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Identity Shifting Behaviors, Perceptions of Diversity, and Perceived Discrimination in South Asian Employees

A Thesis

Presented in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

By

Himali Bhandari

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abstract

Workplace discrimination is a significant issue in the workplace for minority racial and ethnic groups, especially for South Asian employees in the US. This study investigated the relationship between perceived workplace diversity climate and identity shifting behaviors (manifestation and suppression behaviors of group identity) that South Asian employees might display at work. Furthermore, it was also expected that perceptions of racial discrimination experiences would mediate this relationship. It was hypothesized that perceived diversity climate will be negatively related to suppression behaviors and positively related manifestation behaviors, mediated by perceptions of racial discrimination. Participants were recruited from social media, Prolific, and the SONA pool of a university in Chicago (N = 297). Results found that the relationship between perceived diversity climate and suppression behaviors was completely mediated by perceived racial discrimination. However, there was no mediation in the relationship between perceived diversity climate and manifestation behaviors. The study is a starting point for research with the demographic of South Asian workers and a deeper look into identity shifting at work.

Keywords: South Asian, discrimination, diversity climate, manifestation, suppression

Identity Shifting Behaviors, Perceptions of Diversity, and Perceived Discrimination in South Asian Employees

Despite the increase in workforce diversity over the past years (Shore et al., 2018), discrimination against people of color and other minorities in the workplace is still rampant (Burgess et al., 2022). As a result, minority groups may develop coping strategies, including identity management strategies such as identity shifting, to reduce the negative consequences of discrimination (Bryant, 2021; Dickens & Chavez, 2018).

Identity shifting has been defined as altering one's actions, speech, and appearance to adjust to cultural norms within a given environment (Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Jackson, 2002). This coping strategy is a conscious act in some instances and an unconscious act in others (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). Unlike other identity management strategies, identity shifting is mainly done to counteract or avoid discrimination (Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Jackson, 2002). Identity shifting also seems to primarily focus on visible stigmatized identities such as race, gender, physical ability, and age because discrimination is against the individual's visible identity (Bryant, 2021).

Among racial minorities, South Asians (i.e., people originating from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh) have their social realities and challenges to face in the US workplace. South Asians, like other minority groups in the US, have also experienced prolonged discrimination in multiple areas (i.e., work, school, and social lives) (Kaduvettoor-Davidson & Inman, 2013). However, there is a lack of research about workplace discrimination and bias against South Asian employees, specifically in the identity shifting literature. To reduce this gap, I focused my research

on this minority group and their experience with workplace discrimination.

This study investigates whether the perceived organizational diversity climate is negatively associated with identity-shifting behaviors by South Asian employees. It also aims to study whether the association between perceived diversity climate and identity-shifting behaviors is mediated by perceived racial discrimination in the workplace.

South Asians in the US Workplace

Asians are a distinct minority in the US. Two broad and unique categories of Asians are those who originated from East/Southeast Asia (China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and the Philippines) and those who originated from South Asia (including India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Maldives) (Shankar & Srikanth, 1998). With an overall population of 5.4 million, South Asians are one of the largest racial/ethnic minorities in the US (SAALT, 2019).

Despite population growth, the group still faces discrimination from multiple sources, such as employers, co-workers, and the public (Kaduvettoor-Davidson & Inman, 2013). The group faces discrimination based on their race, accents, cultural differences, religious diversity, and perpetual foreigner perceptions (i.e., perceived as being foreign despite being native-born citizens due to membership in an ethnic or racial group) (Liang et al., 2004; Sheth, 1995). For instance, less attention is given to racial discrimination and bias issues of South Asians compared to other racial/ethnic minorities, mainly due to the “model minority” perception (Tummala-Narra et al., 2012) and concentrated success in economic and educational areas (Kaduvettoor-Davidson & Inman, 2013). The term “model minority” was coined by William Peterson

in the 1960s, and it refers to Asian Americans as successful minorities who are quiet, hardworking, and high achieving (Daga & Raval, 2018). This trivialization of racial discrimination against the South Asian community is harmful since research has stated that discrimination contributes to mental health problems (Tummala-Narra et al., 2012; Daga & Raval, 2018) and restricts their upward mobility (Yoo et al., 2010a).

The issue of racial discrimination against South Asians is pervasive in the US workplace (Kaduvettoor-Davidson & Inman, 2013). The group experiences lower inclusion and receives less support at work than their White peers (Chui et al., 2022). South Asian employees also perceive lower levels of fairness, feel less able to be themselves at work, and are less likely to report that their sponsors effectively create opportunities for them (Chui et al., 2022). However, there is less research on South Asian experiences with workplace racial discrimination, its antecedents, and consequences than those of other racial/ethnic minorities in the United States. Studies that do exist tend to focus on the consequences of workplace discrimination on the mental and physical health of Asian Americans (Gee et al., 2009; Kaduvettoor-Davidson & Inman, 2013). Additionally, the existing research seems to focus primarily on Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Korean populations, leaving out other Asian populations, such as South Asians and Pacific Islanders (Gee et al., 2009).

Little is known about the identity shifting behaviors of South Asians in the US workplace. This study investigated issues of racial discrimination and identity shifting among South Asian employees to cover this gap in research.

Identity Shifting Behaviors

Identity shifting behaviors are broadly viewed as social, behavioral, and cognitive phenomenon that are studied under several related concepts including impression management (Leary & Kozlowski, 1990), cultural frame switching (Hong et al., 2000) and identity management (Jackson, 2002). For this study, the focus will be to review identity management for additional context on identity shifting behaviors.

Identity Management.

Identity Management refers to the strategic presentation of oneself to reduce formal or informal discrimination due to stigmatized identity in the workplace (Jones & King, 2014). It is known by several names such as stigma management (Taub et al., 2004), compensatory strategies (Singletary & Hebl, 2009), social identity-based impression management strategies (Roberts, 2005), and self-disclosure (Chaudior & Fisher, 2010). There have also been several underlying theories and models that attempt to explain the concept of identity management (Bryant, 2021).

One common theory is social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1979). This theory states that when a person's social identity or value is threatened, they may use tactics to cope with or manage that conflict (Niens & Cairns, 2003; Tajfel et al., 1979). This theory defines social identity as "part of an individual's self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Greene, 1999, *p*. 394). The theory states that individuals strive for a positive self-concept, which can be partly achieved through a positive social identity. However, if achieving such a positive social identity fails, it may lead to a "negative social identity" (Niens & Cairns, 2003).

Negative social identity is “the disadvantaged or inferior position of one’s social group, which in turn triggers improving one’s status” (Mummendey et al., 1999, *p*. 229). Identity management strategies are one way to improve one’s social identity status.

Stigma theory is the second theory that explains identity management (Goffman, 1963). Goffman (1963, *p*. 3) defines *stigma* as an “attribute that is deeply discrediting” and that reduces the bearer “from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one.” Goffman (1963) further describes stigma as either visible or invisible. Visible stigmas include race, gender, and physical abilities. Invisible stigmas consist of religion, sexual orientation, and mental illness. Stigma theory suggests that stigmatized individuals attempt to avoid bias and improve their life situations by strategically managing their identity (Goffman, 1963). Visible and invisible stigmas can have significant negative impacts on individuals. For instance, people with visible stigmas endure the potential of continually being “discredited” in others’ perceptions (Stutterheim et al., 2011).

Facing negative consequences or just anticipating facing them can make people with these stigmatized identities turn to coping strategies, such as identity management. In the case of visible stigmas, identity management focuses on reducing stigmatization of their identity such that others might see and treat them as equal, part of the in-group, or valued in the workplace (Bryant, 2021). Another strategy could include overcompensation for the stigma by working harder and longer than others (Cassel & Walsh, 1997). On the other hand, identity management is more complex for invisible stigmas. Invisible stigmas are seen to be more controlling than visible ones (Bryant, 2021), and the research usually focuses on the strategic ‘revelation’ of such stigmas to

reduce any adverse effects associated with them (Button, 2004). Besides visible and invisible stigmas, dynamic stigmatized identities are stigmas that change from visible to invisible or vice versa over time, such as pregnancy and chronic or acute illness, and can also lead to identity management strategies for coping with discrimination and bias.

Identity Shifting

One common identity management strategy is identity shifting (Jackson, 2002). Identity shifting is altering one's actions, speech, and appearance to adjust to the dominant cultural norms within a given environmental setting (Jackson, 2002). This process involves changing how one speaks and behavioral patterns (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Identity shifting could be a conscious act, where the individual is fully aware of their behavior change. Still, it can also be unconscious, where the individuals change their thinking and behavior automatically to conform to the dominant social group (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). Identity shifting also focuses on visible stigmas since these seem to be triggered by threats against one's visible identity, like racial/ethnic identity or gender (Bryant, 2021). For example, identity shifting is a common phenomenon among Black women, especially in settings where they are in the minority (Dickens & Chavez, 2018).

Several theories can explain identity shifting. W.E.B. Dubois (2015) created the term "double consciousness" to represent the feeling of having two selves. Identity shifting is associated with this in the sense that the two "consciouses" are not in harmony, which can thus lead to a permanent split of these two identities.

