Counterfeit Diversity: How Strategically Misrepresenting Gender Diversity Dampens
Organizations' Perceived Sincerity and Elevates Women's Identity Threat Concerns

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K. M. Kroeper drafted the manuscript and developed the study concept, study materials, and the experimental design. M.C. Murphy obtained the grant that supported the creation of the study materials, data collection, and analysis. Data collection was performed by K. M. Kroeper under the supervision of M.C. Murphy; data analysis and interpretation was performed by K. M. Kroeper and H.E. Williams under the supervision of M.C. Murphy. All authors provided

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Abstract

Women remain underrepresented in technology and computing fields. Aware of this problem, many tech organizations seek diversification strategies. Several academic sources recommend including gender diverse images in recruitment materials as a low-cost way to potentially attract female workers. However, for gender non-diverse organizations, this strategy means misrepresenting the current on-the-ground diversity of their organization. Four experiments investigate how women and men perceive organizations that *counterfeit diversity* (i.e., exaggerate gender diversity in recruitment advertisements) relative to organizations that (a) authentically portray a *high* degree of gender diversity (*authentic diversity*; Experiments 1-3); (b) authentically portray a *low* degree of gender diversity (*authentic non-diversity*; Experiments 2 and 3); and (c) acknowledge a lack of diversity in the present, but aspire to increase diversity in the future (*aspirational diversity*; Experiment 3). Results reveal that women and men perceive counterfeit diversity as insincere. This perceived insincerity, in turn, decreases women's and men's interest in the organization and engenders identity threat concerns among women (Experiments 1-4). Taken together, these findings complicate scholarly discussions of diversity and inclusion strategies by highlighting the role of perceived sincerity. When recruitment strategies are deemed insincere, these strategies can backfire—decreasing interest in the organization, fomenting threat, and perpetuating underrepresentation.

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Women's Identity Threat Concerns by Dampening Perceived Organizational Sincerity

"No company wants to be seen as a place that doesn't celebrate diversity. Usually the trumpeting about diversity comes after a company releases the mediocre to terrible numbers that highlight just how recently they began noticing the homogeneity of their workforce." -Baker, 2015

Science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) companies have a gender problem. Comprising less than a third of the overall STEM workforce, women remain almost as underrepresented as they were two decades ago (22.9% in 1993 and 29.0% in 2013; National Science Board, 2016, 2018). Gender underrepresentation is particularly severe in technology fields (National Science Board, 2018). Cognizant of this imbalance, many prominent tech companies are clamoring for effective methods to diversify their ranks by recruiting more women (e.g., Meyer, 2018; Microsoft, 2018; Williams, 2018); however questions remain about how to effectively attract and retain talented female workers. Diversity and inclusion consultants offer wide-ranging advice on this topic (e.g., Forbes Human Resources Council, 2018; Ideal, 2016) including encouraging companies to publicly commit to (and follow through with) a variety of diversity and inclusion initiatives. These often evidence-based initiatives include expanding companies' candidate sourcing methods (Cohoon, 2002), providing benefits that specifically appeal to women (e.g., flexible hours, remote working options; Emslie & Hunt, 2009; Gallup, 2016), actively countering negative stereotypes about women (Bush et al., 2002; Cuny & Aspray, 2002), and crafting job advertisements that use gender-neutral language (Gaucher et al., 2011). And perhaps easiest of all, companies are encouraged to display pictorial gender diversity in their recruitment materials (e.g., Csedrik, 2019; Rakuna, 2018). Extensive experimental evidence shows that underrepresented group members report greater attraction to organizations that appear demographically diverse (vs. non-diverse) in company materials,

meaning that *portraying* diversity can be an effective method of *attracting* diversity (Avery, 2003; Erba et al., 2012; Hentschel et al., 2018; Murphy et al., 2007; Perkins et al., 2000; Pietri et al., 2018; Rau & Hyland, 2003; Walker et al., 2009, 2012).

The aforementioned research suggests that if a company is interested in recruiting people belonging to underrepresented groups (like women in technology), it could design recruitment materials that boast substantial demographic diversity. By doing so, the company may increase its odds of attracting underrepresented individuals and, in turn, successfully diversify the organization. Although this advice suggests a pragmatic means to a desired end, curating a gender diverse image poses an ethical dilemma for *gender non-diverse* organizations that wish to diversify. Although companies that are authentically diverse may be able to attract more women applicants by highlighting their diversity, non-diverse companies must exaggerate their current level of diversity when they opt to present such an image.

Is Counterfeit Diversity an Identity-Safe or Identity-Threatening Cue for Women?

Perhaps exaggerating gender diversity is not so problematic. In domains where women are numerically underrepresented, such as STEM, quite a few scholars argue that one way to confront and dismantle stereotypic images of success as agentic and masculine (Diekmann et al., 2010, 2011; Diekmann & Steinberg, 2013) is to supplant these stereotypic images with gender-diverse representations (Blickenstaff, 2005; Kerkhoven et al., 2016; Osei-Kofi & Torres, 2015). Inclusive images of diversity often signal to underrepresented group members that their group will be welcomed and valued within an organization—that they need not be concerned with being singled out, stereotyped, marginalized, or disrespected there (e.g., Murphy et al., 2007; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008). In this way, it is possible that more gender inclusive images of diversity in company recruitment materials (whether counterfeit or not) may be an affirming cue

that signals the organization is *identity safe* for women (Markus et al., 2000; Murphy & Taylor, 2012)—that it sincerely cares about and values gender diversity. The cue may assure women that diverse perspectives and experiences are valued and respected in the setting.

In practice, however, if women expect a gender-diverse STEM environment—due to gender-diverse advertising—and instead learn that women are actually underrepresented, how will they construe and experience this mismatch? It's possible that learning that a company exaggerated their gender diversity will be perceived as a deceptive recruitment tactic—an attempt to draw women to the company under false pretenses. Indeed, many real-world tech organizations have been lambasted by the public for using deceptive tactics to make their companies appear more gender diverse than they are in reality (Mac, 2019; Molla, 2019; Wagner & Molla, 2018). In a related set of studies, Windscheid and colleagues (2016) found that companies promoting mixed diversity messages—like pairing a pro-diversity mission statement with an all-male board of directors (vs. a gender-diverse board of directors)—were perceived as having less behavioral integrity and, in turn, were rated as less attractive than companies with consistent diversity messages. In fact, people preferred a mission statement that did not mention gender diversity *at all* when a company had an all-male board than a mixed diversity message. In a similar way, counterfeit diversity may cause women (and men) to suspect the company's motives to diversify are insincere (Fein et al., 1990; Fein & Hilton, 1994; Yoon et al., 2006) which could, in turn, engender concerns among women about their value at the company (e.g., worries about belonging, marginalization, and gender stereotyping) and lower their interest in joining.

Perceived Sincerity May Moderate Identity Threat

The *cues hypothesis* posits that when cues in the local environment suggest that one's identity may not be valued there, people experience *identity threat* (Murphy et al., 2007; Murphy & Taylor, 2012; Steele et al., 2002). Identity threat is a set of psychological concerns pertaining to the value of one's identity in a setting, including worries about belonging and authenticity as well as concerns about being devalued, disrespected, stereotyped, and marginalized in a setting (Murphy & Taylor, 2012). Compared to majority group members, people who belong to groups that have been traditionally excluded and underrepresented in certain contexts—like women in technology—are especially vigilant to cues that signal whether their group will be respected and valued there (e.g., Murphy et al., 2007; Steele et al., 2002).

To date, most research exploring the identity threatening impact of situational cues has focused on *authentic cues*—cues that we have no reason to doubt reflect the context accurately. For example, researchers have examined how the proportion of women attending an engineering conference affects women's anticipated identity threat there, finding that depicting the conference as gender-unbalanced (only 25% of attendees were women) versus gender-balanced (50% of attendees were women) increased women's cognitive and physiological vigilance and dampened their anticipated sense of belonging at the conference (Murphy et al., 2007). Similarly, researchers have found that the diversity philosophies communicated by companies in their recruitment materials can affect racially minoritized individuals' expectations about their level of trust and comfort in those settings (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008), with colorblind diversity philosophies cuing distrust and discomfort compared to diversity philosophies that explicitly value diversity (see also Cheryan et al., 2009; Hall et al., 2018; Wilton et al., 2015).

The straightforward and uncomplicated view of these findings is that people take identity-related situational cues at face-value. That is, if a company describes itself as gender diverse and welcoming, then the company is likely to *be* (relatively) gender diverse and welcoming. We propose, however, that cues matter because of perceivers' *construals* of those cues. The social meaning that is made of a cue—and not simply the cue itself—is what shapes perceivers' psychological experiences. According to the cues hypothesis then, a pictorial cue of gender diversity should reduce identity threat among women *only to the extent that it is perceived to be a sincere signal (or a valid representation) of the context*. Upon learning information that casts doubt on the original, face-valid construal of the cue (like learning that an organization exaggerated gender diversity in its advertisements), people should update their construal of the context and the meaning of the cue to incorporate this new information. Specifically, the organization should then be reconstrued as insincere, thereby triggering identity threat and disinterest among women.

The present research extends the cues hypothesis by empirically investigating a novel social cognitive process in this literature. We examine directly how people's construal of situational cues may be an iterative and dynamic psychological process, wherein original construals are updated by perceptions about *a setting's motives* (in this case, an organization's sincerity in valuing gender diversity); and these perceptions of the organization's motives moderate the way in which the organization's diversity cues influence people's psychological outcomes. We posit that when a setting's intentions to create and maintain gender diversity and inclusivity are perceived to be disingenuous (as when it is revealed that an organization counterfeited gender diversity in recruitment materials), the resulting insincerity construal may increase the degree of identity threat that women anticipate experiencing at the organization and

decrease their interest in joining the organization. In this way, the effects of situational cues are not simply straightforward wherein identity safety cues invariably decrease psychological threat and identity threatening cues increase psychological threat. Instead, a cue's power to trigger threat or safety is moderated by perceptions of the setting's sincere (or insincere) motives for creating or maintaining the cue. Gender diverse images—traditionally theorized and shown to be “identity safe” for women—could, when counterfeit, ironically lead to the same negative psychological outcomes as classic identity threatening cues such as low levels of depicted diversity (Murphy et al., 2007; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008).

Thus, our primary research questions were these: Will learning that a company that communicated a gender-diverse image had counterfeited its diversity lead women (and perhaps men) to update their construals of the setting? That is, will counterfeit diversity be construed as a *sincere* cue by prospective female members of an organization—as a signal that the setting can be trusted to value and respect underrepresented groups? Or, as predicted, will counterfeit diversity be construed as an *insincere* cue—indicating that the organization cares more about the appearance of diversity than the actual experiences of its underrepresented group members? Further, how might these insincerity construals shape the anticipated identity threat experiences of women and their interest in joining the organization?

But What about the Men?

So far, we have predicted that prospective female employees, on balance, will construe counterfeit diversity as an insincere diversity cue and, therefore, should expect the context to be more identity-threatening and rate it as less attractive than an authentically diverse company. But how might prospective male employees react to counterfeit diversity? Historically, men are overrepresented in technology (National Science Board, 2016, 2018), so learning that a

technology company is less gender diverse on-the-ground than it was advertised to be (such that men are *overrepresented*) may be perceived positively by men, because it reaffirms their majority status (Cundiff et al., 2018). For example, research examining *stereotype lift* suggests that men benefit when they are reminded about stereotypes impugning women's abilities (Walton & Cohen, 2003). Other research, however, suggests that men prefer environments with many (vs. few) women (Murphy et al., 2007), so it is also plausible that learning a technology company is less gender diverse on-the-ground than it originally advertised may be perceived negatively by men too, decreasing their attraction to the organization. So, for men, we were unsure how counterfeit diversity would be perceived. Regardless, as the majority group in technology settings, we expected men to, on average, report fewer identity threat concerns than women.

Overview of the Present Research

Three experiments investigate the psychological consequences of *counterfeit diversity*—defined as exaggerated images of diversity featured in recruitment materials—relative to (a) authentically portraying a *high* degree of gender diversity (*authentic diversity*; Experiments 1, 2, and 3); (b) authentically portraying a *low* degree of gender diversity (*authentic non-diversity*; Experiments 2 and 3); and (c) acknowledging a lack of diversity in the present, but aspiring to increase diversity in the future (*aspirational diversity*; Experiment 3). A fourth experiment examines the psychological processes by which these negative effects unfold. All together, we find that exaggerating gender diversity shapes people's beliefs about the technology company's sincerity and these sincerity construals influence women's forecasted identity threat concerns and, ultimately, their attraction to those organizations.

