

**International Perspectives on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**  
Volume 1

# Practical and Theoretical Implications of Successfully Doing Difference in Organizations

Donnalyn Pompper

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON EQUALITY,  
DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION VOLUME 1

**PRACTICAL AND  
THEORETICAL  
IMPLICATIONS OF  
SUCCESSFULLY DOING  
DIFFERENCE IN  
ORGANIZATIONS**

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

## FOREWORD

It is my privilege to pen the foreword for a book that I needed 22 years ago when I was an assistant professor starting out. In my first academic post, I taught public relations (among other things) and was always having to supplement the standard textbooks with readings about gender and race. In time, I added some on sexual orientation, but there was really very little on any of the central markers of identity in the early 1990s for those of us who took a critical approach to our teaching. I bet others, too, have needed this book in years since.

Fortunately, Donnalyn Pompper has written the first comprehensive text addressing the full range of diversity issues — or, as she calls them, differences — in organizations. While there have been articles to emerge here and there over the years addressing one or more of the various signifiers of difference, her text is the first to unify these elements into a single well-theorized, well-researched, and well-organized book.

Thus, the book immediately fills a gap and represents a model for teaching texts in organizational communication, public relations, and other strands of communications studies. It will be useful to those teaching at both introductory and more advanced levels.

Pompper places her examination of organizations and their people within a framework of social identity theory, which states that we humans form our identities — our senses of self — through our interactions with others with whom we most feel akin. Interactions take place in a variety of modes and settings, including face-to-face and mediated. How we come to feel akin to someone, however, has much to do with our knowledge and understanding of them. Pompper's book, from beginning to end, offers a roadmap for students to consider all of the aspects of themselves and others they will meet in this identity-building process, and to use this learning to function more humanely and effectively in those organizations.

Human beings, after all, are the essential building block of any organization. If organizations are to be strong and fulfill their purposes, those within them will ideally understand and appreciate each other, and find ways to work across their various differences, be those racial, ethnic, gender, age, physical ability, sexual orientation, or otherwise. In this way, the

book recognizes the intersectionality of identity, that is, the complex aspects of ourselves marked by our genetic heritage (e.g., skin color, male or femaleness) but also other characteristics, such as our social class, our religious or spiritual practices, our psychological abilities, etc.

Pompper has organized the book's 12 chapters thematically. The chapters contain subsections on how a particular identity concern relates to both the self and to the organization. Chapters end with summary discussions, key terms, and self-reflection questions, and discussion questions. The book's final chapter suggests "enabling people to reach their full potential" as a principle of managing diversity within the organizational setting. The book is at once practical and probing, straightforward, and deeply thoughtful in its undertaking.

I congratulate the author for bringing forth this long-awaited book, which will benefit generations of professors and students to come.

Carolyn M. Byerly  
*Howard University, USA*

## PREFACE

This book represents an integration of numerous theory streams, orientations, approaches, and techniques to support researchers, students, and managers — of intersecting social identity dimensions and difference as they play out in organizations and are impacted by the larger social milieu. Theories and bodies of research from a variety of fields are incorporated to bring greater clarity to a complex set of issues relative to influences of power in formation and articulation of social identity dimensions in the workplace. It is a go-to resource for engaging with a wide range of literatures connected by a common thread: a desire to rid organizations of overt and covert frameworks and practices that outgroup and marginalize people. Social justice is the overarching goal.

Difference work entails much complexity and potential pitfalls; a formidable challenge for many. Hence, I offer advice and highlight multiple analytical, ethical, and methodological challenges. The broadness of so many incorporated literatures is useful for inviting researchers, students, and organizations' managers to engage in their own expanded study. Yet, the detail which crystallizes central arguments and debates also is useful for bringing readers up to speed quickly so that they easily may come to terms with formulating their own research designs. Informed self-reflection and awareness of power in researcher-researched dynamics are, indeed, compass points for a researcher's journey of discovery when investigating social identity dimensions and difference in organizations.

