

Thinking About Women as Similar to Men: Implications for Perceptions of Masculine
Workplace Cultures

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Abstract

Thinking About Women as Similar to Men: Implications for Perceptions of Masculine
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Thinking of women as very similar or very different than men may affect how we judge masculine work cultures and how much we think women fit in such workplaces. In study 1 participants ($N=703$) primed with gender-similarities forecasted that women would fit relatively well in a very masculine work culture compared to those primed with gender-differences. Then in study 2 ($N=116$) we used the minimal group paradigm to test whether thinking about group-similarities would affect how problematic a non-inclusive company culture was perceived to be. Those who believed the groups were similar judged the non-inclusive company culture as significantly less problematic to the low-status group compared to participants who read that the groups were different. A mediation analysis showed that perceived fit mediates the relationship between thinking about similarities and judgments about the company as problematic. Using the minimal groups as a proxy for gender this research suggests that thinking about gender-similarities can make problematic masculine work cultures to be seen as less problematic for women.

Thinking About Women as Similar to Men: Implications for Perceptions of Masculine Workplace Cultures

Are women more different or more similar to men? In today's US society this question sparks more debate than agreement. While some believe that women and men are mostly similar in most aspects of life; many still think they differ in important ways, such as in how they express their feelings and the topics they are interested in (Pew Research Center, 2017). Even though much attention has been dedicated to resolving this debate (see Hyde, 2005), little is known about the consequences of thinking about women as either similar or different than men. In the current work we do not attempt to answer whether women are more similar or more different than men. Instead, we focus on how viewing women and men as either more similar or different impacts perceptions of problematic work cultures.

When Focusing on Gender-Similarities is Beneficial to Women

Focusing on how similar women are to men can be empowering for women in the workplace. Even though women make-up a large portion of the employees in the United States, women still struggle to assert their positions of leadership, possibly due to traditional beliefs about men being the natural leaders (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Eagly, 2007; Sczesny, Bosak, Neff, & Schyns, 2004). But thinking about gender-similarities makes such traditional gender-roles less salient and causes women to feel more confident in positions of leadership (Martin & Phillips, 2017).

Gender-similarities are also beneficial when aimed at reducing harmful stereotypes about women. For example, women are still commonly thought to be less mathematical, therefore less apt than men for STEM careers (Fennema & Sherman, 1997; Nosek et al, 2009). But thinking about the similarities that exist between women and men causes men to endorse negative

stereotypes about women in STEM significantly less compared to men primed with gender-differences (Martin & Phillips, 2019). The inverse also seems to be true: People who consciously attempt to not be sexist tend to endorse a gender-similarities mindset more than endorsing gender-differences (Koenig & Richeson, 2010). Thus gender-similarities can be an efficient approach when the goal is to reduce harmful gender stereotypes.

Benefits of Focusing on Group-Differences

Thinking about group-differences can result in positive social change not just for racial minorities but also other groups who are disadvantaged in society. For instance, first-generation college students consistently struggle to graduate and to maintain grades as high as other students (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Ishitani, 2006; Engle, 2007). But thinking about group-differences is a successful strategy to remedy this disparity: Instructing first-generation students to think about how their unique life-experiences has shaped their college education serves as an empowerment tool and improves students' mental health and engagement in college, in turn increasing their overall GPAs and college retention (Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014). When the focus is placed on positive differences between groups, such as a group's unique experiences, rather than on harmful stereotypes, thinking about differences becomes a source of empowerment and pride for those in low-status groups in society. Recognizing and celebrating differences (multiculturalism) is also associated with positive outcomes for racial minorities. Endorsement of multiculturalism in Whites predicts lower bias towards racial minorities (Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne, 2000; Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Verkuyten, 2005; Wolsko, Park, & Judd, 2006). Valuing group-differences in the workplace has benefits as well, as it promotes inclusive behaviors and organizational policies

geared towards the inclusion of racial minorities (Plault, Thomas & Goren, 2009; Wolsko et al., 2006).

