the organization as somewhat moderate in external (and internal) motivations and anticipated moderate levels of belonging, regardless of the norm. These findings may be, in part, due to a belief that organizational diversity statement norms are unstable (see General Discussion), or may reflect a belief that mere norm adherence, perhaps perceived as "performative" and thus harmful (Kutlaca & Radke, 2023), is no different than organizations not publicly stating a commitment to DEI.[6]

Study 4

Social norms do not merely exist (or not) but can vary in strength. Study 4 aimed to examine how organizations with a diversity statement are perceived when there is either a strong, weak, or no norm of diversity statements across organizations, again with a sample of LGBTQ+ people. Norm strength has largely been defined as the degree of adherence to a norm (Gelfand et al., 2011), or the overall degree of collective agreement about a behavior (Jackson, 1965; Kuentzel et al., 2008). We operationalized norm strength as the latter in the present study.[7] We again hypothesized that organizations with a diversity statement would be perceived as having more external motivations leading to perceptions of less manager diversity, lower anticipated belonging, and less identity disclosure intentions when the diversity statement norm was strong (i.e., a clear majority of organizations had diversity statements, as in Studies 1–3 manipulations) compared to when no norm was present (i.e., very few organizations had diversity statements, as in Studies 1–3 manipulations). Novel to Study 4, we hypothesized that these effects would not emerge when the norm was weak (i.e., only a slim majority of organizations had diversity statements). Study 4 was preregistered: https://osf.io/5u3zm/?view_only=aa6c581154f64bb9bac9fe8802b75249.

Method

Participants

An a priori power analysis for a three-cell ANOVA indicated a desired sample size of 432 to detect a small–medium effect ($d = 0.30$) with 80% power. In all, 450 LGBTQ+ U.S. participants were recruited from Prolific in exchange for monetary compensation. However, 30 were excluded for not identifying as LGBTQ+ in the survey and four were excluded for failing attentional check questions, leaving an analytic sample of 426 ($M_{age} = 35.54$, $SD = 12.41$; see Table 1 for demographics).

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to read an article indicating that 87% (strong norm condition), 54% (weak norm condition), or 20% (no norm condition) of organizations publicly state a commitment to DEI on their websites. The strong norm and no norm condition articles mirror the articles in Studies 2-3, while the weak norm article was novel to Study 4. After reviewing the article and completing a content check of the article (i.e., multiple choice questions about the norm and other content of the article), participants reviewed the job ad from Study 2. Participants then completed the Study 2 measures of perceived internal ($\alpha = .86$) and external ($\alpha = .84$) motivations, manager and employee diversity, and identity disclosure intentions ($\alpha = .80$). Participants completed the Study 3 anticipated belonging measure ($\alpha = .94$), demographics, and were debriefed.

Results

Analyses were conducted as one-way ANOVAs with Tukey post hoc tests (see Table 7). As in Studies 1–4 and in line with hypotheses, no significant effect emerged for employee diversity. As hypothesized, significant main effects of condition emerged for perceived external motivations, manager diversity, identity disclosure intentions, and anticipated belonging. Post hoc-tests revealed that participants in the strong norm condition perceived the company as being more externally motivated compared to the weak norm condition, $p = .016$, $d = 0.34$, and the no

Table 7. Study 4 ANOVA Results and Descriptive Statistics.

	Condition main effect			No norm	Weak norm	Strong norm
Variable	*F*(2, 423)	*p*	*d*	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)	*M* (*SD*)
Perceived internal motives	3.48	.032	0.26	4.96 (1.22)	4.99 (1.25)	4.63 (1.33)
Perceived external motives	6.68	.001	0.36	5.22 (1.05)	5.31 (1.20)	5.66 (0.85)
Manager diversity	3.48	.032	0.26	20.43 (19.30)	22.31 (25.26)	15.64 (18.41)
Employee diversity	2.01	.135	0.19	29.48 (19.01)	28.72 (22.18)	24.95 (19.13)
Disclosure	5.24	.006	0.31	4.27 (1.49)	4.24 (1.61)	3.73 (1.55)
Anticipated belonging	4.44	.012	0.29	4.99 (1.06)	4.95 (1.05)	4.65 (1.08)