Until recent years, formal research method textbooks were curiously silent on most social identity difference dimensions of age, class, culture, ethnicity, faith/spirituality, gender, physical/psychological ability, sexual orientation, and more. Back then, perhaps one chapter of edited qualitative research method collections attended to "race." When I launched my difference-in-organizations research agenda about 15 years ago, there were next to no roadmaps to follow. One could attribute neglect of intersecting social identity dimensions and difference in research processes to paradigms and traditional scholarly journal conventions for producing chilling effects. The positivist paradigm — assuming a stable, law-like reality by using primarily

quantitative methods – was long the institutional norm for prestige academic journal boards and for policymakers who considered social identity difference variables moot. On the other hand, the newer interpretive (naturalistic) research paradigm involves using qualitative methods to embrace shifting, multiple realities. Unfortunately, some interpretive researchers still struggle for legitimacy among institutions clinging to positivism. On the whole, today's view is much clearer and there are formal research methods texts that address two or three of these dimensions. However, *Practical and Theoretical Implications of Successfully Doing Difference in Organizations* is the first book to offer an expansive view of multiple social identity dimensions, to articulate the importance of intersectionality approaches, and to explore specific paradigms and philosophies for negotiating challenges inherent in social identity difference research. This book is written for advanced undergraduate and graduate students engaged in a variety of public relations, business/management, organizational communication, and research methods courses, as well as academic researchers, and coordinators of training programs for organizations' human resources and other managers. Each user-friendly chapter includes definitions of key terms and a list of thought-provoking questions for deeper, personalized interrogation of important issues relevant to social identity dimensions in organizations.

Even though organizations' managers, especially those in human resources departments, seek to foster harmonious workplaces – and social researchers attempt to build theory for greater predictability and understanding, as well as to study issues that have very practical import in the real world – rarely are we told how to overcome challenges that may derive from differences between ourselves and the people we write about. Fundamentally, such challenges may negatively impact a researcher's ability to expand worldviews for embracing diverse social identity constructions or to question them as a legitimate arena of inquiry in the first place. This book explores various usages of social identity difference (and its original Caucasian/European/White-centric roots), how difference frames the way we think about ourselves and others, how social identity dimensions may be used to build applied theory, and reasons why a new (or a renewed) commitment to embracing social identity and difference is needed if organizations hope to thrive globally through the third millennium. Without careful understanding of power dynamics and creating action-oriented steps for reversing organizational systems which have become bogged down with negative practices, it is virtually impossible to create harmonious-yet-prosperous, diverse organizations.

People hold a wide variety of opinions as to which terms are appropriate (and which ones are offensive) in social identity dimensions and difference discourse. I agree with my friend and colleague, Lee Edwards, that we run the risk of reifying categorizations and social constructions. This is why I have devoted significant space to addressing definitions, paradigm shifts, and ongoing debates. Naming/labeling matters. I still tend to use “race” only when referring to the *human race* and set it off by quotation marks to indicate others’ usage. I also tend to avoid the *Hispanic* label. So many people who have participated in my research projects over the years have told me that they find it extraordinarily offensive. Because many of the issues and terms covered in this book are linked to sensitive topics, it is important to consider contexts of history, politics, economics, work settings, and more. Quite simply, it’s all about power and social construction. Moreover, I seek to balance so much negativity with hope and optimism for the future when work environments are spaces where all kinds of people may equitably contribute, grow and achieve their maximum human potential.

### **How this book is organized**

*Theoretical and Practical Implications of Doing Difference Research* features 12 chapters and is designed to serve as a guide for social identity research with emphases on dimensions’ intersectionalities. Part I provides the foundation for examining social identity by defining it in terms of systems of hegemonic forces, by offering discussion of relationships between researchers and their participants (or, employees), and by focusing on an ever-expanding literature which addresses the many ways that social identity dimensions overlap and intersect. Part II offers in-depth looks at specific social identity dimensions of culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical/psychological ability, and faith/spirituality. The final chapter brings it all together in terms of managing diversity and offers some final thoughts for moving forward.

When assembling this volume, I had to make conscious decisions about where to write about specific issues. While it was a challenge to avoid doing what I have warned against — essentializing social identity categories or presenting them as piled-on or added-on personality facets — I resolved that one way to do it was to fully acknowledge that all social identity dimensions intersect and overlap in *every* chapter. Connections are made across chapters via the intersectionality lens so that chapters are linked rather than standing as individual silos. At the outset, Chapter 2 is devoted



to intersectionality in order to introduce readers to the framework, but then all chapters in Part II include intersectionality as a subtheme and explore empirical studies which have probed key issues. Because social identity intersectionalities are infinite in number, it was impossible to cover all of them in *Theoretical and Practical Implications of Doing Difference Research*. For example, some social identity difference dimensions that are not included here are: skills, functional area of expertise, management styles, tenure, vocational interests, career aspirations, geographic differences, communication styles, personality attributes, working styles, organizational departments, and region or nation (beyond what is covered in Chapter 4's attention to culture). Forgivably, there is some overlap where it seemed necessary to do so since policies and concepts such as affirmative action, bias, difference, discrimination, diversity and its management, and multiculturalism play a significant role when investigating social identity dimensions and difference in organizations. Finally, chapters include a sidebar to devote greater attention to some key episode or example which expands upon key issue(s) addressed in the chapter.

