



Published in final edited form as:

Work Occup. 2014 November ; 41(4): 440–476. doi:10.1177/0730888414539172.

Corporate Diversity Programs and Gender Inequality in the Oil and Gas Industry

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Abstract

Since the 1980s, major U.S. corporations have embraced *diversity* as a management strategy to increase the number of women in top jobs. Diversity management programs include targeted recruitment, hiring, and promotions policies; mentoring programs; affinity groups; and diversity training. Few of these programs have proven effective in achieving gender diversity in the corporate world, despite their widespread popularity. To explore the reasons for this, the authors investigate the experiences of women scientists in the oil and gas industry who are targeted by these programs. In-depth interviews reveal possible reasons why these programs fail to achieve their intended goals. The authors find that these programs can paradoxically reinforce gender inequality and male dominance in the industry. The authors discuss alternative approaches for addressing gender inequality in work organizations and conclude with implications of their findings for corporate approaches to promoting diversity and for future research.

Keywords

gender inequality in the workplace; diversity; women scientists; oil and gas industry

Since the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, support for the employment rights of women has waxed and waned in the federal government (Dobbin, 2009; Harper & Reskin, 2005; Stainback & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012). Not so in the corporate world. Although many companies initially resisted gender equality, today virtually every major corporation claims to be deeply committed to fostering a diverse workforce. In fact, even companies that have few women in leadership positions proudly proclaim their commitment to diversity. Companies tout this commitment to diversity through their mission statements, job advertisements, recruiting literature, public relations, and personnel policies (Embrick, 2011).

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the 2013 meeting of the American Sociological Association and at the University of Southern California.

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In this article, we investigate how women scientists employed in the oil and gas industry experience diversity discourse and policies. Over the past decade, major oil and gas companies have instituted affinity groups, diversity training, and other popular diversity programs to increase and retain the number of women in top jobs. Drawing on in-depth interviews, we explore how women scientists employed by the industry experience these programs, and how, from their perspectives, a corporate investment in what is largely referred to as *diversity management* impacts their careers in the oil and gas industry.

The Rise of Corporate Diversity Programs

Since the implementation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the United States has prohibited employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, and religion. Subsequent legal protections have been implemented for workers who suffer discrimination on the basis of age, veteran status, pregnancy, family status, disability, genetic information, and, in a few jurisdictions, sexual orientation (Edelman, Fuller, & Mara-Drita, 2001; www.eeoc.gov). Companies today demonstrate their compliance with these laws and protect themselves from litigation by embracing diversity discourse and implementing diversity programs.

The term *diversity* has been in popular usage since the 1990s, replacing earlier frameworks of *civil rights* and *equal opportunity* (Edelman et al., 2001; Sinclair, 2000). In general, diversity “refers to policies and practices that seek to include people who are considered to be, in some way, different from the traditional member” of an organization (Herring & Henderson, 2011, p. 630). The concept of diversity envelops gender, race/ethnicity, and cultural differences, as well as a wide range of individual personality differences that might characterize a potential workforce. Companies “value diversity” by expressing recognition and appreciation for these differences, and they “manage diversity” by instituting programs to attract and retain workers from different backgrounds (Sinclair, 2000, p. 239).

A range of corporate programs fall under the rubric of diversity management. These include targeted recruitment, mentoring programs, affinity groups, and diversity training programs; implementation of formal evaluation systems to reduce bias in performance reviews; dedication of a special office or committee to identify and remove barriers to diversity; and the setting of numerical goals for increasing the number of underrepresented groups (Bielby, Krysan, & Herring, 2013). Companies that endorse diversity typically implement some or all of these programs.

Human relations (HR) professionals are credited for the rise of diversity programs and discourse (Dobbin, 2009). In the face of declining popular support for federal equality programs such as Affirmative Action, HR professionals developed the so-called business case for diversity. They argued that employing people from diverse backgrounds (and managing their “differences”) could increase profits by expanding market share; reducing turnover; “increas[ing] employee productivity, profitability, creativity, innovation, and problem-solving abilities”; and lowering legal costs (Hemphill & Haines, 1997, p. 93). In making this case, HR professionals not only saved their jobs but also effectively tied

diversity management programs to the company's bottom line (Dobbin, 2009; Hebson & Cox, 2011).