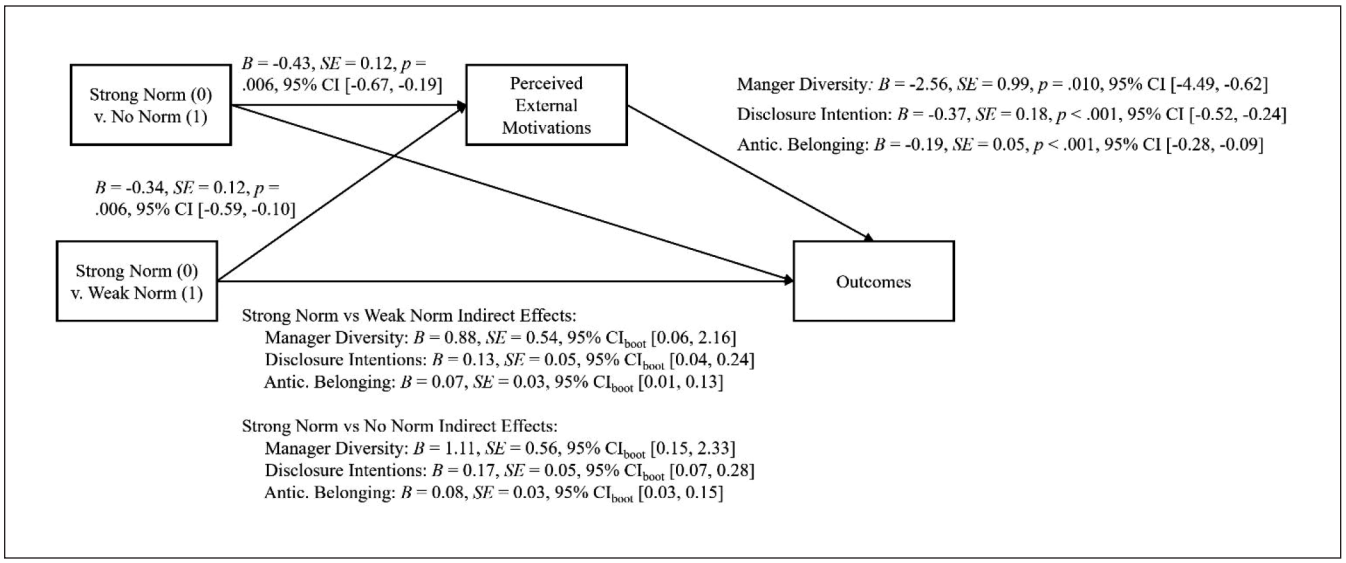

Figure 1. Study 4 Mediation Results.

norm condition, $p = .002$, $d = 0.46$. Participants reported greater manager diversity in the strong norm condition compared to the weak norm condition, $p = .026$, $d = 0.39$, but not the no norm condition, $p = .145$, $d = 0.25$. Participants also reported lower identity disclosure intentions in the strong norm condition compared to the weak norm condition, $p = .017$, $d = 0.32$, and the no norm condition, $p = .012$, $d = 0.36$. Anticipated belonging was also greater in the strong norm condition compared to the weak norm condition, $p = .043$, $d = 0.28$, and the no norm condition, $p = .018$, $d = 0.32$. No significant differences emerged between the weak norm and no norm conditions for perceived external motivations, $p = .746$, $d = 0.08$, manager diversity, $p = .756$, $d = 0.08$, identity disclosure intentions, $p = .989$, $d = 0.02$, and anticipated belonging, $p = .938$, $d = 0.04$. Finally, counter to hypotheses and Studies 1–3, a main effect of condition emerged for perceived internal motives. Post hoc tests revealed a significant difference between the strong norm and weak norm condition, $p = .044$, $d = 0.28$, but not the strong and no norm condition, $p = .076$, $d = 0.26$, or the weak and no norm conditions, $p = .975$, $d = 0.02$.

