Identity-safe or threatening? Perceptions of women-targeted diversity initiatives

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Abstract

One strategy for addressing gender disparities in STEM and leadership focuses on women-targeted diversity initiatives, such as women’s networking groups and women’s leadership development programs. Although well intentioned, targeting diversity initiatives specifically toward women instead of all employees may unwittingly make workplaces appear unwelcoming and biased to prospective employees. To test this notion, undergraduate women and men read a recruitment brochure for a company that framed its diversity initiatives as either targeting women employees or all employees. Both women and men felt less social fit and comfort with the company and were more concerned about being treated negatively and unfairly when diversity initiatives were framed as women-targeted rather than all-inclusive. These results held regardless of whether the company was portrayed as male-dominated or gender equitable (Study 1, N = 117). However, results were somewhat attenuated for women, but not men, when the women-targeted program was portrayed as initiated and led by women employees rather than upper management (Study 2, N = 152). Overall, our results suggest that diversity initiatives may more effectively convey identity safety to both women and men when framed in a way that includes all employees rather than targeting only women.

*Keywords:* gender, diversity initiatives, recruitment, affirmative action, inclusion
Identity-safe or threatening? Perceptions of women-targeted diversity initiatives

Women remain underrepresented in high-paying and highly valued fields, especially science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM; National Science Foundation, 2016) and high-power leadership positions (Thomas et al., 2017). One popular strategy for recruiting, retaining, and advancing women in STEM and leadership focuses on providing professional development opportunities specifically targeted toward women, such as Women in Science and Engineering programs, women’s networking groups, and leadership development programs for women (Knight & Cunningham, 2004; Van Oostende, Chierchia, & Martens, 2012). Despite the frequent use of women-targeted programs, remarkably little research has examined how these diversity initiatives are perceived by prospective employees. The present research fills this gap by examining women’s and men’s perceptions of women-targeted diversity initiatives.

Understanding how company diversity initiatives are perceived is important for recruitment. Subtle situational cues, such as numeric representation (Murphy, Steele, & Gross, 2007) or wording in job ads (Gaucher, Friesen, & Kay, 2011), can either attract or deter potential applicants depending on whether the cues signal threat or safety. Social identity threat arises when people perceive they might be devalued or treated negatively based on their social group membership (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). Identity safety arises when people perceive they will belong and be valued and treated fairly. People monitor settings for identity-relevant cues to determine whether settings are threatening or safe (Cohen & Garcia, 2008; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Emerson & Murphy, 2014); settings that are deemed threatening are often avoided (Murphy et al., 2007).

The way in which diversity initiatives are framed can serve as a cue that prospective employees use to evaluate the threat or safety of their identity in the setting. For instance,
minority job candidates are more trusting of and less likely to expect negative treatment at companies that frame diversity messages as valuing difference rather than minimizing difference (Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Ditlmann, & Crosby, 2008). Likewise, majority job candidates feel like they would fit better and feel more included at a company that explicitly includes majority groups in their diversity message (Jansen, Otten, & van der Zee, 2015). Thus, the way in which diversity messages are framed can powerfully determine whether prospective employees feel like they will fit in and be treated fairly by the company.

What is unclear is whether diversity initiatives that are framed as women-targeted are perceived as identity-safe or threatening. Organizations that portray diversity initiatives as women-targeted likely do so with the intent of conveying identity safety to women. Women-targeted programs offer many benefits to women, including access to mentors, opportunities for networking, and safe and supportive environments that foster professional and personal growth (Clark, 2011; Debebe, 2011; Kahveci, Southerland, & Gilmer, 2008; Vinnicombe, Moore, & Anderson, 2013). It seems logical to assume that the presence of such programs would have a positive effect on attracting women to an organization, as women are the intended beneficiaries of the programs. However, social psychological theories and research suggest that framing these opportunities as specifically targeted toward women may unintentionally convey identity threat rather than safety and deter the very job applicants they intend to attract. In particular, focusing diversity initiatives on women rather than all employees may inadvertently make workplaces appear stereotypic, biased, and threatening to prospective employees. The current research was designed to test this possibility. To derive testable hypotheses, we review relevant literature as to how people might respond differently to diversity initiatives – and in particular, professional
development programs – when they are framed as targeted toward women vs. toward all employees.

**Women-targeted frames**

Targeting professional development programs toward women, although seemingly positive, may be experienced negatively by women. By focusing attention on changing women, women-targeted programs imply that women lack the traits and skills needed to succeed and that women need special assistance to be competitive in the workplace (Kolb, Fletcher, Meyerson, Merrill-Sands, & Ely, 1998; McLoughlin, 2005; Muller, 2003). Women-targeted programs may thus be experienced by women as a form of benevolent sexism, which is comprised of affectively positive yet condescending beliefs that women are warm but incompetent and in need of help (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Receiving seemingly favorable yet unwarranted preferential treatment based on gender facilitates a stigma of incompetence (Heilman, 1994; Leslie, Mayer, & Kravitz, 2014) that induces self-doubt (Dardenne, Dumont, & Bollier, 2007; Dumont, Sarlet, & Dardenne, 2010; Heilman, Simon, & Repper, 1987; Salomon, Burgess, & Bosson, 2015), causes others to discount women’s competence (Garcia, Erskine, Hawn, & Casmay, 1981; Heilman, Block, & Lucas, 1992; Summers, 1991), and arouses concerns among women about being stereotyped and treated negatively based on gender (Heilman & Alcott, 2001; Leslie et al., 2014). For instance, McLoughlin (2005) conducted a qualitative study investigating undergraduate women’s experiences with Women in Engineering programs. She found that the process of singling out women by gender in order to help them prompted women to doubt their own abilities, gave men reason to discount the abilities of their female peers, and made women feel uncomfortable and ostracized in their engineering programs. Furthermore, using in-depth interviews, Sharp, Franzway, Mills, and Gill (2012) found that women engineers were wary of
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diversity programs targeted toward women because they felt that the programs represented unfair preferential treatment that could potentially undermine their credibility and perceived competence. Together these findings suggest that women may perceive diversity initiatives as threatening and biased when they are framed as women-targeted.

Importantly, the effectiveness of diversity initiatives depends not only on receptiveness by historically stigmatized groups, but also receptiveness of dominant groups who represent a critical yet often overlooked stakeholder. We thus investigated the perceptions of men as well as women. Prior research suggests that men too will perceive women-targeted frames as threatening and biased. For instance, dominant groups are less supportive of diversity initiatives when they feel excluded by the initiatives (Jansen et al., 2015; Plaut, Garnett, Buffardi, & Sanchez-Burks, 2011). Thus, by excluding men, women-targeted framing may alienate rather than engage men as allies (Prime & Moss-Racusin, 2009). In addition, dominant groups tend to view diversity initiatives from a zero-sum perspective whereby outgroup gains are perceived as ingroup losses (Eibach & Keegan, 2006; see also Norton & Summers, 2011). That is, dominant groups tend to believe that diversity initiatives disadvantage their group by taking away opportunities from qualified ingroup members in order to benefit outgroups (Crosby, 2004). From this perspective, beneficiaries are perceived as undeserving and diversity initiatives are perceived as violating norms of meritocracy and representing “reverse discrimination” (Fraser & Kick, 2000; Lynch, 1989). Diversity initiatives that imply gains for historically stigmatized groups are psychologically threatening to dominant groups (Dover, Major, & Kaiser, 2016) and can increase intergroup tension (Maio & Esses, 1998). For these reasons, we suspect that framing diversity initiatives as targeting women will be perceived by men as threatening and biased.