Another benefit of thinking about group-differences is that it creates awareness about social disparities. Whites who minimize racial-differences tend to also minimize how problematic racism is in modern society (Neville, Worthington, & Spanierman, 2001; Zamudio, & Rios, 2006). However, when historical differences between minorities and Whites are taught to Whites they become more aware of disparities and are able to identify racism against Blacks more often than when Whites are not taught about their different histories (Nelson, Adams, & Salter, 2013). Similarly, endorsement of group-differences is associated with support for initiatives aimed at decreasing social-disparities by specifically helping racial minorities, such as affirmative action (Awad, Cokley, & Ravitch, 2005). Focusing on group-differences¹ brings social disparities to the forefront of peoples' minds, which can in turn, be the catalyst for change.

Gender-Disparities in Masculine Work Cultures

In order to promote gender-equality in the workplace, it is important to be aware of the barriers that maintain gender-disparities and disadvantage women. One of such barriers is the persistence of masculine norms in workplaces. We define masculine work cultures as workplaces that value, require and/or advantage behaviors and traits associated with masculine social roles, but not women's (Cheryan & Markus, *in prep*). Examples of masculine work-cultures are cultures in which employees are hired and promoted based on self-promoting (Rudman, 1998; Singh, Kumra, & Vinnicombe, 2002), being aggressive (Flory, Leibbrandt, & List, 2010; Somerville, 2005) or having a highly competitive mindset (Jonason, Slomski, & Partyka, 2012). These cultures become obstacles for women because the traits and behaviors required for success

¹ Group-differences are shown to be beneficial when differences are described as historical and social differences. Race essentialism, on the other hand, is associated with racism and negative attitudes towards minorities (CITE).

do not match the way women are generally socialized to be (Stockard, 2006). More importantly, even when women deviate from traditional gender-roles and act in more masculine ways they are met with backlash (Rudman & Glick, 2001; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Williams & Tiedens, 2016). Recognizing masculine work cultures as problematic for women is essential because efforts to diversify such cultures may be met with resistance if masculine work cultures are not seen as problematic in the first place.

Gender-similarities minimizes differences between women and men. While it may be beneficial to minimize some (perceived) differences such as negative stereotypes, an approach that focuses on similarities may also minimizes important differences in how women and men experience the workplace (e.g., different socialization and backlash women face when displaying masculine behaviors). In turn, minimizing such different realities may lead individuals to perceive that women do not face as much obstacles within masculine work cultures. In fact, some may erroneously perceive masculine work cultures to be equally good for both women and men, therefore perceiving them as less problematic then when being reminded of gender-differences.

Perceived-Fit of Women in Masculine Work Cultures

One important reason why many may not see a masculine work culture as problematic is that women are perceived to fit within that culture as well as men. Although women show a persistent lack of fit within such cultures, thinking that women are very similar to men may create a false illusion of masculine cultures are a good fit for all (Cheryan, Ziegler, Montoya, & Jiang, 2017).

On one hand perceiving women to fit well in masculine work cultures may have positive consequences for women. For example, it has the potential to increase hiring of women in such

domains and to reduce stereotypes about their competence (see Martin & Phillips, 2019).

However, in this paper we analyze whether it can contribute to a negative outcome: perceiving otherwise problematic work cultures as innocuous for women.

Present Research

Across two studies we investigate the relationship between gender-similarities, perceived-fit of women within masculine cultures and judgments about how problematic a non-inclusive (masculine) work culture is. In study 1 we tested whether gender-similarities increases the perceived-fit of women in a masculine work culture. We also investigated whether gender-similarities impact people's support for initiatives to change a masculine work culture. In study 2, using a minimal-groups paradigm, we investigated whether group-similarities causes participants to perceive a non-inclusive work culture to be less problematic for the low-status group and whether perceived-fit of the low status group mediates this relationship.

Methods

Study 1

We hypothesized that priming participants with gender similarities would cause participants to perceive women to be more likely to fit within the masculine company. We also predicted that it would result in decreased support for changing the company culture.

Participants

752 undergraduate students participated in this study as part of the psychology subject pool. In accordance to our pre-registration we excluded 51 participants who failed the manipulation check, for a sample of 701 participants (395 Asian/Asian-Americans, 175 Whites, 133 of other races and/or multiracial), (284 men, 413 women, 4 who identified as other). Due to

the binary nature of the research we excluded participants who identified as other gender for a final N of 697. Please note that this exclusion was not included in the pre-registration. However we still reached our pre-registered N of “no fewer than 672 participants”.