Mediations

Pre-registered multicategorical mediations were conducted examining the effect of norm condition (Contrast 1: strong norm = 0, weak norm = 1; Contrast 2: strong norm = 0, no norm = 1) on perceived manager diversity, disclosure intentions, and anticipated belonging via perceived external motivations (Figure 1). Contrast 1 and Contrast 2 significantly predicted perceived external motivations. External motivations in turn significantly predicted manager diversity, disclosure intentions, and anticipated belonging. All indirect effects were significant.

Discussion

Study 4 demonstrated that mere norm adherence effects emerged only from a strong norm of diversity statements. We opted for a "weak norm" that was only slightly above 50% of organizations (54%) and was directly in between our strong (87%) and no norm (20%) manipulations. Further, while we have referred to 20% of organizations not having a diversity statement as *no norm*, this article manipulation (Studies 2–4) could also be perceived as a norm of *not* having diversity

statements. Thus, while we considered the new condition in this study as a "weak norm," the present study also allowed us to examine the possibility that our "no norm" article manipulations in Studies 2–4 were indicating a norm that organizations do *not* have diversity statements, and thus determine if our effects were driven by a norm of diversity statements at organizations or a norm of no diversity statements at organizations. Findings in Study 4 demonstrate that the effects reported here are indeed a product of a strong norm to have a diversity statement. In line with our original theorizing, but counter to Studies 1–3, a small effect of norm condition emerged on perceived internal motives, such that an organization was perceived as having less internal motivations when diversity statements were a strong compared to weak norm.

General Discussion

Past research has indicated that diversity statements can promote belonging and expectations of equality at organizations for marginalized group members (Chaney et al., 2016; Cipollina & Sanchez, 2022; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008). Yet, such expectations are dampened when diversity commitments are inconsistent with other known information about the organization (e.g., no racial diversity, Wilton et al., 2020) or were not maintained over time (Ponce de Leon et al., 2024). Incorporating research on perceptions of internal and external motivations (Kelley, 1967; Major et al., 2013), the present research examined how organizational diversity statement norms impact perceptions of an organization's diversity statement as mere norm adherence, with implications for marginalized group members' anticipated outcomes at the organization.

In the present research, when there was no norm of diversity statements across organizations, diversity statements were perceived as less externally motivated (Studies 1–4), people had greater expectations that the organization was also showing their commitment to DEI (e.g., via manager diversity, Studies 1-4), and anticipated better outcomes (disclosure intentions, anticipated belonging) if they were to work at the company (Studies 2–4) compared to when diversity statements were the norm across organizations. These effects did not emerge when only a weak norm of diversity statements existed (Study 4). These findings demonstrate one way in which the value of a behavior, here, diversity statements, is undermined by emphasizing its normativity (Conway et al., 2021). Finally, counter to hypotheses, the violation of a diversity statement norm did not result in significantly different expectations compared to adherence to the norm (Study 3).

Future Integration of Social Norms and Perceptions of Diversity Statements

While organizational diversity statements may currently be the norm among organizations (Jones & Donnelley, 2017), local norms of egalitarianism vary widely across U.S. cities and countries (e.g., Payne et al., 2019). Further, the United States is currently in the midst of a "DEI regression," with organizations increasingly abandoning DEI initiatives and an executive order banning DEI efforts at the federal level, such that norms of organization diversity statements and efforts have weakened across the 2020's (Associated Press, 2025). This social pattern suggests low norm stability, the extent to which norms endure over time (e.g., Bicchieri & Demo, 2025). While research has examined how an organization's consistent commitment to DEI impacted perceptions of the organization (Ponce de Leon et al., 2024), research has not examined how the stability of organizational DEI commitment norms impact perceptions. We encourage future research to assess and examine the variation in organization DEI initiatives over time, including when and why they emerge and decline, offering a socio-culturally situated analysis of organizational DEI efforts.