Criticisms of Corporate Diversity Programs

In contrast to HR directors in the corporate world, many scholars in academia have been critical of diversity programs. In a study that followed 700 private firms over time, Kalev, Kelly, and Dobbin (2006) questioned the effectiveness of different types of diversity policies for increasing women and minority men's representation in management. They considered several types of programs that vary in purpose and in the location of responsibility and accountability for achieving diversity goals. The first type, programs that assign responsibility for achieving diversity goals to an individual or committee, is the most effective at increasing managerial diversity, especially when the individual or committee is held accountable for outcomes by their supervisor. In contrast, two other typical company programs are mentoring programs and affinity groups, which are designed to redress the social isolation of underrepresented groups. These approaches, they found, are only modestly successful at increasing managerial diversity. The final type of program, diversity training and evaluations, is an attempt to eliminate personal bias against women and minority men. This approach had virtually no impact on diversifying management in the companies they studied. Our analysis builds on this typology.

It makes intuitive sense that the first type of policies, which hold units responsible for achieving workforce diversity, would produce better outcomes. This approach to diversity comes closest to Affirmative Action, a program shown to have positive impact on women's career opportunities in certain industries (Harper & Reskin, 2005). However, unlike Affirmative Action, which requires companies that receive federal contracts to have a plan to remedy the underrepresentation of protected groups, diversity programs are voluntary. As a consequence, diversity programs are more easily subverted than Affirmative Action programs. As Byron (2010) argues, managers routinely "ignore, sabotage, or differentially enforce formal policies, usually to the detriment of women and Blacks. This ubiquitous practice ... allows managers to discriminate while maintaining an anti-discriminatory façade" (p. 462; see also Light, Roscigno, & Kalev, 2011; Roscigno, Williams, & Byron, 2012).

Affirmative Action programs continue to exist, but their administration is increasingly moving out of personnel departments and into legal departments. Research by Vican (2013) shows that, in many cases, diversity managers intentionally shed administration of their companies' Affirmative Action programs. They do so to minimize backlash and gain support for diversity programs in their companies. Vican argues that separating diversity programs from Affirmative Action has the unintended consequence of delegitimizing and undermining the work of diversity managers because they lose the legal mandate for their programs.

Some critics argue that diversity programs are best understood as public relations efforts to promote a positive image of corporations. Experimental studies have shown that the mere existence of diversity programs in a company can create an "illusion of fairness" among

elite groups, despite strong evidence of discrimination (Kaiser et al., 2013, p. 504; see also Castilla & Bernard, 2010). Kalev et al. (2006) suggest that diversity policies are mostly ineffective because they are adopted by employers “as window dressing, to inoculate themselves against liability, or to improve morale rather than to increase managerial diversity” (p. 610). Similarly, writing about diversity policies in a university setting, Ahmed explains,

The appeal of diversity is about looking and feeling good, as an orientation that obscures inequalities, like the obscuring of a rotten core behind a shiny surface. As such, diversity as a term has a marketing appeal; it allows the university to sell itself by presenting itself as a happy place, a place where differences are celebrated, welcomed, and enjoyed. Diversity becomes a brand, and a form of organizational pride. (2007, p. 606)

As a statement of values, diversity can be embraced by companies with virtually no women in upper management.

Some critics also argue that diversity discourse and programs fail to increase the representation of women in top jobs because the definition of diversity has become diluted. Under the diversity rubric, gender along with race are simply two of many kinds of differences, all of which are to be celebrated and managed to maximize corporate profits (Kirton & Greene, 2010). As Edelman et al. (2001) write, “Diversity rhetoric ... tends to equate differences based on geography or taste in sports or dress style with differences based on race or sex” (p. 1626). Diversity discourse promotes the view that “all people are different” (Sinclair, 2000, p. 240), rendering the major inequalities in society equivalent to the idiosyncrasies of personal background and taste.

This equality of differences is evident in the policies themselves, which are written so that they apply to everyone regardless of group affiliation. For example, family policies typically use gender-neutral terms emphasizing individual choice, flexibility, and work–life balance (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005). Collins (2011) argues that diversity is increasingly *color-blind*, as the definition of what constitutes diversity has expanded considerably. She argues that virtually anyone from a “different background” can be drawn on in promoting organizational diversity; “differences in sexual orientation, religious beliefs, occupations, and white men” all count toward a diverse workforce (Collins, 2011, p. 519; Moore & Bell, 2011). Policies targeting gender and racial exclusion have dubious status in diversity discourse because they violate this principle of the equality of differences. Under the diversity rubric in organizations, all differences are created equal, and added together, these differences make up an ideal workplace (evoking the image of Disney’s “It’s a small world after all”). These differences are not conceptualized as the result of power and inequality; they are natural variations, akin to biodiversity in the environment.