Experiment 1

Study 1 provided an initial test of how counterfeiting (vs. authentically reporting) high levels of gender diversity shapes women and men's construals about how sincerely interested an organization is in promoting gender diversity, their anticipated identity threat, and their interest in the organization.

This experiment employed a 2 (Participant Gender: Man, Woman) $\times$ 3 (On-the-Ground Diversity: Counterfeit Diversity, Authentic Diversity, No Information Control) between-subjects, factorial design. Men and women were first exposed to a technology company's gender diverse recruitment website. Then, one third of participants were randomly assigned to learn there was less on-the-ground gender diversity at the company (Counterfeit Diversity condition). Another third learned that the level of on-the-ground diversity was consistent with the diversity depicted in the recruitment materials (Authentic Diversity condition). The remaining third of participants saw the gender diverse website but were given no information about the organization's on-the-ground diversity (No-Information Control condition).

We predicted that women and men in the Counterfeit Diversity condition would perceive the company as less sincerely interested in creating a gender diverse workplace than people in the other two conditions. Further, we hypothesized that women (but not men) in the Counterfeit Diversity condition would anticipate experiencing more identity threat at the company than women randomly assigned to the other two conditions. Similarly, we expected that women (and perhaps men) in the Counterfeit Diversity condition would report less interest in working for the company than women (and men) randomly assigned the other two conditions. Finally, we expected sincerity construals to mediate the relationships between the gender diversity cue and the identity threat and interest outcomes.

All experiments were preregistered prior to data collection on the [Open Science Framework \(OSF\)](#) website.¹ All measures, manipulations, and exclusions for all studies are described and full measures and manipulations are provided in the online supplement.

Method

Power Analysis

For all experiments, we used G*Power v. 3.1 software to compute the *a priori* minimum acceptable sample size for each study, using effect size estimates from prior studies with similar methodologies. Consistent with findings from extant research examining how numeric underrepresentation in settings often leads to identity threat concerns (e.g., Murphy et al., 2007; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008), we sought to detect a medium-sized effect for a two factor, between-subjects experimental design at the standard .05 alpha error probability, with 80% power (Faul et al., 2007). This power analysis revealed a minimum sample size of 158 people (roughly 26 participants per cell) was needed, using the following parameters: test family = *F*-test, ANOVA (main effects and interactions); $f = .25$ (medium-sized effect); $\alpha = 0.05$, $1 - \beta = 0.80$; numerator $df = 2$; number of groups = 6. Considering that effect sizes based on past work may be overestimated (Anderson et al., 2017) and anticipating attrition due to attention and memory check failures, we planned to oversample. We aimed to recruit 480 participants in total (or approximately 80 participants per cell). Sensitivity analyses are also reported in a following section to allow readers to discern minimum detectable effect sizes, given the final sample sizes in each study.

Data Exclusions

¹ To access our OSF preregistration, follow this link:
https://osf.io/7gvux/?view_only=6ba440e5ca7341bba016c31ceb91464d

We aimed to recruit a sample of women and men born and currently living in the United States. Of the 475 eligible participants who started our survey on the Amazon Mechanical Turk website, 169 participants failed to correctly answer one or more of the memory check questions. As pre-specified in our preregistration plan, these 169 people were dropped from the analyses reported in the main text, leaving us with a final sample of 306 participants. The results described in the main text include only participants who correctly answered both memory check questions. Additional analyses with all 475 participants (no memory check exclusions) are reported in the Online Supplement.

Participants & Sensitivity Analyses

The final sample included 306 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 36.7$ years, 52.6% female, 76.5% White). We conducted a sensitivity analysis to provide readers with the minimum detectable effect sizes, given this sample size and study design. The sensitivity analysis revealed a minimally detectable f value of .18 (roughly a small-to-medium sized effect), using the following parameters: test family = F -test, ANOVA (main effects and interactions); total sample size = 306; $\alpha = 0.05$; $1-\beta = 0.80$; numerator $df = 2$; number of groups = 6.

Procedure and Materials

All participants were told that the study examined how people evaluate potential job opportunities. Participants were asked to imagine that they were searching for a job as a project manager in the technology sector. They were then asked to carefully review a [gender diverse] company website.² The gender-balanced website featured an equal number of men and women—meaning that, for this experiment, the advertised diversity at the company (50% gender diverse)

² A pilot test describing the Study Material generation process can be found in the Online Supplement.

was held constant across condition.³ Immediately after reviewing the recruitment website, participants reported their *initial interest* in the company's project manager position.

Then, participants were asked to imagine that they were hired by the company and that they arrived on-site for their first day of work. We experimentally manipulated on-the-ground diversity by randomly presenting participants with one of three possible vignettes: (a) an authentic diversity vignette, (b) a counterfeit diversity vignette, or (c) a no-information control vignette. People randomly assigned to the Authentic Diversity condition learned that the company was indeed gender-diverse (50% women). These participants read the following vignette:

When you actually arrive on-site, you look around and notice there are many women and men working at Harrison Technologies. In fact, it looks like the gender ratio of men to women is about 1:1, meaning about 50% of all employees at the company are women.

By contrast, people assigned to the Counterfeit Diversity condition learned that the company was not as gender diverse (25% women) as the recruitment website suggested. Participants randomly assigned to the Counterfeit Diversity condition read the following vignette:

When you actually arrive on-site, you look around and notice that there are mostly men and very few women working at Harrison Technologies. In fact, it looks like the gender ratio of men to women is about 3:1, meaning only about 25% of all employees at the company are women.

People randomly assigned to the No Information Control condition did not learn anything about the on-the-ground gender diversity at the company. These participants instead read the following vignette, which comments on physical features of the workplace environment:

When you actually arrive on-site, you look around and notice the people around you as well as the building's architecture and the office's set up.

³ The gender-balanced and unbalanced websites are provided in Appendix 1. All study materials (i.e., images, vignettes, measures) can be found in the Online Supplement.

After reading the vignette, participants reported their perceptions about the actual gender diversity at the company (manipulation check); their beliefs about how sincerely interested the company was in creating and maintaining a gender diverse workplace; and their anticipated identity threat concerns (e.g., concerns about being devalued and disrespected at the company). Finally, they rated their interest in the company's project manager position for a second time. By measuring interest twice (once after viewing the website and again after reading the information provided in the vignette), we can assess whether initial interest in the company changed after learning about the company's on-the-ground diversity. After answering several memory check and demographic questions, participants were debriefed and compensated \$1.00 for their time and effort. Measures are described below, and complete scales are included in the Online Supplement.

Measures ⁴

Manipulation Check: Perceptions of Gender Diversity. To ensure that participants perceived the companies as intended, two manipulation check items examined perceptions about the company's gender diversity after participants had learned about the actual on-the-ground diversity (i.e., "I expect Harrison Technologies to be gender diverse" and "I expect to find a predominantly male workforce at Harrison Technologies" [reverse-scored]; 1 *Strongly disagree* to 7 *Strongly agree*; $\alpha = .77$). Higher scores indicate that the company is perceived as more gender diverse. We predicted that people would perceive the counterfeit diversity company to be

⁴ In addition to the measures reported in the main text we included several other measures that examine other anticipated experiences in the company and bolster our cover story that the study examined people's perceptions of companies; however for brevity, we report only the results that are relevant to the main theoretical questions of perceived sincerity, identity threat, and interest in joining the company. Interested readers can examine the other perceptions of the company in the Online Supplement.

the least gender diverse, followed by the no-information control company, followed by the authentically diverse company.

Perceptions of Company Sincerity. We measured the degree to which people perceived the organization to have a sincere interest in creating and maintaining a gender diverse workplace (2-items; i.e., “To what extent do you think Harrison Technologies is sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity in their workforce?” and “How believable is Harrison Technologies' interest in increasing gender diversity in their workforce?”; 1 *Not at all* to 5 *Extremely*; $\alpha = .94$). Higher scores indicate that the company is perceived as more sincerely interested in fostering diversity in the workplace.

Identity Threat Concerns. Because identity threat is a multi-faceted set of concerns (Murphy & Taylor, 2012; Steele et al., 2012), we examined the concerns as described in the literature with 6 items.⁵ We asked people to report their anticipated *belonging concerns* (i.e., “How much might you worry that you won’t belong at the company?”); anticipated *concerns about respect* (i.e., “How much might you worry that others will not respect you at the company?”); anticipated *concerns about being valued* at the company (i.e., “How much might you worry that others will not value your opinion or contributions at the company?”); anticipated *authenticity concerns* (i.e., “How much might you worry that you cannot be your true self at the

⁵ We departed from the preregistrations for Experiments 1-3 when creating the identity threat composite. We originally planned to create a standardized identity threat composite score that included the six identity threat concerns (i.e., belonging concerns, respect concerns, value concerns, authenticity concerns, marginalization concerns, and stereotyping concerns) as well as more distal measures of threat (hypothesizing that identity-based concerns would overlap with outcomes such as anticipated trust and comfort in the company, and anticipated advancement and promotion opportunities). However, an exploratory factor analysis revealed that empirically, these anticipated experiences in the company loaded onto their own factors (different from the identity threat concerns—which all loaded onto one primary factor). Based on these results, we felt that combining all items into a single composite would no longer be appropriate. Because this is a deviation from the preregistered analyses and we want to provide full transparency, analyses of the originally preregistered identity threat composite are provided in the Online Supplement. As readers can see, whether we use the preregistered composite or the empirically derived composite in Experiments 1-3, the results are consistent. In Experiment 4’s preregistration, we preregistered the empirically derived composite—so in that experiment, the identity threat composite in the main text is the preregistered composite.

company?”); anticipated *marginalization concerns* (i.e., “How much might you worry about being left out or marginalized at the company?”); and anticipated *stereotyping concerns* (i.e., “How much might you worry about being stereotyped because of your gender at the company?”). All six identity threat items were presented in a randomized order and measured using a 5-point scale (1 *Not at all* to 5 *An extreme amount*).

As expected, the identity threat concern items were significantly correlated with one another ($r_s \geq .50$, all $p_s \leq .001$). We also conducted an exploratory factor analysis to assess scale dimensionality. The items were submitted to a principal axis factor analysis with oblique rotation to allow correlations among factors. The analysis revealed only one factor that accounted for 72.40% of the variance (eigenvalue = 4.34; item loadings ranged from .74 to .91). Given this finding, we combined the items into a single scale. All items were scored so that higher values indicated greater anticipated threat and then items were averaged together ($\alpha = .92$). Across all studies, the identity threat composite is calculated in this way; however, because readers may be interested in different identity threat concerns (individually), we also provide analyses for each concern separately in the Online Supplement.

Company Interest. People reported how interested they would be in the project manager position (1 *Not at all interested* to 5 *Extremely interested*). This question was asked twice—*initial interest* was measured immediately after people reviewed the recruitment website and *subsequent interest* was measured after people read information about company’s on-the-ground diversity. Higher scores indicate greater interest in the position.

Results

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics (M and SD) by condition. In the Online Supplement, Table S1 provides the psychometric properties of all variables; Table S2 provides

zero-order correlations; and Tables S3 and S4 provide the indirect effects and indices of moderated mediation for the multi-categorical conditional process models.

Table 1*Diversity Condition Comparisons of the Major Variables (Experiment 1)*

Variable	Authentic Diversity (<i>n</i> = 139)				No Information Control (<i>n</i> = 94)				Counterfeit Diversity (<i>n</i> = 73)			
	Women (<i>n</i> = 72)		Men (<i>n</i> = 67)		Women (<i>n</i> = 50)		Men (<i>n</i> = 44)		Women (<i>n</i> = 39)		Men (<i>n</i> = 34)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Gender Diversity Perceptions	5.73	1.22	6.06	1.09	5.01	1.31	4.89	1.16	3.44	1.32	3.04	1.26
Sincerity Perceptions	3.94	0.87	3.91	0.99	3.49	0.81	3.19	0.98	2.74	0.91	2.15	0.80
Identity Threat Concerns	1.88	0.95	1.79	0.96	1.93	0.87	1.67	0.64	2.42	1.13	1.77	0.67
Company Interest (Time 1)	3.86	0.89	3.60	1.03	3.78	0.95	3.34	1.03	3.77	0.90	3.50	1.31
Company Interest (Time 2)	4.36	0.83	4.33	0.77	4.26	0.85	4.18	0.87	3.56	1.02	3.71	1.12

Manipulation Check

Perceived Gender Diversity. To confirm that participants perceived the companies as intended, we conducted a 2 (gender) $\times$ 3 (on-the-ground diversity) ANOVA that revealed a statistically significant main effect of diversity, $F(2, 300) = 113.38, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .43$. As expected, planned post-hoc comparisons revealed that all three companies significantly differed from each other⁶: the Counterfeit Diversity company was perceived as significantly less gender diverse ($M = 3.25, SD = 1.30$) than the No Information Control company ($M = 4.95, SD = 1.24, p < .001, d = 1.36$), which was, in turn, perceived as less gender diverse than the Authentic Diversity company ($M = 5.89, SD = 1.17, p < .001, d = 0.65$; see Figure 1). Neither the main effect of gender, $F(1, 300) = 0.18, p = .67, \eta_p^2 = .001$, nor the interaction were statistically significant, $F(2, 300) = 2.33, p = .10, \eta_p^2 = .02$. This indicates that men and women perceived the manipulated diversity of the companies similarly.