All-inclusive frames
An alternative way to frame diversity initiatives is to offer professional development programs and other initiatives to all employees, rather than simply targeting minority groups. As discussed above, a major drawback to minority-targeted initiatives is that they can make minority groups feel uncomfortably categorized (McLoughlin, 2005) and majority groups feel excluded (Plaut et al., 2011). To address these drawbacks, scholars have recently advocated for all-inclusive approaches to diversity that explicitly include majority groups in the definition of diversity (Stevens, Plaut, & Sanchez-Burks, 2008).

The goal of all-inclusive framing is to maximize the benefits of diversity initiatives while minimizing the costs (Galinsky et al., 2015; Stevens et al., 2008). All-inclusive framing maximizes benefits by preserving aspects of diversity initiatives that effectively address barriers to minorities’ career advancement, such as providing access to valuable social networks and resources from which minority groups have often been excluded. The all-inclusive approach also retains the emphasis on valuing diversity, because valuing diversity is generally associated with more positive intergroup relations and employee outcomes than valuing sameness (Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012; Plaut, 2010; Plaut, Thomas, & Green, 2009; Sasaki & Vorauer, 2013). In addition, all-inclusive framing attempts to minimize the costs of diversity initiatives by addressing identity-based concerns of both minority and majority groups. In particular, by allowing all groups to participate in diversity initiatives, the all-inclusive approach addresses majority group’s concerns of exclusion and minority groups’ concerns of being singled out and stigmatized. Indeed, research suggests that all-inclusive framing may be effective at communicating identity safety and garnering support from both minority and majority groups (Galinsky et al., 2015; Jansen et al., 2015). Such an approach works to bring effective programs
and policies into the mainstream of everyday practice rather than keeping equity efforts, and historically marginalized groups, at the margins.

**Overview and Hypotheses**

Across two studies, we tested the effect of women-targeted vs. all-inclusive diversity frames on undergraduate students’ perceptions about whether they would fit in and be treated fairly at a company. Undergraduate students represent an ideal sample because they are about to enter the job market and thus represent prospective employees. In both studies, we exposed undergraduates to a recruitment brochure from a fictional company. The brochure emphasized that the company valued diversity, but the message about diversity varied in terms of whether diversity initiatives were targeted toward women or all employees. We hypothesized that women-targeted frames would be threatening to both women and men, as indicated by increased concerns about bias and unfair treatment, as well as decreased feelings of social fit and comfort with the company, compared to all-inclusive frames.

In addition, we also examined perceived values and intentions of the company, specifically, whether or not it was clear to participants that the company valued diversity and inclusion and that it was trying to recruit and retain women. We predicted that compared to all-inclusive frames, women-targeted frames would make it seem as though the company is actively trying to recruit and retain women; yet by focusing exclusively on women, we also predicted that women-targeted frames would make it seem as though the company values diversity and inclusion less.

Across both studies, we also examined whether negative reactions to women-targeted frames could be attenuated under certain circumstances. Specifically, we tested whether reactions would vary depending on whether the diversity frames operate within a male-
dominated or gender-equitable domain (Study 1) and depending on whether the frame is portrayed as instigated by women employees or not (Study 2).

**Study 1**

In Study 1 we hypothesized that women and men would be more threatened by women-targeted frames than all-inclusive frames, as indicated by greater concerns of bias and negative treatment, as well as lower feelings of social fit and comfort. However, we also examined whether these hypothesized effects would vary depending on whether the diversity frame operated within a male-dominated or gender-equitable domain. Gender bias is more prevalent in male-dominated domains than gender-equitable domains (Kanter, 1977; Robnett, 2016; Steele, James, & Barnett, 2002). As a result, in male-dominated domains women-targeted frames may be viewed as legitimate and necessary, especially among women, who tend to be more attuned than men to the prevalence of gender bias (Cundiff & Vescio, 2016; Inman & Baron, 1996; Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002). In gender-equitable domains, by contrast, such targeted efforts may seem unwarranted and biased. Thus we expected women’s, but not men’s, negative reactions to women-targeted frames to be attenuated in male-dominated domains, where such framing could be perceived as legitimate, compared to gender-equitable domains, where such framing is likely perceived as unwarranted. Study 1 therefore employed a 2 (diversity frame: women-targeted, all-inclusive) x 2 (domain: male-dominated, gender-equitable) x 2 (participant gender: women, men) between-participant design.

**Method**

**Participants.** Undergraduate students (N = 127) from a selective liberal arts college participated in exchange for partial course credit or a gift card for pizza. We aimed to recruit as many participants as possible in a single semester; data collection closed once the semester
ended. Six participants failed attention checks and four participants incorrectly identified the all-inclusive program as targeted toward women. The responses from these 10 participants were excluded from analyses; including these participants does not change the results. The working dataset consisted of responses from 117 students (70 women, 45 men, 2 unidentified gender). Although we did not determine sample size a priori, a sensitivity analysis using G*Power 3 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007), with power set at .80 and alpha set at .05, indicated that the present sample was large enough to detect medium-sized effects ($f = .26$ or larger). Effects of medium size (or larger) are reasonable to expect, as indicated by prior research on reactions to diversity messages and policies (e.g., Dover et al., 2016; Heilman & Alcott, 2001; Leslie et al., 2014). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 22 ($M = 19.10$, $SD = 1.14$). Most identified as white or Caucasian (72.6%), followed by Asian or Asian American (11.1%), bi- or multi-racial (5.1%), black or African American (4.3%), and Latina/o or Hispanic (4.3%).

**Procedure.** Participants arrived to the lab in groups of up to four where they were greeted by a female experimenter who briefly described the study and obtained informed consent. The experimenter then randomly assigned each participant to a private room or cubicle equipped with a desk and computer. On the desk was a folder that contained one of four versions of a company brochure, which varied across the domain and diversity frame manipulations (see Stimulus Materials). Participants were instructed to read the brochure thoroughly and carefully, and then answer the questions on the computer. Participants were allowed to refer back to the brochure while answering questions.