Procedures

Participation in the study occurred either in small rooms in a lab or in a larger classroom at the Psychology department using paper questionnaires. In order to manipulate participants' mindsets we presented them with one of two articles used by Martin and Phillips (2017) to prime either gender-similarities or gender-differences. The gender-similarities article discussed the merits of focusing on the similarities between women and men while the gender-differences article discussed differences between genders and encouraged the reader to celebrate those differences. Both articles were presented to participants as part of a paper featuring statements from social scientists (see full articles in appendix 1). As a way to reinforce the manipulation, participants were asked to write about either gender similarities or gender differences – depending on which condition they saw.

After the manipulation all participants saw the same description of a fictitious tech company called “Green & Smith”. Our goal was to present a company that would be perceived as very masculine. The company was described as valuing the following traits: *self-promotion, aggressiveness, assertiveness and a highly critical and competitive mindset*. These traits were selected because they are shown to be often associated with masculinity: Self-promotion (Rudman, 1998), aggressiveness (Boysen, 2017; Aylin, Iwamoto, Brady, Clinton, & Grivel, 2019), assertiveness (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992), and a highly critical (Gerdes, Alto, Jadaszewski, D’Auria, & Levant, 2018) and competitive mindset (Aylin et al., 2019).

Perceived fit of women in the masculine culture. One item was used to measure perceived-fit: “*How much do you think women could fit with the culture of this company?*”

Support for Culture Change. We measured participants’ support for changing the culture of the company as well as how effective they thought changing the culture would be to attract more women employees. Support for culture change was measured on a likert scale (1- Not at all, 7- Very much so) across 4 questions: *How much would you support changing the culture of this company to value more stereotypically feminine traits?*, *How much do you think this company should encourage a more feminine culture?*, *How much would you support changing the culture of this company to value less stereotypically masculine traits?*, $\alpha = .852$.

Effectiveness of culture change. Effectiveness of culture change in attracting more women employees was measured with the same likert scale across two questions: *How much do you think the culture of this company needs to change in order to attract women?*; *How effective would it be to change the culture of this company in order to attract more women?*, $r = .851$

Results

Masculinity of company culture. In order to check whether participants perceived this company as masculine we asked them to rate Green & Smith on a Likert scale ranging from 1(Very masculine) to 7(Very feminine) ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.18$). As intended, participants across conditions perceived Green & Smith as relatively masculine compared to the midpoint (4), $t(695) = -25.34$, $p < .001$. Interestingly a 2 x 2 ANOVA (condition vs. gender) on perception of the company’s masculinity revealed a main effect of gender such that men perceived the company to be significantly more masculine ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.13$) compared to women ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.2$), $F(692) = 5.84$, $p = .016$, $d = .18$. However, there was no main effect of condition between

similarities ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.13$) and differences ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.22$), $F(1,692) = .033$, $p > .05$ and no interaction between participants' gender and condition, $F(1,692) = .170$, $p > .05$. Even though, compared to women, men perceived the company as more masculine, both groups perceive the company as more masculine compared to the scales' midpoint. A t-test revealed that participants in the gender-similarities condition perceived women to be more likely to fit within the masculine company culture ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.47$) compared to those in the gender-differences condition ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.46$), $t(695) = 3.39$, $p < .001$, $d = .25$.

Support for changing masculine company culture. We performed an independent samples t-test to investigate whether support for changing the masculine culture would change depending on condition. No statistical significant difference was found on support for culture change between participants in the gender-blindness condition ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.42$) and those in the gender-awareness condition ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.36$), $t(695) = -.447$, $p = .65$.

Effectiveness of culture change in promoting the inclusion of women. Again, we used an independent samples t-test and no statistical significant difference was found on how effective participants thought changing the culture would be to promote the inclusion of women between participants in the gender-similarities condition ($M = 5.07$, $SD = 1.32$) and those in the gender-differences condition ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 1.29$), $t(695) = .405$, $p = .68$.

Support for changing masculine culture by participants' gender and condition. As exploratory analysis we ran a 2 (Participants' gender: Women vs. men) x 2 (Condition: Gender-blindness vs. gender-awareness) ANOVA to check whether participants' gender interacted with the results. The analysis revealed a main effect of gender, $F(1,693) = 12.71$, $p < .001$, $d = .027$, but no main effect of condition, $F(1,693) = .001$, $p > .05$. Overall participants' support for culture change in the gender-similarities condition did not differ from participants in the gender-

differences condition. However, women showed greater support for culture change ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 1.32$) compared to men ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.46$), $F(1,693) = 4.36$, $p = .037$.