### **On a personal note, how this book came to be**

I was born in and have returned to live in a rural part of southern New Jersey, USA. In the 1960s, I was a small child but have vivid memories of social movement events unfolding every night on the evening news. One of my earliest TV memories is the deafening bass drum beating time throughout coverage of U.S. President John F. Kennedy's funeral motorcade. I also remember body counts and protests associated with the Vietnam War. While too young to really grasp the full socioeconomic-political backstory, I did get that people were being hurt, were unhappy, and were unable to get along. By the time I was in second grade and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated while I was on Easter break, my mother explained that when I returned to school some people might be upset. The meaning did not become clear until my teacher, Mrs. Kathleen Jackson, answered my questions. She was an African-American/Black woman and one of the great inspirations in my life. Another was Mrs. Thomas who taught ninth grade U.S. Government/Civics. These women of color motivated me to learn; instilled a sense of curiosity about inequality and set me on an academic career path that no one could have predicted back then given my low-SES upbringing.

A female Caucasian researcher, I have spent the past 15 years teaching and researching across social identity difference lines and publishing in

high-quality academic and applied communication, public relations, and organizational management journals and textbooks. At the outset, I worried that my Caucasian/White standpoint might inhibit an ability to hear, understand, and explain social injustice experiences. Over the years, meetings with incredible women and men via focus groups and interviews enabled me to collect and analyze stories of multiple social identity dimension discriminations and strategies for coping at work and at home. Findings underscored effects of enduring patriarchal practices, shedding light on covert activities that threaten to hinder career advancement and negatively impact lives. I have written *Theoretical and Practical Implications of Doing Difference Research* to aid others in amplifying such stories in order to affect real and significant change in organizations. Another goal is to encourage ongoing discussion of the ethical, emotional, analytical, and methodological dilemmas generated by radical ideologies. I have tried to write a book that is useful for readers from multiple backgrounds and orientations. While my orientation is the United States, I cite empirical studies and engage with discourse about social identity dimensions and difference in organizations which extends across geopolitical boundaries. We live in that kind of world.

### Sincere gratitude

Much inspiration has been drawn from the women and men who have collaborated with me as research participants these years. A few stand out for their support, encouragement and trust in my ability to do justice with their stories: Donna Alston, David Brown, Sharon Bryant, Lourdes Carerra, Silvia Cavazos, Susan Jin-Davis, Theresa Hernandez, Gina Kinchlow, and Dora Tovar. Public relations scholars who have inspired me include Larissa Grunig, Linda Hon and Elizabeth Toth. I also am indebted to my students at Cabrini College, Florida A&M University, Florida State University, and Temple University who always brought their refreshing perspectives to classes. Much gratitude also goes out to colleagues who read early versions of chapters and/or offered advice and suggestions for this project: Lee Edwards, Margarette Morganroth Gullette, and Beth Haller. I also am grateful to critical scholars whom I have yet to meet, but they have inspired me, nonetheless. And where would any of us be without a supportive librarian? I am particularly indebted to the kindness of Temple University's English and Communications Librarian, Kristina DeVoe. Huge thanks, also, to faceless audience members at academic conferences who have engaged in important conversations, offered suggestions,

and become inspired. I am particularly grateful to individuals who have approached me at conferences after a presentation to ask me in a whisper: "Are *you* a woman of color?" The frequency of that timid, yet meaning-filled, question inspired me to further engage with the "matching" paradigm.

Last, but by no means least, I offer sincere thanks to Kim Eggleton, acquisitions editor at Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Mustafa F. Özbilgin, series editor at Emerald, Sarah Hill, managing editor at Emerald, Zoe Sanders, publisher at Emerald and to the Emerald production staff and Mr. Jayanambi (Project Manager, MPS Limited, Chennai, India) and anonymous reviewers.

Donnalyn Pompper Ph.D., APR

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