⁶ As outlined in the preregistration plan, Bonferroni corrections are reported for all post hoc comparisons presented in this manuscript.

Figure 1*Perceived Gender Diversity*

Multi-categorical Conditional Process Models

Our theoretical model predicts that when a setting's diversity cue is perceived as insincere, identity threat concerns are activated among stigmatized groups (here, women) and people's interest in joining the setting is dampened. Since our predictor had more than two levels, we ran a multi-categorical moderated mediation as recommended by Hayes (2018; see also Hayes & Preacher, 2014). This approach allows us to analyze the entire sample simultaneously (vs. separate analyses for each contrast) and retains the multi-categorical structure of the data. To test whether sincerity mediated these relationships, we tested two multi-categorical conditional process models using Hayes (2018) PROCESS macro in SPSS (Model 14, 10,000 bootstrap samples): one model predicting identity threat concerns and another predicting company interest. For each model, three contrasts are examined: Contrast 1: Counterfeit Diversity vs. No-Information Control; Contrast 2: Counterfeit Diversity vs. Authentic Diversity; and Contrast 3: Authentic Diversity vs. No-Information Control. These contrasts were coded using the indicator coding system (i.e., "dummy coding"), such that the reference group was always coded as "0,0", the first comparator to the reference group was coded as "1,0", and the second comparator as "0,1" (Hayes & Montoya, 2017).

Sincerity to Identity Threat Concerns. Setting the Counterfeit Diversity company as the reference group, we found statistically significant indirect effects of condition on identity threat concerns through sincerity perceptions, such that the No-Information Control ($b = 0.89$, $SE = 0.14$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.60, 1.17]) and Authentic Diversity companies ($b = 1.46$, $SE = 0.13$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.20, 1.72]) were perceived as more sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity than the Counterfeit Diversity company. Sincerity negatively predicted identity threat concerns ($b = -0.12$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = .07$, 95% CI [-0.26, 0.01]) such that people anticipated greater

identity threat concerns when the company was perceived as less sincere, but as predicted this effect was moderated by participant gender ($b = -0.36$, $SE = 0.09$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.54, -0.18]) and the index of moderated mediation was statistically significant such that the indirect effects were stronger for women than for men (see Table S3, Contrasts 1 and 2). To examine the difference between the Authentic Diversity and No-Information Control company, Authentic Diversity was set as the reference group. We again found a statistically significant indirect effect through sincerity perceptions, such that the No-Information Control company ($b = -0.57$, $SE = 0.12$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.81, -0.33]) was perceived as less sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity than the Authentic Diversity company. Again, the index of moderated mediation was statistically significant; the indirect path was significant for women, but not for men (see Table S3, Contrast 3; see also Figure 2). Taken together, these models provide empirical support for our prediction that perceived sincerity mediates the relationship between diversity cues and identity threat among women, but not among men. The Counterfeit Diversity company was perceived as insincere, relative to the other two companies, and, in turn, it engendered greater identity threat concerns among women. By contrast, the Authentic Diversity company was perceived as more sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity, relative to the other two companies, and it engendered the least identity threat concerns among women.

Figure 2

Experiment 1: Perceived sincerity mediates the relationship between on-the-ground diversity and identity threat concerns and is moderated by participant gender. Multi-categorical moderated mediation analysis reveals that this relationship is stronger for women than men. Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Sincerity to Company Interest. Setting the Counterfeit Diversity company as the reference group, we found statistically significant indirect effects of condition through sincerity perceptions, such that the No-Information Control company ($b = 0.91$, $SE = 0.14$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.64, 1.17]) and Authentic Diversity company ($b = 1.43$, $SE = 0.13$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.19, 1.68]) were perceived to be more sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity than the Counterfeit Diversity company.⁷ As expected, sincerity positively predicted company interest ($b = 0.20$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.33]). Unlike with identity threat, this effect was not moderated by participant gender ($b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.09$, $p = .65$, 95% CI [-0.13, 0.21]), so we removed the gender moderator and ran simple multi-categorical mediations. This analysis

⁷ This multicategorical conditional process model uses Company Interest (Time 2, post-measurement) as the primary outcome variable. In this model, we control for Company Interest (Time 1, pre-measurement) by including it as a covariate. Pre-measured Company Interest significantly predicted sincerity perceptions ($b = 0.29$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.20, 0.39]), such that the more interested people were in joining the company at Time 1, the more they expected the company to be sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity. Additionally, pre-measured Company Interest significantly predicted post-measured Company Interest ($b = 0.29$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.20, 0.39]). The more interested in joining the company people were at Time 1, the more they tended to be interested in joining the company at Time 2.

yielded two statistically significant indirect effects linking each of the first two condition contrasts to company interest via sincerity perceptions (see Table S4, Contrasts 1 and 2). To examine the difference between the Authentic Diversity and No-Information Control company, Authentic Diversity was set as the reference group. We again found a statistically significant indirect effect through sincerity perceptions, such that the No-Information Control company ($b = -0.53$, $SE = 0.12$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.76, -0.30]$) was perceived to be less sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity than the Authentic Diversity company, which undermined interest in the company. Like Contrasts 1 and 2, this effect was not moderated by participant gender ($b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.09$, $p = .65$, 95% CI $[-0.13, 0.21]$). When the gender moderator is removed from the model, a statistically significant indirect effect emerges such that company diversity predicts interest via sincerity perceptions (see Table S4, Contrast3; see also Figure 3). Taken together, these models suggest that companies perceived as relatively insincere in their commitment to gender diversity were less interesting to women *and* men. Relative to an Authentic Diversity company (and a No-Information Control company), a Counterfeit Diversity company was perceived as less sincere and, in turn, women and men were less interested in joining the company.

Figure 3

Discussion

Study 1 is the first to examine how people perceive organizations that exaggerate their actual, on-the-ground gender diversity in their recruitment materials. Though companies may counterfeit diversity to express a sincere value and interest in attracting greater diversity, we found that this practice is perceived as insincere by both men and women and ironically reduces both men's and women's interest in joining the company. Moreover, counterfeit diversity engenders identity threat among women, which may also contribute to their (lower) interest in joining. By contrast, people who learned that the gender diversity depicted on the website was an authentic portrayal of the context viewed the company to be more sincerely interested in diversity and, in turn, reported the least threat (among women) and the most company interest (among men and women).

As a theoretical advance, this study also reveals that diversity cues seem to (at least initially) be taken at face value, consistent with the iterative cue construal hypothesis. Women

and men who viewed the No-information Control company perceived that company to be more sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity than the Counterfeit Diversity company (albeit less interested than the Authentic Diversity company). In turn, women in this condition expected to experience little threat and were still fairly interested in joining the company.

Perhaps it is not surprising that relative to an authentically diverse tech company (with a high degree of on-the-ground diversity; 50% women), counterfeit diversity seems to engender identity threat among women. Given that such authentically diverse tech environments are extremely rare (National Science Board, 2016), the more practical question is how counterfeit diversity will be construed relative to a company with *low* on-the-ground diversity that authentically depicts its (lack of) gender diversity. Study 2 addresses this question.

Depicting poor gender diversity in recruitment materials is known to engender identity threat among women in STEM contexts (e.g., Murphy et al., 2007). Is counterfeiting diversity at least construed to be more sincere than (truthfully) depicting a *lack* of diversity? Given that companies that lack diversity may choose to exaggerate their demographic diversity as a means of communicating their interest in attracting greater diversity, will women perceive counterfeit diversity as more sincere than an *authentically non-diverse* tech company? Or, will women perceive the company that counterfeits diversity to be just as (or more) insincere as the authentically non-diverse company? Study 2 examines whether counterfeit diversity is perceived to be more, less, or similarly sincere than a company that authentically depicts its lack of gender diversity.

Again, we predict that the perceived motives underlying the representation cue are key. If both companies are perceived as insincerely interested in promoting gender diversity, then we predict that women will experience both companies as identity threatening. However, if the

company that counterfeits diversity is perceived as more sincere in promoting gender diversity than the authentically non-diverse company, then we predict that women will experience the counterfeit company as more identity-safe than the authentically non-diverse company. In sum, we predict that perceivers' construals of the *sincerity* of the companies' commitment to diversity will predict their anticipated threat and interest in joining the companies.

Experiment 2

Study 2 replicates and extends Study 1 by adding an Authentic *Non-Diversity* condition where the company lacks on-the-ground diversity, but accurately advertises its (low) diversity in its recruitment materials. We employed a 2 (Participant Gender: Man, Woman) $\times$ 3 (On-the-Ground Diversity: Counterfeit Diversity, Authentic Non-Diversity, Authentic Diversity) between-subjects, factorial design.⁸

Method

Power Analysis

Again, we sought to detect a medium-sized effect of .25 at the standard .05 alpha error probability with 80% power for a two factor, between-subjects experimental design. Using G*Power v 3.1, the final parameters for the Experiment 2 sample size are listed here: *F*-test, ANOVA (main effects and interactions), $f = .25$ (moderate effect), $\alpha = 0.05$, $1 - \beta = 0.80$, numerator $df = 2$, number of groups = 6. The power analysis revealed an *N*-minimum of 158 people. We attempted to oversample and recruit 480 participants (~80 participants per cell).

⁸ In the initial preregistered design of Experiment 2, we planned to conduct a 2 (Gender: Male, Female) $\times$ 2 (Diversity: Counterfeit Diversity, Authentic Non-Diversity) between-subjects design. After collecting the data, we found no differences between the Counterfeit Diversity and Authentic Non-Diversity conditions. To better understand this finding, we decided to file an addendum to the original preregistration plan and collect more data (see the [OSF project page](#)). We added back in the Authentic Diversity condition (from Study 1) as a comparison group. Therefore, all data from the Authentic Diversity condition was collected several weeks after data from the other two diversity conditions. Although we do not anticipate that this blocked design had an effect on responses, we decided to preregister and directly replicate the design of Experiment 2 in Experiment 3.

Data Exclusions

Of the 473 eligible participants who started our survey on the Prolific website, 71 participants failed to correctly answer one or more of the memory check questions. The results described in the main text include only participants who correctly answered both memory check questions. Complete details regarding data exclusions are outlined in the Online Supplement.

Participants & Sensitivity Analyses

The final sample included the 402 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 33.0$, 51.2 % male, 69.1 % White) who correctly answered both memory check questions. We conducted a sensitivity analysis to provide readers with the minimum detectable effect sizes, given this sample size and study design. Using G*Power (v. 3.1), these were our parameters: test family = F -test, ANOVA (main effects and interactions); total sample size = 402; $\alpha = 0.05$; $1 - \beta = 0.80$; numerator $df = 2$; number of groups = 6. The sensitivity analysis revealed a minimally detectable f value of .16 (a small-to-medium sized effect).

Procedure and Materials

As with the previous study, participants were asked to imagine that they were searching for a job as a project manager in the technology sector. They were then asked to carefully review a company website. Participants randomly assigned to the Authentic Diversity and Counterfeit Diversity conditions reviewed the same gender-balanced website used in the previous study. It advertised an equal number of men and women (50% women, 50% men). New to this study, participants randomly assigned to the Authentic Non-Diversity condition reviewed a gender-unbalanced website. It advertised an unequal number of men and women (25% women, 75% men). Immediately after reviewing the recruitment website, participants reported their *initial interest* in the company's project manager position and reported their perceptions about the

actual gender diversity at the company (*manipulation check, Time 1*). We then asked people to report the amount of gender diversity featured on the company's website (*memory check*).⁹

Then, participants were asked to imagine that they were hired by the company and that they arrived on-site for their first day of work. People randomly assigned to the Authentic Diversity condition learned that the company was indeed gender-diverse (50% women). These participants read the following vignette:

When you actually arrive on-site, you look around and notice there are many women and men working at Harrison Technologies. In fact, it looks like the gender ratio of men to women is about 1:1, meaning about 50% of all employees at the company are women.