Further, we encourage the consideration of geographical and field norms of egalitarianism and prejudice into the study of organizations with diversity statements, such as examining organizational diversity statements in regions with low egalitarian norms among residents (e.g., Hehman et al., 2018) or low egalitarian norms in specific fields (e.g., investment versus trade jobs). That is, research on organizational diversity statements should not only consider the norms of diversity statements across organizations broadly, but also relevant norms at different levels of analyses and across different target populations. For example, future research could explore if field norms are more impactful than broad norms across all organizations, and if micro level norms (organization's county or state) are more impactful in shaping perceptions of an organization than national level norms.

Finally, the present research relied on multicultural diversity statements with moral rationales that explicitly centered marginalized identities. Past research suggests that these statements have the most positive effect on marginalized group members (Kirby et al., 2025; Starck et al., 2021). Yet, moral diversity rationales are not necessarily the norm among U.S. universities (Starck et al., 2021), and recent analyses suggest that organizations may frequently publish diversity statements that focus on diversity of ideologies, personality, and skills rather than demographic and cultural diversity (Kirby et al., 2025). Thus, a diversity statement with a moral rationale that focuses on demographic and cultural diversity may be perceived as less externally motivated if the norm across organizations is instrumental diversity rationales that focus on ideological or skill diversity. Future research would benefit from examining how diversity statements that vary in their language (multicultural versus colorblind; moral versus instrumental rationales; cultural versus ideological diversity) are perceived when they are or are not the norm across organizations. That is, future research should explore the heterogeneity of diversity statement content when each type of statement is presented as in line or counter to the normative language.

Methodological Considerations and Constraints on Generality

First, one contribution of this paper is offering construct clarity to a literature that has used a plethora of terms to refer to perceptions of genuine, internal motivations (Burns & Granz, 2023; Moser & Wiley, 2024; Thai & Nylund, 2024; Wilton et al., 2020). Yet, our findings suggest that perceived internal motivations were relatively moderate across studies and did not significantly vary across conditions (except Study 4). Rather, perceived *external* motivations significantly varied across conditions, and were relatively high across studies and conditions. These findings indicate a general belief that organizations have external motivations for engaging in DEI efforts and that perceivers recognize the duality of motives (e.g., perceive relatively high internal and external motivations). Thus, we encourage future research to directly assess motivations rather than a single measure that loosely captures motivations, such as genuineness or honesty. That is, we believe that the present paper further offers construct clarity to a literature that has presently been somewhat fractured in its discussion of how "true," "genuine," "authentic," "sincere," "honest," or "performative" an organization's or person's allyship or DEI commitment has been. We believe that our measurement of perceived motives offers a foundation from which to develop further literature.

As noted, the present research found no effects of norms (Studies 1–3) or statement presence versus absence (Study 3) on perceived internal motivations, except a small effect in Study 4.[8] These null effects may suggest that people struggle to imagine a moral motivation for equality among organizations, though further research is warranted as participants rated organizations at or above the scale mean across studies. Additionally, it is possible that perceptions of internal motives vary more across perceivers than across targets, and thus, perceiver individual differences should be incorporated in future research. For example, Black Americans who recalled greater racial socialization during childhood were more likely to report suspicion of White American's egalitarian motives (Swerbenski et al., 2021). As such, integrating both context information *and* individual-level suspicion or attributional tendencies will afford greater insights. We encourage future research to assess individual differences in suspicion of *organizational* diversity commitments, extending work on individual differences in suspicion of interpersonal claims of egalitarianism (LaCosse et al., 2015; Major et al., 2013).

The present research focused primarily on Black and LGBTQ+ people (non-exclusive identities). Yet, past research has demonstrated that women (Chaney et al., 2016) and other marginalized group members (Unzueta & Binning, 2012) similarly perceive anticipated belonging and treatment at organizations based on diversity structures. We hypothesize that similar patterns of effects of organizational diversity statement norms may emerge for these marginalized groups and encourage this exploration in future research. Such research should examine how egalitarian norms might shape organizations' public-facing diversity initiatives more broadly, such as organization tables at Pride parades, support for activism movements such as Black Lives Matter, or social media posts regarding Women's History Month. These frequent low-effort and high-visibility displays of diversity commitments may ultimately increase suspicion of organizational diversity commitments.