These scholarly criticisms of diversity are based mainly on analyses of organizational policies (Kalev et al., 2006), interviews with diversity managers (Ahmed, 2007; Kirton & Greene, 2010; Vican, 2013), experimental research (Kaiser et al., 2013), and analysis of management publications (Edelman et al., 2001). In this article, we add the voices of women professionals to the assessment of diversity management programs. Because diversity

programs rely entirely on employees to make complaints—either internally to HR or externally to the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission—the perspectives of women employees are crucial to understanding the persistence of gender discrimination. (Affirmative Action programs, in contrast, require review by the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs.) Using a case study of women geoscientists in the oil and gas industry, we investigate their experiences with preferential hiring and promotions practices, mentoring programs, affinity groups, and diversity training. We argue that women’s on-the-ground experiences can provide clues to explain the limited and, in some cases, negative impact of diversity programs on women’s representation in management.

Until now, few studies have examined diversity programs from the perspective of women employees. One exception is the work of Sharp, Franzway, Mills, and Gill (2012), who interviewed managers and engineers (several of whom were women) in their study of diversity initiatives in three Australian engineering firms. The women engineers they interviewed were wary of diversity management projects because they feared increased marginalization; indeed, those who advocated for diversity experienced stigma and backlash from the male-dominated management at their organizations. Sharp et al. conclude that diversity policy “fails to transform gender inequality because it does not address the male dominance of sexual politics in engineering organizations” (p. 557).

Our study extends this research by examining how diversity programs are experienced and understood by women scientists in the oil and gas industry, one of the largest and most powerful industries in the global economy. Although much literature has focused on women workers’ reactions to male-dominated work environments (e.g., Kanter, 1977; Miller, 2004; Podmore & Spencer, 1982), and their experiences with Affirmative Action programs (e.g., Pierce, 2012), we examine women’s experiences with diversity programs. Their experiences, we argue, can highlight the limitations of diversity programs for remedying gender discrimination in the workplace.

Women Geoscientists in the Oil and Gas Industry

To investigate corporate diversity policies, we draw on our research on women geoscientists (geologists and geophysicists) in the oil and gas industry. Oil and gas companies employ geoscientists to identify potential hydrocarbon deposits by analyzing geological formations and core samples taken from prospective well sites. Women geoscientists currently comprise about 40% of graduates with master’s degrees in geology, the entry-level credential in the field (Keane & Wilson, 2013). This percentage is up from 25 in 1985 but down from a peak of 47 in 2006. A recent report indicates that nearly 40% of all new hires in the oil and gas industry are women (Dupre, 2013); additional evidence from our interviews suggests that this is also true of women geoscientists in the larger firms. Despite these encouraging advances, there is a strong perception that women stall out in midcareer and eventually leave their jobs at the major companies (American Association of Petroleum Geologists [AAPG], 2009). The glass ceiling is firmly in place in the oil and gas industry, with very few women represented at the executive levels and on boards of directors (Catalyst, 2012)—a pattern not uncommon among women scientists in general (Preston, 2004).

The oil and gas industry is an ideal setting to study diversity programs. First, as we mentioned, it is arguably the most powerful, global, essential, and lucrative industry in the world—and yet it largely excludes women. Oil and gas industry giants occupy three of the top four positions in the 2012 Fortune 500 list. In 2011, the five largest oil and gas companies made roughly 1.8 trillion U.S. dollars in total revenue and 133 billion U.S. dollars in net income (Pirog, 2012). Despite its critical importance, few sociologists have examined the gender dynamics in this industry (for exceptions, see Miller, 2004; Williams, Muller, & Kilanski, 2012). Second, the industry has a high demand for so-called knowledge workers (scientists and engineers)—a defining feature of the new economy (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). As a large and powerful employer, workplace innovations in this industry can have wide-ranging impacts throughout the economy. Third, and most importantly for our analysis, the industry has only recently joined the diversity bandwagon. Given historical trends in layoffs and hiring (huge layoffs in the 1980s during the oil bust, followed by years of depressed hiring), the oil and gas industry stands to lose a majority of its current geoscience workforce to retirement within the next 15 years (Gonzales & Keane, 2011), what industry insiders refer to as the *Great Crew Change*. Thus, it is likely not a coincidence that the major oil and gas companies are struggling against the industry's long-standing reputation as an *old White boys club* (Kilanski, 2011) by implementing new diversity management strategies at this particular time. With the current oil boom, the demographic changes faced by the industry, and a relatively large share of degrees in geology earned by women, this is a period when we would expect to observe advances for women.

