

# Presumed Fair: Ironic Effects of Organizational Diversity Structures

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This research tests the hypothesis that the presence (vs. absence) of organizational diversity structures causes high-status group members (Whites, men) to perceive organizations with diversity structures as procedurally fairer environments for underrepresented groups (racial minorities, women), even when it is clear that underrepresented groups have been unfairly disadvantaged within these organizations. Furthermore, this illusory sense of fairness derived from the mere presence of diversity structures causes high-status group members to legitimize the status quo by becoming less sensitive to discrimination targeted at underrepresented groups and reacting more harshly toward underrepresented group members who claim discrimination. Six experiments support these hypotheses in designs using 4 types of diversity structures (diversity policies, diversity training, diversity awards, idiosyncratically generated diversity structures from participants' own organizations) among 2 high-status groups in tests involving several types of discrimination (discriminatory promotion practices, adverse impact in hiring, wage discrimination). Implications of these experiments for organizational diversity and employment discrimination law are discussed.

*Keywords:* diversity, procedural justice, discrimination, multiculturalism

Diversity is big business in the United States. An overwhelming majority of organizations incorporate promoting diversity within their values and mission, even when not required to do so by law, and many organizations offer diversity training programs (Dobbin, 2009; Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006; Kelly & Dobbin, 1998). These approaches to managing diversity, which we refer to as

*diversity structures*, are often developed by human resource managers and self-professed diversity experts who have neither the training in theoretical and empirical issues from science on diversity nor the necessary background to evaluate the effects of these programs (Dobbin, 2009; Edelman, Uggen, & Erlanger, 1999; Paluck, 2006). Consequently, rigorous research on the effectiveness of diversity structures is sparse, and conclusions are inconsistent (Kalev et al., 2006; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). Although diversity structures aim to create more positive environments for members of underrepresented groups, we propose that diversity structures can also have ironic, negative implications for members of underrepresented groups. Specifically, we propose that diversity structures have the potential to create an *illusion of fairness*, whereby high-status group members' perceptions of how fairly members of underrepresented groups are treated may be influenced by the presence, not the efficacy, of a diversity structure. This illusion, in turn, impairs high-status group members' ability to detect discrimination against members of underrepresented groups and causes them to react more harshly toward members of underrepresented groups who claim to experience discrimination. We describe six experiments testing these hypotheses.

## Diversity Structures Create Illusions of Fairness

Diversity is a relatively new theme for organizations, following on the heels of affirmative action and equal opportunity programs (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Plaut, 2010). Broadly, diversity structures

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promote fair treatment of employees with different attributes (Edelman, Fuller, & Mara-Drita, 2001). More specifically, these structures typically involve employee recruitment and promotion strategies targeting underrepresented groups, and implementing practices that indicate that valuing and promoting diversity are priorities of the organization (Triana & Garcia, 2009). By *underrepresented groups*, we mean primarily members of racial and ethnic minority groups and women, but the term can be applied broadly to other groups who fall under protected class status. Diversity structures can take various forms, such as advocating diversity values, recognizing cultural differences among employees, creating diversity committees, mandating diversity training, broadcasting diversity awards and successes, and appointing diversity managers (Kalev et al., 2006). Sometimes called a “multicultural” approach, diversity structures aim to expand the diversity of the workforce (Dobbin, 2009).

Diversity structures offer important benefits, including changing norms surrounding the expression of discrimination, raising awareness of biases, and increasing organizational trust among underrepresented groups (Cheryan, Plaut, Davies, & Steele, 2009; Paluck, 2011; Plaut, 2010; Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009; Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Dittmann, & Randall Crosby, 2008). In addition, however, we propose that diversity structures can also have ironic negative consequences for the very people they intend to help. Specifically, we argue that diversity structures have the potential to lead to an *illusion of fairness concerning the treatment of members of underrepresented groups*—an illusion that makes high-status group members underestimate discrimination against underrepresented groups and unsympathetic toward those who claim to experience discrimination. An illusion of fairness occurs when high-status group members believe that the mere presence of diversity programs makes organizations fairer for underrepresented group members, even in the face of evidence that low-status groups are unfairly disadvantaged.

Evidence from sociology suggests that organizations that brand themselves as valuing diversity may be effective in convincing others that they are indeed egalitarian, even if their brand is little more than “window dressing” (Edelman, Krieger, Eliason, Albiston, & Mellema, 2011; Wallace, Edwards, Mondore, & Finch, 2008). For example, Edelman and colleagues (2011) examined over 1,000 federal civil rights legal decisions over a 35-year period and found that, over time, judges increasingly showed *deference* to organizations’ diversity management structures. That is, judges assumed that the mere presence of diversity structures was evidence of an organization’s compliance with civil rights law, without questioning whether the structure actually provided protection for employees or more fair systems of governance.

Judicial deference has been found even among the nation’s highest court. In *Faragher v. City of Boca Raton* (1998), the Supreme Court’s majority ruled that organizations could be absolved of responsibility for a plaintiff’s meritorious discriminatory charges if the employee had knowledge of an organization’s diversity structures (e.g., sexual harassment-related grievance channels) but did not use them (see also *Burlington Industries Inc. v. Ellerth*, 1998, Supreme Court Case for a similar ruling). These rulings imply that judges assumed that employees’ use of available diversity structures would have effectively addressed their civil rights complaints, even though no evidence was available that these structures actually could make any difference. Furthermore,

empirical research shows that diversity structures such as grievance channels are not effective solutions for airing discrimination claims (Edelman et al., 1999; Kaiser & Miller, 2001).

The legal findings and rulings on deference to diversity policies are particularly problematic when considered in conjunction with findings that companies often use diversity structures without any empirical evidence that these structures are effective. In fact, one of the few studies to address whether the implementation of diversity structures causes organizations to treat members of underrepresented groups more fairly suggests that the most commonly implemented types of diversity structures are ineffective in achieving the stated aim of improving diversity and reducing bias. Specifically, in a rare and elegant longitudinal study on this topic, Kalev and colleagues (2006) examined 30 years of data from over 700 organizations and assessed how the diversity structures implemented in these organizations predicted changes in the percentage of Black and White managers in these organizations. Kalev and colleagues found that most of the diversity structures used in these companies were unrelated to subsequent racial diversity within the organizations. Ironically, the most frequently used diversity structure, diversity training programs that focused on reducing managerial bias, was associated with subsequent *decreased* racial diversity. This is consistent with social psychological research showing that complying with diversity-related pressure can decrease support for diversity and increase prejudice among those who resent this pressure (Legault, Gutsell, & Inzlicht, 2011; Plant & Devine, 2001; Thomas, 2008) and that asking people to suppress their stereotypes can inadvertently increase stereotyping and prejudice (Kulik, Perry, & Bourhis, 2000; Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Jetten, 1994; Monteith, Sherman, & Devine, 1998). Thus, many organizations in the United States are using diversity structures that are untested or ineffective with respect to reducing bias and increasing diversity (see T. D. Wilson, 2011, for a related argument about the pitfalls of untested assumptions underlying interventions to change social behavior).

Why would judges and others defer to the mere presence of a diversity program as an indicator of civil rights compliance without considering whether the program was in fact effective at achieving fair treatment of underrepresented groups? We argue that the presence of diversity structures acts as a *signal* that the organization is committed to treating members of diverse groups with respect and dignity and hence provides an unbiased environment for members of these groups. That is, diversity programs signal to others that the organization’s treatment of underrepresented groups is *procedurally fair*.

### Diversity Structures and the Perception of Procedural Justice

Many studies have shown that judgments of the fairness of decisions are enhanced by the perception of procedural justice. Indeed, perceived fairness of procedures often shapes satisfaction with outcomes and trust in authorities more than the perceived fairness or favorability of the outcome (Lind & Tyler, 1988). Procedures are seen as just when they are consistent, neutral, impartial, and trustworthy, and when authorities treat people with respect and give them an opportunity to be heard (e.g., Colquitt, 2001; Leventhal, 1980; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). According to the “group-value” model of justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind,

1992), people care about the justness of their treatment (and not simply their outcomes) because fair treatment indicates status within the social group. Giving people voice (the opportunity to express their opinions), for example, indicates that their views are worthy of hearing and that they are valued, full-fledged members of the group. People who have voice are more satisfied with decisions even when it is clear that the exercise of voice had no influence on those decisions, and even when those decisions are unfavorable (e.g., Lind, Kanfer, & Early, 1990). Importantly, assessments of procedural justice are particularly influential when outcomes are unfavorable—perceived procedural fairness leaves people satisfied with unfavorable outcomes (see Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001, for reviews).