By contrast, people assigned to the Counterfeit Diversity condition and Authentic Non-Diversity condition learned that the company was not very gender diverse (25% women). These participants read the following vignette:

When you actually arrive on-site, you look around and notice that there are mostly men and very few women working at Harrison Technologies. In fact, it looks like the gender ratio of men to women is about 3:1, meaning only about 25% of all employees at the company are women.

After reading the vignette, participants reported their perceptions about the actual gender diversity at the company (*manipulation check, Time 2*) and then completed the same measures described in Experiment 1: sincerity perceptions, identity threat concerns, and company interest (*subsequent interest*).

Results

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics (*M* and *SD*) by condition. Table S5 provides the psychometric properties of all variables; Table S6 provides zero-order correlations; and Tables

⁹ We asked the first memory check question to examine people's initial perception of the gender diversity cue to make sure that the numeric information communicated in by the numeric depiction was perceived accurately—before the counterfeit information was communicated.

S7 and S8 provide the indirect effects and indices of moderated mediation for the multi-categorical conditional process models.

Table 2*Diversity Condition Comparisons of the Major Variables (Experiment 2)*

Variable	Authentic Diversity (<i>n</i> = 147)				Authentic Non-Diversity (<i>n</i> = 119)				Counterfeit Diversity (<i>n</i> = 136)			
	Women (<i>n</i> = 82)		Men (<i>n</i> = 65)		Women (<i>n</i> = 53)		Men (<i>n</i> = 66)		Women (<i>n</i> = 61)		Men (<i>n</i> = 75)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Gender Diversity Perceptions (Time 1)	5.23	1.20	4.98	1.04	3.24	1.41	3.05	1.12	5.12	1.11	4.94	1.02
Gender Diversity Perceptions (Time 2)	6.37	0.71	6.32	0.58	1.97	0.81	1.98	0.79	2.02	0.74	1.99	0.60
Sincerity Perceptions	3.67	0.86	3.67	0.90	2.21	0.71	2.10	0.79	2.36	0.86	2.18	0.77
Identity Threat Concerns	1.69	0.71	1.71	0.55	2.65	1.06	2.01	0.79	2.79	1.09	1.89	0.72
Company Interest (Time 1)	3.61	0.98	3.52	0.97	3.70	1.05	3.11	1.15	3.62	0.95	3.53	0.95
Company Interest (Time 2)	3.83	0.94	3.78	0.88	3.26	1.13	3.14	1.19	3.13	0.90	3.21	0.92

Manipulation Check

Perceived Gender Diversity. To confirm that participants perceived the companies as intended, we conducted a repeated measures ANOVA. Time was the within-subjects factor and it had two levels: *Time 1* (informed by the company's advertised diversity) and *Time 2* (informed by both the company's advertised diversity and knowledge about the company's on-the-ground diversity). Participant gender and diversity condition were the between-subjects factors.

Consistent with predictions, analyses revealed a statistically significant main effect of time, $F(1, 396) = 268.01, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .40$, and of diversity condition, $F(2, 396) = 638.78, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .76$. These main effects were qualified by the predicted time $\times$ diversity interaction, $F(2, 396) = 450.84, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .70$. As expected, *before* learning on-the-ground diversity information, people perceived the Authentic Non-Diversity company to be significantly less gender diverse ($M = 3.13, SD = 1.26$) than the Authentic Diversity ($M = 5.12, SD = 1.13, p < .001, d = 1.67$) and Counterfeit Diversity companies ($M = 5.02, SD = 1.06, p < .001, d = 1.64$), but gender diversity perceptions did not significantly differ between the latter two companies ($p > .99$). *After* learning about on-the-ground diversity, however, people's perceptions of gender diversity changed: increasing in the Authentic Diversity condition ($M_{Difference} = 1.24, SE = .10, p < .001, d_z = 1.14$) and decreasing in the Authentic Non-Diversity ($M_{Difference} = -1.17, SE = .11, p < .001, d_z = 0.95$) and Counterfeit Diversity conditions ($M_{Difference} = -3.03, SE = .10, p < .001, d_z = 2.95$). On average, people perceived the Authentic Diversity company to be significantly more gender diverse ($M = 6.35, SD = 0.66$) than the Authentic Non-Diversity ($M = 1.98, SD = 0.80, p < .001, d = 6.07$) and Counterfeit Diversity companies ($M = 2.00, SD = 0.66, p < .001, d = 6.62$), but gender diversity perceptions between the Authentic Non-Diversity and Counterfeit Diversity companies did not significantly differ ($p > .99$). All of these effect sizes are conventionally

considered to be large (Cohen, 1988), but the drop in perceived gender diversity from Time 1 to Time 2 within the Counterfeit Diversity condition, on average, traverses three units on a 7-point scale and it is over three times larger than the drop in the Authentic Non-Diversity condition and over two times larger than the increase in the Authentic Diversity condition. These findings indicate that people detect mismatches between advertised and on-the-ground gender diversity. Thus, these results indicate that the diversity manipulation was effective (see Figure 4).

The main effect of gender, $F(1, 396) = 2.29, p = .13, \eta_p^2 = .01$, the gender $\times$ time interaction, $F(1, 396) = 2.19, p = .14, \eta_p^2 = .01$, the gender $\times$ diversity interaction, $F(2, 396) = 0.05, p = .95, \eta_p^2 < .001$, and the three-way interaction were all not statistically significant, $F(2, 396) = 0.02, p = .98, \eta_p^2 < .001$, indicating that men and women perceived the gender diversity manipulation similarly.

Figure 4*Perceived Gender Diversity*

Multi-categorical Conditional Process Models

To test whether sincerity mediated the relationships between diversity condition and our outcomes of interest, we tested two multi-categorical conditional process models (Hayes, 2018): one for the identity threat outcome and one for the company interest outcome. We examined the following three contrasts: Contrast 1: Authentic Diversity vs. Authentic Non-Diversity; Contrast 2: Authentic Diversity vs. Counterfeit Diversity; and Contrast 3: Counterfeit Diversity vs. Authentic Non-Diversity. These contrasts were coded using the same PROCESS indicator coding system described in Study 1.

Sincerity to Identity Threat Concerns. Setting the Authentic Diversity company as the reference group, we found statistically significant indirect effects of condition on identity threat through sincerity perceptions, such that the Authentic Non-Diversity ($b = -1.52$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-1.72, -1.32]$) and Counterfeit Diversity companies ($b = -1.41$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-1.60, -1.22]$) were perceived as less sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity than the Authentic Diversity company. Sincerity negatively predicted identity threat concerns ($b = -0.06$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .31$, 95% CI $[-0.18, 0.06]$), such that people anticipated greater identity threat when the company was perceived as less sincere. Consistent with our earlier findings, the effect of sincerity was moderated by participant gender ($b = -0.39$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.53, -0.24]$). The index of moderated mediation was statistically significant such that the indirect effects were stronger for women than for men (see Table S7, Contrasts 1 and 2). To examine the difference between the Counterfeit Diversity company and Authentic Non-Diversity company, Counterfeit Diversity was set as the reference group. The contrast between Counterfeit Diversity and Authentic Non-Diversity did not significantly predict sincerity beliefs ($b = -0.11$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .28$, 95% CI $[-0.31, 0.09]$). Therefore, the indirect effect linking this condition

contrast to identity threat concerns (via sincerity) was not statistically significant for women or for men (see Table S7, Contrast 3; see also Figure 5). Together, these models suggest that authentic diversity (vs. counterfeit diversity *and* authentic non-diversity) increases perceived sincerity and ameliorates identity threat concerns for women; however, counterfeit diversity does not increase perceived sincerity relative to authentic non-diversity and, in turn, does not ameliorate identity threat.

Figure 5

Experiment 2: Perceived sincerity mediates the relationship between on-the-ground diversity and identity threat concerns and is moderated by participant gender. Multi-categorical moderated mediation analysis reveals that this relationship is stronger for women than men. *Note.* * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Sincerity to Company Interest. Setting the Authentic Diversity company as the reference group, we found statistically significant indirect effects of condition on company interest through sincerity perceptions, such that the Authentic Non-Diversity ($b = -1.49$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.69, -1.30]) and Counterfeit Diversity companies ($b = -1.41$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.60, -1.22]) were perceived as less sincerely interested in increasing gender

diversity than the Authentic Diversity company.¹⁰ Sincerity positively predicted company interest ($b = 0.19$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.31]). Consistent with our earlier findings, this effect was not moderated by participant gender ($b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = .58$, 95% CI [-0.10, 0.18]), so we removed the gender moderator and ran simple multi-categorical mediations. This yielded two statistically significant indirect effects linking the condition contrasts to company interest via sincerity perceptions (see Table S8, Contrasts 1 and 2). To examine the difference between the Counterfeit Diversity company and Authentic Non-Diversity company, Counterfeit Diversity was set as the reference group. The contrast between Counterfeit Diversity and Authentic Non-Diversity did not significantly predict sincerity beliefs ($b = -0.08$, $SE = 0.10$, $p = .42$, 95% CI [-0.28, 0.12]). Therefore, the indirect effect linking this condition contrast to company interest (via sincerity) was not statistically significant (see Table S8, Contrast 3; see also Figure 6). Taken together, these models suggest that authentic diversity (vs. counterfeit diversity *and* authentic non-diversity) increases perceived sincerity and increases interest in joining the company for men and women; however, counterfeit diversity does not increase perceived sincerity relative to authentic non-diversity and, in turn, does not increase interest.

¹⁰ Like the previous study, this multicategorical conditional process model uses Company Interest (Time 2, post-measurement) as the primary outcome variable. We again control for Company Interest (Time 1, pre-measurement) by including it as a covariate. Again, pre-measured Company Interest significantly predicted sincerity perceptions ($b = 0.15$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.07, 0.23]), such that the more people were interested in the company at Time 1, the more they expected the company to be sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity. Also as expected, pre-measured Company Interest was a significant predictor of post-measured Company Interest ($b = 0.54$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.47, 0.62]). As with the previous study, the more interested in joining the company people were at Time 1, the more interested they were in joining the company at Time 2.

Figure 6

Experiment 2: Perceived sincerity mediates the relationship between on-the-ground diversity and company interest post-measurements. Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion

Experiment 2 replicated the results of Experiment 1. Again, we found that women and men perceive the counterfeit diversity company to be insincerely interested in creating and fostering a gender diverse workplace, relative to the authentic diversity company. This construal cued identity threat among women and reduced both men's and women's interest in joining the company. New to this experiment, we introduced an authentic non-diversity company. This company accurately advertised its *low* level of gender diversity. Much like the counterfeit diversity company, an authentic non-diversity company is perceived as less sincere than an authentic diversity company. This lack of sincerity engenders greater identity threat among women and reduces the interest in joining the company among men and women. The authentic non-diversity company did not differ from the counterfeit diversity company, indicating that neither company is reliably construed to be more sincere than the other. Both companies are perceived as having an insincere commitment to gender diversity.

So far, the only surefire recruitment method we have found that preserves sincerity perceptions—which, in turn, maintains interest in the company and buffers women from identity threat—is to take an authentic gender diversity approach. Unfortunately, this recruitment tactic is of little use to gender non-diverse companies. By definition, these companies *cannot* showcase authentic gender diversity because they are not diverse. So what can gender non-diverse companies do? Our findings suggest that diversity cues matter, but they must be construed as sincere. This suggests that to attract female workers, gender non-diverse companies must find ways to sincerely cue their interest in increasing gender diversity. Some real world companies have attempted to increase their perceived sincerity by stating their *aspirational diversity* in recruitment materials—that is, they have admitted lacking gender diversity, acknowledged that lacking gender diversity is a problem, and expressed an aspiration to diversify now and going forward (Durruthy, 2018; Prophet, 2018; Silbermann, 2019; Williams, 2017, 2018). Study 3 examines whether expressing such an aspiration is enough to increase sincerity construals, maintain interest in the company, and allay identity threat concerns.