All of the major oil and gas companies proclaim a commitment to diversity in their official corporate documents. In Table 1, we provide links to corporate Web pages representing diversity in ways typical of the industry.

Companies' commitment to diversity is typically stated in their core values that are highlighted on the front page of their Web sites. For example, Shell proclaims: "Working to promote inclusion is not merely a human resources initiative. It is at the very core of how we do business." Similar sentiments are repeated by all the other majors and many smaller companies as well. For instance, Marathon Oil tells its stake-holders that rather than being a side goal, "diversity and inclusion is a vital part of our business strategy" (www.marathonoil.com). Unlike corporations that feature women in supportive positions only, or not at all, in corporate documents (Mills, 2005), oil and gas companies are highly attuned to their public representation. For example, ExxonMobil's Web site features a video of men and women working in equivalent positions. ConocoPhillips's Web site features video profiles of two employees—one White woman and one racial/ethnic minority woman. The recruitment sections of oil and gas companies' Web sites highlight corporate-driven efforts to recruit and retain women and racial/ethnic minority men, their commitment to equal opportunity laws, the establishment of corporate-initiated affinity groups, and other diversity-related activities and programs.

However, despite this stated commitment to diversity, the oil and gas industry is dominated by White men. As Table 1 indicates, all five *majors* were headed by White men in 2013. (The majors are the handful of large global corporations—BP, Chevron, ConocoPhillips, ExxonMobil, and Shell—that integrate both upstream and downstream functions, including

exploration, development, refining, and distribution.) In these companies, women comprised 14% of the members of the board of directors and 13% of the total number of corporate officers—although three of the five companies had no women corporate officers at all and no company had a majority of women. For the most part, the men and women who were in these positions are White. Thus, the images of diversity in corporate advertisements are not matched by the representation of women in top management.

These features of the oil and gas industry—its size and global importance, its reliance on a science and engineering workforce, its public commitment to diversity, and its domination by White men—make it a paradigmatic case for investigating how women professionals perceive and experience diversity programs.

Methods

This article is based on in-depth interviews with 30 experienced women geoscientists, supplemented by observations at three professional meetings, an informal focus group with high-level executives, and interviews with three male supervisors. The method of in-depth interviewing was chosen to illuminate how women understand the challenges of working in a male-dominated industry, and how they experience and interpret industry practices that are designed to make the industry more inclusive. Although 30 women cannot speak for an entire industry, their perspectives can reveal the disjuncture between diversity discourse and policies on the one hand and on-the-ground practices on the other. While surveys may be able to tell us something about the prevalence of their views and experiences, in-depth interviews can reveal the often paradoxical meanings of diversity culture in the lives of the women who are targeted by them (Pugh, 2013). Their experiences provide clues about why many diversity programs are ineffective at increasing the representation of women in management.

We located respondents with the assistance of the AAPG. This 31,000-member professional association includes a standing committee dedicated to the advancement of women geoscientists, called Professional Women in Earth Sciences (PROWESS). We attended panels organized by PROWESS at two national AAPG meetings, where we were given the opportunity to recruit respondents for our study. Additional interviews with senior women geoscientists were arranged by an executive at a major company. We obtained other respondents by snowballing out from these initial contacts. In this way, we were able to include three women who had left the industry in the study. Because this study was designed in part to understand the reasons for women's attrition from the industry, it was important for us to hear from those who had decided to leave. The snowball sample selection method is useful for gaining access to small and hard-to-identify populations (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006).