We propose that diversity structures signal to high-status group members that members of underrepresented groups are respected and valued and have standing within the organization. Thus, high-status group members will perceive companies that adopt diversity policies and practices as more procedurally just for underrepresented groups than those companies that do not adopt these policies and practices. According to our *illusion of fairness* hypothesis, diversity policies should create enhanced perceptions of procedural justice among high-status group members, even when it is clear that members of underrepresented groups are experiencing distributively unfair outcomes.

Furthermore, we propose that the illusion of fairness stemming from the simple presence of diversity structures can make it difficult for high-status group members to detect discrimination against underrepresented groups. Specifically, by increasing perceived procedural justice for underrepresented groups within an organization, diversity programs *legitimize* existing social arrangements within the organization (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Major & Schmader, 2001). The more high-status group members perceive the social system to be legitimate, the less likely they are to see discrimination against members of underrepresented groups (Eccleston, Kaiser, & Kraynak, 2010). In addition, the illusion of fairness stemming from the presence of diversity structures may lead high-status group members to judge underrepresented group members who claim to be victims of discrimination more harshly. Our reasoning is that if diversity structures enhance the perception that an organization is fair for underrepresented groups, underrepresented employees within this organization who claim to be victims of discrimination are thereby challenging the justice of a “fair” system. Discrimination claims would be at odds with the perception that this organization is a just place that rewards members of underrepresented groups fairly, and as a result, the discrimination claims would be seen as unjustified. Furthermore, threats to system legitimacy increase high-status group members’ animosity toward low-status discrimination claimants (Jost & Burgess, 2000; Kaiser, Dyrenforth, & Hagiwara, 2006; Kaiser, Eccleston, & Hagiwara, 2008).

In sum, we hypothesize that the presence of organizational diversity structures leads high-status group members to legitimize existing social arrangements by assuming that organizations are more procedurally fair for underrepresented groups. This legitimization, in turn, makes it difficult to detect discrimination against underrepresented groups and increases animosity toward underrepresented group members who claim discrimination. Both of these judgments are central to organizational fairness. That is, for

organizations to address injustice, people must be able to notice deviations from fairness, such as discrimination, and they must subsequently feel entitled to speak up about discrimination.

## Hypotheses

We conducted six experiments to test our hypotheses. In Experiments 1–4, we examined the hypotheses that the presence (vs. absence) of diversity structures creates an illusion of fairness, causing members of high-status groups (Whites, men) to perceive the organization as more procedurally fair for members of underrepresented groups, and does so even when the organization is distributively and procedurally unjust (Hypothesis 1). In Experiments 2–6, we examined the consequences of the illusion of fairness. These experiments examine whether the presence (vs. absence) of organizational diversity structures causes members of high-status groups to legitimize inequality by underestimating discrimination against members of underrepresented groups (Hypothesis 2) and by reacting harshly toward members of underrepresented groups who claim discrimination (Hypothesis 3).<sup>1</sup>

### Experiment 1: Do Diversity Structures Create an Illusion of Fairness?

#### Method

**Participants and procedure.** The design of Experiment 1 was a 2 (diversity structure: present or absent)  $\times$  3 (promotion practices: fair, unfair, or no information) between-subject factorial with random assignment to condition. Participants were 245 White adults from the United States who completed the study on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk Internet site in exchange for 25¢ (see Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011, for a full description of Mechanical Turk sampling). Data from two participants were unanalyzed because these individuals failed to follow instructions on a question designed to capture random responding (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenkoc, 2009). Participants ranged from 18 to 73 years of age ( $M = 31.89$ ,  $SD = 12.37$ ) and were majority male (55.1%). Participants varied in highest educational attainment, including some high school (1.6%), high school diploma (10.7%), some college (35.0%), associate’s degree (11.1%), bachelor’s degree (23.5%), some graduate school (8.2%), and a graduate degree (9.9%). Most participants (81.5%) reported being currently or in the past employed in a full-time job.

Participants were invited to take part in a study in which they would learn about a company and provide impressions of the organization. Participants first read background information describing an investment company, Smith & Simon Corporation (e.g., its goals, its contact information). Participants then viewed either the company’s *Diversity Statement* or its *Mission Statement*.

<sup>1</sup> In these studies, we restrict our focus to members of high-status groups (i.e., White Americans and White men). An important question concerns whether members of high- and low-status groups differ in their vulnerability to the illusion of fairness. Although we have incidental data from low-status group members (collected in the process of recruiting high-status group members) for several experiments, the sample sizes are small and not sufficiently powered for adequately testing hypotheses. More information about the responses of low-status groups is available from the first and second authors.

These statements were similarly worded, with the exception of the title (diversity or mission statement) and the insertion of words that implicated a commitment to diversity and nondiscrimination in hiring in the diversity condition. The wording of these statements was drawn from real diversity policies in American workplaces. See the Appendix for these statements.<sup>2</sup>

Participants then viewed data purportedly from Smith & Simon's Human Resources Department showing the racial demographics of those awarded promotions at the company. Participants in the two promotion practices experimental conditions saw two pie charts, one representing the percentage of Whites who received promotions and the other representing the percentage of minorities who received promotions over 2005–2009. In the racially unequal promotion practices condition, the pie charts revealed that 28% of Whites received promotions, whereas only 10% of minorities received promotions. In the racially equal promotion practices condition, participants learned that 25% of Whites and 25% of minorities received promotions. In the control (no-information) condition, participants did not see data from the Human Resources Department.

All participants then viewed an ostensible *New York Times* article describing an African American broker at Smith & Simon Corporation who sued the organization because of racial discrimination. The employee claimed that branch managers did not refer clients to him, preventing him from building his portfolio and resulting in him being paid less than his White colleagues. He also claimed that he received less sales support than his colleagues, a less desirable office, and less training. After he complained, he said other colleagues retaliated against him. The evidence in the article was created to convey that discrimination was plausible, but not certain. This type of ambiguous discrimination case is characteristic of the majority of discrimination suits that go to trial (Nielsen & Nelson, 2008). We included this article to make the possibility of racial discrimination at Smith & Simon equally salient across conditions. After reading this information, participants completed the dependent measures, provided demographic information, and were debriefed.

**Dependent measures.** Participants completed a five-item measure based on key components of procedural justice (Colquitt, 2001; Leventhal, 1980; Thibaut & Walker, 1975) assessing the extent to which they believed that Smith & Simon offered a procedurally fair environment for racial minorities. Ratings were made on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale ( $\alpha = .90$ ). Items were as follows: Racial minorities are able to express their views and feelings about their treatment at Smith & Simon Corporation; Racial minorities have influence over the outcomes they receive at Smith & Simon Corporation; Smith & Simon Corporation applies personnel procedures consistently across all employees, irrespective of race; Smith & Simon Corporation values diverse opinions; and Smith & Simon Corporation treats racial minorities with respect.

Participants also completed two manipulation checks. As a check on the Diversity Structure manipulation, participants were asked to indicate whether they had read Smith & Simon's mission statement or diversity statement. As a check on the Promotion Practices manipulation, participants were asked to indicate whether the following statement was true or false: Racial minorities and Whites are equally likely to receive promotions at Smith & Simon Corporation.

## Results

**Manipulation checks.** A check on the diversity structure manipulation revealed that 76.5% of participants in the diversity statement condition and 75.8% of participants in the mission statement condition correctly recalled whether they read a diversity statement or a mission statement. We retained all participants for analyses, however, as all findings are unchanged irrespective of whether those who incorrectly recalled the manipulation are excluded.

The manipulation check on the item assessing whether it was true that the company promotes Whites and minorities equally revealed that 91.4% of the participants in the unequal promotion condition responded with false and 88.8% of those in the equal condition responded with true. In the no-information control condition, participants responded at chance levels (50.0% responded with true). All participants were retained for analyses; findings do not change when those who failed the manipulation check were excluded.