Experiment 3

Experiment 3 replicates and extends Experiments 1 and 2 by adding an Aspirational Diversity condition, in which the company lacks gender diversity but aspires to increase it going forward. We employed a 2 (Participant Gender: Man, Woman) $\times$ 4 (On-the-Ground Diversity: Counterfeit Diversity, Authentic Non- Diversity, Aspirational Diversity, Authentic Diversity) between-subjects, factorial design. We expected the Authentic Diversity company to be perceived as the most sincere, next followed by the Aspirational Diversity company, and lastly followed by the Counterfeit Diversity and Authentic Non-Diversity companies.

Method

Power Analysis

Consistent with Experiments 1 and 2, we sought to detect a medium-sized effect of $f = .25$ at the standard .05 alpha error probability with 80% power for a two factor, between-subjects experimental design. Using G*Power v 3.1, the final parameters for the Experiment 3 sample size are listed here: F -test, ANOVA (main effects and interactions), $f = .25$ (moderate effect), $\alpha = 0.05$, $1-\beta = 0.80$, numerator $df = 3$, number of groups = 8. The power analysis revealed an N -minimum of 179 people. Again, we attempted to oversample and recruit 640 participants (~80 participants per cell).

Data Exclusions

Of the 629 eligible participants who started our survey on the Prolific website, 124 participants failed to correctly answer one or more of the memory check questions. The results described in the main text include only participants who correctly answered both memory check questions. Complete details regarding data exclusions are outlined in the Online Supplement.

Participants & Sensitivity Analyses

The final sample included the 505 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 34.73$, 50.7% female, 76.6% White) who correctly answered both memory check questions. We conducted a sensitivity analysis in G*Power (v. 3.1) to provide readers with the minimum detectable effect sizes, given this sample size and study design, using the following parameters: test family = F -test, ANOVA (main effects and interactions); total sample size = 505; $\alpha = 0.05$; $1-\beta = 0.80$; numerator $df = 3$; number of groups = 8. The sensitivity analysis revealed a minimally detectable f value of .15 (a small-to-medium sized effect).

Procedure and Materials

The procedure and materials for Experiment 3 were nearly identical to the previous study, except that a new Aspirational Diversity condition was introduced. Participants were asked to imagine that they were searching for a job as a project manager in the technology sector and to carefully review a company website. Again, participants randomly assigned to the Authentic Diversity and Counterfeit Diversity conditions reviewed a gender-balanced website that advertised an equal number of men and women (50% women, 50% men); participants randomly assigned to the Authentic Non-Diversity and Aspirational Diversity conditions reviewed a gender-unbalanced website that advertised an unequal number of men and women (25% women, 75% men).

After reviewing the company website, participants in the Authentic Diversity condition read a vignette indicating that the company was indeed gender diverse (50% women). By contrast, participants in the Counterfeit Diversity, Authentic Non-Diversity, and Aspirational Diversity conditions read a vignette indicating that the company was not very gender diverse (only 25% women):

When you actually arrive on-site, you look around and notice that there are mostly men and very few women working at Harrison Technologies. In fact, it looks like the gender ratio of men to women is about 3:1, meaning only about 25% of all employees at the company are women.

After reading the above vignette, people assigned to the Aspirational Diversity condition read one additional message written by top executives at the company. In the message, participants learned that top executives felt the company was not gender diverse enough and that they believed the lack of diversity was problematic. To rectify this, the executives stated that the company would actively try to increase its gender diversity. The full statement is below:

Diversity is critical to the success of our company—it helps us build better products, make better decisions, and better serve our community. Since establishing Harrison Technologies, we've made some progress

toward increasing the number of women employed here. However, our current numbers don't reflect our company's values. We aren't yet where we'd like to be. Now and going forward, we will work hard to recruit and retain more women. In fact, we have several programs in place to help move us towards our goals. We are committed to making Harrison Technologies a diverse and inclusive company, where all employees feel that they can thrive and succeed.

This aspirational diversity statement was based on similar, publicly available statements on technology company websites (e.g., Williams, 2018). After reading one of the vignettes, participants completed the same measures described in Experiments 1 and 2.

Results

Table 3 provides descriptive statistics (M and SD) by condition. Table S9 provides the psychometric properties of all variables; Table S10 provides zero-order correlations; and Tables S11 and S12 provide the indirect effects and indices of moderated mediation for the multi-categorical conditional process models.

Table 3*Diversity Condition Comparisons of the Major Variables (Experiment 3)*

Variable	Authentic Diversity (<i>n</i> = 136)				Counterfeit Diversity (<i>n</i> = 139)			
	Women (<i>n</i> = 74)		Men (<i>n</i> = 62)		Women (<i>n</i> = 63)		Men (<i>n</i> = 76)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Gender Diversity Perceptions (Time 1)	5.28	1.07	4.82	1.09	4.93	1.09	4.99	1.17
Gender Diversity Perceptions (Time 2)	6.34	0.50	6.15	0.82	1.94	0.78	2.07	0.67
Sincerity Perceptions	3.80	0.79	3.62	0.73	2.40	0.80	2.43	0.86
Identity Threat Concerns	1.65	0.58	1.80	0.81	2.64	1.04	1.90	0.73
Company Interest (Time 1)	3.64	1.05	3.15	1.16	3.81	1.03	3.34	0.99
Company Interest (Time 2)	3.95	0.83	3.52	1.07	3.29	0.94	3.25	0.98
Variable	Authentic Non-Diversity (<i>n</i> = 116)				Aspirational Diversity (<i>n</i> = 114)			
	Women (<i>n</i> = 58)		Men (<i>n</i> = 58)		Women (<i>n</i> = 61)		Men (<i>n</i> = 53)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Gender Diversity Perceptions (Time 1)	2.74	0.98	3.13	1.13	2.95	1.10	3.11	1.05
Gender Diversity Perceptions (Time 2)	1.67	0.61	1.89	0.68	2.07	0.90	2.18	0.75
Sincerity Perceptions	2.20	0.87	2.10	0.93	3.04	1.14	2.89	0.89
Identity Threat Concerns	2.96	1.09	1.84	0.69	2.79	1.10	2.00	0.82
Company Interest (Time 1)	3.48	0.98	3.38	1.24	3.59	1.01	3.57	1.07
Company Interest (Time 2)	3.17	1.08	3.31	1.10	3.25	1.15	3.51	1.01

Manipulation Check

Perceived Gender Diversity. Analyses revealed a statistically significant main effect of time, $F(1, 497) = 359.70, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .42$, and of diversity, $F(3, 497) = 538.69, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .77$. These main effects were qualified by the predicted time $\times$ diversity interaction, $F(3, 497) = 310.50, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .65$. As predicted, *before* learning on-the-ground diversity information the Authentic Non-Diversity ($M = 2.94, SD = 1.07$) and Aspirational Diversity companies ($M = 3.03, SD = 1.07$) were perceived to be significantly less gender diverse than the Authentic Diversity ($M = 5.07, SD = 1.10, ps \leq .001, ds \geq 1.89$) and Counterfeit Diversity companies ($M = 4.96, SD = 1.13, ps \leq .001, ds \geq 1.76$); gender diversity perceptions neither differed between the former two companies ($p > .99$) nor the latter two companies ($p > .99$). *After* learning about the on-the-ground diversity, however, gender diversity perceptions changed: significantly increasing for the Authentic Diversity company ($M_{Difference} = 1.20, SE = 0.10, p < .001, d_z = 1.20$) and decreasing for the other three companies (Authentic Non-Diversity: $M_{Difference} = -1.16, SE = 0.10, p < .001, d_z = 1.19$; Aspirational Diversity: $M_{Difference} = -0.91, SE = 0.11, p < .001, d_z = 0.90$; Counterfeit Diversity: $M_{Difference} = -2.95, SE = 0.10, p < .001, d_z = 2.88$). On average, people perceived the Authentic Diversity company to be significantly more gender diverse ($M = 6.25, SD = 0.67$) than the Authentic Non-Diversity company ($M = 1.78, SD = 0.65, p < .001, d = 6.78$), the Aspirational Diversity company ($M = 2.12, SD = 0.83, p < .001, d = 5.54$), and the Counterfeit Diversity company ($M = 2.01, SD = 0.72, p < .001, d = 6.11$). Gender diversity perceptions did not differ between the Counterfeit Diversity, Authentic Non-Diversity, and Aspirational Diversity companies ($ps \geq .08$). Like in Experiment 2, these effect sizes are large (Cohen, 1988), but the drop in perceived gender diversity between Time 1 and Time 2 for the Counterfeit Diversity company, on average, traverses almost three units on a 7-point scale and it

is over two times larger than the changes between Time 1 and Time 2 for the other companies.

Again, people seem able to detect mismatches between advertised and on-the-ground diversity.

These results indicate that the diversity manipulation was again effective (see Figure 7).

Regarding the effects of gender on the manipulation check outcome, the main effect of gender, $F(1, 497) = 0.60, p = .44, \eta_p^2 = .001$, the gender $\times$ time interaction, $F(1, 497) = 0.06, p = .81, \eta_p^2 < .001$, and the three-way interaction were all statistically non-significant, $F(3, 497) = 0.82, p = .48, \eta_p^2 = .01$. However, unlike the previous studies, the gender $\times$ diversity interaction was statistically significant, $F(3, 497) = 4.29, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .03$. This interaction appeared to be driven by differences in men's and women's perceptions of gender diversity within the Authentic Diversity condition at Time 1, such that women perceived the Authentic Diversity company to be significantly more gender diverse than did men ($M_{Difference} = 0.45, SE = 0.19, p = .02, d = 0.42$). This gender difference, however, was largely attenuated by Time 2 ($M_{Difference} = 0.20, SE = 0.12, p = .11, d = 0.30$). There were no statistically significant gender differences within the other diversity conditions (all $ps \geq .06$).

Figure 7*Perceived Gender Diversity* **Multi-categorical Conditional Process Models**

We evaluated two multi-categorical conditional process models (Hayes, 2018): one for the identity threat outcome and the other for the company interest outcome. Through this approach, we examined six contrasts: Contrast 1: Authentic Diversity vs. Aspirational Diversity; Contrast 2: Authentic Diversity vs. Authentic Non-Diversity; Contrast 3: Authentic Diversity vs. Counterfeit Diversity; Contrast 4: Aspirational Diversity vs. Authentic Non-Diversity; Contrast 5: Aspirational Diversity vs. Counterfeit Diversity; and Contrast 6: Counterfeit Diversity vs. Authentic Non-Diversity. These contrasts were coded using the indicator coding system in PROCESS, such that the reference group was coded as “0,0,0”, the first comparator to the

reference group was coded as “1,0,0”, the second comparator as “0,1,0”, and the third comparator as “0,0,1.”

Sincerity to Identity Threat Concerns. Setting the Authentic Diversity company as the reference group, we found statistically significant indirect effects through sincerity perceptions, such that the Aspirational Diversity company ($b = -0.74$, $SE = 0.11$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.96, -0.53]), Authentic Non-Diversity company ($b = -1.56$, $SE = 0.11$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.78, -1.35]), and Counterfeit Diversity company ($b = -1.30$, $SE = 0.11$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.51, -1.09]) were perceived as less sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity than the Authentic Diversity company. Sincerity negatively predicted identity threat concerns ($b = -0.06$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .31$, 95% CI [-0.17, 0.05]), such that people anticipated greater identity threat concerns when the company was perceived as less sincere. This effect was moderated by participant gender ($b = -0.51$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.65, -0.38]), which is consistent with the findings of Experiments 1 and 2. The index of moderated mediation was statistically significant such that the indirect effects were stronger for women than for men (see Table S11, Contrasts 1, 2, and 3). To examine the difference between the Aspirational Diversity company and the Counterfeit Diversity and Authentic Non-Diversity companies, Aspirational Diversity was set as the reference group. We found statistically significant indirect effects through sincerity perceptions, such that the Authentic Non-Diversity ($b = -0.82$, $SE = 0.12$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.05, -0.59]) and Counterfeit Diversity companies ($b = -0.56$, $SE = 0.11$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.77, -0.34]) were perceived as less sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity than the Aspirational Diversity company. Again, the index of moderated mediation was statistically significant; the indirect effects were significant for women, but not for men (see Table S11, Contrasts 4 and 5). To examine the difference between the Counterfeit Diversity company and

Authentic Non-Diversity company, Counterfeit Diversity was set as the reference group.