Our respondents were employed at least 5 years in the oil and gas industry. The 30 women had combined work experience at 14 companies. Several had worked at more than one company, including a few at more than one major. Some women interviewed had experience working in midsize and service companies, including Marathon, Schlumberger, and JW Operating, for smaller independent producers, or as consultants.

The women we interviewed were between the ages of 30 and 52 (median age of 38). Three of our respondents were Latina or Asian American; the rest were White. All but four respondents were married—the majority to other geoscientists or petroleum engineers—and most had children. Twenty of the women in our sample lived in Houston; others were located in California, Colorado, Florida, Louisiana, and Oklahoma. All respondents had a master's degree; eight had obtained a PhD. All of those currently employed in the industry earned incomes more than \$90,000 per year; eight earned more than \$150,000 per year. Some received bonuses in addition to their salaries.

Interviews lasted at least 1 hour, some as long as 2 hours, and were conducted either in person or over the phone. The in-person interviews took place in Houston, Texas, in offices, coffee shops, or restaurants. Interviews covered the following topics: background questions (early influences), graduate school experiences, employment history, mentoring, current job responsibilities, informal socializing at work, future goals, and general views about women's retention in the industry. Respondents were specifically asked about their experiences with diversity programs at their companies. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and then analyzed following the inductive coding techniques described by Charmaz (2006). In our report of our findings, we have changed some minor details about our respondents to obscure their identities and maintain confidentiality.

Findings

We begin our discussion of how our sample of women geoscientists experience diversity programs in the oil and gas industry by reviewing the meaning of diversity from their perspectives. Next we examine their views on four of the diversity management programs analyzed by Kalev et al. (2006): (a) programs that set goals for the hiring and promotion of women, (b) mentoring programs, (c) affinity groups, and (d) diversity training. Each of these popular diversity strategies addresses a distinct mechanism believed to reproduce gender inequality. We discuss women geoscientists' experiences with these strategies and the possible impact of these strategies on women's careers in the oil and gas industry.

The Meaning of Diversity

The women we interviewed embraced the concept of diversity, associating the term with positive and progressive feelings (see also Bell & Hartmann, 2007). Although corporate diversity discourse typically references a wide variety of demographic and personality differences, for the women we interviewed, diversity mainly concerns gender, and, to a lesser extent, age. Because this study was designed to examine women's attrition from the oil and gas industry, their focus on gender is not surprising. However, their emphasis on age diversity was unanticipated. Our respondents expressed the strong and consistent impression that there are very few geoscientists in the 35 to 45 age range, with women especially rare in that age-group.

On the other hand, concern about racial diversity was notably absent in our interviews. Our White respondents in particular perceived that their companies had already achieved racial/ethnic diversity owing to the global nature of the industry. For example, one White woman geoscientist described her group as “pretty ethnically diverse—we had a lot of

Chinese people, we had a guy from Greece, a guy from Pakistan.” For this woman, geographic and cultural differences represent diversity in her workplace—a perception that reflects diversity discourse itself, which defines diversity as any sort of *difference* rather than inequalities stemming from systematic discrimination (Edelman et al., 2001).

Despite their impression, however, racial/ethnic groups that are subjected to systematic discrimination in the United States, including African Americans, Latina/s, and Asian Americans, are underrepresented throughout the industry. Fewer than 5% of geoscientists are African American or Latina/o (Gonzales & Keane, 2011). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012) reports that Whites make up 85% of the oil and gas extraction industry. Furthermore, while the industry does employ a global workforce, some international workers we interviewed described difficulties in obtaining permanent corporate placements in the United States. We were told that a PhD was necessary for foreign nationals (in contrast to the typical requirement of the master’s degree for American workers), and that companies were sometimes reluctant to sponsor their work visas. They perceived that foreign nationals are recruited only if their home countries are major producers of oil and gas (e.g., Russia, Norway, Nigeria), and they may face pressure to be stationed in these corporate outposts.

Thus, while the oil and gas industry may seem inclusive of racial/ethnic minorities to our mostly White women respondents, we are skeptical about this characterization. But it is understandable why, from their point of view, the targets of diversity programs in their industry are not minority men, but rather women in a male-dominated industry.