**Stimulus materials.** A trifold brochure described the ostensible mission and services of a company, Xander, Inc. The brochure had three sections. The first section, *About Us*, detailed the company’s vision, services, office locations, and a photo and quote from a white male CEO. The
content in this section remained constant across conditions, except for one important variation that allowed for the domain manipulation: in the male-dominated condition, the company was identified as an engineering firm, whereas in the gender-equitable condition, the company was identified as a consulting firm. Pretesting confirmed that engineering is perceived as male-dominated and consulting as gender-equitable\(^1\). The domain manipulation was further bolstered by two group photos that depicted employees in either a ratio of approximately 1 woman to 3 men (male-dominated condition) or 1 woman to 1 man (gender-neutral condition).

The second section of the brochure, *Our People*, detailed the company’s values regarding its workforce. All participants read the following:

If there is anything we are more committed to than providing excellent service to our clients, it is hiring and retaining the most impressive talent in the industry. The exciting nature of our work offers exceptional opportunities for career development, and we are committed to supporting employees in reaching their career goals. We understand the value that diversity of thought and experience brings to our company.

The content that followed varied depending on whether professional development opportunities were targeted toward all employees (all-inclusive condition) or toward only women (women-targeted condition). Participants in the all-inclusive condition read the following:

As part of our goal to maintain a diverse workforce, we seek to hire, develop, and retain a diverse workforce through professional development programs and opportunities for our employees. Xander Inc. is committed to providing a safe and inclusive workplace where

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\(^1\) A separate group of 35 undergraduates rated each of 14 industries on two 7-point scales, one measuring gender stereotypicality (1 = stereotypically masculine, 7 = stereotypically feminine) and the other measuring gender composition (1 = mostly men, 7 = mostly women). The two items were averaged for each industry such that lower scores indicated stronger perceptions of the industry as male-dominated. One-sample \(t\)-tests with the test value set at the scale midpoint (4) indicated that engineering was perceived as male-dominated, \(M = 1.79, SD = 0.72, t(34) = -18.19, p < .001\), and consulting was perceived as gender-neutral, \(M = 3.70, SD = -1.57, t(34) = -1.57, p = .126\).
the voice of every employee is strongly valued and where all team members uphold principles of inclusion, respect, and connection with one another as part of a supportive community. “At Xander Inc., we are proud to have a culture that values and supports the contributions and perspectives of all employees.” - Jim Foster, CEO

Participants in the women-targeted condition read the following:

As part of our goal to maintain a diverse workforce, we seek to hire, develop, and retain women through specific programs and opportunities for our female employees. These programs and opportunities provide a safe and inclusive space where women’s voices are valued and where women can connect, network, and learn strategies from other women for overcoming challenges that they may face in the workplace. “At Xander Inc., we are proud to sponsor programs that provide women with the resources and support they need to succeed.” - Jim Foster, CEO

The third section of the brochure was labeled Development Resources and outlined the professional development program. The content in this section remained constant across conditions with one important exception. In the women-targeted condition, each mention of employees was female-marked, indicated below in brackets:

We are devoted to providing our [associates/female associates] with the resources they need to succeed. We have a rigorous training and development program in order to provide [associates/female associates] with necessary experiences and exposure to the field, while also developing critical skill sets. The program is designed to provide a safe and supportive environment for [new associates/women] to network and learn new skills. The program includes mentorship and networking events with esteemed [industry professionals/female industry professionals], as well as skill development workshops that
focus on issues important to [all of our employees/women], such as life-work balance, building connections, and overcoming workplace challenges. Additional opportunities for development are available to [all team members/women] throughout their career at Xander, Inc.

**Measures.** Participants completed the following measures in the order below. Unless otherwise noted, participants rated their agreement with items using a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from disagree strongly (1) to agree strongly (6).

**General impression.** Participants indicated on a single item their general impression of the company using a 7-point scale ranging from very negative (1) to very positive (7).

**Social fit and comfort with company.** Seven items assessed how much participants felt they would fit with and feel comfortable in the company (adapted from Gaucher et al., 2011; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008; Walton & Cohen, 2007): (1) I feel like I would fit in at a company like Xander, Inc.; (2) I feel like I could be myself at a company like Xander, Inc.; (3) I would like to work at a place like Xander, Inc.; (4) I think I would enjoy working in a work environment like that of Xander, Inc.; (5) I would recommend this company to a friend who specializes in this industry; (6) I feel like I could succeed at a company like Xander, Inc.; (7) I think the environment at Xander, Inc., would inspire me to do the very best job that I can. Scores were averaged across the seven items; higher scores indicate greater perceived fit (α = .89).

**Support for program.** Nine items assessed participants’ support for the professional development program: (1) I think the program is a good idea; (2) I think the program is a much needed resource; (3) Something about the program makes me feel uneasy (reverse-coded); (4) The program seems to me like a fair and equitable program; (5) I am happy to see that they offer a development program; (6) I would take advantage of the program if I was at the company; (7) I
think the program evens the playing field for women and men; (8) I think I would like to work in a company that has similar development programs as those of Xander, Inc.; (9) I think graduates of the program will develop skills that will benefit them in their career. Two additional items were not included in analyses due to poor item-total scale correlations (r = .36 and .10, respectively); including these two items does not change the results. Scores were averaged across the nine items; higher scores indicate greater support for the program (α = .92).

Perceived company values. To assess perceptions of the company’s values regarding diversity and inclusion, participants responded to four items: (1) I think the company strongly values the contributions of all employees; (2) I think the company genuinely cares about the success of its employees; (3) I think the company values having a diverse workforce; (4) I think the company strives to create an inclusive work environment for all employees. Items were averaged together; higher scores indicate stronger perceptions that the company values diversity and inclusion (α = .82).

Perceived company intentions. Three items assessed whether participants perceived the company as actively making attempts to recruit and retain women: (1) I think the company is trying to make an effort to recruit and retain women; (2) I think the company is trying to create an equal opportunity for both women and men; (3) I think the company is trying to equip women with techniques necessary to succeed in the field. Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was low (α = .60). Removing the second item improved reliability (α = .72). The two remaining items were averaged such that higher scores indicate stronger perceptions that the company is attempting to recruit and retain women. Including the removed item does not change results.

Anticipated stigma of incompetence. Seven items (some adapted from Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008; Miner, Settles, Pratt-Hyatt, & Brady, 2012) assessed participants’ concerns about
being treated in a way that signals perceived incompetence by others: (1) I think I would trust the management to treat me fairly (reverse-coded); (2) I feel like I would have to continually ‘prove’ myself if I worked at a company like Xander, Inc; (3) If I worked for this company, I think that my co-workers would assume I knew what I was doing (reverse-coded); (4) If I worked for this company, I would worry that some people might attribute my success to special treatment or luck rather than to my competence; (5) I would be concerned that my co-workers or supervisors might talk down to me if I worked at a company like Xander Inc.; (6) If I worked for this company, I would be concerned that my ideas or opinions would be minimized, ignored, or devalued by my co-workers and supervisors; (7) If I worked for this company, I would be concerned that my behaviors and performance might be interpreted in terms of my gender. An additional item was removed due to poor item-total scale correlation ($r = .19$); including this item does not change the results. The seven items were averaged together; higher scores indicate stronger anticipation of being stigmatized as incompetent ($\alpha = .84$).