**Procedural justice for minorities.** Data were analyzed with a 2 Diversity Structure (present or absent)  $\times$  3 Promotion Practices (unequal promotions, equal promotions, or no information) analysis of variance (ANOVA) on perceived procedural justice. Consistent with hypotheses, there was a significant main effect for diversity structure,  $F(1, 237) = 7.48, p < .01, d = .21$ : Participants perceived the company as more procedurally fair for minorities when they saw its diversity statement ( $M = 4.63, SD = 1.42$ ) compared with when they saw its mission statement ( $M = 4.33, SD = 1.39$ ). There was also a main effect for the promotion practices manipulation,  $F(2, 237) = 25.22, p < .001$ . Bonferroni post hoc tests ( $ps < .05$ ) revealed that participants perceived the company with equal promotions ( $M = 5.25, SD = 1.10$ ) as significantly more procedurally fair for minorities than the no-information condition ( $M = 4.35, SD = 1.51$ ) and the unequal promotion practices condition ( $M = 3.88, SD = 1.24$ ), and the latter two conditions were marginally different from each other ( $p = .06$ ). As can be seen in Figure 1, the main effect of diversity structure did not interact with the promotion practices manipulation,  $F(2, 237) = 0.33, p = .72$ . Consistent with an illusion of fairness, reading a diversity statement caused Whites to perceive the organization as more procedurally fair for minorities, and this pattern emerged irrespective of whether or not the organization promoted minorities and Whites equally. Thus, although Whites were sensitive to the objective reality of how fairly the organiza-

<sup>2</sup> In order to examine whether the mission and diversity statements unintentionally differed on factors that might covary with these statements, we had a separate group of 61 undergraduate volunteers at two large universities examine the company profile and either the diversity statement or the mission statement. Participants then evaluated the company on dimensions that might spuriously vary across the two conditions, including the company's financial success, size, discrimination-related litigation history, percentage of White employees, percentage of minority employees, percentage of female employees, racial diversity of client base, cooperativeness of employees, happiness of employees, effectiveness of the Human Resources department, and conservatism/liberalism of employees. All responses were made on 7-point Likert-type scales. There were no differences across any of these dimensions (all  $ps > .15$ ).

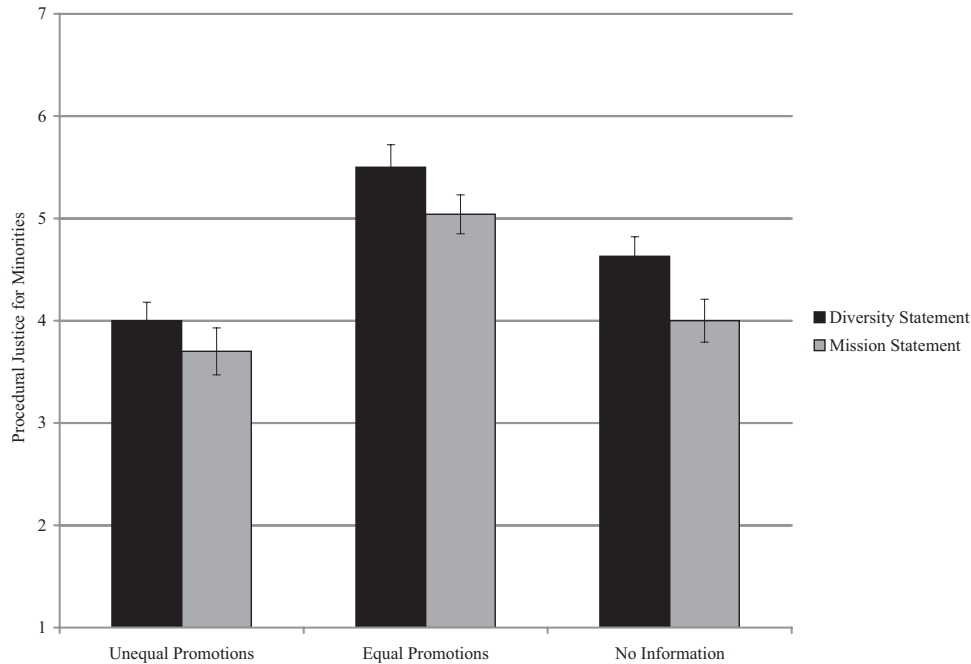


Figure 1. Diversity policies create an illusion of fairness among Whites (Experiment 1). Error bars indicate standard errors.

tion treated minorities, they nonetheless demonstrated the illusion of fairness.<sup>3</sup>

## Discussion

Experiment 1 provides support for our illusion of fairness hypothesis by indicating that high-status groups perceive organizations with (vs. without) diversity structures as more procedurally fair for minorities, and this pattern emerges even when companies have racially disparate promotion records. It is possible, however, that participants did not see the unequal promotion practices as evidence that the company was unfair toward minorities. They might have instead assumed that minority and White employees had different qualifications or credentials that justified the unequal promotion practices. In Experiment 2, we addressed this issue by examining whether high-status groups show an illusion of fairness in the face of evidence of objective discrimination, that is, when low-status group members are passed over in the hiring process despite having the same qualifications as high-status group members. We also further tested in Experiment 2 the generality of the illusion of fairness effect by examining a second diversity structure, management training. We told participants that managers at the organization were required to complete either a management training program or a management training program that focused on diversity. Additionally, we shifted from examining racism to considering whether diversity structures affect perceptions of procedural justice for women who experience discrimination.

In Experiment 2, we also examined the implications of the illusion of fairness. We predicted that the presence (vs. absence) of a diversity structure produces an *underestimation of discrimination*, reducing the likelihood that men will see discrimination against women. We reasoned that because men will (erroneously)

perceive organizations with diversity structures as procedurally fair workplaces for women, they will give organizations with these structures the benefit of the doubt when it appears that they discriminated against women.

## Experiment 2: Do Diversity Structures Lead White Men to Legitimize Sex Discrimination in Hiring?

### Method

**Participants and procedure.** Participants were 66 White men recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk in exchange for 25¢ ( $M$  age = 27.61,  $SD$  = 8.50). We focus on White men, as White men are high status in terms of both race and gender, and, unlike minority men, they do not associate themselves and their groups with the concept of diversity (Unzueta & Binning, 2010). Participants varied in highest educational attainment, including high school diploma (6.1%), some college (53.0%), associate's degree (4.5%), bachelor's degree (22.7%), some graduate school (1.5%), and a graduate degree (12.1%). Seventy-nine percent reported being currently or in the past employed in a full-time job.

Participants first read background information about Smith & Simon Corporation as in the previous study. Participants then read that all managers at the organization were required to complete a training program. We manipulated the title of that program to be

<sup>3</sup> As can be seen in Figure 1, the pattern of perceiving greater procedural justice in the diversity condition compared with the control condition occurred at all three levels of the promotion practice manipulation, although the difference between the diversity and control condition was statistically significant only in the no-information condition ( $p$  = .03;  $p$ s = .10 and .34 in the equal and unequal conditions, respectively).

either “Fostering Employee Success” or “Fostering Women’s Success.” The training programs were described identically, with the exception that words reflecting diversity were included in the diversity condition. Specifically, the statements read as follows (with the slash within the brackets separating the parts of the description that varied across conditions):

Smith and Simon Corp considers its employees to be one of its greatest assets. All Smith and Simon Corp management-level employees are required to participate in a mandatory training program called [FOSTERING EMPLOYEE SUCCESS/FOSTERING WOMEN’S SUCCESS]. The goal of this program is to foster improved communication among [employees/male and female employees], to develop increased sensitivity to managing [personnel/gender diversity], and to establish ways of recognizing and [rewarding good performance/rewarding good performance that do not discriminate against women].

After reading the statement, participants provided a one-sentence written summary of the statement. Participants were next told that they would examine a table of applicants who applied for a client manager position at Smith & Simon. The table contained 40 applicants, represented by first name and last initial. Twenty of the names were clearly female and 20 were clearly male. Each applicant’s name was accompanied by data communicating his or her relevant years of work experience, highest degree earned, scores on a validated employment test (which ranged from 0 to 30), and scores from a resume screening (ranged from 0 to 5). These data were matched across applicant gender so that for each male applicant with a given set of credentials, there was a female applicant with the exact same set of credentials. That is, the male and female applicants were exactly the same in terms of their credentials for the position. Participants were told to examine the list and identify top candidates. The table of candidates stayed on the screen for 2.5 min.

Next, participants were asked to review the short list of applicants selected for an interview (the screen automatically advanced after displaying the short list for 60 s). The interview short list included seven men and three women, demonstrating that despite equivalency among male and female applicants, men made up 70% of those receiving interviews. The men were the top seven scoring men from the applicant list, and the women were the top three scoring women. In U.S. law, the rule of thumb for demonstrating adverse impact against a given group is referred to as the “four-fifths rule,” meaning that adverse impact can be inferred when one group is hired at the rate of less than 80% of the other group. The short list in this study showed that women’s interview rate was just 43% of men’s interview rate, falling well below the four-fifths proxy for adverse impact. After reviewing the short list, participants completed the dependent measures and manipulation checks, were debriefed, and thanked.

**Dependent measures.** Participants completed a behavioral intention item assessing the degree to which they would support women seeking judicial litigation to address discrimination, phrased as follows: “If women brought a class action lawsuit against Smith & Simon for sex discrimination in hiring, how likely would you be to find in favor of the women who sued?” Response options ranged from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 7 (*very likely*). They also completed a measure of perceived procedural justice for women (the same items from Experiment 1, except that they were phrased with respect to women;  $\alpha = .81$ ).