We now turn to a discussion of four popular diversity management programs. We explore women’s perspectives and experiences with (a) programs that set goals for the hiring and promotion of women, (b) mentoring programs, (c) affinity groups, and (d) diversity training. Each of these programs is designed to remedy a specific cause of inequality—organizational inertia, social isolation, inadequate social support, or unconscious sexist bias. We describe the intended purpose of each program and then explore how women geoscientists perceive and respond to each one. Our analysis of the in-depth interviews provides insights into the effectiveness of these programs for increasing diversity.

Programs that set goals for the hiring and promotion of women—Some companies set specific goals for hiring and promoting women and minority men, and they appoint an individual or a committee to monitor the achievement of these goals. By holding an entity accountable for the achievement of diversity goals on-the-ground, this policy aims to subvert both organizational inertia and willful resistance from frontline supervisors, which are considered major barriers to diversity. According to Kalev et al. (2006), this particular diversity strategy is the most effective at increasing the representation of women in management. However, research suggests that this is also the least popular diversity program (Bielby et al., 2013).

Several women in our study raised concerns about these programs. Although they wanted more women in their industry, they did not endorse policies that set specific goals or timetables for hiring or promoting women. For instance, we talked to one woman supervisor

who told us that she does not consider gender when making team assignments; all that matters in her decision making is who is the most “technically competent” for a position. She said, “I would hate that people are placed in a position just because they are female As a female looking at that, I’m always, ugh, I hope it’s not that.” Nevertheless, she claimed, “I would love to see more women in management roles. But not because they’re females.” She recognized that other companies, in contrast to her own, are “really about putting females on the management ladder.” She added, “I hope that is going to change, but it’s not something we have to do, either.”

Her apparent ambivalence about policies that target women for hiring and promotions highlights a paradox in diversity discourse: Although she clearly wants greater representation of women throughout the industry, she would resist any policy that requires her to consider anything other than professional competence in making her personnel decisions. The definition of technical merit is not problematized in her account. In keeping with a scientific worldview, she understands the evaluation of competence as objectively determined (cf., Moore, 2008). Her comments construct a binary between technical decisions based on merit (deemed gender neutral) and any policy mandating the hiring and promotion of women (deemed gender biased).

The consequence of this binary is that the only way to prove one is neutral and objective is to hire a White man for a position. One woman supervisor told us that she recently hired a woman on her team, a decision that aroused suspicions of gender bias. Luckily, she told us, she had previously offered the job to a man who turned down the assignment, proving to others that technical competence, and not gender, was the basis of her decision.

One geoscientist we interviewed spoke directly about this paradox. A PhD in geophysics, she expressed frustration that diversity discourse was not accompanied by effective policies for increasing women’s representation in leadership positions. She said, “It is very frustrating to hear the diversity speak and not see any action. A lot of time they do not see the lack of diversity.” She gave the following example:

Every time they make a new committee, they’re only men. And I remember saying at one point, at this big group-wide meeting, they’re talking about, “We’ve made this new committee to reevaluate blah, blah, blah, and it will be company-wide for exploration.” And the list of people on it was like 20 men. And I said, “There is not a single woman on that committee.” It was like I said, “There is not a frog on that committee!” They didn’t understand what I meant So the corporation may say that they care about diversity, but when it comes down to the managers, I think they just plain don’t see it. They don’t see us.

In her company, diversity is a virtuous ideal; it is not a practice that mandates the increased representation of women. When asked if the company would consider a mandate to include women on such committees, she said,

You run into people getting all upset about Affirmative Action. Those guys do not like things like that. Any form of Affirmative Action, whether it’s women, or different races of people. They will say, well, if you are the best person for the job, then you are the best person, and if you’re not, you’re not.

Thus, diversity discourse provides a rationale for *not* including women on these committees. Because it rests on the assumption that men are more meritorious than women, including women is a sign of bias. Once again, we see a binary between supposedly neutral and objective technical decisions counterposed to the goal of inclusiveness and diversity. In this particular case, this woman's frustration with the lack of effective action led her to decide to exit the industry—an altogether too common response to gender discrimination in the STEM workplace (Glass, Sessler, Levitte, & Michelmore, 2013; Hunt, 2010).

Targeted hiring and promotions policies may be effective at diversifying organizations, but implementing them may require overcoming significant resistance, even from some women who stand to benefit from such policies. Because of the widespread cultural assumption that women are less competent than men, this particular approach appears to subvert the ideal of meritocracy on which scientific careers are based.