**Negative climate towards women.** Six items assessed the extent to which participants perceived that the climate at the company negatively stereotypes women: (1) I think the company values and respects women and men to the same degree (reverse-coded); (2) I think the company assumes women need additional support to be competitive with men in the workplace; (3) I think the company assumes that women are just as capable as men (reverse-coded); (4) I think the company sees women as members of their gender group, rather than as individuals; (5) I would not be surprised if the company uses different standards to evaluate women and men; (6) I think it’s possible that the company might hold stereotypic views of women. Scores were averaged across the six items; higher scores indicate stronger perceptions of a negative climate towards women ($\alpha = .93$).
**Unfair female advantage.** Three items assessed the extent to which participants felt that the company gave an unfair advantage to women at the expense of men: (1) I think the development program provides women with an unfair advantage; (2) I think women are given unfair advantages at this company; (3) I think the company unfairly excludes men from professional development opportunities. Scores were averaged such that higher scores indicate stronger perceptions that the company unfairly advantage women ($\alpha = .85$).

**Manipulation checks.** Participants completed three items measuring sensitivity to the domain manipulation and the diversity frame manipulation. The first two items asked about the gender stereotypicality of the climate at the company ($1 = \text{very masculine}, 7 = \text{very feminine}$) and the gender composition of the company ($1 = 100\% \text{men}/0\% \text{women}, 11 = 0\% \text{men}/100\% \text{women}$ in 10% increments). The third item asked participants, without looking at the brochure, to recall to whom the professional development program was targeted. Answers were coded by the first author for whether participants mentioned women or not.²

**Results**

**Manipulation checks.** We first examined the efficacy of our diversity frame and domain manipulations. A 2 (domain: male-dominated, gender-equitable) x 2 (diversity frame: all-inclusive, women-targeted) x 2 (participant gender: women, men) analysis of variance (ANOVA) on recalling women as the targeted group revealed a significant main effect of diversity frame, $F(1, 111) = 460.56, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .81$. Participants in the women-targeted condition were much more likely to recall women as the targeted group (97%) compared to participants in the all-inclusive condition (7%). No other effects were significant. These results indicate that the diversity frame manipulation was successful. Participants in the all-inclusive

² We also checked whether any participants mentioned racial minorities as the target group; none did.
condition who incorrectly recalled that women were the targeted group \((n = 4)\) were excluded from further analyses; including these participants does not change results.

The 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA on the gender stereotypicality of the company revealed a significant main effect for domain, \(F(1, 107) = 13.26, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .11\). Participants in the male-dominated condition rated the company as more masculine \((M = 2.56, SD = 1.17)\) than did participants in the gender-equitable condition \((M = 3.40, SD = 1.38)\). No other effects were significant. The 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA on gender composition also revealed a significant main effect of domain, \(F(1, 107) = 8.96, p = .003, \eta_p^2 = .08\). Participants in the male-dominated condition rated the company as employing more men \((M = 4.32, SD = 1.44)\) than did participants in the gender-equitable condition \((M = 5.17, SD = 1.62)\). No other effects were significant. These results indicate that the domain manipulation was successful.

**Primary analyses.** We next tested our hypotheses by submitting each dependent variable to the same 2 (domain: male-dominated, gender-equitable) x 2 (diversity frame: all-inclusive, women-targeted) x 2 (participant gender: women, men) analysis of variance (ANOVA). Because the pattern of results was relatively similar for each dependent variable, we organized the results below according to the type of effect found for ease of interpretation.

**Main effects for diversity frame.** The 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVAs revealed significant main effects for diversity frame on all dependent variables, except perceived company values. Means and standard deviations are reported in Table 1. As predicted, compared to participants in the all-inclusive condition, those in the women-targeted condition had more negative impressions of the company (but this effect varied across participant gender; see interaction below), \(F(1, 107) = 5.43, p = .022, \eta_p^2 = .05\), felt less fit and comfort with the company, \(F(1, 106) = 7.91, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .07\), were less supportive of the program, \(F(1, 103) = 19.32, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .16\), thought the
company was trying harder to recruit and retain women, $F(1, 107) = 31.59, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .23$, were more concerned about being stigmatized as incompetent, $F(1, 105) = 11.42, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$, perceived the company climate toward women as more negative, $F(1, 106) = 54.89, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .34$, and more strongly believed that the company unfairly advantaged women, $F(1, 107) = 27.49, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .20$. Contrary to predictions, participants in the all-inclusive and women-targeted conditions did not differ in how much they believed the company valued diversity and inclusion, $F(1, 105) < 1$.

Main effects for participant gender. Main effects for participant gender emerged on only two dependent variables. Compared to men, women reported greater anticipation of being stigmatized as incompetent, $F(1, 105) = 16.80, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .14$, and perceived the company climate toward women as more negative, $F(1, 106) = 7.65, p = .007, \eta_p^2 = .07$.

Main effects for domain. A main effect for domain emerged on only one variable. The company climate was rated as more negative toward women in the male-dominated condition ($M = 4.17, SD = 1.26$) than the gender-equitable condition ($M = 3.92, SD = 1.29$), $F(1, 106) = 4.06, p = .046, \eta_p^2 = .04$.

Interactions. Contrary to predictions, domain did not interact with diversity frame or participant gender on any of the variables. In fact, only one interaction reached standard levels of significance: a Participant Gender x Diversity Frame interaction on general impressions of the company, $F(1, 107) = 4.45, p = .037, \eta_p^2 = .04$. Whereas women rated the company more positively in the all-inclusive condition ($M = 5.09, SD = 1.09$) compared to the women-targeted condition ($M = 4.16, SD = 1.20$), $F(1, 107) = 12.52, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .11$, men’s ratings did not vary across diversity frame conditions (all-inclusive: $M = 4.89, SD = 1.06$; women-targeted: $M = 4.82, SD = 0.80$), $F(1, 107) < 1$. In addition, gender differences emerged in the women-targeted
condition, $F(1, 107) = 5.04, p = .027, \eta^2_p = .05$, with men rating the company more positively than women, but not in the all-inclusive condition, $F(1, 107) < 1$.

**Discussion**

Results suggest that the way in which diversity initiatives are framed powerfully influences how a company is perceived. Supporting predictions, framing diversity initiatives as women-targeted rather than all-inclusive conveyed threat to both women and men, indicated by increased concerns about bias and negative treatment, as well as decreased feelings of social fit and comfort with the company. It is important to note, though, that in both framing conditions, the company was perceived as valuing diversity and inclusion to the same extent, with means above the midpoint of the scale (see Table 1). Thus, the message that the company values diversity and inclusion was clear regardless of framing. However, the way in which the message was framed influenced whether participants felt they would fit in and be treated fairly at the company. Framing diversity initiatives as specifically targeted toward women instead of all employees, although well-intentioned, gave the impression that the company climate is biased against women and, at the same time, women are given unfair advantages at the company. These results suggest that well-intentioned but misguided framing that targets marginalized groups may inadvertently make settings appear stereotypic, biased, and threatening.