Lafromboise and colleagues (1993) postulated five models of biculturalism, including assimilation, acculturation, alternation, multiculturalism, and fusion. Out of

these five models, the alternation model is the foundation of the phenomenon of identity shifting (Bryant, 2021). It suggests that it is possible to participate in two different cultures or to use two different languages, perhaps for various purposes, by altering one's behavior according to the situation (Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986).

Similar to the structure of the alternation model (LaFromboise et al., 1993), code-switching emerged in linguistic studies to describe the use of multiple languages within a single conversation (Barker, 1947; Weinreich, 1953). Research on code-switching has expanded to social and multicultural fields since changing languages involves cognitive and social factors (Bryant, 2021; Heller, 2010).

The expansion of code-switching into social and cognitive sciences has led to the coining of another similar theory known as frame switching. It refers to "shifts between interpretive frames rooted in different cultures in response to cues in the social environment" (Hong et al., 2000, *p*. 709). Frame switching also suggests that individuals use cultural cues or symbols (Hong et al., 2000) as triggers to change their language and behavior based on the appropriate situation. Thus, identity shifting, code-switching, and frame switching are similar in that individuals are changing an aspect of themselves (i.e., language and behavior) based on the cultural or social cues around them.

Another way to explain the concept of identity shifting lies in the identity negotiation theory and a phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST) postulated by Dickens and Chavez (2018). They stated that individuals decide how to adapt to different cultural and social contexts based on their understanding of societal expectations, stereotypes, and biases. Individuals who do not fit into the

dominant culture in their current context may experience stressors, like discrimination, and subsequently may develop coping reactions, such as altering their behaviors to fit in a situation (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). This model has been previously utilized for Black women in the US workforce (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Identity shifting has extensively been used as a coping mechanism for stigmatized identity in the context of psychology research about Black minority groups (Bryant, 2021; Dickens & Chavez, 2018; McCluney et al., 2021).

Lastly, suppression and manifestation (Madera et al., 2012) are other ways to manage one's identity in response to workplace discrimination. Identity manifestation is defined as openly displaying one's identity, such as disclosure of a concealable identity, behaving and dressing in ways closer to one's social identity, and engaging in discussions about social identity (Madera et al., 2012; Cha et al., 2019). Thus, manifestation is an expression of one's authentic stigmatized identity without changing it. On the other hand, suppression is the purposeful hiding of one's identity and not being genuine to one's social identity (Madera et al., 2012). Suppression can include concealing signs (e.g., pictures, artifacts) of identity in a workplace and refraining from talking about one's social identity with coworkers (Clair et al., 2005). Thus, in terms of identity shifting, suppression is when one hides their authentic identity, hence changing who they are in the workplace

All these theories and models explain identity shifting as a coping mechanism or reaction to some environmental threat to identity for the individual. However, this behavior change mechanism is both a complex and a long-lasting solution to identity-threatening scenarios. Identity shifting is known to be a double-edged sword for

individuals who partake in such behaviors (Ferguson et al., 2017). Identity shifting can be seen as a source of strength since it can allow minority individuals (e.g., Black women) to explore different aspects of their self-concept and aid in their interactions with people from different cultures (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). In organizational settings, Black employees (and even employees of other racial minorities) may benefit from "switching off" their stigmatized identity at work (McCluney et al., 2021). These benefits can include fair treatment in the workplace, better employment opportunities, and quality service (Cross Jr et al., 2002; Oyserman & Destin, 2010). Research has also stated that manifestation and suppression of identities have unique relationships with perceived discrimination (Madera et al., 2012). Manifesting group identity is negatively related to perceived discrimination, whereas suppression is positively related to perceived discrimination, indicating that manifesting one's authentic identity positively affects interpersonal interactions (Hebl et al., 2000; Madera et al., 2012). Some studied identity shifting behaviors that have been observed among Black employees in the workplace include temporarily replacing their self-presentation as 'Black' by changing how they dress, think, speak, act, and express themselves (Cross & Strauss, 1998), reducing the use colloquialisms and African American Vernacular English (AAVE) to promote perceptions of competence (Britt & Weldon, 2015; Lacy, 2007; Scott, 2013), and Black applicants also have been known to "Whiten" their resumes by using White-sounding names and removing markers of racial and cultural activities for higher chances of being hired (Kang et al., 2016).

There are also drawbacks to partaking in identity shifting behaviors. The pressure to constantly navigate in a context where one must change the way one

presents oneself and one's behaviors can be burdensome for an individual (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Dickens and Chavez (2018) also stated that frequent identity shifting can create internal conflict and lead to a distorted self-perception. In a cross-race collaboration study between White and Black women researchers (Bell et al., 2003), the results indicated that Black women do not wish to change or hide their racial identity. This has also led to emotional resistance on the part of such racial minority groups when they tried to shift their identities in response to racial discrimination (Scott, 2013). Some researchers have also stated that Black employees (like other racial minorities) could limit their creativity at work by suppressing their cultural identities and promoting the dominant cultures instead (Cha & Roberts, 2019).

Furthermore, Madera and colleagues (2012) also suggest the negative consequences of suppressing one's identity. Suppression of group identity is not only positively related to perceived discrimination and negative self-esteem (Avery et al., 2008) and self-concept (Vorauer & Kumhyr, 2001), but it is also suggested to have significant correlations with job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Madera et al., 2012). This suppression of identity harms the employees and the organization since employees are not giving or cannot give their best performance. Overall, the constant changing or shifting of identity can be emotionally, psychologically, and even physically exhausting for individuals (McCluney et al., 2021).

Drawbacks of not partaking in identity shifting behaviors for minority groups in the workplace also exist. Research, for instance, has shown bias against Black-sounding names in hiring, recruiting, and promotion decisions at companies (Mithani & Murphy, 2017). Bias related to sounds and accents is also prevalent. For instance, voices that

were distinctly recognized as Black from a White sample of college students were perceived as less competent and received lower wages in comparison to Black employees who spoke the same standard American English (Grogger, 2011). Black women who wear their hair in natural styles are also penalized for violating professional norms (Koval & Rosette, 2021). Such judgments on natural hairstyles have led to the loss of employment for most Black women (Byrd & Tharps, 2014; Onwuachi-Willig, 2010). This goes to show that weighing the pros and cons of identity shifting is a dilemma for ethnic minority groups who want to be professionally successful in their careers. Due to the derivation of professional standards from White cultural norms, including having "properly combed hair" (Barrick et al., 2009; McCluney et al., 2021), Black and other racial minority employees adjust their identities in ways (for example, changing their accent and hairstyles) that reflect these dominant standards of professionalism and competency to advance their careers and not face any negative consequences (McCluney et al., 2021).

The research on identity shifting has been primarily qualitative and focused mainly on the racial minority of Black people, especially Black women in the workplace. Examination of other racial minorities (especially South Asian employees) and related identity-shifting research has been scant (Watson & Scraton, 2001; Sundar, 2008). Outcomes of identity shifting, such as emotional burnout and feelings of inauthenticity (Bryant, 2021), have also been investigated more than antecedents and triggers of identity shifting behaviors among minority groups. Identity shifting is partly due to visible stigmas (e.g., race and gender) and discrimination associated with those stereotypes (Bryant, 2021). However, there is not much research done on what are the

perceptions of minority groups who use identity shifting behaviors as coping mechanisms about the discrimination they face or believe they face.

Thus, the current study focused on the relationship between identity shifting behaviors by a specific racial minority group (i.e., South Asians) and the perceived diversity climate of the organization they are currently working in.

Perceived Diversity Climate

According to Schneider and Reichers (1983), climate perceptions are part of a person's processes for making sense of their work environment and integrating those ideas into their broader environmental perceptions and personal meanings of these perceptions. In the workplace, climate perceptions can have a specific focus, such as shared or diversity (Cachat-Rosset et al., 2019). This study will focus on diversity climate perceptions.

Perceived diversity climate (or diversity climate) is defined as individual employees' impressions of an organization's actions that indicate that the organization cares about diversity and strives to create an inclusive environment for all demographic groups (Triana et al., 2015).

Although, several models have defined diversity climate, Cox's (1994) model is among the most popular. Cox's (1994) groundbreaking work originated the construct of diversity climate when he embedded the concept into his interaction model of cultural diversity (IMCD). The IMCD model states that the type and form of diversity in each social system combine with characteristics of the diversity climate that pertain to that system, impacting various individual, organizational, and even societal outcomes (Cox, 1994).

Expanding on Cox's (1994) research, several researchers have examined pro-diversity climates' positive and negative effects (Cachat-Rosset et al., 2019). At the individual level, a pro-diversity climate increases employees' job satisfaction, develops loyalty and dedication toward the organization, and improves co-worker interactions (Eisenberger et al., 1990; Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2001; Robinson & Dechant, 1997). At the organizational level, scholars have found that pro-diversity climates' impact is significant on sales performance (McKay et al., 2009), productivity, and return on investment (Gonzalez & DeNisi, 2009).

Besides Cox (1994), another multi-dimensional model of perceived diversity climate was created by Barak et al. (1998). Barak and colleagues proposed that diversity climate perceptions can be categorized into two dimensions, personal and organizational, which further include four factors: personal comfort, diversity value, organizational fairness, and organizational inclusiveness. These factors were found through a 16-item diversity perception scale factor analysis.