The analysis also showed an interaction between participants' gender and condition, $F(693) = 4.36$, $p = .037$. While male participants did not differ between the similarities condition ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.44$) and the differences condition ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.47$), $p > .05$; women marginally reported an increase in support for culture change in the gender-differences condition ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 1.41$) compared to the gender-similarities condition ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.23$), $p = .096$.

Perceptions of Women's Fit in Masculine Culture by Participants' Gender and Condition. A 2 (Participants' gender: Women vs. men) x 2 (Condition: Gender-similarities vs. gender-differences) revealed no main effect of gender, $F(1,693) = 2.09$, $p > .005$. Overall women's perceptions of women's fit in the given masculine company ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 1.44$) did not differ from those of men ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 1.52$).

However, we found a main effect of condition, $F(1,693) = 13.71$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.28$. Participants in the gender-similarities condition perceived women to be more likely to fit in the masculine company ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.42$) relative to participants in the gender-differences condition ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.46$).

A marginally significant interaction occurs between condition and gender on perceptions of women's fit in the masculine company, $F(693) = 3.56$, $p = .058$. Women's responses did not significantly differ between women in the gender-similarities condition ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 1.45$) and the gender-differences condition ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.38$), $p > .05$. On the other hand, men in the gender-similarities condition perceived women to be more likely to fit into the masculine

culture ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 1.43$) compared to men in the gender-differences condition ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.54$), $p < .01$.

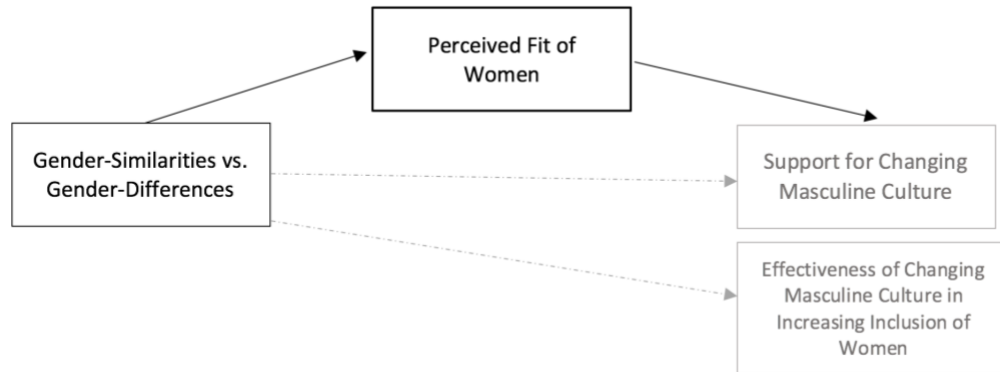


Figure 1. In study 1 gender-similarities caused increased perceived-fit of women in the masculine work-culture. Perceived-fit of women was negatively correlated with support for changing the masculine culture. However, participants across conditions did not differ on how much they support changing the culture or how effective for the inclusion of women they find culture change to be.

Discussion

As predicted, when primed with gender-similarities participants perceived women as more likely to fit within the masculine work culture compared to participants primed with gender-differences. Nonetheless, further analysis showed that this effect was driven by men, since women perceived women to be just as likely to fit into the masculine company regardless of condition.

Thinking about similarities vs. differences between women and men did not change how much participants support efforts to change a very masculine culture in order to promote inclusion to women. It also did not change how effective participants thought that changing the culture of the company would be as an inclusion effort. However, exploratory analysis found that

for women, but not for men, being primed with gender-similarities marginally decreased support for changing the culture of the company relative to being primed with gender-differences.

Lastly, perceptions of women's fit in the masculine company for both men and women were negatively correlated with support for culture change. The more participants perceived that women would fit in the company, the less they supported culture change.

Together the results suggest that the way we think about gender (similarities vs. differences) may affect our perceptions of women in masculine company cultures, but not enough to change how we think about masculine work cultures themselves.

Methodological Limitations

As a first study in this line of research, we identify some possible methodological flaws. First we are unsure whether the articles we used to manipulate gender mindsets were enough to compensate for participants' preconceived beliefs about gender. Debrief questions revealed that many participants did not agree with the article they were assigned to read, with some even expressing disappointment or frustration at the article and the fact that some of the questions asked about feminine and masculine traits. It is possible that some responses may have been driven by participants' backlash against the views presented rather than solely by the study design.