To examine whether participants accurately remembered the applicant list and short list, we asked them to provide estimates of the number of women on the applicant list (the scale contained nine response options labeled with 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, and 40 women) and interview list (11 response options that ranged from 0 to 10 women). To examine whether male and female applicants were viewed as equally qualified, we assessed participants’ recollection of men’s and women’s average years of work experience (11-point scale, ranging from 0 to 10 years); resume score for men and women (6-point scale, ranging from 0 to 5 points); employment test score for men and women (7-point scale, with labels of 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, and 30 points); and the percentage of men and women who earned high school, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees (11-point scales for each level of education, response options represented 10% increments starting at 0% and ending at 100%).<sup>4</sup>

Participants completed a check on the diversity structure manipulation by responding to three items: “The managerial training program you read about emphasized that Smith & Simon values employees of different genders”; “Smith & Simon Corporation has a policy that addresses discrimination against women”; and “Smith & Simon Corporation engages in diversity practices to increase opportunities for female employees” ( $\alpha = .88$ ), ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Participants also completed a forced-choice item asking them to select whether they read about a program called Fostering Employee Success or Fostering Women’s Success.

## Results

**Manipulation checks.** A diversity structure (present or absent) one-way ANOVA revealed that participants exposed to the Fostering Women’s Success training program were more likely to say that the company addresses gender diversity issues ( $M = 5.86$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ) compared with those who read the Fostering Employee Success training program ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ),  $F(1, 64) = 80.59$ ,  $p < .001$ . Furthermore, 93.9% of participants correctly recalled the condition to which they were assigned, and the four participants who answered incorrectly (all in the diversity condition) provided one-sentence summaries of the manipulation that explicitly mentioned that the company addressed gender issues, suggesting that all participants effectively attended to the manipulation.

**Procedural justice for women.** Consistent with hypotheses and the first experiment, men who read that Smith & Simon had a diversity training program (Fostering Women’s Success) perceived the organization as more procedurally fair for women ( $M = 5.65$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ) relative to men who read that the company had a Fostering Employees’ Success training program ( $M = 5.05$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ),  $F(1, 64) = 8.37$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = .72$ .

**Support for litigation.** Also consistent with hypotheses, men in the diversity structure condition ( $M = 2.57$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ) were less likely to support sexism-related litigation against Smith & Simon relative to men in the control condition ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ),  $F(1, 63) = 3.86$ ,  $p = .05$ ,  $d = .49$ . Thus, diversity structures

<sup>4</sup> When participants’ estimates for males’ ( $n = 11$ ) or females’ ( $n = 12$ ) educational background did not sum to 100%, we dropped those participants’ educational percentage data from analyses.

increased men's complacency with the outcome of a hiring process that unjustly discriminated against women.

**Mediation.** We examined whether perceptions of procedural justice mediated the relationship between the diversity structure condition (coded as 1 = *control*, 2 = *diversity*) and support for litigation with Hayes's (2012) Process macro. As already demonstrated, condition predicted support for litigation ( $\beta = -.66$ ,  $p = .05$ ) and procedural justice ( $\beta = .63$ ,  $p < .01$ ). When both condition and procedural justice were simultaneously entered as predictors of support for litigation, condition was no longer significant ( $\beta = -.36$ ,  $p = .30$ ) and procedural justice was significant ( $\beta = -.48$ ,  $p = .01$ ). Thus, procedural justice mediated the relationship between diversity condition and support for litigation. To test the significance of this mediated relationship, we used 10,000 bootstrapped samples to estimate the indirect effect (as well as 95% confidence intervals) of diversity condition on perceived discrimination through procedural justice. The unstandardized indirect effect ( $-.30$ ) was contained in a 95% confidence interval that did not contain 0 ( $-.70$ ,  $-.06$ ), demonstrating a significant indirect effect.

**Recollection of women's representation on applicant and short list.** In order to examine participants' attentiveness to the adverse impact against women on the interview short list, we examined their recollection of the number of women on both the applicant list and interview short list. Experimental condition did not affect participants' recollection of the number of women on the applicant list,  $F(1, 64) = 0.02$ ,  $p = .89$ , or interview short list,  $F(1, 64) = 0.25$ ,  $p = .62$ . On average, participants stated that women made up approximately 15 of the 40 applicants ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ) and 3.5 of the 10 interview candidates ( $M = 4.5$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ).

**Perceived qualifications of men and women.** In order to examine the possibility that the procedural justice and support for litigation effects were due to participants perceiving women as less qualified than men (despite the fact that they were objectively as equally qualified as men), we examined participants' recollection of men's and women's qualification for the position (see Table 1). As intended, male and female applicants' qualifications were perceived quite similarly. We use a series of mixed ANOVAs, in which condition was a between-subjects variable and the ratings on each qualification criterion for men and women was the repeated measures factor. For example, with years of work experience, the ANOVA treated ratings of men's work experience and women's work experience as the repeated measures factor. A similar analysis was conducted for resume score, employment test score, percentage with a high school degree, percentage with a

bachelor's degree, and percentage with a master's degree. Of these six analyses, there were two instances in which ratings of male and female applicants differed significantly ( $ps < .05$ ). Women were perceived to have scored higher on the employment test than men, and women were perceived as less likely than men to have the lowest level of education, a high school degree (all other  $ps > .15$ ). There was just one significant main effect of condition, with applicants on average viewed as lower on the resume score in the diversity condition compared with the control condition ( $p = .05$ , all other  $ps > .53$ ). There were no interactions with experimental condition ( $ps > .36$ ). Thus, if anything, women were perceived as more qualified than men.

## Discussion

Experiment 2 provides further evidence that organizational diversity structures create an illusion of fairness with respect to high-status group members' perception of the treatment of low-status groups. That is, the presence of diversity structures, in this case mandatory diversity training, caused high-status group members (White men) to believe that women in the organization were treated more fairly, despite concrete evidence that women were discriminated against. Furthermore, the presence (vs. absence) of a diversity training program caused men to express less support for litigating what was objectively an unjust environment for women. And finally, perceptions of procedural justice mediated the relationship between the presence of a diversity structure and support for litigation.

Although the first study was susceptible to the critique that the disproportionate promotion practices disadvantaging low-status groups were not sufficient to clearly signify discrimination, Experiment 2 was not. In fact, on none of the six measures of perceived qualifications were women perceived as less qualified than men, suggesting that adverse impact on the interview list did not stem from assumptions about women's poor qualifications.

Finally, one unexpected, but interesting, finding was that participants remembered that women were in fact underrepresented on the short list, but falsely believed that women comprised less than half of the applicant list (on average, they recalled 15 women, vs. the reality of 20 women). The recollection of fewer female applicants may represent an effort to downplay the plausibility of sexism by assuming that women were interviewed at the rate at which they were represented in the applicant pool. Despite this overall potential downgrading of sexism, diversity structure presence still exerted influence over participants' perceptions of procedural justice for women and support for litigation.

Table 1  
*Recollection of Men's and Women's Qualifications (Experiment 2)*

Variable	Diversity condition		Control condition	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Years of work experience	7.48 (1.21)	7.39 (1.33)	7.74 (1.36)	7.29 (1.81)
Resume score	4.33 (0.61)	4.41 (0.68)	4.57 (0.56)	4.69 (0.68)
Test score	5.35 (0.76)	5.55 (0.62)	5.34 (0.77)	5.57 (0.70)
% high school degree	2.62 (1.02)	2.35 (1.02)	2.75 (1.21)	2.57 (1.17)
% bachelor's degree	7.73 (1.22)	7.85 (1.32)	7.57 (1.67)	7.57 (1.67)
% master's degree	2.65 (0.75)	2.81 (1.06)	2.68 (0.95)	2.86 (1.51)

To further understand the scope of the illusion of fairness, we conducted a third experiment to examine another manifestation of discrimination: wage discrimination. As full-time employed women's salaries are still just 82.2% of men's salaries (United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012), wage discrimination is a significant form of discrimination in the workforce. Indeed, recent Supreme Court Cases (Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire, 2007) and laws (Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009) have put inequality in women's salaries on the forefront of civil rights compliance. If diversity structures make it difficult to detect wage discrimination, this may make it more difficult for efforts aimed at remedying wage discrimination.

### Experiment 3: Do Diversity Structures Cause White Men to Legitimize Sex Discrimination in Salaries?

#### Method

**Participants and procedure.** Thirty-nine White male undergraduate students from the University of California, Santa Barbara (ages 18–23) participated in exchange for a candy bar. Participants were randomly assigned to read about a company that either did or did not have a diversity structure. They were asked to take the role of a consultant and evaluate a company's managerial promotion and pay practices. Participants were told that they would review personnel information from one male employee and one female employee pulled at random from each of a company's 10 departments. They then viewed the company profile (as in Experiment 1). For those assigned to the diversity condition, this included a *Diversity Statement* identical to that used in Experiment 1, and information indicating that the company encouraged managers to take part in diversity training programs ("Empowering Women's Leadership Skills," "Managing Diversity"). Those assigned to the control condition read a *Mission Statement* identical to that used in Experiment 1 and also learned that managers were encouraged to take part in training programs titled "Empowering Leadership" and "Managing for the Future."