Surprisingly, and contrary to predictions, domain did not moderate any of the effects, for either women or men. Even in the context of an engineering firm – a male-dominated domain where targeted diversity initiatives could potentially be perceived as justifiable – women and men still evaluated women-targeted frames less positively than all-inclusive frames.

There may, however, be certain circumstances under which women-targeted programs may be perceived positively. Specifically, women-targeted programs may be perceived more
positively when they are portrayed as driven by women-led grassroots efforts rather than driven top-down by company management. The program description used in Study 1 may have implied that the program was created by top management, that is, created by powerful men who assumed women needed help; this portrayal may have made the program seem patronizing, condescending, and stereotypic. A program created by women employees from the ground up, by contrast, may be perceived as justified and based on real needs rather than stereotypes. To test this notion, we conducted a second study that, in addition to the women-targeted and all-inclusive conditions in Study 1, also included a condition that depicted the women-targeted program as being created and led by women employees. We did not include a condition that depicted the all-inclusive program as being created and led by women employees because our focus was on improving reactions to the women-targeted frame; reactions to the all-inclusive frame were already positive. Because domain did not moderate any of the results in Study 1, Study 2 tested hypotheses only in the domain of engineering. Study 2 thus consisted of a 3 (diversity frame: all-inclusive, women-targeted, grassroots) x 2 (participant gender: women, men) between-participants design.

We again expected that participants would perceive the company as more threatening and biased in the women-targeted condition than the all-inclusive condition. However, we expected that these negative reactions would be attenuated when the women-targeted frame is portrayed as a grassroots effort compared to when it is portrayed as the top-down effort described in Study 1. In addition, we expected that the different perceptions between the grassroots and top-down women-targeted frames would be especially apparent among women, but that men would not differentiate between the two frames.

**Study 2**
Method

Participants. Participants were recruited from two universities: a selective liberal arts college \((n = 76)\) and a midsized public university \((n = 102)\). Participants received either partial course credit or $10 for participating. We recruited from two universities instead of one in order to obtain a large enough sample. Sample size was determined a priori using G*Power 3, with alpha set at .05, power at .80, and effect size at medium \((i.e., f = .25; Faul et al., 2007)\). The effect size was determined by examining the effect sizes of Study 1, which ranged in size from medium to large; we used the more conservative effect size \(\)medium rather than large\) for the power analysis. The power analysis indicated we needed 158 participants; we recruited slightly more in case we needed to exclude participants for failing attention or manipulation checks. Indeed, 11 participants failed attention checks, five incorrectly indicated that the all-inclusive program was targeted toward women, eight failed to correctly indicate that the grassroots program was started by women employees, and two incorrectly indicated that the top-down program was started by women. These 26 participants were excluded from analyses; including these participants does not change the results. The remaining 152 participants \((78 \text{ women}, 74 \text{ men})\) comprised the working dataset. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 53 \((M = 20.00, SD = 3.64)\). Most identified as white or Caucasian \((71.1\%)\), followed by Asian or Asian American \((13.8\%)\), Latina/o or Hispanic \((3.9\%)\), black or African American \((3.3\%)\), and bi- or multi-racial \((2.6\%)\). The university from which participants were recruited did not moderate any of the results and so will not be discussed further.

Procedure and stimulus materials. The procedure was identical to Study 1, except participants were randomly assigned to read one of three instead of one of four brochures. In all conditions, participants read a brochure about an engineering firm. Two brochures were identical
to the women-targeted and all-inclusive conditions used in Study 1. The third brochure – the grassroots condition – was similar to the women-targeted condition, but was altered to indicate that the program was founded and led by two women employees. Specifically, the Our People section was modified as indicated in italics:

As part of our goal to maintain a diverse workforce, we have fully supported efforts by women in the company to create strategies to hire, develop, and retain women. These women-led efforts resulted in the creation of specific programs and opportunities for our female employees. When asked about their vision for these programs, co-founders Maria Sheffield and Sara Clemstine said, “These programs and opportunities provide a safe and inclusive space where women’s voices are valued and where women can connect, network, and learn strategies from other women for overcoming challenges that they may face in the workplace.”

In addition, the section of the brochure describing the professional development program clearly stated that the program was initiated and led by women employees. Besides these modifications, the women-targeted brochure and grassroots brochure were identical. After reading the brochure, participants completed the dependent measures on the computer.

**Measures.** The following measures were identical to Study 1: general impression (single item), social fit and comfort with company (7 items, $\alpha = .93$), support for the program (9 items, $\alpha = .93$), perceived company values (4 items, $\alpha = .85$), perceived company intentions (2 items, $\alpha = .67$), anticipated stigma of incompetence (7 items, $\alpha = .83$), and negative climate towards women (6 items, $\alpha = .94$). Participants also completed the same measure of unfair female advantage, but with the addition of a fourth item ($\alpha = .91$): “I think that men are under-appreciated at this company”.
In addition, participants completed a measure assessing perceived authenticity. Results from Study 1 indicated that the company was perceived as valuing diversity and inclusion to the same extent, regardless of diversity frame condition. However, we wondered whether these values were perceived as authentic and genuine or merely window-dressing depending on diversity framing. We predicted that company diversity values would be perceived as less authentic in the women-targeted condition than the other two conditions. We created four items to assess perceived authenticity: (1) “I think that the company genuinely values diversity in its employees”; (2) “I think that the company is more concerned with its public image to potential applicants than actually promoting diversity” (reverse-scored); (3) “I think the company's dedication to diversity and inclusivity comes off as contrived” (reverse-scored); and (4) “I think the company honestly wishes to build and maintain a diverse work environment”. Participants responded to items using a 6-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). Items were averaged together; higher scores indicate stronger perceived authenticity ($\alpha = .88$).

Finally, participants completed two items measuring sensitivity to the diversity frame manipulation. Without looking at the brochure, participants first recalled to whom the professional development program was targeted. Answers were coded by the first author for whether participants mentioned women or not$^3$. Next, participants indicated who initiated the program, from a list of options: women in the company, CEO, board of directors, human resources, or no one in particular. Answers were coded as 1 (women in the company) and 0 (all other answer choices).

**Results**

$^3$ We also checked whether any participants mentioned racial minorities as the target group. None of the participants mentioned race or a particular racial group. One participant in the all-inclusive condition mentioned “minorities”, but did not specify the minority group. Because “minority” could mean women in the context of engineering, this participant was coded as incorrectly recalling women as the target group and was excluded from analyses.
Manipulation checks. We first examined the efficacy of our framing manipulation. The 3 (diversity frame: all-inclusive, women-targeted, grassroots) x 2 (participant gender: women, men) ANOVA on recalling women as the targeted group revealed a significant main effect for framing condition, \(F(2, 161) = 290.45, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .78\). Participants in the women-targeted (93%) and grassroots conditions (100%) were much more likely to recall women as the targeted group compared to participants in the all-inclusive condition (8%), \(ps < .001\). No other effects were significant.