Evidence suggests that perceptions of diversity climate are affected by one's racial group membership (Kossek & Zonia, 1993). Minority racial groups learn about their subordinate status in society, as experienced through prolonged discrimination (Clark et al., 1999; Williams et al., 1997). Conversely, the majority groups are less likely to experience racial discrimination. This difference between discriminatory experiences implies that the perception of minority groups should place considerable value on a firm's diversity climate compared to those of the majority groups (McKay et al., 2007). True to this implication, research on diversity climate has primarily focused on perceptions of different racial minorities (McKay et al., 2007). Following this trend, the

focus of this study was also on the perceptions of diversity climate by racial minority employees.

Furthermore, perceived diversity climate is an essential concept since how employees perceive their work environment in terms of diversity can have a considerable influence on individual affective outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational identification, and individual job performance measures such as work quality, productivity, and absenteeism (Cox, 1994; Wolfson et al., 2011). Employees who believe their organization is working effectively toward making the workplace diverse and inclusive will have a positive attitude and reaction toward their organization (Cox, 1994; Eisenberger et al., 1990; Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2001; Robinson & Dechant, 1997). One of the ways that employees can perceive that their organization is working toward a diverse and inclusive work environment is how they tackle discrimination and bias in the workplace.

Perceived Workplace Racial Discrimination

Discrimination is denying equal treatment to individuals because of their group membership (Allport, 1954). Title VII of the Civil Rights Act forbade employment discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion, and national origin (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1964). However, despite laws being in place, workplace discrimination is still a significant issue (Triana et al., 2015). Moreover, racial discrimination has associated costs to employers as well as employees (Triana et al., 2015). For instance, employment discrimination impacts employers' ability to recruit and retain talent, improve individual and organizational performance, and market consumer products or services (Triana et al., 2015). It is also linked to employee

stress, job dissatisfaction, and increased turnover intent (Dipboye & Colella, 2005; Gee, 2002; Triana et al., 2010). These employee effects, when aggregated, can also negatively impact an organization's success (Lepak et al., 2006; Messersmith et al., 2011). Actual employee discrimination is harmful, but research has suggested that employee perceptions of racial discrimination (even if there are no such incidents in reality) can also be harmful, especially when they are over- or under-estimated (Turner & Turner, 1981). Therefore, it is also critical to investigate an employee's perception of racial discrimination in the workplace.

The focus of this study is perceived racial discrimination, which has been defined as "a minority group member's subjective perception of unfair treatment of racial/ethnic groups or members of the groups, based on racial prejudice." (Noh et al., 1999, *p*. 194). Triana and colleagues (2015) have attempted to explain perceived racial discrimination using perceived diversity climate (Cox, 1994) and relative deprivation theory (Crosby, 1976). Relative deprivation theory (Crosby, 1976) is defined as "individuals' feelings of being deprived of something anchored to standards of fair treatment, informed by the context in which deprivation occurs." According to their research, the theory of perceived diversity climate (Cox, 1994) has been shown to predict that perceived discrimination at work will negatively affect employees' perceptions of their employers and employees' psychological and physical well-being (Triana et al., 2015), including work-related stress and tension (Wated & Sanchez, 2006), post-traumatic stress disorder (Buchanan, 2002), greater bodily pain (Burgess et al., 2009), hypertension (Din-Dziethama et al., 2004), substance abuse (Rospenda et al., 2009; Yoo et al., 2010b), and psychological and physical health conditions (Asakura et al., 2008; de Castro et al., 2008).

Rationale

South Asians are a unique work demographic, as their success in economic and academic fields (Kaduvettoor-Davidson & Inman, 2013) has always somewhat overshadowed the social issues they might face in several US spaces. The "model minority" perception and perceptual foreigner stereotype are a few of the many racial issues that South Asians face. However, these issues have been understudied in the US workplace for South Asians. Thus, it is unclear what consequences South Asian employees face and what coping mechanisms these groups use against these racial issues in the workplace. It is crucial to understand how South Asian employees perceive, experience, and cope with racial discrimination issues in the workplace since they are a substantial proportion of the US workforce (SAALT, 2019).

This study can be a significant step toward filling the gap in industrial and organizational psychology research regarding South Asian employees and their experiences of discrimination. It attempts to cover South Asian employees in the identity shifting literature. Additionally, this study can also help to give organizations some helpful insight into how their South Asian employees experience and deal with workplace discrimination and how they can intervene to reduce the negative consequences for this minority group. How employees perceive their organizations is essential knowledge since it can help them shape and modify policies and rules to make the workplace environment more conducive for their employees to keep job satisfaction and productivity high.

Statement of Hypothesis

This study examines the correlation between South Asian employees' perceptions of diversity climates and their identity shifting behaviors with the mediation of perceived racial discrimination. Perceived discrimination and perceived diversity climate are negatively correlated (Triana et al., 2015), and perceived discrimination and employees' coping behavior are positively correlated (Triana et al., 2015). I propose that an employee's perception of positive diversity climate will be correlated with their high sensitivity to racial discriminatory experiences at work; this will also be correlated with less reliance on or usage of coping behaviors that usually are done in response to discrimination and bias (i.e., more manifestation and less suppression behaviors). On the other hand, an employee's perception of negative diversity climate will associated with their low sensitivity to racial discriminatory experiences at work and usage of more coping behaviors such as identity shifting behaviors (i.e., less manifestation and more suppression behaviors). Therefore, I proposed the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1

South Asian perceptions of workplace diversity climate will be negatively associated with their perceptions of racial discrimination in the workplace.

Hypothesis 2 A-B

South Asian perceptions of racial discrimination in the workplace will be positively associated with suppression behaviors by South Asian employees (A) and negatively associated with manifestation behaviors by South Asian employees (B).

Hypothesis 3 A-B

The negative relationship between perceived diversity climate and identity shifting behaviors will be mediated by perceived racial discrimination in the workplace such that the more positive perception of diversity climate South Asian employees have, the less they will perceive racial discrimination in the workplace, thus they will be less likely to rely on suppression behaviors (A) and more likely to rely on manifestation behaviors (B).

Figure 1

Proposed Conceptual Model – Hypothesis 3A

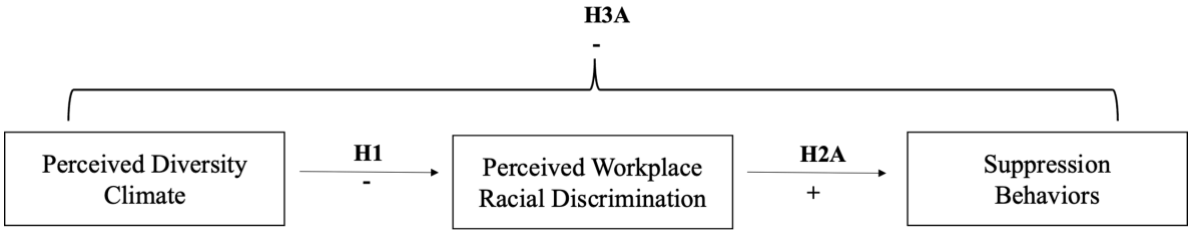
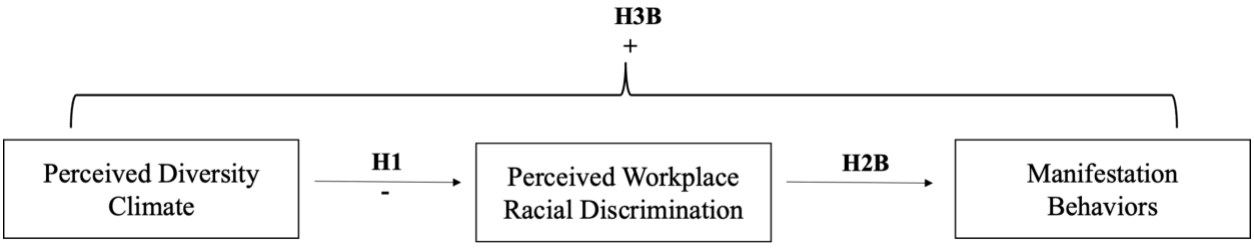


Figure 2

Proposed Conceptual Model – Hypothesis 3B



Method

Participants

Participants completed an online Qualtrics survey on their perceptions about their current workplace's diversity climate, perceptions of racial discrimination, and whether they had been partaking in identity shifting behaviors. To be included, participants had to: (a) Identify as a South Asian American (part- or full-South Asian heritage; either a native US-born or an immigrant from South Asian countries including India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Maldives) and (b) working at least 20 hours per week. For this study, South Asian Americans included South Asians born in the US and working in the US, South Asians born outside the US but working in the US, Half South Asian Americans with one of the parents and being non-South Asian and working in the US. Besides inviting people of this specific demographic, the survey also provided an option to indicate eligibility in the demographics. The participants were recruited from three platforms: social media websites (LinkedIn, Instagram, and X), Introductory Psychology participant SONA pool, and Prolific. Funding was used to compensate participants on Prolific ($12/hour for an average completion time of 7 minutes). SONA participants received points toward their research credit requirement in undergraduate classes, and social media participants did not receive any compensation.