Adapting procedures used by Cordova (1992), participants then viewed the information pertaining to 20 employees—the one male and one female employee ostensibly pulled at random from each of 10 departments in the company. This information consisted of the employee's inputs (current job level, seniority, education level, and motivational rating) and annual salary. The values were taken directly from Cordova (1992), with the exception that salaries were doubled to reflect current salaries. Salaries ranged from \$20,000 to \$70,000; current job levels ranged from 8 to 14; seniority ranged from 1 to 25 years with the company; education levels ranged from high school degree to graduate degree; and motivational ratings (ostensibly provided by the direct supervisor) ranged from 1 to 3. This information was the same in both the diversity and control conditions. Prior to looking at the personnel information, participants were told that the four inputs provided were the only criteria that should determine an employee's salary and that each of the 10 departments was equally important in the company.

Personnel information was presented one department at a time (order counterbalanced), and with either the female or male information always appearing first (counterbalanced). The information was designed so that when averaged across all 10 departments, men and women had equivalent job levels, seniority, education,

and motivational rating. Annual salaries, however, differed such that women earned only 81% of what men earned (\$41,800 on average for women compared with \$51,600 on average for men). After seeing all 10 departments, participants completed the dependent measures and manipulation checks, were debriefed, and thanked.

**Dependent measures.** Participants answered four items assessing procedural fairness of the company measured on 7-point scales anchored at 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*). The items were as follows: "Women and men are treated the same way at Smith & Simon"; "Smith & Simon applies personnel procedures consistently across all employees, irrespective of gender or ethnicity"; "Personnel decisions at Smith & Simon are free of bias"; and "Smith & Simon uses fair procedures when making salary decisions" ( $\alpha = .88$ ). Participants also were asked to make a judgment about whether there was sex discrimination in the company as a whole on a 10-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 (*no, there is no sex discrimination*) and 10 (*yes, there is sex discrimination*). Participants were then asked to recall the average salaries and average inputs of men and women from the information they saw. As a manipulation check, participants were asked to recall whether the company had a training program called "Managing Diversity" or "Managing for the Future."

#### Results

**Manipulation check.** Nine people incorrectly remembered the name of the training program (three in the control condition and six in the diversity condition). Excluding these participants did not affect the pattern of results, so they were retained in analyses. We did not find any effects of the order in which the male and female information or the departments were presented ( $ps > .34$ ), so analyses collapse across these factors.

**Procedural justice for women.** As predicted, men in the diversity condition rated the company as more procedurally fair ( $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ) than did men in the control condition ( $M = 2.70$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ),  $F(1, 37) = 4.12$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = .66$ .

**Perceived discrimination.** Also consistent with predictions, men in the diversity condition ( $M = 6.85$ ,  $SD = 2.28$ ) were significantly less likely to say that sex discrimination occurred in the company than did men in the control condition ( $M = 8.53$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ),  $F(1, 37) = 7.84$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = .92$ .

**Mediation.** We examined whether perceptions of procedural justice mediated the relationship between diversity structure condition (1 = *control*, 2 = *diversity*) and perceived discrimination. As previously found, diversity condition predicted both procedural justice ( $\beta = .32$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and perceived discrimination ( $\beta = -.42$ ,  $p < .01$ ). When procedural justice was entered along with condition to predict perceived discrimination, condition was only marginally predictive of perceived discrimination ( $\beta = -.21$ ,  $p = .08$ ), whereas procedural justice significantly predicted perceived discrimination ( $\beta = -.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This provides evidence that procedural justice mediates the relationship between diversity condition and perceived sex discrimination. To test the significance of this mediated relationship, we used 10,000 bootstrapped samples to estimate the indirect effect (and the 95% confidence intervals) of diversity condition on perceived discrimination through procedural justice (Hayes, 2012). The unstandardized indirect effect



( $-.85$ ) was contained in a 95% confidence interval that did not contain 0 ( $-2.01, -.06$ ), indicating a significant indirect effect.

**Recollection of men's and women's salaries.** Estimates of salary were analyzed with a mixed factorial ANOVA design, with condition (diversity vs. control) as a between-subjects factor and gender of target as a within-subjects factor (similar to Experiment 2). We found a main effect of target sex such that participants correctly recalled that the male salaries were higher than female salaries,  $F(1, 35) = 58.38, p < .001$ , indicating that participants noticed wage disparities. There was no main effect of diversity structure on salary estimates ( $p > .70$ ), and diversity structure did not interact with target sex,  $F(1, 35) = 2.38, p = .13$ , although the male advantage in salary tended to be recalled as larger in the diversity condition (see Table 2).

**Perceived qualifications of men and women.** In order to test whether participants perceived men and women as equally qualified, we conducted a series of mixed ANOVAs, with condition (diversity vs. control) as a between-subjects factor and gender of the target as a within-subjects factor. Overall, women and men were correctly recalled as having similar job levels ( $p > .60$ ) and educational levels.<sup>5</sup> Women were incorrectly remembered as having greater seniority than men,  $F(1, 33) = 4.24, p < .05$ , and having higher motivational ratings than men,  $F(1, 34) = 12.01, p < .01$  (see Table 2). There was no effect of diversity structure on recall of inputs (job level, seniority, education, and motivational rating; all  $ps > .3$ ). Diversity structure also did not interact with target sex to affect recall of inputs ( $ps > .3$ ). Thus, participants recalled female employees as having similar or better qualifications than the male employees, and this did not differ depending on whether the participant was in the diversity condition or the control condition.

## Discussion

Experiment 3 provides further evidence that organizational diversity structures create an illusion of fairness with respect to high-status group members' perception of the treatment of low-status groups. As in Experiment 2, the presence of diversity structures, in this case a diversity statement accompanied by a statement that the company encouraged diversity training, caused White men to believe that women in the organization were treated more fairly and also to judge that sex discrimination at the company was significantly less likely, despite concrete evidence that women were discriminated against in salaries at the company. Furthermore, perceptions of procedural justice mediated the relationship between the presence of a diversity structure and perceived likelihood of sex discrimination.

In this study, like Experiment 2, the effect of the diversity structure cannot be attributed to men perceiving women as less qualified than men. Irrespective of experimental condition, men correctly recalled that women were as qualified (or even more qualified) than men and correctly recalled that women were being paid less than men on average. In fact, men in the diversity condition recalled the sex difference in salaries as slightly (but not significantly) greater than did men in the neutral condition. Nonetheless, in the presence (vs. absence) of a diversity structure, men judged the company as more fair toward women and sex discrimination as less likely.

Together, the first three experiments demonstrate that the mere presence of an organizational diversity structure causes high-status group members to legitimize potential inequalities by perceiving organizations as procedurally fairer for underrepresented groups (even when it is clear that these groups experienced distributively unfair outcomes). Furthermore, Experiments 2 and 3 demonstrate that diversity structures reduce high-status group members' sensitivity to seeing discrimination and result in less support for litigation to remedy discrimination. These studies show these effects across two types of commonly employed diversity structures (diversity statements, diversity training), with two types of discrimination (racism and sexism), and with three substantiations of unfair personnel procedures (disparate promotions, adverse impact in interview selection, and wage discrimination).

The first three experiments examined participants' reactions to a fictitious company and lawsuit. This was necessary as it allowed us to standardize the company and prevent any prior knowledge from influencing participants' evaluations of fairness and the presence of discrimination. We conducted a fourth study to address this constraint by focusing on a real company and discrimination lawsuit, as this provides a more ecologically valid test of the hypotheses. We used a contemporary sex discrimination lawsuit in which an organization responded to discrimination claims, in part, by highlighting its diversity structure. We hypothesized that the presence of a diversity structure would cause White men to perceive a sex discrimination class action lawsuit against the company as less valid, and would also cause them to perceive the company as more procedurally fair for women. In other words, we expected that when reading about an actual discrimination lawsuit, White men would give the benefit of the doubt to a company that was seemingly committed to diversity.

## Experiment 4: Do Diversity Awards Cause White Men to Legitimize Sexism?

### Method

**Participants and procedure.** Sixty-one White male participants who volunteered without compensation were recruited from public areas in Seattle, including the University of Washington and North Seattle Community College ( $M$  age = 30.83,  $SD$  = 13.26). Participants varied in highest educational attainment, including some high school (1.7%), high school diploma (8.3%), associate's degree (15%), some college (23.3%), bachelor's degree (30.0%), some graduate school (6.7%), and a graduate degree (15%). Eighty-five percent reported being currently or in the past employed in a full-time job.