Another possible flaw is that the articles presented were broad in nature. As such, it is possible that great variability existed within participants in the kinds of similarities or differences they thought about. For example, while some participants may have thought of biological similarities or differences, others may have thought about similarities or differences rooted in culture and socialization. We know that many negative stereotypes about women are rooted in (often mistaken) beliefs about biological differences (e.g., men are better at visual-spatial

reasoning). Therefore it is likely that thinking about biological differences causes different reactions than thinking about differences in socialization and life experiences. For future studies we plan on controlling for such variability.

Conceptual Limitations

An important limitation of this study is that we did not have a prediction for gender of participants as a moderator variable. Given the methodological flaws we have identified and the exploratory nature of the analyses that include participants' gender, it is difficult to reach a conclusion about how one's own gender interacts with the results. One possibility is that after fixing the methodological issues participants' gender would no longer moderate results. Given that both women and men are shown to hold similar cultural stereotypes about gender this is likely to be the case (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Heilman, 2012).

Another conceptual limitation of the study may be the dependent variable used. Support for culture change may not have been clear enough for participants who are not familiar with the concept of work cultures; particularly given that participants were young undergraduates. Diversity efforts have mostly been focused on decreasing harassment, implicit bias and directly hiring more women (Moynahan, 1993; Jacobson & Eaton, 2018; Bartlett, 2009; Kossek, Lobel, & Brown, 2006). However, culture change may still be a jargon discussed mostly by academics. If this is the case, participants may have been confused or unsure about what culture change meant, which may have been reflected by an overall mid-scale pattern of response across conditions.

Study 2

In order to have a ‘clean’ test of our theory, minimizing the effect of participants’ preconceived ideas about gender, we use the minimal groups paradigm to test whether group-similarities impacts perceptions of how problematic non-inclusive work cultures are. To make the methodology cleaner we removed the article and primed participants using simple sentences. We also included another dependent variable that we believe could be more proximal to participants: perceptions of the non-inclusive company as problematic. In this study Blickeys (the high-status group) is our proxy for men and Moshers (the low-status group) is a proxy for women.

We hypothesized that describing the low-status group as very similar to the high-status group would cause participants to judge the company culture as less problematic compared to when the groups are described as very different. We also predicted that perceptions of the company as problematic would be positively correlated with support for changing the culture of the company.

Methods

Participants

116 undergraduate students participated in this study as part of the psychology subject pool, (71 Asian/Asian-Americans, 26 Whites, 9 Latinx, 10 of other races and/or multiracial), (82 women, 34 men).

Procedures

Participants took an online survey administered by Qualtrics. After consenting to participate, participants in both conditions were asked to “imagine a lucrative company that exists in a different society”. The company was described as being traditionally dominated by a

group called Blickets. This company's values, mission statements and policies were made by and reflected the Blickets. Participants were also told that in order to be successful at this company one needed to possess abilities, behaviors and characteristics similar to the Blickets. After that participants were told that a new group of people called Moshers have become a large portion of the employees in this company.

Depending on which condition participants were randomly assigned to, they read that the Moshers were very (similar/different) to the Blickets in their characteristics, habits and personalities and that it was (fairly easy/nearly impossible) to identify who was a Blicket and who was a Mosher on any assessment.

Perception of Company Culture as Problematic. We measured how problematic participants judged this company culture to be for the Moshers on a likert scale (1- Not at all, 7- Very much so) across 2 questions: *How much do you think the company's current policies, mission statement and values pose a problem for the Moshers (the most recent group)?*, *How problematic for the Moshers is it that this company's policies, mission statement and values reflect those of the Blickets?* $r = .829$.

Support for Changing Company Culture. We also measured support for changing the current culture with the same likert scale across two questions: *How supportive would you be of this company changing its current policies, mission statement and values to include more of the Moshers' characteristics?*; *How much would you support an inclusion initiative focused on changing this company's policies, mission statements and values?*, $r = .709$

Perceived Fit of Disadvantaged Group in the Company. Perceived fit was measured using one item: *How well do you think the Moshers fit into this company?* on a likert scale (1- Not at all to 7 - Very much so).

Perceived Success of Disadvantaged Group in the Company. One item was used to measure perceived success: *How successful do you think the Moshers are in this company?* on a likert scale (1- Not at all to 7 - Very much so).