Unexpectedly, we found that the contrast between Counterfeit Diversity and Authentic Non-Diversity significantly predicted sincerity beliefs ($b = -0.26$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = .02$, 95% CI [-0.48, -0.05]), such that the Authentic Non-Diversity company was perceived as less sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity than the Counterfeit Diversity company. This is inconsistent with the finding from Experiment 2 (where no difference between the Counterfeit Diversity and Authentic Non-Diversity companies was detected). The effect is small, but it suggests that Counterfeit Diversity companies may be construed as somewhat more sincere than Authentic Non-Diversity companies. Again, the index of moderated mediation was statistically significant; the indirect effect linking this contrast to identity threat concerns (via sincerity perceptions) was significant for women, but not for men (see Table S11, Contrast 6; see also Figure 8).

Figure 8

Experiment 3: Perceived sincerity mediates the relationship between on-the-ground diversity and identity threat concerns and is moderated by participant gender. Multi-categorical moderated mediation analysis reveals that this relationship is stronger for women than men. Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Sincerity to Company Interest. Setting the Authentic Diversity company as the reference group, we found statistically significant indirect effects through sincerity perceptions,

such that the Aspirational Diversity ($b = -0.77$, $SE = 0.11$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.99, -0.55]), Authentic Non-Diversity ($b = -1.57$, $SE = 0.11$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.78, -1.35]), and Counterfeit Diversity companies ($b = -1.32$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.53, -1.12]) were perceived as less sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity than the Authentic Diversity company.¹¹ Sincerity positively predicted company interest ($b = 0.25$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.14, 0.36]) and, unlike the previous studies, this effect was moderated by participant gender ($b = 0.17$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = .014$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.31]). Notably, the indirect effects were still statistically significant for *both* women and men; however, significant indices of moderated mediation indicate that the indirect effects were significantly stronger for women than for men (see Table S12, Contrasts 1, 2, and 3). To examine the difference between the Aspirational Diversity company and the Counterfeit Diversity and Authentic Non-Diversity companies, Aspirational Diversity was set as the reference group. As expected, the indirect effects linking these contrasts to company interest, via sincerity perceptions, were statistically significant. The Authentic Non-Diversity ($b = -0.80$, $SE = 0.11$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-1.02, -0.57]) and Counterfeit Diversity companies ($b = -0.55$, $SE = 0.11$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.77, -0.34]) were perceived as less sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity than the Aspirational Diversity company. These indirect effects were statistically significant for both women and men but were significantly stronger for women (see Table S12, Contrasts 4 and 5). Lastly, to examine the difference between the Counterfeit Diversity company and Authentic Non-Diversity company,

¹¹ Consistent with the previous studies, this multicategorical conditional process model uses Company Interest (Time 2, post-measurement) as the primary outcome variable. Company Interest (Time 1, pre-measurement) is included as a covariate. Again, pre-measured Company Interest significantly predicted sincerity perceptions ($b = 0.15$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.22]), such that the more interested in the company people were, the more they expected the company to be sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity. Also as expected, pre-measured Company Interest was a significant predictor of post-measured Company Interest ($b = 0.44$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.37, 0.51]). As with the previous studies, the more interested in joining the company people were at Time 1, the more interested they tended to be in joining the company at Time 2.

Counterfeit Diversity was set as the reference group. The indirect path linking this contrast to company interest, via sincerity perceptions, was statistically significant ($b = -0.24$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = .03$, 95% CI $[-0.46, -0.03]$). The Authentic Non-Diversity company was perceived as less sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity than the Counterfeit Diversity company. This indirect effect was significant for both women and men, but was significantly stronger for women (see Table S12, Contrast 6; see also Figure 9).

Figure 9

Experiment 3: Perceived sincerity mediates the relationship between on-the-ground diversity and company interest post-measurements and is moderated by participant gender. Multi-categorical moderated mediation analysis reveals that this relationship is stronger for women than men. Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion

Experiment 3 replicated many of the results found in Experiments 1 and 2. Women and men perceived the Counterfeit Diversity and Authentic Non-Diversity companies to be less sincerely interested in creating and fostering a gender diverse workplace than the Authentic Diversity company. This (in)sincerity construal engendered identity threat among women and reduced men's and women's interest in joining the Counterfeit Diversity and Authentic Non-Diversity companies compared to the Authentic Diversity company.

New to this experiment, we examined whether expressing aspirational diversity—defined as (a) explicitly acknowledging a lack of diversity, (b) identifying lacking diversity as a problem, and (c) committing to increase diversity—would be perceived as a more sincere way for non-diverse technology companies to recruit women, at least relative to doing nothing (i.e., authentic non-diversity) or counterfeiting diversity. As predicted, the Aspirational Diversity company was perceived to be more sincere than the Counterfeit Diversity and Authentic Non-Diversity companies, but was still perceived to be less sincere than the Authentic Diversity company. Moreover, we found an indirect effect of Aspirational Diversity (compared to the Counterfeit Diversity and Authentic Non-Diversity companies) on identity threat and interest in joining the company via sincerity perceptions. Men and women perceived the Aspirational Diversity company to be more sincerely interested in promoting gender diversity than the Counterfeit Diversity and Authentic Non-Diversity companies which, in turn, predicted lower rates of identity threat among women and more interest in joining the company among men and women (but more so for women).

Unexpectedly, people perceived the Counterfeit Diversity company to be slightly more sincere than the Authentic Non-Diversity company. This finding is inconsistent with the results of Experiment 2, wherein sincerity perceptions did not meaningfully differ between the Authentic Non-Diversity and Counterfeit Diversity companies. It should be noted that this contrast effect was small. Still, a conservative interpretation of these results is that counterfeit diversity may sometimes signal a degree of sincerity to participants that authentic non-diversity does not.

Thus far, we have found consistent evidence that women's and men's sincerity construals mediate the relationships between diversity cues, identity threat concerns, and company interest.

However, based on the experimental designs, the previous three studies provide insufficient evidence to support the claim that sincerity construals are *causally* linked to identity threat concerns and interest. In these studies, sincerity was measured and not experimentally manipulated, rendering the argument for causality relatively weak (Bullock et al., 2010; Spencer et al., 2005). To more rigorously test whether there is a causal relationship linking sincerity construals to identity threat concerns and company interest, we next experimentally manipulated company sincerity.

Experiment 4

The findings from the previous three studies provide initial evidence that women anticipate greater identity threat and (both women and men) are less interested in companies that seem insincerely interested in promoting and maintaining gender diversity. Until now, the empirical links connecting sincerity construals to identity threat concerns and company interest have relied on statistical mediation analyses. The purpose of Experiment 4 is to experimentally manipulate company sincerity, which would provide a stronger test of our causal mechanism. Therefore, we employed a 2 (Participant Gender: Man, Woman) $\times$ 3 (Company Sincerity: Sincere, Insincere, No-Information Control) between-subjects, factorial design. Consistent with the logic of the previous studies, we expect women who learn that the technology company is insincerely interested in promoting gender diversity to report the most identity threat, women who receive no-information about the company's sincerity to report less identity threat, and women who learn the company is sincerely interested in promoting gender diversity to report the least identity threat. We expect company interest to follow a similar pattern, with men and women exhibiting the least interest in joining the insincere company, more interest in joining the no-information company, and the most interest in joining the sincere company.

Method

Power Analysis

Again, we sought to detect a medium-sized effect for a two factor, between-subjects experimental design at the standard .05 alpha error probability, with 80% power. This power analysis revealed an N -minimum of 158 people, using the following parameters: test family = F -test, ANOVA (main effects and interactions); $f = .25$ (medium-sized effect); $\alpha = 0.05$, $1-\beta = 0.80$; numerator $df = 2$; number of groups = 6. Consistent with the previous three studies, we planned to oversample. We planned to recruit 480 participants in total (or roughly 80 participants per cell).

Data Exclusions

Of the 479 eligible participants who started our survey on the Prolific website, 122 participants failed to correctly answer one or more of the memory check questions. The results described in the main text include only participants who correctly answered both memory check questions. Complete details regarding data exclusions are outlined in the Online Supplement.

Participants & Sensitivity Analyses

The final sample included the 357 participants ($M_{\text{age}} = 33.4$, 51.3 % female, 69.6 % White) who correctly answered all memory check questions. We conducted a sensitivity analysis to provide readers with the minimum detectable effect sizes, given this sample size and study design. Using G*Power (v. 3.1), here were our parameters: test family = F -test, ANOVA (main effects and interactions); total sample size = 357; $\alpha = 0.05$; $1-\beta = 0.80$; numerator $df = 2$; number of groups = 6. The sensitivity analysis revealed a minimally detectable f value of .16 (a small-to-medium sized effect).

Procedure and Materials

As with the previous studies, participants were asked to imagine that they were searching for a job as a project manager in the technology sector. They were then asked to carefully review a gender diverse company website that featured an equal number of men and women. Next, all participants learned that the company was not as gender diverse (25% women) as the recruitment website suggested—meaning that all participants evaluated a Counterfeit Diversity company.

We experimentally manipulated Company Sincerity by randomly presenting participants with one of three possible vignettes: (a) a sincere vignette, (b) an insincere vignette, or (c) a no-information vignette.¹² Participants randomly assigned to the Sincere condition learned that the company was sincerely interested in increasing its gender diversity. These participants read the following vignette:

Harrison Technologies is sincerely interested in promoting and maintaining gender diversity. The company is currently working harder to recruit more women and to provide benefits that will encourage women to stay with the company long term (e.g., flexible hours, remote working options, expansions to the paid family leave policy).

By contrast, people randomly assigned to the Insincere condition learned that the company was not sincerely interested in increasing its gender diversity. These participants read the following vignette:

Harrison Technologies is not sincerely interested in promoting and maintaining gender diversity. The company has no current or future plans to recruit more women, nor do they have plans to provide benefits

¹² Of course, there could be multiple ways to experimentally manipulate Company Sincerity—the approach taken here is simply one approach. Instead of providing explicit policies that favor (or disfavor) women, we could have simply stated that the company is “sincere” or “insincere” with no further information or we could have provided participants with employee testimonials avowing or disavowing the company’s sincerity. Ultimately, we chose to provide explicit policies and behaviors because we expected that providing evidence of actions actually taken (or not taken) in support of gender diversity would be one of the strongest manipulations of Company Sincerity. Providing less would run the risk of being perceived as to be just another empty “words only” expression of sincerity. Future work could examine how Company Sincerity is communicated and perceived.

that will encourage women to stay with the company long term (e.g., no flexible hours, no remote working options, no expansions to the paid family leave policy).

As its name implies, people randomly assigned to read the No-Information Control condition did not receive any information about the company's level of sincerity. This condition was identical to the Counterfeit Diversity conditions used in the previous three studies. Then participants completed the exact same measures described in Experiments 1 through 3.

Results

Table 4 provides descriptive statistics (*M* and *SD*) by condition. Table S13 provides the psychometric properties of all variables; Table S14 provides zero-order correlations; and Tables S15 and S16 provide the indirect effects and indices of moderated mediation for the multi-categorical conditional process models.

Table 4*Company Sincerity Condition Comparisons of the Major Variables (Experiment 4)*

Variable	Insincere (<i>n</i> = 104)				No-Information Control (<i>n</i> = 136)				Sincere (<i>n</i> = 117)			
	Women (<i>n</i> = 52)		Men (<i>n</i> = 52)		Women (<i>n</i> = 73)		Men (<i>n</i> = 63)		Women (<i>n</i> = 58)		Men (<i>n</i> = 59)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Gender Diversity Perceptions (Time 1)	5.15	1.14	4.93	1.02	5.29	1.13	4.95	1.26	5.08	1.25	4.70	1.15
Gender Diversity Perceptions (Time 2)	1.47	0.57	1.62	0.60	1.86	0.73	1.92	0.76	2.02	0.79	2.26	0.77
Sincerity Perceptions	1.32	0.61	1.37	0.47	2.38	0.86	2.23	0.76	3.53	1.00	3.19	0.93
Identity Threat Concerns	3.19	1.31	2.11	0.94	2.77	1.14	2.00	0.79	2.39	1.03	1.64	0.76
Company Interest (Time 1)	3.58	1.14	3.67	1.13	3.74	0.93	3.32	1.15	3.52	1.11	3.27	1.17
Company Interest (Time 2)	2.13	1.03	2.92	1.06	2.99	1.12	3.22	1.05	3.33	1.18	3.32	1.18

Manipulation Checks

Perceived Gender Diversity. To confirm that participants perceived the companies as intended, we conducted a repeated measures ANOVA. As predicted, analyses revealed a statistically significant main effect of time, $F(1, 351) = 1812.80, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .84$, such that people perceived the company to be more gender diverse *before* being given on-the-ground diversity information ($M = 5.03, SD = 1.17$) compared to *after* ($M = 1.87, SD = 0.75$). Interestingly, this main effect was qualified by an unexpected (but, in hindsight, very reasonable) statistically significant interaction between time and company sincerity, $F(2, 351) = 8.32, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$, such that, *before* being given on-the-ground diversity information, gender diversity perceptions did not differ by company sincerity ($ps \geq .36$), but *afterward* the Sincere company was perceived as more gender diverse ($M = 2.14, SD = 0.79$) than the No-Information Control company ($M = 1.89, SD = 0.74, p = .02, d = 0.33$), which was, in turn, perceived as more gender diverse than the Insincere company ($M = 1.54, SD = 0.59, p = .001, d = 0.52$). This finding supports the idea that sincerity perceptions are tightly linked with gender diversity perceptions (see Figure 10).