Mentoring programs—Companies design mentoring programs to increase women's networks and connections to more experienced people in the organization who can share their wisdom and experience about succeeding and thriving in the industry. This particular diversity strategy is based on the theory that women's careers are stymied because they lack access to advisors who can advocate for them and teach them the ropes, so companies take steps to assign women to mentors and encourage their ongoing relationship. Typically, mentors do not have direct supervisory power over those they are assigned to mentor (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010).

Major companies in the oil and gas industry assign formal mentors to offer both technical and career advice to geoscientists at the start of their careers. Companies also encourage the development of informal mentoring relationships. For example, one company instituted a buddy system that matches new women geoscientists to more experienced women geoscientists; another offers occasional luncheons that enable women to meet top women managers. These mentoring relationships are voluntary and develop or fail depending on personal compatibility and desire.

According to the research (Dobbin, Kalev, & Kelly, 2007; Kalev et al., 2006), mentoring programs are modestly successful at increasing the number of women in leadership roles. Interestingly, minority women and men benefit most from these programs: Where they were implemented, minority women and men increased their representation in management by approximately 15% to 38%. But as their numbers were so small to begin with, this percentage increase can be the result of only a handful of individuals moving into managerial ranks. White women, in contrast, experience virtually no increase in management roles as a result of mentoring programs.

In general, the women we interviewed gave positive reviews of mentoring programs. We were told that formal mentors were especially valuable during their first 5 years at an organization; in fact, some regretted that they no longer had access to formal mentors.

Informal mentors were a different matter. The women we interviewed raised a number of issues concerning the informal mentoring they received. First, several women noted that it

was very difficult to find a senior woman in their firm to offer them informal mentoring advice—not surprising in the male-dominated oil and gas industry. Consequently, they were mentored by more senior men. Although several women were extremely positive about their male mentors—and the evidence suggests that women do benefit from the sponsorship of powerful men (Dreher & Cox, 1996; Ramaswami, Dreher, Bretz, & Wiethoff, 2010)—the gender dynamics in these relationships can have negative consequences that derail or stymie women’s advancement. A woman who had worked in a variety of major companies said that her male mentors often treated her like a daughter, which is not an especially empowering or equal position. Although senior men may treat younger men as *sons*—also an unequal and fraught position—the son is more easily conceptualized as a man’s potential successor, resulting in more time and emotional investment than a young woman might receive (Ollilainen & Calasanti, 2007). Furthermore, in a predominately White institution, it is unlikely that racial/ethnic minority women and men will have access to mentoring patterned after these quasi-family roles.

However, having access to a woman mentor is no guarantee of success. Those we interviewed who did develop successful informal mentoring relationships with women did not necessarily receive helpful advice on advancing their careers. One woman, who had worked with a variety of formal and informal mentors at a major oil and gas company, said, “Even times when I had a formal assigned mentor, that is not necessarily where I got the best or the most guidance.” The most difficult stage of her career, she told us, was when she turned to her mentors for advice when she decided to have children. She said, “I didn’t get any negativity except in terms actually how to do this and how to deal with it.” Her mentors sent her to HR, who rejected her request for a temporary part-time schedule. She believed that “even some of the women in the higher up roles, there wasn’t a lot of support for that kind of work schedule.” One senior woman told her, “If you try to go part-time, you don’t get the good assignments.” The lack of support almost convinced her to quit her job.

Importantly, the senior woman she consulted was correct: Mothers do face discrimination when they work part time (Epstein, Seron, Oglensky, & Saute, 1999; Glass, 2004; Kmec, O’Conner, & Schieman, 2014). In a male-dominated organization, those who are most successful follow the *ideal worker norm* (Whittington, 2011; Williams, 2001). To be competitive with men, women find that they must figure out ways to negotiate their competing work–family obligations without drawing attention to their plight (Blair-Loy, 2005). But this exposes a major limitation of mentoring for redressing the underrepresentation of women in management. Women mentors may recognize gendered obstacles and help their mentees strategize about how to cope with them (Kay & Wallace, 2009). But women mentors are rarely in a position to remove those obstacles; as women, they face similar obstacles to their own careers.

Even a supportive male senior colleague has no power to alter a supervisor’s behavior. A woman who worked at a midsized company when she started her career told us that she often turned to her (male) mentor for advice. She said,

I had a really good mentor who encouraged me to take certain training courses that I think really helped my development. If it had not been for him, most of the people would not have encouraged me to take those courses.