Results

Perception of Company Culture as Problematic. We performed an independent samples t-test to investigate the effect of group-similarities on how problematic participants perceived the company culture. Those who thought that the disadvantaged group (Moshers) were very similar to the advantaged group (Blickets) perceived the non-inclusive company culture as significantly less problematic ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.33$) than those in the group-differences condition ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.23$), $t(113) = -6.64$, $p < .01$, $d = 1.25$.

Support for Changing Masculine Culture Across Conditions. We performed an independent samples t-test to investigate whether group-similarities would affect support for changing the non-inclusive company culture. The analysis revealed a marginal difference between conditions, where those who thought of the groups as very similar supported changing the culture *less* ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.28$) than those in the group-differences condition ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 1.40$), $t(113) = -1.89$, $p = .06$.

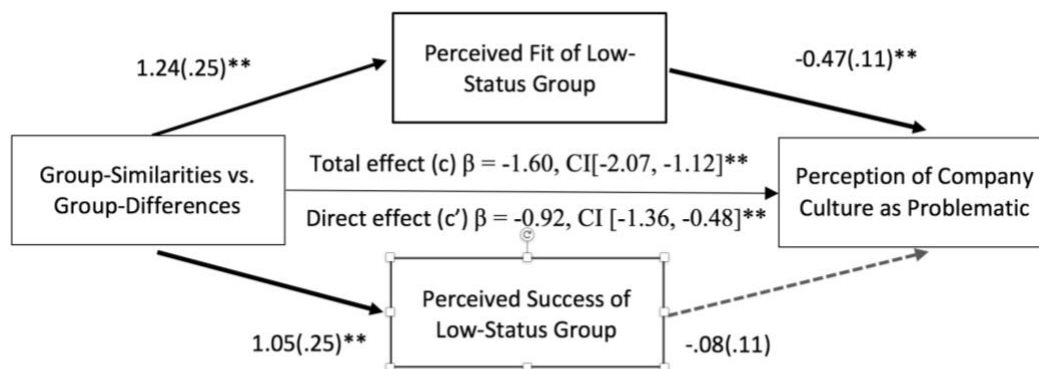
Correlation Between Perceptions of the Company as Problematic and Support for Culture Change. A Pearson's test of correlation found a moderate, positive, significant correlation between perceiving that the company is problematic and support for changing it, $r = .347$, $p < .01$.

Perceived Fit of Disadvantaged Group in the Company Across Conditions. An independent-samples t-test showed that participants in the group-similarities condition perceived

the disadvantaged group as significantly more likely to fit within the non-inclusive company culture ($M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.42$) than those in the group-differences condition ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.24$), $t(113) = 4.94$, $p < .01$, $d = .93$.

Perceived Fit and Success of the Disadvantaged Group in the Company as

Mediators. A PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) with 10,000 bootstrap resamples analyses revealed that perceived fit of the low-status group fully mediates the effect of group mindset (similar vs different) on perception of the company culture as problematic. Perceived success of the low-status group, on the other hand, is affected by group mindset but does not seem to affect perceptions of the company culture. (See figure below).



Perceived Fit of Low-Status Group in Non-Inclusive Company Culture, Company Culture as Problematic: Correlations (N = 116)

Variables	1	2	3
1. Perceived Fit of Women	—	—	—
2. Perceived Success of Women	-.776***	—	—
3. Problematic	-.647***	-.544***	—

Table 1. Correlations for mediator variables in study 2

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

In accordance to our hypotheses, we found that describing a low-status group as very similar to the high-status group in a non-inclusive company culture caused participants to perceive the company culture as less problematic compared to those who believed the groups were different. We also found that this relationship was mediated by a perception that the low-status group would fit well in the non-inclusive company culture.

This study used the minimal-groups paradigm to draw a parallel with gender. This is both a strength and a limitation of the study. The main limitation is that we cannot conclude that the results perfectly generalize to gender. In fact, it is possible that participants thought the study was about race. If there is a distinct conceptual difference between how people think of race and

gender, these results may change when we directly use gender in our methods. Nonetheless the use of minimal-groups provided us with the opportunity to clearly demonstrate how beliefs about groups impact how we perceive non-inclusive cultures.