Based on the empirical tests performed by Fritz and MacKinnon (2007), a sample size of 148 would be required for the power of 0.8 and low to medium effect sizes of 0.26 for α and β parameters based on Cohen's (1988) criteria for a mediated regression study. To count for errors in data collection and incomplete responses, I aimed for a sample of 200. After data cleaning and excluding non-eligible, the sample size for the current analyses was $N = 279$. For a full breakdown of demographics, see Table 1.

All participants in the sample were South Asian, with the majority (95.95%, *n* = 285) having only one racial/ethnic background and some of them having additional racial and ethnic backgrounds: 2.36% (*n* = 7) East South Asian, 0.67% (*n* = 2) East Asian, 0.67% (*n* = 2) White/Caucasian, and 0.34% (*n* =1) Latino. Furthermore, 60.61% (*n* = 180) had their origins in India, 20.54% (*n* = 61) from Pakistan, 6.73% (*n* = 20) from Bangladesh, 4.71% (*n* = 14) from Nepal, 2.36% (*n* = 7) from the Maldives, 0.67% (*n* = 2) from both Pakistan and India, 0.34% (n = 1) from both Nepal and India, 0.34% (*n* =1) from Bhutan, and 3.7% (*n* = 11) did not specify their origins. Based on the results of the Census Bureau 2020, Asian Indian (79.53%) was the largest South Asian population in the US, followed by 11.47% from Pakistan, 4.55% from Bangladesh, 3.66% from Nepal, 0.01% from Maldives, and 0.77% from Bhutan. Thus, the sample is under-representative of those who identify their origins from India and Bhutan and over-representative of those from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Maldives.

The average age of the sample was 28.13 years. The gender identity breakdown of the participants is as follows: 58.92% (*n* = 175) identified as Woman, 37.37% (*n* = 111) as Man, 1.68% (*n*=5) as Genderqueer, nonbinary, and gender-fluid, 0.34% (*n* = 1) as both Genderqueer, nonbinary, and gender-fluid and man, 0.34% (*n* = 1) both preferred to self-describe and as a woman, 0.42% (*n* = 1) did not prefer to respond and 1.01% (*n* =3) did not specify. As per the 2020 Census Bureau results, the US population comprises 50.9% of females and 49.1% of males, which makes the sample over-represent those who identify as women and under-represent those who identify as men. The US Census Bureau does not provide details on gender and sexual identity, making it difficult to assess the representativeness of the gender demographics of the current dataset.

The average working hours (per week) entered by the sample was 31.96 (SD = 8.75). According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, the nation's average working hours were 38.5 per week in 2023, making the sample under-representative of the current US workforce. Based on the responses of the participants about their work setting, 50.51% (*n* = 150) worked entirely in-person for their jobs, 22.56% (*n* = 67) worked completely remotely or from home, and 25.93% (*n* = 77) worked in a hybrid setting. Upon further questioning, some participants provided more explanation on their hybrid work settings with responses such as, “2 days from home and 3 days in the office”, “1 remote day, 4 in-person per week”, and “5 days a month in person.” As per the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 78.1% worked in-person, 10.5% teleworked all hours, and 11.4% teleworked some hours. Thus, participants who stated they worked completely in-person were under-represented, and those who worked remotely and hybrid were over-represented. The majority of the sample (25.93%, *n* = 77) worked in the Health care and social assistance industry, followed by 11.45% (*n* =34) in Scientific or Technical services, 10.44% (*n* =31) in Retail, 8.75% (*n* = 26) in Information services and Data or other, 8.08% (*n* = 24) in Finance and Insurance, 7.74% (*n* =23) in Hotel and Food services, 6.73% (*n* =20) in Education, 3.37% (*n* = 10) in Manufacturing Electronics or other, 2.36% (*n* = 7) in Government and Public Administration, 1.68% (*n* = 5) in Telecommunications, 1.35% (*n* = 4) in Legal Services, 1.35% (*n* = 4) in Construction, 0.84% (*n* = 2) in Arts and Entertainment, 0.84% (*n* = 2) in Agriculture, forestry, fishing or hunting, 0.84% (*n* = 2) in Military, 0.34% (*n* =1) in Publishing, and Real Estate, respectively. A portion of the sample, 8.08% (*n* =24), did not specify their current work industry. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 13.4% of the US workforce is

in the Health care and social assistance industry, 8.8% in Retail, 1.9% in Information services, 5.6% in Financial activities, 2.3% in Education services, 9.6% in Leisure and Hospitality, 13.1% in Government, and 4.6% in Construction. Data on other occupations was not available to peruse. Therefore, the participants who identified as working in Health care and social assistance, Retail, Information services, Finance, and Education were over-represented, and those who worked in Government, Construction, and Hotel and Food services were under-represented in the current sample. The average organizational tenure of the sample was 6.07 years. Lastly, 66.23% (n = 197) respondents mentioned having no supervisory responsibility, while 32.32% (n = 96) did have such responsibilities, and 1.35% (n = 3) did not specify.

Procedure

At the beginning of the survey, the purpose of the study was described to the participants as research on racial discrimination experiences of South Asian employees in the US workplace. The study was conducted entirely on Qualtrics. After providing informed consent, participants answered a 38-item questionnaire about their perceptions of the diversity climate, racial discrimination experiences, and whether they partook in identity-shifting behaviors (i.e., identity manifestation and suppression) at their current place of work. These three scales were counterbalanced to protect against order or sequence effects (Corriero, 2017). Following the three main scales, a demographic questionnaire including questions about gender, age, supervisory responsibility status, work industry, tenure at the current job, and average working hours (Appendix A) was filled out by the participants. At the end of the survey, participants were also asked an open-ended question about any other identity shifting behaviors they partake in at their

workplace (Appendix D). This question was asked to collect more contextual data to understand if South Asian employees have different identity shifting behaviors than other racial/ethnic groups. Two attention check items were present throughout the survey. A complete copy of the survey is in Appendix E.

Materials

Perceived Diversity Climate.

Perceived diversity climate was measured by the perceptions of diversity climate scale developed by McKay and colleagues (2007). The scale was inspired by Mor Barak et al. (1998) and uses nine items that address how employees perceive diversity as valued in their organization. Scale responses were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = well below expectations to 5 = well above expectations. High scores on the items will represent positive perceptions about the firm's diversity climate (Appendix B).

Perceived Racial Discrimination.

The Workplace Prejudice/Discrimination Inventory (WPDI) developed by James and colleagues (1994) was used to measure perceived racial discrimination (Appendix C). The 15-item scale includes general items reflecting individuals' global perceptions of prejudice/discrimination at work and items reflecting the common specific types of discrimination (James et al., 1994) in the workplace. Additionally, the items were modified by replacing the "racial/ethnic group" phrase with "South Asian identity" to make the scale more specific to the South Asian population while keeping the item meanings the same. Participants indicated their level of agreement /disagreement with a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree with four negatively phrased items reverse-scored.

Identity Shifting Behaviors.

I utilized the Madera et al. (2012) scale of manifestation and suppression of group identity items for the identity shifting construct. The authors developed this scale to measure how identity management strategies of manifesting and suppressing one's identity are related to perceived discrimination and, in turn, job-related outcomes such as job satisfaction and turnover intentions. The scale includes ten items that describe identity suppression strategies (α = .90) and ten items that describe identity manifestation strategies (α = .88). Identity manifestation is defined as openly displaying one's identity, such as disclosure of a concealable identity, behaving and dressing in ways closer to one's social identity, and engaging in discussions about social identity (Madera et al., 2012; Cha et al., 2019). Thus, manifestation is an expression of one's authentic stigmatized identity without changing it. On the other hand, suppression is the purposeful hiding of one's identity and not being authentic to one's social identity (Madera et al., 2012). Since this is a closely tied concept to identity shifting, I used this scale to learn more about the specific identity shifting behaviors that participants engaged in or not. I revised the scale to make the participants think about their racial identity (i.e., South Asian) instead of other social identities by replacing the phrase "my identity" with "my South Asian identity" in the items (Appendix D). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale with 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, with high scores on manifestation and suppression sub-scales revealing a higher probability of manifestation and suppression of one's racial/ethnic identity, respectively. Both scales were measured with manifestation scores indicating low to no identity shifting behaviors' probability and suppressions scores indicating high identity shifting behaviors probability.

Attention Check.

Two attention check items were present in the survey. One was within the Perceived Racial Discrimination measure (Appendix B), and the second was within the Manifestation of Group Identity items (Appendix C). An example of an attention check item is, “Please select “strongly agree” to show you are paying attention to the item.”

Results

Pre-Processing

Inclusion Criteria and Attention Checks

Twelve responses were collected from social media, 235 from SONA, and 314 from Prolific, making the sample size 561. The next step included removing responses that failed to meet the inclusion criteria from all three samples, i.e. (a) South Asian American (part- or full-South Asian heritage; either a native US-born or an immigrant from South Asian countries including India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Maldives) (b) working at least 20 hours per week. The removal of responses that failed to meet the inclusion criteria included $n = 7$ from the social media set, $n = 156$ from the SONA set, and $n = 54$ from the Prolific sample. Responses that failed both attention checks were also removed from the analysis, resulting in the removal of $n = 1$ from the social media set, $n = 21$ from the SONA set, and $n = 25$ for the Prolific set. The final sample size for the social media sample was $n = 4$, $n = 58$ for the SONA set, and $n = 235$ for the Prolific set, with the overall total to be $n = 297$.