All participants read an excerpt adapted from a *New York Times* article (D. Wilson, 2010a) describing the class action sex discrim-

<sup>5</sup> For education input, participants did not all report levels that appeared in the personnel information (e.g., some wrote "BA," whereas others put "college" or wrote down numbers). Because we were unable to put all responses into the same scale, we instead coded the data categorically as (1) men and women equivalent education, (2) men have more education, or (3) women have more education. A chi-square test revealed a significant difference in the number of people who saw education levels as equivalent for men and women (57%), as men higher than women (21%), and women higher than men (21%),  $\chi^2(2) = 9.16, p = .01$ . That is, most people correctly saw that the education levels were the same.

Table 2  
*Recollection of Men's and Women's Qualifications and Salaries (Experiment 3)*

Variable	Diversity condition		Control condition	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Current job level	10.83 (0.61)	11.22 (0.61)	10.29 (0.63)	10.18 (0.63)
Seniority	9.94 (1.02)	10.67 (1.09)	10.59 (1.05)	11.24 (1.12)
Motivational rating	2.06 (0.11)	2.36 (0.12)	1.86 (0.11)	2.33 (0.12)
Salary (\$)	50,789 (2,171)	38,158 (2,156)	49,611 (2,231)	41,222 (2,215)

*Note.* Means and standard deviations of recalled inputs and salaries (education level not included).

ination lawsuit of Velez et al. v. Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation that was tried in U.S. District Court (Southern District of New York) in 2010. Participants read the actual *New York Times* article published in the week the case went to trial (D. Wilson, 2010a), with the exception that we shortened it to encourage rapid completion of the study. The article described the class's allegations that Novartis paid women less than men and denied women promotions, especially women who already had children or who became pregnant. The class of women sought more than \$200 million in damages to compensate 5,600 female employees affected by Novartis's discriminatory practices. The only difference across experimental conditions was that in the diversity condition, the article stated that the company had been named one of the 100 best companies in the United States by *Working Mother* magazine ("She [Novartis lawyer] noted that Novartis had been cited by *Working Mother* magazine as one of the 100 best companies in the nation for 10 years in a row, through 2009"; D. Wilson, 2010a). This sentence from the real article was deleted in the control condition. Thus, this diversity structure manipulation highlighted an award that the company had received for its treatment of an underrepresented group. Diversity awards are an intriguing diversity structure because the receipt of these awards often hinges upon human resource departments' representations of a company's policies and data, all of which can be presented in a highly favorable light, with little to no accountability of asserted claims (Dobbin, 2009). After reading the *New York Times* article, participants completed the dependent measures, provided demographic information, and were debriefed.

**Dependent measures.** To assess participants' beliefs about the validity of the discrimination claim, we asked them to indicate the extent to which the plaintiffs' case was valid with the following four items: "If you were a juror in this lawsuit, how likely would you be to find in favor of the class of women who sued Novartis"; "The class of women suing Novartis was discriminated against"; "The class of women suing Novartis was given the same opportunities as male employees" (reverse scored); and "The class of women suing Novartis was treated unfairly." Responses for the first item were anchored at 1 (*very unlikely*) and 7 (*very likely*), and the other three items were anchored at 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*) ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

Participants also completed a measure of perceived procedural justice for women. This measure included five items: "Novartis applies personnel procedures consistently across all employees, irrespective of gender"; "Novartis treats women with respect"; "Novartis values women's opinions"; "Novartis is a fair employer for women"; "Novartis made fair decisions regarding women's

promotions and pay" ( $\alpha = .91$ ). Responses were anchored at 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*).

As a check on the diversity structure manipulation, participants indicated whether the article they read stated that *Working Mother* magazine recognized Novartis for being a top 100 company. Answer choices were *yes*, *no*, or *I don't recall*.

## Results

**Manipulation check.** Seventy-four percent of participants correctly remembered whether the article stated that *Working Mother* magazine named Novartis a top 100 company. Sixteen percent (eight participants in the control condition and two participants in the diversity condition) indicated that they could not recall their condition. Ten percent (two participants in the control condition and four participants in the diversity condition) reported being in the opposite condition to which they were assigned. Given the subtlety of the manipulation (one sentence in a long article), we excluded the six participants who reported being in the opposite condition to which they were assigned, as it is likely that they did not carefully read the article.<sup>6</sup>

**Procedural justice for women.** Consistent with hypotheses, men in the diversity structure condition perceived Novartis as more procedurally fair for women ( $M = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ) relative to men in the control condition, ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ),  $F(1, 53) = 5.40$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $d = .64$ .

**Validity of the discrimination claim.** Also consistent with hypotheses, men in the diversity structure condition perceived the plaintiffs' case against Novartis as less valid ( $M = 4.22$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ) relative to men in the control condition ( $M = 4.87$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ),  $F(1, 53) = 7.82$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = .75$ . Thus, consistent with hypotheses, the presence of a diversity structure decreased the legitimacy men afforded to a class of women suing a company for sexism.

**Mediation.** We examined whether perceptions of procedural justice mediated the relationship between diversity structure condition (1 = *control*, 2 = *diversity*) and perceived validity of the plaintiffs' discrimination claim. As already established, diversity condition predicted both procedural justice ( $\beta = .52$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and perceived claim validity ( $\beta = -.65$ ,  $p < .01$ ). When procedural justice and condition simultaneously predicted perceived claim validity, condition did not significantly predict validity ( $\beta = -.23$ ,

<sup>6</sup> When these six participants are included, the validity of discrimination effect remains significant ( $p = .04$ ), but the procedural justice effect becomes marginally significant ( $p = .12$ ).

$p = .14$ ), whereas procedural justice significantly predicted validity ( $\beta = -.82, p < .001$ ). Thus, procedural justice mediates the relationship between diversity condition and perceived validity of the discrimination claim. We used 10,000 bootstrapped samples to estimate the indirect effect (as well as 95% confidence intervals) of diversity condition on perceived discrimination through procedural justice (Hayes, 2012). The unstandardized indirect effect ( $-.42$ ) was contained in a 95% confidence interval that did not contain 0 ( $-.87, -.10$ ), indicating a significant indirect effect.

## Discussion

Experiment 4 again demonstrated that the presence (vs. absence) of a diversity structure caused high-status group members (i.e., White men) to perceive the organization as fairer for women and to perceive the plaintiff class's discrimination claim as less valid. Furthermore, procedural justice mediated the effects of diversity structure presence on perceptions of the validity of the plaintiffs' discrimination claim. This study expanded on the first three experiments by testing the hypotheses with ecologically valid stimuli. The sex discrimination case described in this study was an actual recent case, in fact the largest sex discrimination case to reach trial in U.S. history, and the information participants read about the company and the lawsuit had been published in a national news outlet. Our findings, therefore, may characterize the way in which people react to discrimination cases they read about in everyday life.

To further explore the scope of our hypotheses, we conducted another experiment to examine the implications of the illusion of fairness by examining whether diversity structures also decrease participants' sympathy toward underrepresented group members who claim to experience discrimination. We reasoned that to the extent that the presence of diversity structures leads high-status group members to view an organization as more fair, those exposed to diversity structures should perceive discrimination claims as illegitimate and should have little sympathy for individuals who complain about discrimination (e.g., derogating them and viewing them as troublemakers).

## Experiment 5: Do Diversity Policies Create Animosity Toward Discrimination Claimants?

### Method

**Participants and procedure.** Participants were 150 White adults from the United States who completed the study on Amazon's Mechanical Turk Internet site in exchange for 50¢. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 81 ( $M = 34.29, SD = 14.25$ ), and participants were predominately female (62.0%). Participants varied in highest educational attainment, including some high school (1.3%), high school diploma (14.0%), some college (33.3%), associate's degree (6.7%), bachelor's degree (23.3%), some graduate school (8.7%), and a graduate degree (12.7%).

Procedures were identical to Experiment 1, with the exception that we simplified the design by no longer manipulating the fairness of the personnel procedures (we provided no information about the company's personnel procedures). Thus, participants read about a company (and were randomly assigned to read its mission or diversity statement) and then read an ostensible *New*

*York Times* article describing a suit brought against the company by a Black employee (identical to that used in Experiment 1). Finally, participants completed the dependent measures and demographic information, were debriefed, and thanked.

**Dependent measures.** Participants completed five items assessing the extent to which they perceived the plaintiff's discrimination claim as valid, using Likert-type scales anchored at 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*) ( $\alpha = .91$ ). Items were as follows: "The individual who sued the company was discriminated against"; "The branch managers at Smith & Simon Corporation were biased when distributing customers to the individual suing the company"; "The individual who sued the company was given the same opportunities as other employees" (reverse scored); "The branch managers at Smith & Simon Corporation acted fairly in their distribution of customers to the individual suing the company" (reverse scored); and "The individual suing Smith & Simon Corporation was treated unfairly when customers were assigned."