Social inequalities and public-facing efforts to promote DEI can vary across cultures based on varying historical racialization, present-day structural equality, and cultural norms of inclusion. As such, research considering how the specific U.S. context of inequality for Black and LGBTQ+ Americans may shape suspicion of organizational diversity statements is needed. Moreover, research on cultural tightness versus looseness focuses on how strongly norms are enforced and adhered to across cultures (Gelfand et al., 2011). It is possible that detection of social norms may be greater in tight cultures because of the greater concern for norm adherence. Thus, we encourage research to examine how diversity statement norms may differentially impact perceived motives across cultures, and, for example, how immigrants from tight cultures may perceive U.S. norms of organizational DEI efforts.

Finally, the present research utilized simple and clear manipulations of diversity statement norms. Yet, outside of an experimental setting, marginalized groups may be more prone to spontaneously detecting norms of diversity statements than privileged groups, given that these identity-safety cues can impede attention to identity threats (Chaney & Sanchez, 2024). Future research exploring attentional biases to diversity statements and their broader contexts will thus be critical. Research integrating individual levels of suspicion may provide clarity on when and why marginalized group members may be more attentive to diversity statements and norms of diversity statements.

Conclusion

Across four studies, the present research demonstrates that organizational norms of diversity statements impact perceptions of an organization's diversity statement. Evidence that diversity statements are common among organizations resulted in perceptions of an organization with a diversity statement as engaging in mere norm adherence, such that the organization was perceived to be more externally motivated to be non-prejudiced compared to when organizational diversity statements were not the norm. By integrating research on social norms, organizational diversity statements, and attribution theories, we demonstrate that perceptions of organizations that claim a commitment to DEI may be viewed as externally motivated, minimizing the positive effects often

associated with diversity statements for members of marginalized groups.

Authors Note

All research was conducted with IRB approval and all participants provided consent Data and materials for all studies can be found at: https://osf.io/dvjt7/?view_only=f6cbe43c03804431babbbb54064f3a62.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material is available online with this article.

Notes

1. See Supplement for a pilot survey that found that among LGBTQ+ people, a belief that more organizations state a commitment to DEI was related to greater self-reported suspicion of organizations' DEI claims, $r(149) = .23$, $p = .004$.
2. Participants also indicated what year the statement was added, reported in Supplement. Suspicion of DEI commitment was included as a primary outcome in Study 1 and 2 pre-registrations. This is reported in the Supplement for brevity.
3. See Supplement for full measure.
4. Per reviewer suggestion, we also examined Perceived Internal Motivations removing item number 3. With the shortened scale, there remains no effect of norm condition on perceived internal motivations in Study 1, $F(1,197) = 0.02$, $p = .884$, and no effect in Study 2, $F(1,347) = 0.02$, $p = .897$. In Study 3, there remains no main effect of norm condition, $F(1,351) = 0.78$, $p = .378$, no main effect of statement condition, $F(1,351) = 0.01$, $p = .951$, and no significant interaction, $F(1,351) = 1.06$, $p = .304$. In Study 4, a condition effect on internal motives emerged with the full scale. With the shortened scale, the effect becomes slightly smaller, $F(2,423) = 3.04$, $p = .049$, $d = 0.24$, and no post hoc tests are significant, $ps > .078$.
5. Notably, while we initially hypothesized that both perceived internal and external motives would be significantly affected by the manipulation of norms, initial studies, reported in the Supplement, revealed, consistently, no effect on perceived internal motives. As such, here and across Studies 1–4, we hypothesized no effect of condition on perceived internal motives.
6. See Supplemental Studies 2 and 3 for some mixed evidence of norm violation being perceived more negatively than norm adherence.
7. Note, the importance of the norm standard (Jackson, 1965) and sanctioning of deviant behavior (Gelfand et al., 2011) have at times been included in broader definitions of norm strength. We encourage future research to explore how these factors may impact perceptions of organizational diversity statement norms.
8. Study 4 was conducted after the 2025 U.S. presidential inauguration when commitments to DEI were rapidly disappearing.

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