Perceived Diversity Climate

All nine items' scores were averaged together to obtain an overall perceived diversity climate score, with a high score indicating a positive perception of the

diversity climate at one's workplace. The Cronbach's alpha (α = 0.91) was high for the items.

Perceived Racial Discrimination

Scores of all 15 items were averaged together to get a composite score for the measure, with items 3, 7, 10, and 15 being reverse-coded. The Cronbach's alpha (α = 0.90) was high for the items.

Identity Shifting Behaviors

Ratings for all ten items on the suppression and manifestation subscales will be averaged to create two composite scores for identity shifting (low identity shifting probability = manifestation score and high identity shifting probability = suppression score). The internal consistency scores for both manifestation (α = 0.88) and suppression (α = 0.94) scales were high.

All analyses were conducted using R (R Core Team, 2021). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviations, range, etc.) were calculated for each of the four study variables. To see the complete descriptive statistics, see Table 2.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 predicted that South Asian employees' perceptions of workplace diversity climate will be negatively associated with their perceptions of racial discrimination in the workplace. Results found that there is a significant negative relationship between workplace perceived diversity climate and perceived racial discrimination (B = -0.49, p <.001, 95% CI [-0.56, -0.41]), thus supporting the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2A predicted that South Asian employees' perceptions of racial

discrimination in the workplace would be positively related to identity shifting behaviors such that there will be a positive significant correlation with suppression behaviors. Results found a significant positive relationship between perceived racial discrimination and suppression behaviors (B = 0.46, p<0.001, 95% CI [0.33, 0.59]). Therefore, Hypothesis 2A was supported.

On the other hand, hypothesis 2B predicted that South Asian employees' perceptions of racial discrimination in the workplace will be negatively related to manifestation behaviors. Results found that there was no significant relationship between perceived racial discrimination and manifestation behaviors of South Asian identity (B = 0.11, p = 0.135, 95% CI [-0.04, 0.27]), thus finding no support for hypothesis 2B.

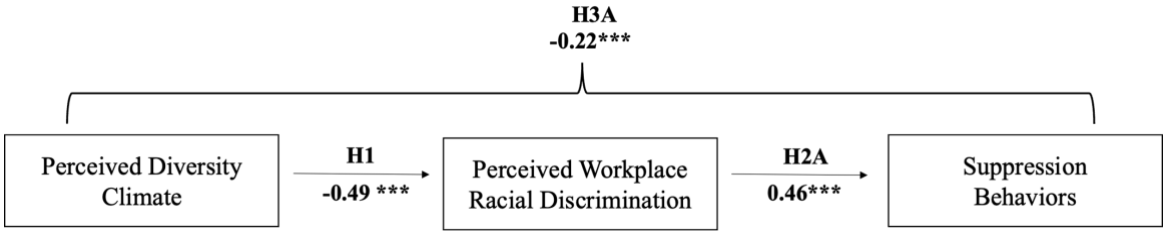
Hypothesis 3A predicted that the negative relationship between perceived diversity climate and identity shifting behaviors would be mediated by perceived racial discrimination in the workplace; thus, the more positive the perception of the diversity climate South Asian employees have, the less they will perceive racial discrimination in the workplace. Thus, they will be less likely to rely on suppression behaviors. Results found that there was a complete mediation by perceived racial discrimination on the relationship between workplace diversity climate and suppression behaviors, with a significant negative total effect (B = -0.18, p< .001, 95% CI [-0.29, -0.08]) a significant negative indirect effect (B = -0.22, p <.001, 95% CI [-0.30, -0.15]), and a non-significant direct effect (B = 0.04, p = 0.54, 95% CI [-0.08, 0.15]). Therefore, hypothesis 3A was supported.

Lastly, hypothesis 3B predicted that the positive relationship between perceived

diversity climate and manifestation behaviors would be mediated by perceived racial discrimination such that South Asian employees perceive that the more positive diversity climate, the less they will perceive racial discrimination in the workplace. Thus, they will be more likely to manifest their South Asian identity. However, results found that there was no mediation by perceived racial discrimination on the relationship between workplace diversity climate and manifestation behaviors, with a positive significant total effect (B = 0.23, p <.001, 95% CI [0.12, 0.34]), a non-significant indirect effect (B = -0.06, p = 0.15, 95% CI [-0.13, 0.02]), and a positive significant direct effect (B = 0.29, p <0.001, 95% CI [0.16, 0.42]). The significant positive total and direct effects indicate a relationship between perceived diversity climate and manifestation behaviors. However, it cannot be explained through perceived racial discrimination, thus not supporting Hypothesis 3B.

Figure 3A

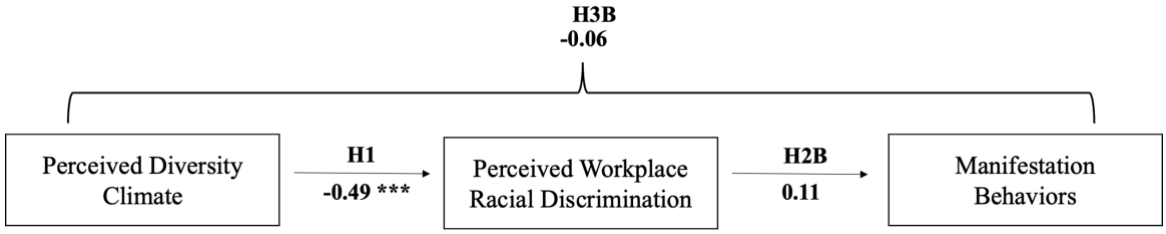
Results – Hypothesis 3A



*** *indicates p-values < 0.05*

Figure 3B

Results – Hypothesis 3B



*** *indicates p-values < 0.05*

Discussion

Summary and Interpretation of Results

This study explored the understudied demographic of South Asian employees in the US workforce and their usage of manifestation and suppression behaviors concerning perceived diversity climate and perceived racial discrimination. Results found a significant negative correlation between perceived diversity climate and perceived racial discrimination, thus supporting hypothesis one. For hypothesis two, there was a significant positive relationship between perceived racial discrimination and suppression behaviors of South Asian identity. On the other hand, the results were not significant when it came to the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and manifestation behaviors of South Asian identity. Lastly, the results for hypothesis three revealed a complete mediation by perceived racial discrimination for the relationship between perceived diversity climate and suppression behaviors, with both total and indirect effects being significant and negative and direct effects being non-significant. However, there was no mediation by perceived racial discrimination on the relationship between perceived diversity climate and manifestation behaviors of South Asian identity, with total and direct effects being positive and significant and indirect effects being non-significant.

The significant results of the first hypothesis replicate Triana and colleagues' (2015) results, who found perceived diversity climate and perceived racial discrimination to also be significantly negatively correlated. Since the items in the Workplace Prejudice/Discrimination Inventory (James et al., 1994) included both global perceptions of discrimination and specific perceptions of discrimination (Appendix C), the significant results indicate that with positive diversity climate perceptions, South Asian employees are not only likely to perceive less racial discrimination in their workplace but also less likely perceive racial discrimination toward themselves.

Concerning hypothesis two, there was a significant positive relationship between perceived racial discrimination and suppression behaviors, indicating that the more an employee has perceptions about racial discrimination in the workplace, the more they will rely on suppression behaviors to hide or suppress their South Asian identity. The results regarding suppression behaviors confirmed by Triana and colleagues (2015) in that perceived discrimination is positively related to employees' coping behaviors. Identity shifting behaviors are expected in response to or anticipation of experiencing workplace discrimination and bias (Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Hong et al., 2000), which makes it a coping mechanism in the workplace.

On the other hand, the non-significant results for the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and manifestation behaviors may indicate that even when South Asian employees experience racial discrimination in the workplace, their manifestation behaviors remain unaffected, and there might be another workplace variable that could be affecting it instead. These results are surprising, especially given

that suppression and manifestation behavior items for group identity are parallel. Previous research found significant relationships between the manifestation behaviors and perceived discrimination (Madera et al., 2012). These results indicate that manifestation and suppression might not be as similar as previously thought. Another reason why there might not be a significant relationship between manifestation behaviors and perceived racial discrimination is the fact that past research (Madera et al., 2012) has used the manifestation and suppression of group identity scale for more invisible identities such as sexual identities. The way manifestation behaviors interact with invisible identities compared to visible identities such as race might be different since it might not be possible to manifest and suppress one's racial identity completely.

A complete mediation by perceived racial discrimination for the relationship between perceived diversity climate and suppression behaviors was found, with both total and indirect effects being significant and negative and direct effects being non-significant. Thus, it can be stated that the negative relationship between perceived diversity climate is explained entirely by perceived racial discrimination such that when South Asian employees perceive a positive diversity climate at their workplace, they also perceive less racial discrimination and, consequently, are less likely to rely on suppression behaviors to hide their South Asian identity at the workplace. However, there was no mediation by perceived racial discrimination on the relationship between perceived diversity climate and manifestation behaviors of South Asian identity, with total and direct effects being positive and significant and indirect effects being non-significant. These results suggest that perceived diversity climate and manifestation behaviors are positively related to each other, such that when South Asian employees

perceive their workplace to have a positive diversity climate, they are also more likely to rely on manifestation behaviors, where they can be authentic to their South Asian identity. However, unlike the hypothesis, this positive relationship is not explained via mediation through perceived racial discrimination. A possible reason for this insignificant mediation result is that the study design was not longitudinal, making mediation and causal prediction unlikely (Levin, 2006).