The main effect of gender, $F(1, 351) = 1.24, p = .27, \eta_p^2 = .004$, the gender $\times$ sincerity interaction, $F(2, 351) = 0.17, p = .84, \eta_p^2 = .001$, and the three-way interaction were all not statistically significant, $F(2, 351) = 0.28, p = .75, \eta_p^2 = .002$. However the gender $\times$ time interaction was statistically significant, $F(1, 351) = 9.67, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .03$. Whereas women perceived the companies to be more gender diverse overall ($M = 5.18, SD = 1.17$) than men at Time 1 ($M = 4.86, SD = 1.15, p = .01, d = 0.28$), by Time 2, this gender difference between men ($M = 1.95, SD = 0.76$) and women was smaller and no longer statistically significant ($M = 1.80, SD = 0.74, p = .05, d = 0.20$).

Figure 10*Perceived Gender Diversity*

Sincerity Perceptions. To confirm that participants perceived the sincerity of the companies as intended, we conducted an ANOVA. As predicted, analyses revealed a statistically significant main effect of company sincerity, $F(2, 351) = 175.03, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .50$, such that people perceived the Sincere company to be significantly more sincere ($M = 3.36, SD = 0.98$) than the No-Information Control company ($M = 2.31, SD = 0.81, p < .001, d = 1.18$) and the Insincere company ($M = 1.34, SD = 0.54, p < .001, d = 2.52$). Moreover, people perceived the No-Information Control company to be significantly more sincere than the Insincere company ($p < .001, d = 1.38$). These effect sizes are conventionally considered to be large ($ds > .80$; Cohen, 1988), suggesting that participants indeed noticed the Company Sincerity manipulation and it had a robust impact on their perceptions of the tech company's sincerity. Thus, these results indicate that the company sincerity manipulation was effective (see Figure 11). Neither the main effect of Gender, $F(1, 351) = 3.06, p = .08, \eta_p^2 = .01$, nor the interaction between Company Sincerity and Gender were statistically significant, $F(2, 351) = 1.60, p = .20, \eta_p^2 = .01$.

Figure 11*Sincerity Perceptions*

Multi-categorical Conditional Process Models

To test whether sincerity perceptions mediated the relationships between company sincerity condition and our outcomes of interest, we tested two multi-categorical conditional process models (Hayes, 2018): one for the identity threat outcome and one for the company interest outcome. We examined three contrasts: Contrast 1: No-Information vs. Insincere; Contrast 2: Sincere vs. Insincere; and Contrast 3: No-Information vs. Sincere. These contrasts were coded using the same PROCESS indicator coding system described in Study 1.

Sincerity to Identity Threat Concerns. Setting the Insincere condition as the reference group, we found statistically significant indirect effects of company sincerity (a manipulated variable) on identity threat concerns through sincerity perceptions (a measured variable). As expected, the No-Information Control company ($b = 0.97$, $SE = 0.11$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.76, 1.17]) and Sincere company ($b = 2.02$, $SE = 0.11$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.81, 2.23]) were perceived as more sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity than the Insincere company. Sincerity perceptions negatively predicted identity threat concerns ($b = -0.27$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [-0.43, -0.10]). Consistent with the three previous studies, this effect was moderated by participant gender ($b = -0.26$, $SE = 0.09$, $p = .004$, 95% CI [-0.44, -0.09]). The index of moderated mediation was statistically significant such that the indirect effects were stronger for women than for men (see Table S15, Contrasts 1 and 2). To examine the difference between the No-Information Control company and Sincere company, the No-Information Control was set as the reference group. The indirect effect linking this contrast to identity threat, via sincerity perceptions, was statistically significant ($b = 1.05$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.85, 1.25]). The No-Information Control company was perceived as less sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity than the Sincere company. The index of moderated mediation was statistically

significant such that the indirect effects were stronger for women than for men (see Table S15, Contrast 3; see also Figure 12).

Figure 12

Experiment 4: Perceived sincerity mediates the relationship between manipulated sincerity and identity threat concerns and is moderated by participant gender. Multi-categorical moderated mediation analysis reveals that this relationship is stronger for women than men. Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Sincerity to Company Interest. Setting the Insincere condition as the reference group, we found statistically significant indirect effects of company sincerity (a manipulated variable) on company interest through sincerity perceptions (a measured variable), such that the No-Information Control ($b = 0.98$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.79, 1.18]) and Sincere companies ($b = 2.07$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.87, 2.28]) were perceived as more sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity than the Insincere company.¹³ Sincerity perceptions positively

¹³ Again, this multicategorical conditional process model uses Company Interest (Time 2, post-measurement) as the primary outcome variable. Company Interest (Time 1, pre-measurement) is included as a covariate. As expected, pre-measured Company Interest significantly predicted sincerity perceptions ($b = 0.23$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.31]), such that the more interested in the company people were, the more they expected the company to be sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity. Also as expected, pre-measured Company Interest was a significant predictor of post-measured Company Interest ($b = 0.50$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.42, 0.59]). Again, the more interested in joining the company people were at Time 1, the more interested they tended to be in joining the company at Time 2.

predicted company interest ($b = 0.27$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.11, 0.42]). Consistent with Experiment 3 (but not Experiments 1 and 2), this effect was moderated by participant gender ($b = 0.20$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = .014$, 95% CI [0.04, 0.36]). The index of moderated mediation was statistically significant such that the indirect effects were stronger for women than for men (see Table S16, Contrasts 1 and 2). To examine the difference between the No-Information Control company and Sincere company, the No-Information Control was set as the reference group. The indirect effect linking this contrast to company interest, via sincerity perceptions, was statistically significant ($b = 1.09$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.90, 1.28]). The No-Information Control company was perceived as less sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity than the Sincere company. Again, the index of moderated mediation was statistically significant such that the indirect effect was stronger for women than for men (see Table S16, Contrast 3; see also Figure 13).

Figure 13

Experiment 4: Perceived sincerity mediates the relationship between manipulated sincerity and company interest post-measurements and is moderated by participant gender. Multi-categorical moderated mediation analysis reveals that this relationship is stronger for women than men. Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion

The findings of Experiment 4 replicated the results of the first three experiments and provided evidence for the proposed psychological process model. Across 4 experiments, we found consistent evidence that sincerity construals influence women's identity threat concerns and both women's and men's interest in joining a technology company. In Experiments 1-3, this claim relied solely on statistical mediation analyses linking on-the-ground diversity to identity threat concerns and company interest through sincerity construals. In Experiment 4, we experimentally manipulated company sincerity and again found that, by increasing perceived sincerity, this decreased identity threat among women and increased company interest among men and women (but especially among women). These experimental findings increase confidence in the proposed psychological process model, wherein diversity cues—to the extent that they are construed as sincere (vs. insincere)—can alleviate identity threat and promote interest in joining a company, even in cases where that company lacks on-the-ground diversity. Conversely, this finding also implies that when diversity cues are perceived to be insincere, companies may unintentionally ramp up identity threat concerns and decrease people's interest in joining.

General Discussion

The National Science Foundation has declared that in order to promote the progress of science, we must "...recruit, retain and develop a diverse, high-performing workforce that draws from all segments of society" (National Science Foundation, n.d.). As such, the persistent underrepresentation of women in STEM fields, particularly in technology settings (National Science Board, 2018), is an issue that must be addressed. Although there are a number of reasons

for women's underrepresentation in technology (Cheryan et al., 2017), one important factor is that technology settings are often rife with identity-threatening situational cues. When identity-threatening situational cues are present in technology settings (e.g., numerical underrepresentation; "geeky" office spaces), women are more likely to exhibit psychological concerns about their belonging and value and, in turn, express less interest in entering these contexts (Cheryan et al., 2009; Murphy et al., 2007; Murphy & Taylor, 2012; Steele et al., 2002). Until now, most research examining the threatening impact of situational cues has focused on *authentic cues*, or cues that accurately reflect the setting. Indeed, researchers have found that cues—like high levels of gender diversity in STEM classrooms or workplaces—can reduce women's identity threat concerns (Hall et al., 2018; Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2000; Murphy et al., 2007). The present work complicates this view by demonstrating that situational cues matter because of an active and dynamic process of construal. The social meaning derived from a situational cue matters more than the literal content of the cue itself (e.g., high numeric representation). When a technology company portrays itself as highly gender diverse, women may at first interpret this cue to be authentic (because they have been given little reason to doubt its authenticity) and, as a result, initially anticipate low levels of threat and exhibit a relatively high interest in joining the company. But the cue construal process does not stop there. Previous theory—and no empirical investigation—has posited that stigmatized individuals continually assess their environment on an ongoing basis for the presence of threatening or safety cues (e.g., Murphy & Taylor, 2012; Steele et al., 2002). Upon learning new information about a setting that challenges initial construals, women should update and reconstrue the meaning of situational cues. In the case of conflicting cues (like learning that a technology company depicted as gender diverse exaggerated their gender diversity), women should reconstrue the numeric diversity cue,

changing their perception of it from a sincere signal that the company values gender diversity to an insincere signal. In such a case, the (now) insincere cue should engender identity threat and reduce interest in the company. While neither men nor women are likely to enjoy an insincere company, the identity threat hypothesis is that these sincerity construals would impact *women's* psychological outcomes to a greater extent than men's due to women's historic underrepresentation and gender stereotyping in the (tech) domain.

Across four experiments, we investigated this iterative construal process by examining how a *counterfeit diversity* company (a company that initially presents an inauthentic, exaggerated image of gender diversity in their recruitment ads) was construed relative to a company that authentically portrayed a high degree of gender diversity (*authentic diversity*; Experiments 1, 2, and 3), a company that authentically portrayed a low degree of gender diversity (*authentic non-diversity*; Experiments 2 and 3), and a company that acknowledged a lack of diversity in the present, but aspired to greater diversity in the future (*aspirational diversity*; Experiment 3). We found that compared to authentic diversity, women and men evaluated the counterfeit diversity company to be less sincerely interested in creating and fostering a gender diverse workplace. Women and men evaluated the authentic non-diversity company to be similarly insincere. The aspirational diversity company bridged some (but not all) of this perceived sincerity gap—perhaps illustrating that words (without action) are insufficient.

Consistent with our construal theory, we repeatedly found that sincerity construals mediated the relationship between on-the-ground diversity and identity threat concerns for women. To the extent that women perceived the company to be sincerely interested in fostering gender diversity, women anticipated fewer identity threat concerns there. Believing that a company sincerely cares about gender diversity leads women to anticipate feeling welcomed,

respected, and valued there. By contrast, harboring skepticism about how much a company cares about gender diversity leads women to anticipate a greater degree of gender stereotyping, disrespect, and marginalization—even when the literal content of the cue is one traditionally considered “identity-safe” (e.g., a high degree of advertised gender diversity).

Consistent with identity threat theory (Steele et al., 2002), we did not find the same pattern for men, who, on average, anticipated low levels of identity threat, regardless of on-the-ground diversity. This makes intuitive sense. Women (relative to men) are numerically underrepresented in technology and computing fields (Corbett & Hill, 2015; National Science Board, 2016, 2018), so when a technology company is described as gender non-diverse—more specifically as lacking *female* representation—it makes sense that women, but not men, would be concerned about their group’s standing in the company and anticipate negative treatment there. Notably, we found no evidence that men anticipated increased identity threat at tech companies where men and women were equally represented. That is, women *and* men anticipated low levels of identity threat at tech companies that were authentically gender diverse.