The 3 x 2 ANOVA on indicating women as initiating the program revealed a significant main effect for framing condition, \(F(2, 161) = 235.19, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .75\). Participants in the grassroots condition (85%) were much more likely to indicate that women initiated the program compared to participants in the women-targeted (4%) and all-inclusive conditions (0%), \(ps < .001\). No other effects were significant.

Together, these results indicate that the diversity frame manipulation was successful. Participants were excluded from the primary analyses if: in the all-inclusive condition incorrectly recalled that women were the targeted group (\(n = 5\)), in the women-targeted condition incorrectly indicated that women initiated the program (\(n = 2\)), or in the grassroots condition failed to correctly indicate that women initiated the program (\(n = 8\)). Including these participants does not change results.

Primary analyses. We next tested our hypotheses by submitting each dependent variable to the same 3 (diversity frame: all-inclusive, women-targeted, grassroots) x 2 (participant gender: women, men) ANOVA. Because the pattern of results was relatively similar for each dependent variable, we organized the results below according to the type of effect found.
Main effects for diversity frame. The 3 x 2 ANOVAs revealed significant differences between diversity frame conditions on all dependent variables. Table 2 displays the means and standard deviations, as well as the inferential statistics for each main effect. We followed up each significant main effect with pairwise comparisons to determine which diversity frame conditions differed from each other. The pairwise comparisons indicated that, compared to participants in the all-inclusive condition, those in the women-targeted and grassroots conditions felt less fit and comfort with the company, \( p = .016 \) and \( .046 \), were less supportive of the program, \( ps < .001 \), thought the company valued diversity and inclusion less, \( p < .001 \) and \( .042 \), thought the company was trying harder to recruit and retain women, \( p < .001 \), and .001, thought the company’s diversity and inclusion efforts were less authentic, \( ps < .001 \), were more concerned about being stigmatized as incompetent, \( ps < .001 \), perceived the company climate towards women as more negative, \( ps < .001 \), and more strongly believed that the company unfairly advantaged women, \( ps < .001 \) (but this effect varied across participant gender; see interaction below). In addition, participants in the all-inclusive condition had more positive impressions of the company than participants in the women-targeted condition, \( p = .001 \), but not the grassroots condition, \( p = .073 \). Contrary to predictions, the women-targeted and grassroots conditions did not differ on any of the variables.

Main effects for participant gender. Main effects for participant gender emerged on only two dependent variables. Replicating Study 1, women anticipated being stigmatized as incompetent \( (M = 3.89, SD = 1.05) \) more than men \( (M = 3.36, SD = 0.74) \), \( F(1, 144) = 14.23, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .09 \). In addition, men more strongly believed \( (M = 3.34, SD = 1.53) \) than women did \( (M = 2.72, SD = 1.35) \) that the company unfairly advantaged women, \( F(1, 146) = 13.01, p < .001 \).
.001, \( \eta^2_p = .08 \). This effect was, however, qualified by a Diversity Frame \( \times \) Gender interaction, described below.

**Interactions.** The only interaction to emerge was a Diversity Frame \( \times \) Gender interaction on perceived unfair female advantage, \( F(2, 146) = 6.19, p = .003, \eta^2_p = .08 \) (see Table 3 and Figure 1). Simple effects tests showed significant gender differences in the women-targeted condition, \( F(2, 146) = 6.00, p = .016, \eta^2_p = .04 \), and grassroots condition, \( F(2, 146) = 17.41, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .11 \), but not in the all-inclusive condition, \( F(2, 146) < 1 \). In addition, there were significant differences between conditions among women, \( F(2, 146) = 7.83, p = .001, \eta^2_p = .10 \), as well as men, \( F(2, 146) = 31.34, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .30 \). Replicating Study 1, pairwise comparisons indicated that both women and men perceived more unfair female advantage in the women-targeted condition compared to the all-inclusive condition, \( ps < .001 \). However, women and men differed in their perceptions of the grassroots condition. Women perceived less unfair female advantage in the grassroots condition than the women-targeted condition, \( p = .047 \), whereas men perceived similarly high levels of unfair female advantage in the grassroots and women-targeted conditions, \( p = .970 \). Likewise, for women, the grassroots and all-inclusive conditions did not differ, \( p = .069 \); for men, the grassroots condition elicited greater perceptions of unfair female advantage than the all-inclusive condition, \( p < .001 \).

**Discussion**

Study 2 replicated the main findings of Study 1. Compared to all-inclusive frames, women-targeted frames conveyed threat to both women and men, as indicated by increased concerns about bias and negative treatment, as well as decreased feelings of social fit and comfort with the company. In addition, women-targeted frames made diversity efforts seem less
authentic and, contrary to Study 1, made it seem as though the company valued diversity and inclusion less than all-inclusive frames.

Importantly, and contrary to predictions, there were no differences between the grassroots and women-targeted conditions except on one variable. That is, on most variables, portraying women-targeted diversity initiatives as being led by grassroots efforts did not attenuate negative reactions. However, important differences emerged on one variable: unfair female advantage. Consistent with predictions, women, but not men, perceived less unfair female advantage when the women-targeted frame was portrayed as a grassroots effort. Thus, women perceived the women-targeted frame as less unfair when it was clear that the program was instigated and supported by women employees. Without the clear support of women employees, though, the women-targeted frame conveyed unfair bias. At the same time, even with the clear support of women employees, the women-targeted frame still lessened women’s sense of fit and comfort and aroused concerns of negative treatment compared to the all-inclusive frame.

A limitation of Study 2 is that the women-targeted vs. grassroots manipulation confounded gender and employee status of the program creator. The women-targeted condition implied that the program was created by male upper-management whereas the grassroots condition implied that it was created by women employees. We did not include conditions that implied the program was created by female upper-management or male employees. Instead, we focused on male upper management and women employees in order to reflect real-world features whereby most upper-management consists of men (Thomas et al., 2017) and grassroots efforts to address inequality often originate from members of stigmatized groups. This confound, however, makes it difficult to discern the exact mechanism that led the program to be perceived as less unfair in the grassroots compared to women-targeted condition; the mechanism could either be
that the program creators were (a) women instead of men, (b) employees instead of upper
management, or (c) both. Future research could tease apart these factors. Nonetheless, taken
together our results indicate that all-inclusive frames portrayed as driven by male upper
management elicit more positive reactions than women-targeted frames portrayed as driven by
either male upper management or women employees.

It is important to note that, as predicted, men’s negative reactions to the women-targeted
frame were not attenuated by the grassroots description. This may be because men tend to
endorse modern sexism (i.e., deny that gender discrimination is still a problem) to a larger extent
than women do (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995); any mention of gender equity efforts may
thus elicit more negative reactions from men than women. Future research could test this
possible mechanism. There may, however, be circumstances under which men react positively to
women-targeted frames. For instance, interventions that focus on empathy and educating about
sexism have been successful at decreasing sexist attitudes among men (e.g., Becker & Swim,
2011). In addition, people are more supportive of affirmative action policies when justification
for the policies is given (Harrison et al., 2006). Building on this prior work, future research could
explore whether providing clear justification for the policies and/or increasing empathy and
awareness of sexism attenuates men’s negative reactions to women-targeted frames.