The survey also asked participants to specify any other specific ways they change their appearance, behavior, or how they communicate at work that is different from their South Asian heritage and identity. Out of the responses, 67 participants wrote comments about whether they partake in any specific identity shifting behaviors and their rationale. There were some comments mentioning the usage of identity suppression and some mentioning no such usage and their rationale for doing so. Comments about suppression confirm some of the study's results, where participants state that they perform such identity changes in response to or in anticipation of some racial discrimination or bias in the workplace. Participants who commented on how they do not particularly suppress their South Asian identities offer a variety of reasons, from feeling comfortable in their workplace because they are not the minority to being indifferent about their South Asian identity (see Table 6).

Limitations

Despite the significant results of the study, there are still various limitations of this study. First, the raw data collected before any pre-processing and data analysis was several times bigger than the final sample size (n = 567 to n = 297) reduced. It is widely known that a large test sample is required to accurately evaluate patterns between

variables with a low error rate (Raudys & Jain, 1991). Therefore, the small sample size could result in some of the study's insignificant results. Second, the study relied on self-reports for all the measures, and participants could have needed to be more accurate, inattentive, or misleading in their responses. Since the study focused on self-referential constructs (such as racial discrimination experiences and manifestation and suppression behaviors done by the participants), using self-reported measures was justifiable (Chan, 2009).

Additionally, the study included two instructional manipulation checks (IMCs), which asked the respondents to click on a specific answer choice and to assess whether they were paying attention to the instructions (Oppenheimer et al., 2009). However, more research is still needed on the effectiveness of the current attention check items in accurately identifying participants who provide poor online survey responses (Gummer et al., 2021). The misleading responses by participants and common method variance could have influenced the strength of the observed relationships (Podsakoff et al., 2003). However, since the participants were allowed to take the questionnaire anonymously (study assurances about anonymity were given in the informed consent, and their personal identity information was not recorded) and at their time and place of choosing, common method variance is reasonably minimized (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Third, the study relied on cross-sectional, single-point data, which does not allow us to infer a causal relationship between the variables (Levin, 2006).

On the other hand, concerning manifestation behaviors, the cross-sectional design of the study could be a potential reason for no mediation result as it does not allow for causal inferences, and a longitudinal study might be more accurate in

studying the mediation effect of perceived racial discrimination on perceived diversity climate and manifestation behaviors, as well as suppression behaviors. Fourth, instead of using actual identity shifting items for the study, I used manifestation and suppression behaviors of group identity items (Madera et al., 2012). Even though several definitions of identity shifting (and related) concepts define something similar (Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Hong et al., 2000) to what manifestation and suppression behaviors have also been defined (Triana et al., 2015), there is still a possibility that these results might not be utterly replicable in future studies. Furthermore, Madera and colleagues (2012) developed the suppression and manifestation scales in the context of invisible social group identities, which might have different effects on visible identities such as race. Fifth, the minimum 20-hour working requirement might have excluded other part-time South Asian workers in the US who may also experience racial discrimination in the workplace as well as partake in identity shifting behaviors. However, the decision to include this minimum working hour requirement was chosen for the sample's stable foundation of workers. Part-time jobs with hours less than 20 might be more variable. Sixth, self-selection bias that might have been involved in the response collection of this study (Bethlehem, 2010), indicating that probability sampling was not involved in data collection. Since majority of the sample was collected from a data collection website like Prolific, SONA psychology pool, and social media websites like Instagram and LinkedIn, most of the participants might have chosen to take part in the survey for the purpose of compensation and because they had access to these Internet databases. Furthermore, a large part of this sample either works in remote work settings or hybrid, indicating that they may only physically interact with

their co-workers and supervisors differently than their in-person counterparts. Judgments about diversity climate, racial discrimination, and identity shifting may differ across work contexts (Fineman et al., 2007). Lastly, the focus of this study was South Asian employees in the US which leads to specific results for this population which should not be generalized to other racial minority groups and their experiences with identity shifting behavior and discrimination due to differences in cultures and working practices. More research should be done to examine how different groups compare with each other.

Future Research and Practical Implications

Future research should not only use the limitations of this study to improve upon and replicate the results of this study but also include new mediator variables to examine the relationship between the two main variables, which is also recommended. Perceived racial discrimination had previous significant relationships with perceived diversity climate and manifestation and suppression behaviors (Madera et al., 2012). However, as the non-significant relations in the case of manifestations behaviors indicate, other mediator variables must be present to explain the relationship between perceived diversity climate and identity shifting behaviors of South Asian employees. Furthermore, applying these concepts to more racial and ethnic groups can provide more comparisons with South Asian groups.

Additionally, researchers should look for alternate study designs to examine these variables and the patterns between them, such as qualitative elements like interviews to get more depth of what identity shifting means to different employees, observational studies in actual organizational setting where there is a substantial

presence of South Asian employees and studying more longitudinal elements to establish (or at least propose) causality.

There is also room to introduce moderators, which could exacerbate or diminish the strength of the relationship between the variables in this study. The study collected data on gender, work setting, organizational tenure, and racial/ethnic background to evaluate the participants' demographics and the sample's representativeness, which research could use as potential moderators in the future.

As the results suggest, suppression and manifestation behaviors done by South Asian employees are influenced by their perceptions of the workplace diversity climate and experiences of racial discrimination in the workplace. Observation of suppression behaviors can indicate that South Asian employees are not particularly feeling like they can be their authentic selves in the workplace, which has been linked with low work engagement, self-alienation at work, burnout, job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Van den Bosch & Taris, 2014). The study is also a good reminder for practitioners to understand the importance of employee perceptions. The study revolves around what participants believe they see and experience in the workplace, which might be completely different or the same as what is happening. It is essential for organizations to not only establish policies and guidelines about their diversity maintenance and discrimination disciplinary and prevention practices but also to communicate them accurately and enforce them properly so that employees and the organizations are on the same page about such things. Collecting data on what employees perceive about the diversity climate of the workplace is useful for organization to know if the diversity and inclusion policies and work practices they are establishing and promoting are doing what the

organizations intended them to do. Suppose employees perceive an organization's diversity climate to be negative and racial discrimination levels to be high. In that case, managers can use this knowledge to recognize and mitigate the problematic variables in the workplace that are potentially making employees feel discriminated against and less authentic and satisfied.

Conclusion

The study provides a crucial step for including South Asian workers in organizational research and for further research into identifying shifting behaviors in the workplace, as well as their causes and consequences. No previous research has studied this demographic concerning perceived diversity climate and identity shifting behaviors. The findings show that these variables influence each other in the case of South Asian workers, and further research is required to understand other aspects of work.

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Tables

Table 1.

Sample Demographics (n = 297)

Sample characteristics	***n***	**%**
Gender		
Woman	175	58.92%
Man	111	37.37%
Genderqueer, nonbinary, gender fluid	5	1.68%
Did not mention	3	1.01%
Prefer not to respond	1	0.34%
Genderqueer, nonbinary, gender fluid & Man	1	0.34%
Woman & Prefer to self describe	1	0.34%
Race/Ethnicity		
South Asian	285	95.95%
South Asian and South East Asian	7	2.36%
South Asian and East Asian	2	0.67%
South Asian and White	2	0.67%
South Asian and Latino	1	0.34%
Origin Country		
India	180	60.61%
Pakistan	61	20.54%
Bangladesh	20	6.73%
Nepal	14	4.71%
Did not mention	11	3.70%
Maldives	7	2.36%
India & Pakistan	2	0.67%

Bhutan	1	0.34%
India & Nepal	1	0.34%
Work Setting		
Completely in-person	150	50.51%
Hybrid	77	25.93%
Completely remote or Work from Home	67	22.56%
Note reported	3	1.01%
Supervisory Responsibility		
No	197	66.23%
Yes	96	32.32%
Not reported	4	1.35%
Industry		
Health Care and Social Assistance	77	25.93%
Scientific or Technical Services	34	11.45%
Retail	31	10.44%
Information Services and Data or other	26	8.75%
Finance and Insurance	24	8.08%
Other Industry (Unspecified)	24	8.08%
Hotel and Food Services	23	7.74%
Education	20	6.73%
Manufacturing- Electronics or Other	10	3.37%
Government and Public Administration	7	2.36%
Telecommunication	5	1.68%
Legal Services	4	1.35%
Construction	4	1.35%
Arts, Entertainment or Recreation	2	0.67%

Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, or Hunting	2	0.67%
Military	2	0.67%
Publishing	1	0.34%
Real estate, Rental, or Leasing	1	0.34%

Table 2.

Means, Standard Deviations, Range, and Median

Variable	*M*	*SD*	*Range*	*Median*
Age (in years)	28.13	10.2	18-66	26
Hours Worked (per week)	31.96	8.75	20-61	31
Org Tenure (in years)	2.92	3.05	0-24	2
Diversity Climate	3.29	0.87	0-5	3.22
Racial Discrimination	2.33	0.73	0-5	2.27
Suppression	2.38	0.74	0-5	2.3
Manifestation	2.86	0.81	0-5	2.8

n = 297

Table 3.