Sincerity construals also mediated the relationship between on-the-ground diversity and interest in joining the company. To the extent that people perceived the company to be sincerely interested in fostering gender diversity, both women *and* men reported greater interest in the company. However, unlike the link between sincerity and psychological threat—which were consistently greater for women (vs. men) across studies—Experiments 1 and 2 found that gender did not moderate the positive effect of sincerity perceptions on *company interest*. In these studies, perceived sincerity was a similarly important predictor of men’s and women’s interest in the company. In Experiments 3 and 4, however, gender *did* moderate this relationship. Again, the relationship between sincerity and company interest was positive and significant for both men

and women, but in these latter two studies this relationship was significantly stronger for women than men. A conservative interpretation would be that, across all studies, we found that sincerity construals lead to increased company interest for men and women, but, in some cases, this relationship may be stronger for women.

The first three experiments provided evidence that diversity cues influence women's experiences of identity threat and women's and men's company interest via their sincerity construals. However, because all outcome variables (sincerity construals, threat, and interest) were measured at the same time, these relationships were only suggestive. To more rigorously test our proposed causal process, Study 4 experimentally manipulated company sincerity. When sincerity was directly manipulated, we again found that companies described (and construed) as more sincere engendered less identity threat among women and were more attractive to both men and women. Taken together, these findings support the theoretical claim that situational cues engender identity threat and affect interest via an iterative construal process, wherein people update their beliefs about the sincerity of an organization, based on the information available, and will reconstrue the meaning of situational cues as identity safe or threatening.

Theoretical Contributions

As we noted above, a number of scholars have recommended that organizations portray a diverse image in order to attract members of underrepresented groups, with the implication being that portraying an exaggerated level of diversity will, on balance, be perceived positively. The present research challenges this dominant theoretical perspective on the social cognitive effects and mechanisms of counterfeit diversity. We show that the functionality of a diversity cue depends on whether or not it is construed as a sincere signal that the organization values diversity. When a technology company portrays itself as highly gender diverse, women at first

interpret this cue to be authentic and, as a result, they initially anticipate low levels of threat and show relatively high interest in joining the company. Upon learning new information about the setting that challenges their initial construals, women update and reconstrue the meaning of the diversity cue, changing their perception of it from a sincere signal that the company genuinely values gender diversity to an insincere signal. This reconstrual increases anticipated threat (for women) and reduces interest in joining the organization (for women and men). In fact, it was only when the sincerity of a counterfeit diversity company was made explicit (in Study 4), that counterfeit diversity did not engender threat and disinterest.

To summarize then, the major theoretical contributions of this research are that we (a) we depart from the more traditional approach of studying *authentic* diversity cues and broaden research on identity threatening cues into domains where diversity cues can be construed as *inauthentic*; (b) we posit and examine a novel upstream psychological mechanism of traditionally-studied processes in the cues literature, namely, *perceived sincerity*—a mechanism that it is only possible to study in contexts where sincerity could plausibly be doubted, as in counterfeit contexts; and finally, (c) we show—across many studies—how this novel theoretical mechanism of perceived sincerity matters. Put simply, diversity cues that are deemed to be insincere do not have the same power to alleviate threat and preserve interest that sincere diversity cues have.

Practical Recommendations: Vetting Counterfeit Diversity Alternatives

Counterfeiting diversity is attractive as a recruitment strategy for non-diverse companies, in part, because it is easy to implement. Simply collect photographs of female employees or, easier still, stock photos from an online repository and then prominently display them on the company website. Despite this ease of implementation, our research shows that counterfeiting

diversity is often ineffective, because as soon as people learn it is counterfeit, this signals that the company is insincerely interested in gender diversity, thereby engendering identity threat and decreasing interest in the company.

These findings have important practical implications for the many organizations currently grappling with how to communicate their diversity values. The present work suggests that organizations cannot reasonably expect that prospective employees (and possibly consumers) will be satisfied with empty diversity gestures, like counterfeit diversity. Instead, their efforts must be perceived as *sincere*. Whereas diversity cues that are perceived as sincerely communicating companies' values and commitment to diversity alleviate identity threat and promote interest in organizations, diversity cues that are perceived as insincere may ramp up identity threat concerns and reduce people's interest in joining. Does this mean that counterfeiting diversity will *always* signal an insincere commitment to diversity? No, not necessarily. As we outlined in the introduction, before conducting these studies, it seemed quite plausible to us that Counterfeit Diversity companies—though not actually gender diverse—could still be viewed as sincerely interested in increasing gender diversity. The mere fact that a Counterfeit Diversity company takes the initiative to present a gender diverse image of itself (even if exaggerated) might reasonably be interpreted as evidence that the company is at least *trying* to become more gender diverse. We repeatedly found, however, that this was often *not* the case. The sincerity of Counterfeit Diversity companies—when their diversity motives were left ambiguous—was widely viewed with skepticism. We found, however, that this skepticism could be attenuated (or *exacerbated*) when their underlying diversity motives were made explicit. When people were explicitly told that a Counterfeit Diversity company was *sincerely* interested in promoting and maintaining gender diversity, men and women maintained their interest in the

company and women expected to experience (relatively) less threat there. Conversely, when people were explicitly told that a Counterfeit Diversity company was *insincerely* interested in diversity, the negative effects on threat and interest were amplified. Together, these findings suggest that counterfeiting diversity, in and of itself, does not invariably lead to threat and disinterest. Rather, the *perceived sincerity* of the company's intent to increase and support diversity is the key mechanism. Practically speaking, sincere companies engaging in counterfeit diversity practices would be wise to disambiguate their motives for taking such an approach, finding ways to emphasize their sincerity (e.g., providing examples of diversity initiatives, including employee testimonials).

As an alternative to counterfeiting diversity, the present work suggests that emphasizing aspirational diversity may be one promising recruitment tactic for non-diverse companies. To our knowledge, ours is the first study to examine the efficacy of an aspirational diversity approach in recruitment. We find that companies are construed as more sincerely interested in promoting gender diversity when they explicitly acknowledge a lack of diversity in the present but express an aspiration to increase diversity going forward. It must be noted, however, that expressing aspirational diversity did not completely bridge the sincerity gap between counterfeit diversity and authentic diversity. This may mean that words (in the absence of action) are perceived with some degree of skepticism. For this reason, non-diverse technology companies might consider adopting an aspirational diversity approach, in combination with other actions, as they attempt to recruit more women (Ashcraft et al., 2016).

There is no easy fix for non-diversity. Across all studies, the authentically diverse company was always perceived to be the most sincerely dedicated to gender diversity, the least identity threatening, and the most attractive. Increasing an organization's diversity may be

challenging, but it is possible. Companies can increase their gender diversity by deploying better candidate sourcing methods (e.g., seeking candidates who belong to diverse professional groups; Cabrera, 2009; Johnson et al., 2016; Kazim, 2018), constructing inclusive job postings (e.g., avoiding highly masculine wording; Gaucher et al., 2011), and imposing identity-blind review of job applications (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Moss-Racusin et al., 2012; but see also Thomas, 2019). Importantly, organizations must transparently track and evaluate their recruitment trends over time, and not take for granted that the above-mentioned diversity recruitment strategies are working. The mere presence of diversity structures (e.g., identity-blind review, inclusive recruitment ads) may make organizations *seem* fair (Brady et al., 2015; Kaiser et al., 2013), but they do not guarantee actual fairness.

Limitations & Future Directions

By using vignette-based stimuli, we were able to highlight the important diversity-related features of companies while holding other incidental features constant. This approach offers a great deal of experimental control, but potentially less external validity (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). For example, it may be that gender diversity was more salient to our participants than it would be in more naturalistic contexts, where there are more cues competing for people's attention. It is possible then that the large effects found in this report may be smaller in real world contexts where diversity cues may be less salient or are competing with other cues in the context. On the other hand, some real-world examples of counterfeit diversity are much more egregious than our manipulation (e.g., photoshopping women into a photo of all-male tech executives; Mac, 2019)—it is possible that these examples are quite salient and might even produce larger effects than those found in our report. To address the limitations of the vignette approach, additional research is needed to investigate the iterative cue construal process in

applied settings. Do men and women readily identify counterfeit diversity in the real-world? How distinguishable is it from authentic diversity? We might expect that the rates of counterfeit diversity detection would be higher for women than for men, because women (who are underrepresented and negatively stereotyped in STEM settings) are more vigilant and practiced in construing cues that could signal their group's value than are men in the same settings (Major & O'Brien, 2005; Murphy et al., 2007; Steele et al., 2002). However, many individual difference variables might moderate this effect too. For example, research suggests that women who are higher in gender identity centrality (Settles, 2004), stigma consciousness (Brown & Pinel, 2003), or gender rejection sensitivity (Ahlqvist et al., 2013) might be more vigilant to counterfeit diversity than women who are lower on these dimensions. These predictions are ripe for future investigation.

The present work also raises interesting questions about potential asymmetries between employers' and employees' construals of organizational diversity cues. Although our research shows that prospective employees often perceive counterfeit diversity to be insincere, off-putting, and (for women) identity threatening, organizations continue to engage in this practice (Conklin, 2001; Mac, 2019; Molla, 2019; Pippert et al., 2013; Wagner & Molla, 2018). What accounts for this discrepancy? Perhaps *employers* do not perceive counterfeit diversity as insincere. It is possible that employers believe that any effort that signals their commitment to diversity is equally valuable, whereas employees may be more likely to value concrete, behavioral efforts. These are important questions for future research. Understanding how employers' construals of counterfeit diversity are similar to and different from employees' construals will help inform organizational interventions aimed at recruiting and retaining a more diverse workforce.

In our work, we examined the effects of *gender-related* diversity cues in *technology settings*, however, these results may apply to other groups and other contexts. For example, counterfeiting racial diversity is notoriously prevalent in college settings (Conklin, 2001; Pippert et al., 2013), with college admissions booklets inflating the photographic (vs. actual) representation of Black students. Our findings suggest this practice might negatively affect racially and ethnically minoritized students at these colleges. To the extent that they view it as insincere, this common practice may trigger identity threat concerns and disengagement from the institution. Although we expect other underrepresented groups (e.g., people of color, individuals living with disabilities) to construe counterfeit diversity as an insincere cue, we are also wary of generalizing our findings prematurely beyond gender and STEM contexts. More empirical testing, with other groups and contexts, is necessary.

This research also focused exclusively on diversity *recruitment*. However, companies must also consider *retention* as a diversity and inclusion metric. Women leave tech industry jobs at twice the rate of men (Ashcraft et al., 2016), often citing the workplace environment as the primary reason for leaving (e.g., feeling professionally stalled, lacking access to creative roles and leadership roles; Ashcraft et al., 2016; Wynn & Correll, 2018). Thus, even if organizations use empirically informed diversity recruitment strategies, women's retention may be short-lived if the company culture contains insincere practices. To alleviate threat and maintain interest, organizations should sincerely value diversity at all stages—in recruitment and in day-to-day operations.

Conclusion

Women remain underrepresented in technology and computing fields (Corbett & Hill, 2015; National Science Board, 2016, 2018). Aware of this problem, many tech organizations

seek diversification strategies (Meyer, 2018; Microsoft, 2018; Williams, 2018). Although a number of academic experts recommend including gender diverse images in recruitment materials as a low-cost way to attract female workers, for gender non-diverse organizations, this strategy means misrepresenting the current on-the-ground diversity of their organization. The present research empirically vetted this *counterfeit diversity* recruitment strategy against several other strategies: *authentic diversity*, *authentic non-diversity*, and *aspirational diversity*.

Consistent with an active, dynamic construal process of situational cues, we found that authentically diverse companies were perceived to be the most sincerely interested in gender diversity, followed by aspirational diversity companies, and then followed by counterfeit diversity and authentic non-diversity companies—which usually did not differ from each other in engendering threat and lowering interest. Taken together, the present research demonstrates both a novel, dynamic construal process of situational cues that extends the identity threat literature and shows how well-intentioned, seemingly innocuous diversity cues—when construed as insincere—can backfire, engendering identity threat and depressing interest. Our sincere hope is that this research will be considered by companies as they seek to increase gender diversity.

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Appendix

The study materials used to manipulate advertised diversity are printed below. High quality, full color images can be found by visiting our project page on OSF (<https://osf.io/yzvmp/>).

Gender Diverse Website	Gender Non-Diverse Website