**General Discussion**

Women are often excluded from career-enhancing opportunities, such as training,
developmental assignments, and access to powerful social networks (Seron, Silbey, Cech, &
Rubineau, 2016; Williams, Li, Rincon, & Finn, 2016; Yee et al., 2016). Providing women access
to these resources has clear benefits for women’s recruitment, retention, and advancement in
STEM and leadership (Goodman et al., 2002; Jansen & Joukes, 2013; Van Oostende et al., 2012;
Dobbin & Kalev, 2013). Thus, ensuring women have access to career-enhancing resources and opportunities is an important goal for diversity initiatives. However, our results suggest that the way in which diversity initiatives are framed can have unintended consequences. In particular, our results suggest that framing diversity initiatives as specifically targeted toward women may be problematic and met with resistance by both women and men. Across two studies, results consistently showed that women and men anticipated more bias and negative treatment and felt less comfort and fit with a company that targeted diversity initiatives toward women rather than toward all employees. Thus, women-targeted frames, although seemingly positive, signaled the presence of stereotypes and the potential for negative and unfair treatment.

To be clear, our results do not suggest that companies should get rid of diversity initiatives that are designed to address gender disparities. Nor do our results suggest that diversity initiatives should ignore the reality and power of gender and other meaningful identities to shape people’s experiences and outcomes. Quite the contrary, we agree with other scholars (e.g., Purdie-Vaughns & Walton, 2011) that diversity initiatives should take into account the racialized and gendered nature of institutions, interactions, and experiences that reproduce inequality in the workplace. Indeed such identity-conscious approaches are more effective at advancing underrepresented groups than programs and policies that fail to take into account identity-based concerns and structural inequality (Konrad & Linnehan, 1995a; Fox, Sonnert, & Nikiforova, 2009; Purdie-Vaughns & Walton, 2011). We thus stress the importance of identity-conscious approaches for addressing inequality in the workplace.

What our results do suggest is that diversity initiatives may be more effective at achieving their goals when framed in a way that includes all employees rather than targeting only women. That is, rather than removing the beneficial components of diversity initiatives, our
results suggest repackaging those benefits to be inclusionary so that they convey identity safety to all employees rather than threat. One real-world example of a diversity initiative that used an all-inclusive frame is the 21st Century Program implemented at the University of Michigan in the 1990s (Hummel & Steele, 1996). A major goal of the program was to reduce the racial gap in academic success and retention between African American and white students. The program incorporated elements, drawn from stereotype threat theory, that were designed to address identity-based concerns of stereotyping and belonging faced by African American students. But rather than singling out African American students, the program used an all-inclusive frame that targeted all students. The program successfully closed the racial gap in academic achievement and retention, with both white and African American program participants outperforming non-participants (Hummel & Steele, 1996). Our results suggest that the all-inclusive framing used by the 21st Century Program was a wise decision that may have helped convey identity safety to program participants.

Our results also suggest that diversity initiatives garner more support when they are framed as all-inclusive rather than women-targeted. A major challenge for gender equity efforts is generating support and buy-in, especially from men who tend to be powerful stakeholders; success is unlikely without the avid support of men (Prime & Moss-Racusin, 2009). Our results suggest that, whereas women-targeted frames unwittingly alienate men, inclusionary frames show promise for engaging men as allies in gender equity efforts.

Changing frames to be all-inclusive may help generate buy-in and reduce threat, but long-term outcomes likely depend on how diversity initiatives are actually implemented on the ground. All-inclusive framing does not guarantee that diversity initiatives are tied to meaningful action aimed at achieving gender equality; if not carefully implemented and monitored, all-
inclusive framing could act as mere window-dressing without actually effecting change. Thus, while working within an all-inclusive frame, initiatives should also consider the historical and structural context of gender and motivate change at multiple levels. For instance, initiatives should incorporate strategies that take into account and mitigate gender-based concerns of belonging and stigma (Purdie-Vaughns & Walton, 2011), interrupt bias in interactions and decision-making (Williams & Dempsey, 2014), and restructure seemingly neutral institutional practices and policies that disproportionately disadvantage women (Williams, 2014). An all-inclusive frame may be part of the solution, but it is not sufficient to achieve gender equality; additional measures are also needed (see also O’Neil & Hopkins, 2015; Williams, Kilanski, & Muller, 2014).

Limitations and Future Directions

The diversity frame conditions differed in word count, making it possible that reactions differed across conditions because of word count rather than diversity frame. However, the two conditions with the largest word count discrepancy (women-targeted = 428 words vs. grassroots = 478 words) differed on only one outcome variable. By contrast, the two conditions with the smallest word count discrepancy (women-targeted = 428 words vs. all-inclusive = 435 words) differed on most variables. It thus seems unlikely, although possible, that word count affected our results.

It is unclear whether our results generalize to other types of identity-targeted frames. We compared an all-inclusive frame to a woman-targeted frame, but results may differ for frames that focus on other historically marginalized identities, such as African American or LGBTQI identities. Future research should test the generalizability of our findings by examining perceptions of diversity frames that target different groups.
Although we focused on gender, women and men are not homogenous categories and important differences exist at the intersection of gender and race-ethnicity, as well as other identities (Crenshaw, 1991). Our predominately white sample, however, limited our ability to test for racial-ethnic differences within gender. Some research suggests that women and men of color may be more supportive than their white counterparts of minority-targeted initiatives (Konrad & Linnehan, 1995b; Chaney, Sanchez, & Remedios, 2016), whereas other research suggests only small differences depending on the initiative in question (Harrison, Kravitz, Mayer, Leslie, & Lev-Arev, 2006). Future research is needed to examine whether perceptions of diversity initiatives differ between women and between men at different intersections of identity.

Other individual differences may also influence perceptions. For instance, women who are strongly identified with their gender group may be more supportive of women-targeted programs than women who are weakly identified (Martins & Parsons, 2007). In addition, individuals who have experienced discrimination (Slaughter, Sinar, & Bachiochi, 2002) or perceive discrimination as ongoing (Harrison et al., 2006) tend to be more supportive of diversity initiatives, including targeted preferential treatment (Matheson, Echenberg, Taylor, Rivers, & Chow, 1994); these individuals may be more supportive of women-targeted programs. By contrast, women-targeted programs may trigger more negative reactions among those who endorse sexist beliefs compared to those who do not (Harrison et al., 2006). Future research could test these potential moderators.