Correlation Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	-						
2. Hours worked	0.25**	-					
3. Org Tenure	0.46**	0.12**	-				
4. Diversity Climate	-0.08	0.02	-0.08	-			
5. Discrimination	0.07	0.02	0.16**	-0.58**	-		
6. Manifestation	0.04	0.04	0.09	0.25**	-0.08	-	
7. Suppression	0.01	-0.06	0.03	-0.21**	0.42**	-0.42**	-

Note: n = 297, * indicates $p<0.05$

Table 4.

Regression Analysis for Mediation of Perceived Racial Discrimination between Perceived Diversity Climate and Suppression

Variable	*B*	95% CI	*SE B*	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Diversity Climate x Discrimination					0.34	0.33***
(Intercept)	3.93***	[3.66, 4.20]	0.13			
Diversity Climate	-0.49***	[-0.56, -0.41]	0.04	-0.58***		
Discrimination x Suppression					0.18	0.17***
(Intercept)	1.19***	[0.59, 1.78]	0.30			
Diversity Climate	0.04	[-0.07, 0.15]	0.05	0.05		
Discrimination	0.46***	[0.33, 0.59]	0.06	0.45***		
Diversity Climate x Suppression x Discrimination						
Indirect Effect	-0.22***	[-0.30, -0.15]				
Direct Effect	0.04	[-0.08, 0.15]				
Total Effect	-0.18***	[-0.29, -0.08]				
Prop. Mediated	1.21***	[0.79, 3.39]				

Note. n=297, CI = Confidence Interval
****p <0.001*

Table 5.

Regression Analysis for Mediation of Perceived Racial Discrimination between Perceived Diversity Climate and Manifestation

Variable	*B*	95% CI	*SE B*	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Diversity Climate x Discrimination					0.34	0.33***
(Intercept)	3.93***	[3.66, 4.20]	0.13			
Diversity Climate	-0.49***	[-0.56, -0.41]	0.04	-0.58***		
Discrimination x Manifestation					0.07	0.06***
(Intercept)	1.65***	[0.96, 2.34]	0.35			
Diversity Climate	0.28***	[0.16, 0.41]	0.06	0.31***		
Discrimination	0.11	[-0.04, 0.27]	0.08	0.10		
Diversity Climate x Manifestation x Discrimination						
Indirect Effect	-0.06	[-0.13, 0.02]				
Direct Effect	0.29***	[0.16, 0.42]				
Total Effect	0.23***	[0.12, 0.34]				
Prop. Mediated	-0.24	[-1.83, 0.07]				

Note. . n=297, CI = Confidence Interval
*****p <0.001*

Table 6.

Participant Comments

Partaking in Identity Suppression behaviors	***Not* partaking in Identity Suppression behaviors**
"I tend to suppress the urge to talk about anything related to my culture or things of the sort. I don't speak in my native language, it feels a bit embarrassing, although I know I shouldn't feel that way."	"There is no specific change, however, I express my identity by speaking my language, talk about my culture, and emphasize that I am proud of my heritage."
"I try to have a more fluent or "American" pronunciation to lessen my accent and try to not play cultural music in front of my coworkers, which I do not mind."	"I am pretty indifferent about my identity at work overall, so I don't think I do anything to emphasize or hide my identity specifically."
"I don't talk about it at all, especially being the only South Asian person in my office. There's a lot of white people there and I just have a lot of issues and experiences related to white people being racists and prejudicial regarding anything of my background/the color of my skin."	"I do not do anything to conceal my South Asian heritage at work. However, I am the only person of South Asian descent at my workplace, so representation is important."

“I definitely have to be less loud in the workplace - naturally speak with too much energy at home. Also South Asians tend to be a little more direct, so I work on sugarcoating things more especially with non-POC colleagues.”	“No, I embrace my South Asian heritage at work through wearing jewelry such as Jhumkas. My dress code at work is business casual, so I have some limitations in terms of expressing my culture through my clothing.”

Appendix A: Demographic Questions

1) What is your age in years?
    a) _____
    b) I prefer not to answer.
2) Which of the following best defines your current gender identity? Select all that apply
    a) Genderqueer, nonbinary, or genderfluid
    b) Man
    c) Woman
    d) Prefer to self-describe _____
    e) Prefer not to respond
3) Do you have supervisory responsibilities?
    a) Yes
    b) No
4) Do you currently work in:
    a) In-Person
    b) Remote
    c) Hybrid
5) Which of the following category best describes the industry you currently work in?
    a) Agriculture, forestry, fishing, or hunting
    b) Arts, entertainment, or recreation
    c) Broadcasting
    d) Education- Primary/secondary (K-12), college, university, adult or other
    e) Construction

f) Finance and insurance

g) Government and public administration

h) Health care and social assistance

i) Hotel and food services

j) Information- Service and data or other

k) Legal Services

l) Manufacturing- Electronics or others

m) Military

n) Publishing

o) Real estate, rental, or leasing

p) Retail

q) Scientific or Technical services

r) Telecommunications

s) Other industry, please specify _____

6) On average, how many hours do you work a week, including time at an office, in the field, or working from home? _____

7) For how long have you worked at your current workplace (in years) ? _____

8) Do you identify yourself as South Asian working in the US (i.e. you are either born in or have parent/s and/or grandparents from one or more of these countries: India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Maldives)

a) Yes

b) No

Appendix B: Perceived Diversity Climate Scale

Please rate the following statements on how well (1 = well below expectations, 2 = below expectations, 3 = meets expectations, 4 = above expectations, and 5 = well above expectations) your employer organization has done the following:

1. Recruiting from diverse sources.
2. Offer equal access to training
3. Open communications on diversity
4. Publicize diversity principles
5. Offer training to manage a diverse population
6. Respect the perspectives of South Asian people like me
7. Maintains a diversity-friendly work environment
8. The workgroup has climate that values diverse perspective
9. Top leaders visibly committed to diversity

** Attention check item

Appendix C: Workplace Prejudice/Discrimination Inventory (WPDI)

Please rate the following statement on your level of agreement/disagreement (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree):

1. I have sometimes been unfairly singled out because of my South Asian identity. (SP)
2. Racial Prejudice exists where I work. (GP)
3. Where I work all people are treated the same, regardless of their racial/ ethnic group. *(SP)
4. I feel socially isolated at work because of my South Asian identity. (SP)

- Please select “strongly disagree” to show you are paying attention to the item. **

5. At work, racial minority employees receive fewer opportunities. (SP)
6. There is no racial discrimination in my present job.* (GP)
7. Where I work members of some racial/ethnic groups are treated better than members of other groups. (SP)
8. At work, people are intolerant of others from different racial/ethnic backgrounds. (GP)
9. Supervisors scrutinize the work of members of my South Asian group more than that of members of other racial/ethnic groups. (SP)
10. Where I work people of different racial and ethnic groups get along well with each other. *(SP)
11. At my present job, some people get better treatment because of their racial/ethnic group. (SP)
12. There is discrimination where I work. (GP)

13. I am treated poorly at work because of my South Asian identity. (SP)
14. At my present place of employment, people of other racial/ethnic groups do not tell me some job-related information that they share with members of their own group. (SP)
15. Where I work promotions and rewards are not influenced by racial or ethnic group membership.* (SP)

* Reverse-scored item

** Attention check item

GP= Global Perception of discrimination; SP= Perception of specific types of discrimination

Appendix D: Identity Manifestation and Suppression

Please rate the following statement on your level of agreement/disagreement (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and5 = strongly agree):

Manifest Group Identity

1. I discuss my South Asian identity with my co-workers.
2. I display signs of South Asian identity in my workspace (e.g., cultural objects).
3. I wear clothes or emblems (e.g., jewelry, pins) that reflect my South Asian identity at work.
4. I celebrate meaningful dates or holidays related to my South Asian identity at work.
5. I talk about my South Asian identity with my supervisor.
6. Everyone I work with knows how important my South Asian identity is to me.
7. I express my South Asian identity at work.
8. I use the language, vernacular, or speech style of my South Asian identity at work.
9. I listen to music associated with my South Asian identity at work.
10. I consume foods or drinks associated with South Asian identity at work.

- Please select “strongly agree” to show you are paying attention to the item.**

Suppress Group Identity

1. I refrain from talking about my South Asian identity with my co-workers.
2. I conceal or camouflage signs of South Asian identity in my workspace (e.g., cultural objects).
3. I hide emblems that would reflect my South Asian identity at work.

4. I try to keep meaningful dates or holidays related to my South Asian identity secret.
5. I try not to talk about my South Asian identity with my supervisor.
6. No one I work with knows how important my South Asian identity is to me.
7. I suppress my South Asian identity at work.
8. I try not use the language, vernacular, or speech style of my South Asian identity at work.
9. I make a point of not listening to music associated with my South Asian identity at work.
10. I refrain from consuming foods or drinks associated with South Asian identity at work

Are there any other specific ways you change your appearance, behavior, and/or the way you communicate when you are at work that is different from your South Asian heritage and identity? Please specify. _____

** Attention check item

Appendix E: Survey

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDY

Principal Investigator: Himali Bhandari, Graduate Student, I/O Psychology MA/PhD Program, DePaul University

Faculty Advisor: Alice Stuhlmacher, PhD, Professor of Psychology

We are conducting a research study because we are trying to learn more about the workplace experiences of South Asian workers in the US.