General Discussion

The present research examined the impact of thinking about women as similar or different than men on perceived fit of women in masculine work-cultures and on judgements about the impact of non-inclusive work-cultures. We first found that thinking about gender-similarities causes people to perceive that women fit well in a masculine work-culture compared to thinking about gender-differences. In the second study we used a minimal-groups paradigm with fake groups as proxy for women and men in order to test the model without participants' preconceived beliefs about gender acting as potential confounds. We found that when we describing a non-inclusive company culture, participants who were told that a low-status group of employees was very *similar* to the high-status group of employees found that non-inclusive company culture to be less problematic compared to when participants read about the groups being mostly different. This effect was driven by perceptions that the non-normative group is more likely to fit within the normative culture when groups are described as similar.

Theoretical Contributions

The present research broadens the understanding of the effect of thinking about women as very similar or different to men in two ways: 1) by switching from consequences of the individual level to a systemic level and 2) by suggesting a negative consequence of gender-similarities.

So far, research on the consequences of gender-similarities (often referred to as sex-similarities or gender blindness; Koenig & Richeson, 2010) has focused on implications for individuals. For instance, Martin and Phillips, 2017 examined the impact of gender-blindness on women's self-confidence in the workplace. They also show that men endorse negative stereotypes about women in STEM less often when primed with gender-similarities (Martin & Phillips, 2017). Similarly, Koenig and Richeson, 2010 analyzed the association between sex-similarities and sexism in individuals. In the present research we switch the focus from individual to systems by measuring not only how similarities impact how we perceive women who work in masculine work cultures, but also how we perceive the impact that masculine work cultures have on women.

The present research also contrasts from previous research by suggesting that gender-similarities may not always be positive for women. As Koenig and Richeson show, gender-similarities is considered the best way to think about gender by those who wish to not be sexist (2010). However, many well-meaning diversity efforts are shown to be sometimes ineffective or even backfire, depending on the context (Dover, Major, & Kaiser, 2014; Brady, Kaiser, Major, & Kirby, 2015; Vedantam, 2008). Consequently it is imperative to understand the limitations of the gender-similarities approach when using it as a way to advance gender-equality.

One question that readers might have is whether women are more similar or more different than men. While evidence exists to support similarities in many aspects (e.g., intelligence, cognitive functioning) (Hyde, 2005; Colom, Juan-Espinosa, Abad, & García, 2000), gender-differences also exist in other aspects (e.g., physiological, socialization; Eagly, 1997). The purpose of the current work is not to answer this debate or even to advocate for one way to think about gender versus the other. Our focus is on studying the consequences of thinking about

gender either as similar or different, especially in broader societal levels such as work cultures. We acknowledge that these beliefs may sometimes be descriptive but also prescriptive, if used as a strategy to increase equality. Such differences lay outside of the scope of the current research but would be an interesting future direction in which to take the present findings.

Practical Implications

It may be early to prescribe behaviors based on this research. However, this line of work has the potential to clarify when gender-differences or similarities should be promoted in the workplace, depending on the objective. For example, gender-similarities may be more effective than differences when the goal is to promote gender-equality on the individual level; such as reducing negative stereotypes about women and promoting better interpersonal relationships between genders. On the other hand, recognizing the different experiences and realities of women and men may be beneficial when aiming to make broader cultural changes.

Limitations and Future Research

Although the current work proposes a novel and expected consequence of gender-similarities, research is still in its infant stages. As such, many questions remain unanswered. The next step in this research should be to replicate the model from study 2 using gender instead of minimal groups.

Additionally, a main concern about focusing on gender-differences may be that it could reinforce negative stereotypes based on beliefs that women are biologically or cognitively inferior to men. Future research will benefit from examining what kinds of similarities and differences yield positive consequences.

Conclusion

Efforts to advance gender-equality often contain the message that women and men are virtually the same and advocate for downplaying gender-differences. While the gender-similarities approach result in many benefits on the individual level (such as reducing stereotypes and empowering women), it may impede progress on a broader level, such as changing problematic work cultures. Decisions to whether focus on gender-similarities or differences appears to be more nuanced than previously believed to be and it may depend on which level of society we are trying to implement change.