To assess attitudes toward the plaintiff, participants reported the extent to which the plaintiff was likable, was friendly, had a good personality, and was someone they would like as a coworker on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) ( $\alpha = .80$ ). Participants also indicated how much they thought the plaintiff was a complainer by indicating the extent to which the plaintiff was a troublemaker, emotional, irritating, and hypersensitive on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) ( $\alpha = .88$ ). These two measures were negatively correlated with each other ( $r = -.61, p < .01$ ).

Finally, participants completed a manipulation check item on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*): "Smith & Simon Corporation has a policy that addresses discrimination."

## Results

**Manipulation check.** Companies with a diversity statement ( $M = 5.74, SD = 1.69$ ) were perceived as more likely to have a policy that addressed discrimination compared with companies with a mission statement ( $M = 4.35, SD = 1.56$ ),  $F(1, 148) = 27.62, p < .01$ .

**Perceived validity of the discrimination claim.** Consistent with hypotheses, participants in the diversity statement condition ( $M = 4.35, SD = 1.18$ ) were less likely to regard the plaintiff's discrimination claim as valid than were participants in the mission statement condition ( $M = 4.79, SD = 1.09$ ),  $F(1, 148) = 5.49, p < .05, d = .39$ .

**Attitudes toward the plaintiff.** Consistent with Hypotheses 3, participants reported less positive attitudes toward the plaintiff in the diversity condition ( $M = 3.63, SD = 0.84$ ) than in the mission statement condition ( $M = 3.95, SD = 0.81$ ),  $F(1, 148) = 5.51, p < .05, d = .39$ . Participants also tended to see the participant as more of a complainer in the diversity condition ( $M = 3.78, SD = 1.34$ ) compared with the mission statement condition ( $M = 3.38, SD = 1.21$ ),  $F(1, 148) = 3.63, p < .06, d = .31$ .

## Discussion

Experiment 5 replicated and extended the underestimation of discrimination effect observed in Experiments 2–4. It showed that the illusion of fairness produced by the presence of diversity

structures led Whites to regard discrimination claims brought by a minority against the company as less valid and also made them more likely to dislike and derogate a minority who brings discrimination claims against a company. These findings are consistent with our theorizing that diversity policies act as a legitimizing cue, signaling that organizations that have these policies are fairer than those that do not. Hence, low-status groups who claim discrimination against organizations with diversity structures are unlikely to be believed and are likely to be evaluated negatively.

We conducted a final experiment to further test the generality of the effects discovered in the first five experiments. Although participants in the first five experiments are in many ways highly representative of people who make decisions about discrimination claims in the larger world (e.g., all our participants were jury-duty eligible, and roughly 80% of the Mechanical Turk participants reported experience with full-time employment), these participants did not uniformly have management experience within their organizations. One could question whether support for our hypotheses would be found among more experienced workers, and in particular those with experience in management. Thus, we conducted a final study to test these hypotheses among more experienced workers in U.S. society, all of whom had management experience. Furthermore, Experiment 6 provided the opportunity to test our hypotheses in a context in which participants reflected on the actual diversity structures at their own organizations. Using diversity structures that are both real and personally relevant for participants provides an important ecologically valid test of our hypotheses.

### Experiment 6: Do Diversity Structures at Their Own Organizations Cause White Managers to Legitimize Racism?

#### Method

**Participants and procedure.** Participants were 53 White adults from the United States (52.8% male), ranging in age from 21 to 67 ( $M = 37.42$ ,  $SD = 12.60$ ). Participants varied in highest educational attainment, including high school diploma (1.9%), some college (17.0%), bachelor's degree (30.2%), some graduate school (9.4%), a graduate degree (26.4.7%), and a few participants who did not provide their educational attainment (8%). All participants reported some previous experience managing employees ( $M_{years} = 6.24$ ,  $SD_{years} = 6.48$ ; range = 0.50 years–26 years). To obtain a sample with management experience, participants were recruited from three places: (a) Master's of business administration students at UCLA were approached and asked to participate in exchange for a candy bar ( $n = 8$ ); (b) staff members were recruited to participate from a participant database maintained at UCLA in exchange for \$2.50 ( $n = 7$ ); and (c) Participants with management experience on Amazon's Mechanical Turk Internet site were recruited in exchange for 25¢ ( $n = 38$ ).

Participants were told they would be completing two ostensibly unrelated studies. First, participants were randomly assigned to quickly consider, and then list, what their company does to increase either diversity (diversity condition) or environmental sustainability (control condition) within the workplace. Next, participants moved onto the purported second study. Participants were

told that they would be reviewing real claims filed with Human Resources by three employees at Fortune 1000 companies. The first two claims were filler cases used to maintain the cover story and dealt with limited employee parking availability and desire for additional health insurance benefits. The third claim was the focal case dealing with racial discrimination (these claims were modeled after the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's Compliance Manual on "Race and Color Discrimination"). Participants were presented with one of two racial discrimination claims (two claims were used for the purpose of stimulus sampling). Both claims were filed by African American employees and detailed lack of advancement opportunities due racial discrimination. Participants were asked to consider these claims as though they were raised at their company, and then respond to the dependent measures. Participants then provided demographic information and were debriefed and thanked.

**Dependent measures.** All responses were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 (*not at all*) and 7 (*very much so*). Participants completed a two-item measure assessing claim validity: "To what extent does the employee have a legitimate case?"; "To what extent is the case filed by the employee valid?" ( $r = .72$ ). To assess perceptions of seriousness of the claim, participants completed the following item: "To what extent should the events in this case be of serious concern?" Participants completed a behavioral intention item assessing support for the claimant: "To what extent would you support the employee filing the case?" Ratings of case validity were positively correlated with seriousness of the claim ( $r = .74$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and support for the claimant ( $r = .81$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and these latter two measures were also positively correlated ( $r = .65$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

#### Results

To verify that the two discrimination claims were not evaluated differently across condition, the dependent variables were subjected to ANOVAs, with condition (diversity vs. control) and racial discrimination claim as between-subjects factors. Racial discrimination claims did not interact with the experimental condition (all  $ps > .13$ ), so analyses collapse across this factor.

**Claim validity.** Consistent with hypothesis, participants in the diversity condition perceived the discrimination claim as less legitimate ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ) compared with participants in the sustainability (control) condition ( $M = 4.86$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ),  $F(1, 50) = 8.21$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $d = 0.79$ .

**Seriousness of the claim.** As hypothesized, participants perceived the discrimination claim as less serious in the diversity condition ( $M = 4.50$ ,  $SD = 2.02$ ) compared with participants in the sustainability condition ( $M = 5.50$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ),  $F(1, 48) = 4.21$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = .57$ .

**Support for claimant.** As predicted, participants were less supportive of the employee filing the discrimination claim in the diversity condition ( $M = 4.09$ ,  $SD = 1.78$ ) compared with the sustainability condition ( $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ),  $F(1, 50) = 3.88$ ,  $p = .054$ ,  $d = 0.54$ .

#### Discussion

Experiment 6 further replicated findings from Experiments 2–5. That is, thinking about the presence of diversity (vs. control)

structures led high-status individuals to regard racial minorities' discrimination claims as less valid. Specifically, White managers thinking about what their company does to increase diversity in the workplace subsequently perceived a racial discrimination claim as less legitimate, of less serious concern, and were willing to offer less support to the employee filing the claim compared with participants in the control condition.

Importantly, Experiment 6 provides support for the illusion of fairness phenomenon using ecologically valid methods. While completing the experiment, participants referenced self-relevant organizations (the companies where they were employed) and considered the discrimination claims as though they had occurred at their place of employment. Furthermore, all participants had experience working in organizations in management positions.

### General Discussion

Despite the widespread prevalence of diversity structures and initiatives in U.S. organizations, surprisingly little is known about whether these diversity structures actually help organizations address discrimination and benefit underrepresented groups. Although diversity structures offer certain benefits to members of underrepresented groups (Plaut et al., 2009; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008), in the present research, we tested the hypothesis that diversity structures also have ironic, unintended consequences that could potentially undermine efforts to mitigate discrimination. Specifically, we proposed that diversity structures create an illusion of fairness that causes majority group members to become less sensitive to recognizing discrimination against minorities and leads them to react more negatively toward minority group members who claim discrimination. Across six experiments, the present research provided support for these hypotheses across four types of diversity structures—a diversity statement, diversity awards, diversity management training, and idiosyncratically generated structures at participants' own organizations—and two types of discrimination (racism and sexism).