You must be age 18 or older and fluent in English to be in this study. Furthermore, to be eligible to participate in the study you must: Identify as South Asian (i.e., you are either born in or have parent/s and/or grandparents from one or more of these countries: India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Maldives) and; be employed at least 20 hours per week.

If you agree to be in this study, you will complete a short research survey where you will be asked to recall and briefly describe South Asian experiences in the workplace, demographic information including questions about your age, gender identity, country of origin, current job, and your perceptions of workplace racial discrimination. We cannot tell you the true purpose of our research right now, because we would not get good results if we did. The full details about the research, why we did it this way, and what we

hope to find will be explained to you after you complete the research. You will complete the study online on Qualtrics. This study will take less than 30 minutes of your time.

Research data collected from you will be anonymous. Since we will not record identifiers with your information, your information will remain confidential. We will not try to re-identify the information or contact you.

Your participation is voluntary, which means you can choose not to participate. There will be no negative consequences if you decide not to participate or change your mind later after you begin the study. You can withdraw your participation at any time prior to submitting your survey. If you change your mind later while answering the survey, you may simply exit the survey. Once you submit your responses online, we will be unable to remove your data later from the study because all data is anonymous, and we will not know which survey response belongs to you.

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study or you want to get additional information or provide input about this research, please contact:

- Himali Bhandari (email: hbhandar@depaul.edu, phone: (646) 240-6165)
- Dr. Alice Stuhlmacher (email: astuhlma@depaul.edu, phone: (773) 325-2050)

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Jessica Bloom, DePaul University's Director of Research Compliance, in the Office of Research

Services at (312) 362-6168 or by email at jbloom8@depaul.edu. You may also contact DePaul's Office of Research Services if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.

You may keep this information for your records.

By completing the survey, you are indicating your agreement to be in the research.

1. Please rate on how well your employer organization has done the following:

	Well Below Expectations (1)	Below Expectations (2)	Meets Expectations (3)	Above Expectations (4)	Well Above Expectations (5)
Recruiting from diverse sources. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Offer equal access to training (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Open communication on diversity (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Publicize diversity principles (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Offer training to manage a diverse population (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Respect the perspectives of people like me (6)	○	○	○	○	○
Maintains a diversity-friendly work environment (7)	○	○	○	○	○
The workgroup has a climate that values diverse perspectives (8)	○	○	○	○	○
Top leaders visibly committed to diversity (9)	○	○	○	○	○

2. Please rate the following statement on your level of agreement or disagreement:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I have sometimes been unfairly singled out because of my South Asian identity (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Racial prejudice exists where I work (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Where I work all people are treated the same, regardless of their racial/ethnic group (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I feel socially isolated at work because of South Asian identity (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Please select “strongly disagree” to show you are paying attention to the item (5)	○	○	○	○	○
At work, racial minority employees receive fewer opportunities (6)	○	○	○	○	○
There is no racial discrimination at my job (7)	○	○	○	○	○

Where I work members of some racial/ethnic groups are treated better than members of other groups (8)	○	○	○	○	○
At work, people are intolerant of others from different racial/ethnic groups (9)	○	○	○	○	○
Supervisors scrutinize the work of members of my South Asian racial/ethnic group more than that of members of other racial/ethnic groups (10)	○	○	○	○	○
Where I work people of different racial and ethnic groups get along well with each other (11)	○	○	○	○	○
At my present job, some people get better treatment because of their racial/ethnic group (12)	○	○	○	○	○

There is discrimination where I work (13)	○	○	○	○	○
I am treated poorly at work because of South Asian identity (14)	○	○	○	○	○
At my present place of employment, people of other racial/ethnic groups do not tell me some job-related information that they share with members of their own group (15)	○	○	○	○	○

3. Please rate the following statement on your level of agreement or disagreement:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I discuss my South Asian identity with co-workers (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I display signs of South Asian identity in workspace (e.g. cultural objects) (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I wear clothes of emblems (e.g. jewelry, pins) that reflect my South Asian identity at work (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I celebrate meaningful dates or holidays related to my South Asian identity at work (4)	○	○	○	○	○
I talk about my South Asian identity with my supervisor (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Everyone I work with knows how important my South Asian identity is to me (6)	○	○	○	○	○
I express my South Asian identity at work (7)	○	○	○	○	○

I use the language, vernacular, or speech style of my South Asian identity at work (8)	○	○	○	○	○
I listen to music associated with my South Asian identity at work. (9)	○	○	○	○	○
I consume foods or drinks associated with South Asian identity at work. (10)	○	○	○	○	○
Please select “strongly agree” to show you are paying attention to the item (11)	○	○	○	○	○
I refrain from talking about my South Asian identity with my co-workers (12)	○	○	○	○	○
I conceal or camouflage signs of South Asian identity in my workspace (e.g., cultural objects) (13)	○	○	○	○	○

I hide emblems that would reflect my South Asian identity at work (14)	○	○	○	○	○
I try to keep meaningful dates or holidays related to my South Asian identity secret (15)	○	○	○	○	○
I try not to talk about my South Asian identity with my supervisor (16)	○	○	○	○	○
No one I work with knows how important my South Asian identity is to me (17)	○	○	○	○	○
I suppress my South Asian identity at work (18)	○	○	○	○	○
I try **not** to use the language, vernacular, or speech style of my South Asian identity at work (19)	○	○	○	○	○

I make a point of not listening to music associated with my South Asian identity at work. (20)	○	○	○	○	○
I refrain from consuming foods or drinks associated with South Asian identity at work (21)	○	○	○	○	○

4. Do you have supervisory responsibilities?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)

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5. Do you currently work:

- ○ Completely In-Person (1)
- ○ Completely Remote or Work from Home (2)
- ○ Hybrid (Describe) (3) _____

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6. Which of the following category best describes the industry you currently work in?

- ○ Agriculture, forestry, fishing, or hunting (1)
- ○ Arts, entertainment, or recreation (2)
- ○ Broadcasting (3)
- ○ Education- Primary/secondary (K-12), college, university, adult or other (4)
- ○ Construction (5)
- ○ Finance and insurance (6)
- ○ Government and public administration (7)
- ○ Health care and social assistance (8)
- ○ Hotel and food services (9)
- ○ Information- Service and data or other (10)
- ○ Legal Services (11)
- ○ Manufacturing- Electronics or others (12)
- ○ Military (13)
- ○ Publishing (14)
- ○ Real estate, rental, or leasing (15)
- ○ Retail (16)
- ○ Scientific or Technical services (17)
- ○ Telecommunications (18)
- ○ Other industry, please specify (19)

7. On average, how many hours do you work a week, including time at an office, in the field, or working from home?

_____

8. For how long have you worked at your primary workplace (in years)?

_____

9. What is your age (in years)?

_____

10. Which of the following best defines your current gender identity? Select all that apply

- ☐ Genderqueer, nonbinary, or genderfluid (1)
- ☐ Man (2)
- ☐ Woman (3)
- ☐ Prefer to self-describe (4) _____
- ☐ Prefer not to respond (5)

11. Do you identify yourself as South Asian working in the US (i.e. you are either born in or have parent/s and/or grandparents from one or more of these countries: India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Maldives)

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)

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12. Which one of the following country/countries do you originate from?

- ☐ India (1)
- ☐ Pakistan (2)
- ☐ Nepal (3)
- ☐ Sri Lanka (4)
- ☐ Bangladesh (5)
- ☐ Bhutan (6)
- ☐ Maldives (7)

13. We are interested in learning more about South Asian experiences at the workplace! Are there specific ways you change your appearance, behavior, and/or how you communicate at work that are different from your South Asian heritage and identity?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for sharing your experiences in the US as a South Asian worker.

The goal of this study was to investigate whether the perceived organizational diversity climate is negatively related with reliance on identity-shifting behaviors by South Asian employees. South Asians are a unique work demographic, as their concentrated success in economic and academic fields (Kaduvettoor-Davidson & Inman, 2013) has always somewhat overshadowed the social issues they might face in several US spaces. The "model minority" perception and perceptual foreigner stereotype are a few of the many racial issues that South Asians face. However, these issues have not been properly studied in the US workplace for South Asians, thus it is unclear what consequences South Asian employees face and what coping mechanisms these groups use against these racial issues in the workplace. It is important to understand how South Asian employees perceive, experience, and cope with racial discrimination issues in the workplace. We used the perceived diversity climate scale by McKay et al (2007), the workplace prejudice/discrimination inventory (James et al., 1994), and the identity manifestation and suppression scale (Madera et al., 2012) for this study.

If you would like to know more about this research, please contact:

Principal Investigator: Himali Bhandari (hbhandar@depaul.edu).

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Alice Stuhlmacher (astuhlma@depaul.edu) .

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Jessica Bloom in the Office of Research Services at 312-362-6168 or by email at jbloom8@depaul.edu.

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