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Appendix A
Martin and Phillips (2017) Priming Articles

Part 1:

Instructions: Please read the following excerpt from a recent academic publication:

Sociologists, psychologists, economists, and political scientists all agree that gender issues are a #1 concern for the U.S. Social scientists note that it is extremely important to heed our creed in the Declaration of Independence that “all men and women are created equal.” According to this perspective, we will be in a better position to advance as a society if we remember that we are all, first and foremost human beings, and second, we are all American citizens. According to this perspective, we will be in a better position to advance as a society if we stop thinking of men and women as different from each other, and instead see each person as an individual. Dr. Katherine Richardson, author of *The Gender Paradox*, suggests that modern American society would be better off if people would recognize that women and men are much more similar than they are different. Acknowledging this similarity would help build a sense of harmony and unity amongst men and women. “That is really the story here – The most striking thing about men and women is how much they have in common. There is simply so much overlap between the two groups. The most important thing is to pay attention to the characteristics that make a person a unique individual rather than focusing on his or her gender.” “The notion of ‘the opposite sex’ is really just a historical artifact,” says Michael Klein, a Sociology Professor at Columbia University who agrees with Richardson’s point of view. “The genders are much more alike than they are different.” Klein points out that these similarities may be due to the largely identical biological make-up that all humans share, or they may be shaped and molded through our culture. According to Klein, where the similarities come from is unimportant. “Pretending men and women approach life tasks in fundamentally different ways is counterproductive to society,” says Klein. Klein believes that men and women would be more successful, more satisfied with their lives, and interact more cooperatively if people embraced the idea that the genders typically approach situations and problems in much the same way. According to Klein, understanding and focusing upon individual differences, not group differences, would not only contribute to a more cooperative and creative workplace, but could also help people in interpersonal relationships between men and women. Thus, social scientists encourage us to see the larger picture, and to appreciate that at our core, we really are all the same.

Instructions: In the exercise below, **please list examples of similarities between men and women mentioned in the article or others that you can think of.** These could be similarities in personalities, experiences, hobbies, opportunities, etc.

Part 1:**Instructions: Please read the following excerpt from a recent academic publication:**

Sociologists, psychologists, economists, and political scientists all agree that gender issues are a #1 concern for the U.S. Social scientists note that it is extremely important to embrace our differences, rather than denying them. According to this perspective, we will be in a better position to advance as a society if we embrace that the two genders bring different perspectives to life, providing a richness in viewpoints, styles of interaction, and problem-solving strategies. Each gender can contribute in its own unique way. Recognizing this diversity would help build a sense of harmony and complementarity amongst men and women. Men and women have their own talents, as well as their own problems, and by acknowledging both these strengths and weaknesses, we validate the identity of each gender. Dr. Katherine Richardson, author of *The Gender Paradox*, suggests that modern American society would be better off if people would recognize that women and men have their own strengths, weaknesses, experiences, and issues. Acknowledging this diversity would help build a sense of harmony and unity amongst men and women. “That is really the story here – the most striking thing about men and women is how different they are. There is great variety between the two groups. The most important thing is to pay attention to these differences - recognizing these differences builds a sense of harmony and complementarity to each group”. “The notion of ‘the opposite sex’ has some truth,” says Michael Klein, a Sociology Professor at Columbia University, who agrees with Richardson’s point of view. “The genders are more different than they are alike.” Klein points out that these differences could be due to biological make-up or they may simply be learned and socialized through our culture. According to Klein, where the differences come from is unimportant. “Understanding men and women approach life tasks in different ways is productive to society,” says Klein. Klein believes that men and women would be more successful, more satisfied with their lives, and interact more cooperatively if people embraced the idea that the genders often approach situations and problems differently. According to Klein, understanding and utilizing women and men’s unique strongpoints would not only contribute to a more cooperative and efficient workplace, but could help people in interpersonal relationships between men and

women. Thus, social scientists encourage us to see the larger picture, and to appreciate that at our core, we really are all different.

Instructions: In the exercise below, **please list some differences between men and women that you learned from the text.** These could be differences in personalities, experiences, hobbies, opportunities, etc.

Company Description

Part 2:

Please read the description of the following company:

Green & Smith



Green & Smith is a successful tech startup with a culture that values:

- *Promoting oneself*
- *Aggressiveness*
- *Assertiveness*
- *Highly critical and competitive mindset*

Part 2:

Please read the description of the following company:

Green & Smith



Green & Smith is a successful tech startup with a culture that values:

- *Promoting oneself*
- *Aggressiveness*
- *Assertiveness*
- *Highly critical and competitive mindset*