The present findings extend our theoretical understanding of how high-status group members make decisions about the presence or absence of discrimination. One might assume that introducing diversity structures and programs will increase the salience of discrimination as a problem and subsequently change norms about the expression of bias (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Paluck, 2011). The present research, however, reveals that for high-status groups, the mere presence of diversity structures has the ironic consequence of *reducing* perceptions of discrimination and undermining support for those who claim to be its victims. This occurred even in the presence of information communicating that organizations with diversity structures actually treated members of underrepresented group unfairly. Furthermore, the present research identifies a mechanism that accounts for this effect, demonstrating that diversity structures increase high-status group members' perceptions of procedural fairness for underrepresented groups. That is, the presence of diversity structures at a company causes high-status group members to assume that members of underrepresented groups are treated more fairly at that company, *regardless of whether the company actually treats underrepresented groups equally to high-status groups*. This presumption of procedural fairness, in turn, facilitates underestimation of discrimination and negative reactions toward those who claim discrimination.

### Practical Implications of the Illusion of Fairness and Underestimation of Discrimination

The present research has a number of practical implications for organizations, law, diversity initiatives, and targets of discrimination.

**Implications for organizations.** First, our findings suggest that organizations and observers may erroneously use the presence of diversity structures at a company as indicators of the efficacy of diversity efforts, even though these structures might not actually achieve equity. This practice of pointing to the presence of a diversity structure as “evidence” of fair treatment can be seen in companies' responses to recent lawsuits brought against them. For example, female employees at Wal-Mart Corporation accused Wal-Mart of systematic sex discrimination across stores in the United States. Company representatives retorted that the accusations were unfounded, pointing out that “Wal-Mart has had, for many years, strong policies against discrimination and these policies are there to ensure women are promoted and paid well” (Vaidyanathan, 2011). And, in the Novartis case that inspired Experiment 4, Novartis denied treating women inequitably, and pointed to diversity awards they had accrued, arguing, “We are proud of the public honor and recognition we have received for the policies and programs we have in place to support the advancement of women in the sales force” (D. Wilson, 2010b).

Our research suggests that when companies flout their diversity credentials, they may actually convince others (Experiments 1–5) and themselves (Experiment 6) that discrimination claims against them are unfounded, despite the lack of any evidence that their diversity policies are effective. For example, Experiments 1–3 demonstrated that even when there was explicit evidence of a company's failure to promote high-status and underrepresented groups equitably, high-status group members still deferred to the presence of diversity structures in assuming the company was fairer than a company without the diversity structures. Because explicit information regarding the effectiveness of diversity initiatives typically is not available to organizational decision makers, the likelihood that they will rely on heuristics such as the presence of diversity policies is increased. Thus, one implication of our work is that organizations need to be vigilant to the illusion of fairness. Decision makers should be alerted to this illusion and trained to look for, and use, actual data (e.g., proportion of majority/minority group members hired, promoted) when assessing the efficacy of their organization's practices. Future research will benefit from identifying other markers of diversity effectiveness that practitioners can use when assessing an organization's practices.

**Implications for law.** There is a similar implication of the present research for legal structures. Underrepresented groups still face employment discrimination (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2010), highlighting the important role that legal outlets play for ensuring equity. However, just as the presence of diversity policies and structures within organizations can make it more difficult for employees of these organizations to recognize discrimination, these policies can also blind judges and juries—those in the position to rectify these practices. Indeed, Edelman and colleagues (2011) found that in discrimination lawsuits, judges evaluate organizations with diversity structures as making a good faith effort to decrease discrimination. As a result,

diversity structures can be used as a legal strategy to preemptively inoculate organizations against claims of discrimination. Thus, our research points to the importance of training judges and juries to be aware of the illusion of fairness created by diversity structures and avoid the biasing effects of mere presence of diversity structures in their decision making.

**Implications for targets of discrimination.** When faced with discrimination or unjust treatment, individuals may want to speak up and rectify inequitable treatment or outcomes, but may be afraid of doing so. Speaking up about discriminatory experiences can cause individuals to be labeled as a troublemaker and complainer (Kaiser & Miller, 2001) and expose them to retaliation (Kaiser & Major, 2006). People are generally aware of these risks, and as a result, these risks decrease the likelihood of people from underrepresented groups claiming discrimination (Shelton & Stewart, 2004). The present research suggests the ironic possibility that there may be *even greater* social costs to claiming discrimination in a company that touts itself as promoting diversity. Because companies that have diversity structures are seen as more egalitarian and procedurally fair by majority group members, discrimination claims brought against companies by individuals from underrepresented groups will seem even less legitimate to majority group members, increasing the likelihood that they will penalize a discrimination claimant. Indeed, Experiment 5 provides evidence supportive of this proposition. Future research will benefit from continuing to explore the implications of diversity structures on discrimination claimants.

### Caveats and Future Directions

These experiments are the first to address how diversity structures affect perceptions of procedural fairness toward underrepresented groups, and thus provide an important first step toward understanding how diversity structures can affect perceptions of discrimination. Nonetheless, they have several limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, our use of a Mechanical Turk, university, and management samples allowed us to sample from a range of work experience, demonstrating that this effect emerges across this range. However, future research will benefit from examining these processes in actual organizations (e.g., corporations, social organizations) and exploring the emergence of these biases across the range of experience within organizations (e.g., Human Resource personnel, executives).

Second, our methodology relied on self-reported responses. The type of self-report measures we collected, however, is precisely the type of judgments that legal decision makers ponder when determining whether a discrimination case has merit. Nonetheless, in future research, it will be important to explore whether the perceptions observed in these experiments translate to actual behavior toward members of underrepresented groups who claim discrimination in the presence or absence of diversity structures.

Third, it will be important for future work to address the boundary conditions of the illusion of fairness created by diversity structures, in order to determine when it does and does not occur. There may be situations, for example, in which the presence of diversity structures makes people more vigilant for discrimination. This might occur, for example, when people assume that companies that have instituted diversity structures have done because they were sued for discriminating in the past.

Fourth, our research focused exclusively on how diversity structures affect the perceptions and judgments of members of high-status groups—Whites and men. These groups are in positions of power, and their reactions to discrimination play an important role in shaping the success of discrimination claims in organizational and judicial realms. Nonetheless, as research on this topic develops, it will be important to examine the reactions of less powerful groups as they are often responsible for bringing discrimination claims to light, and it will be important to understand how diversity structures shape their perceptions of organizational justice.

### Conclusion

Although diversity management is big business in the United States, there is surprisingly limited research on the psychological effects of diversity initiatives or their effectiveness with regard to increasing diversity, promoting equity, or reducing bias. The present research demonstrates an ironic consequence of these initiatives—they can increase the perception that companies treat underrepresented groups fairly even when they do not, with the consequence that discrimination may go unnoticed. These findings thus add to a growing number of studies demonstrating the potential dangers of untested assumptions about the success of interventions (see T. D. Wilson, 2011). Efforts to promote diversity require the development of theoretically driven and empirically tested policies and a thorough understanding of the psychological phenomena underlying their effectiveness.

Our conclusions are not meant to imply, however, that diversity structures cannot be effective or that they should be eliminated. Diversity initiatives broadly are an important acknowledgement that discrimination and prejudice are still a factor in today's society. Furthermore, these initiatives can play an important role in helping to remedy disparate treatment and outcomes based on group membership. As research on diversity structures develop, it will be important to rely upon evidence-based diversity structures that can more effectively eliminate inequities and create more just environments for members of underrepresented groups.

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## Appendix

### Company Policy Statements

#### Diversity Statement

Smith & Simon Corporation holds the belief that creativity and innovation result exclusively from cooperation between people with different experiences, perspectives, and cultural backgrounds. Our policies and practices are built on this philosophy. To better serve our customers and create a united workforce we strive to:

- Promote trust, mutual respect and dignity between employees.
- Attract, develop, promote and maintain a talented diverse workforce
- Encourage collaboration among employees from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities.

In accordance with our philosophy, Smith & Simon Corporation motivates our employees to contribute their best and provide us with a competitive advantage. Smith & Simon Corporation does not discriminate against any employee because of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, age, or covered veteran status.

#### Mission Statement

Smith & Simon Corporation holds the belief that creativity and innovation result exclusively from cooperation between people with different experiences and perspectives, and backgrounds. Our policies and practices are built on this philosophy. To better serve our customers and create a united workforce we strive to:

- Promote trust, mutual respect and dignity between employees;
- Attract, develop, promote and maintain a talented workforce;
- Encourage collaboration among employees with different work and learning styles.

In accordance with our philosophy, Smith & Simon Corporation motivates our employees to contribute their best and provide us with a competitive advantage.

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