Relatedly, our research focused on undergraduates, but perceptions may differ among sitting employees who, based on their workplace experience, may recognize the need for women-targeted programs (Matheson et al., 1994). Indeed, research suggests that support for diversity initiatives is stronger in field studies with sitting employees than in lab studies with
undergraduate students (Harrison et al., 2006). The potential for differing perceptions between undergraduates and sitting employees suggests that different strategies may be needed for recruitment versus retention. Our results suggest that women-targeted approaches could hurt recruitment by conveying threat to undergraduate students, but future research is needed to determine how such approaches may affect retention and perceptions of sitting employees.

Furthermore, women-targeted approaches may have additional consequences that we did not examine. For instance, by essentializing the group women, women-targeted approaches fail to recognize differences between women, which may aggravate the experience of intersectional invisibility (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) in ways that likely privilege dominant identities while marginalizing others (Purdie-Vaughns & Walton, 2011). Further, our results demonstrate that women-targeted programs are perceived as unfairly advantaging women; such perceptions could undermine women’s credibility and perceived competence, as well as increase intergroup tension between women and men. Future research should investigate these possible consequences.

There may be circumstances we did not examine under which women-targeted programs are perceived positively. In particular, women-targeted programs may be perceived more positively when they exist alongside other diversity initiatives. Diversity management typically involves multi-pronged approaches that implement many programs simultaneously. Thus, in real-world settings, women-targeted programs may be one of many diversity initiatives implemented by a company. Hosting a broad array of programs that target different groups, including majority groups, may lessen resistance to women-targeted programs.

Relatedly, women-targeted programs may be perceived more positively when they are embedded within a broader workplace culture that emphasizes norms of inclusion and respect. In
the present research, only the all-inclusive condition portrayed the company as endorsing cultural norms of inclusion and respect. This confound was intentional because all-inclusive approaches by definition emphasize a broader culture of inclusion and respect (Stevens et al., 2008), whereas women-targeted approaches can and often do exist within cultures that lack inclusion and respect (McLoughlin, 2005; Sharp et al., 2012). However, the confound leaves open the possibility that reactions differed between conditions because of the presence vs. absence of a broader inclusive culture rather than because the program was offered to women vs. all employees. Future research should examine whether women-targeted programs are perceived more positively when they exist within a broader culture of inclusion and respect.

Women-targeted programs may also be perceived more positively if they are initiated by female rather than male upper management. Behavior directed toward women is less likely to be perceived as sexist when it is enacted by a woman than a man (Inman & Baron, 1996). Thus women-targeted programs may arouse fewer stereotyping concerns among women when coming from a female CEO than a male CEO. In addition, the mere presence of a female CEO may ease stereotyping concerns among women (Dasgupta, 2011). By contrast, men’s reactions to women-targeted frames may be more negative when upper-management is female compared to male. For instance, men feel more threatened by a woman than a man in a superior role (Netchaeva, Kouchaki, & Sheppard, 2015), and men react more negatively to women than to men who confront sexism (Drury & Kaiser, 2014; Gervais & Hillard, 2014). Thus men may respond especially negatively to women-targeted programs when they are initiated by female compared to male upper-management. Future research should investigate these possibilities.

**Conclusion**
Our findings illustrate the importance of framing diversity messages inclusively, especially during recruitment when prospective employees are attuned to contextual cues that signal the social fit and safety of the setting. Compared to women-targeted frames, all-inclusive frames signaled greater safety for both women and men, including greater feelings of fit and comfort and anticipated fair treatment. More broadly, our results add to a growing body of work (e.g., Galinsky et al., 2015; Jansen et al., 2015; Stevens et al., 2008) showing the effectiveness of inclusionary diversity messages for conveying identity safety and garnering support for diversity efforts, not only among minority groups but also majority groups.
References


Table 1

*Means (standard deviations) of dependent variables across Diversity Frame conditions in Study 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>All-inclusive</th>
<th>Women-targeted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>($n = 57$)</td>
<td>($n = 60$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General impression</td>
<td>5.00 (1.07)a</td>
<td>4.40 (1.11)b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social fit and comfort</td>
<td>4.38 (0.78)a</td>
<td>3.90 (0.95)b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for program</td>
<td>4.52 (0.74)a</td>
<td>3.72 (1.04)b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company values</td>
<td>4.62 (1.01)a</td>
<td>4.43 (0.99)a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company intentions</td>
<td>4.17 (0.98)a</td>
<td>5.08 (0.83)b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated stigma of incompetence</td>
<td>3.22 (0.79)a</td>
<td>3.87 (0.98)b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative climate towards women</td>
<td>3.16 (1.05)a</td>
<td>4.64 (1.09)b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfair female advantage</td>
<td>2.27 (0.97)a</td>
<td>3.36 (1.23)b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Adjacent means with different superscripts significantly differ at $p < .05$. Variables were measured on 6-point scales, except *general impressions*, which was measured on a 7-point scale.
Table 2

*Means (standard deviations) and main effects for Diversity Frame conditions in Study 2.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All-inclusive (n = 54)</th>
<th>Women-targeted (n = 53)</th>
<th>Grassroots (n = 45)</th>
<th>Framing condition main effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General impression</strong></td>
<td>5.28 (0.92)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4.47 (1.46)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4.82 (1.17)&lt;sup&gt;ab&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social fit and comfort</strong></td>
<td>4.35 (0.79)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.84 (1.29)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.91 (1.09)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support for program</strong></td>
<td>4.73 (0.77)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.49 (1.16)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.90 (1.12)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>19.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Company values</strong></td>
<td>5.00 (0.78)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4.25 (1.27)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4.56 (1.05)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>6.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Company intentions</strong></td>
<td>4.25 (0.89)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5.13 (0.87)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5.44 (0.76)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>27.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authenticity</strong></td>
<td>3.75 (1.00)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2.68 (1.07)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.03 (1.00)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>15.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anticipated stigma of incompetence</strong></td>
<td>3.10 (0.69)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.99 (1.03)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.87 (0.86)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>15.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative climate towards women</strong></td>
<td>2.87 (1.09)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4.90 (0.93)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4.60 (1.05)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>59.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unfair female advantage</strong></td>
<td>2.00 (0.82)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.75 (1.45)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.38 (1.43)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>33.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Adjacent means with different superscripts significantly differ at *p* < .05. Variables were measured on 6-point scales, except *general impressions*, which was measured on a 7-point scale. The three rightmost columns provide statistics for Diversity Frame main effects from the 3 (Diversity Frame) x 2 (Participant Gender) ANOVAs.
Table 3

*Perceived unfair female advantage as a function of gender and diversity frame in Study 2.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All-inclusive</th>
<th>Women-targeted</th>
<th>Grassroots</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>2.09 (0.96)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>3.36 (1.47)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2.70 (1.31)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>1.91 (0.66)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4.15 (1.35)&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4.17 (1.16)&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Adjacent means across columns and across rows with different superscripts significantly differ at $p < .05$. 
Figure 1. Perceived unfair female advantage as a function of gender and diversity frame in Study 2. Bars with different superscripts significantly differ at $p < .05$. 