She also turned to her mentor when her boss put up roadblocks to her career. Her boss required that her mentor sign off on her work, a requirement he imposed only on her and the other woman in her group. Her mentor explained that the other woman was not especially proficient, and in the interests of treating the women “equally,” her boss was imposing this requirement on them both: “[My mentor] said, I don’t think he [the boss] knows how to deal with having two women on his team that are so different. He wasn’t a bad person. I felt like he was trying to be fair.” Even after she received a negative performance review, her mentor continued to encourage her: “He was very supportive. He could see what was happening. He kept telling me, ‘You’re good at your job.’ But after that review, I had to leave.”

In this case, his technical advice was helpful, that is, he encouraged her to sign up for additional training. But beyond this, he could offer only support and his personal reassurance about her abilities. He could not intervene even though he believed that she was being treated unfairly. As a result, she left the company. Thus, this diversity strategy failed not only to promote her into management but also to retain her in the company.

We asked the more senior women we interviewed about the advice they gave to the women they mentored. Here, too, we found advice of uncertain value in promoting women into management. One told her mentee to ignore the gruff manner of her male supervisor who summarily refused her request to do fieldwork and who criticized her for “losing focus” and for not being “interested in [her] current career.” The woman we interviewed had experience working with the same supervisor and told her mentee, “They are trying to get to you. Don’t worry about it, don’t take it personally.” Most importantly, she told her not to complain: “This is going to sound bad. Sometimes it comes across that that person is complaining. It’s just how we talk about things. Just venting for females is different. I don’t really hear males venting so much.”

In a male-dominated company, women might have more to vent about than men do—such as being denied a work opportunity. However, in this example, the mentor warns that because she is a woman, her mentee’s venting is likely to be seen as unseemly complaining. This double standard came up frequently in our interviews: Women who expressed strong opinions or acted aggressively said that they were stigmatized as “sharp tongued,” “dogmatic,” or “bitches.” In this example, the woman mentor may be correct in advising her mentee that it is better for her career if she does not complain to avoid this stigma. But this individual strategy does nothing to alter the gendered obstacles to career advancement in this company.

One woman we interviewed emphasized to the younger women who consulted her for advice not to emulate men’s behavior. She said,

I don’t even know if it’s good advice. I always tell them, don’t try to be a man because you are not a man. You shouldn’t have to feel like you need to do that to

get into their circle. Just do the best technical job that you can and feel confident in your ideas.

She continued,

Sometimes it seems as if there is sort of like a “guys’ club” or “guys’ network,” not anything formal or overt. It’s just like the guys seem to act a different way when it’s just a bunch of guys around. Just sort of like the level of humor and the joking nature.

It disturbs her when she sees women mimicking men’s behavior by bantering with them, or carrying themselves like men, or dressing in more masculine styles. She said, “I don’t want to think that I have to be like that and I don’t think that other women should have to be like that either.”

This advice, based on her personal experience, was clearly intended to help younger women navigate a male-dominated workplace. She understands that women may feel excluded from men’s informal socializing groups, and she advises them not to act like men to gain entry into these networks. But what is the alternative? If the basis of their exclusion is gender, then emphasizing their difference from men may exacerbate the problem (Kanter, 1977). Caught inside this paradox herself, the best concrete advice she can give as a mentor is to encourage young women to develop personal confidence in their technical abilities. Once again, we see that the definition of merit or technical competence is not problematized, even though these terms may be conceptualized by managers in ways that privilege White men (Byron, 2010; Light et al., 2011; Roscigno et al., 2012). Thus, her mentoring advice does not address the existence of the guys’ club, the underrepresentation of women in management, or the possibility of managerial bias in the assessment of technical abilities.

Although mentoring might help women to survive in a male-dominated industry, it is unlikely to enable them to thrive and ascend to higher level positions. For this, women need influential sponsors who can advocate for them at higher levels (Ibarra et al., 2010). Well-meaning mentoring designed to provide emotional support does not appear to be an effective strategy for diversifying organizations.

Affinity groups and networking programs—Affinity groups provide employees with an opportunity to meet and interact with other people who share a common interest (such as sports or hobbies) or demographic trait (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation). Larger companies have instituted affinity groups for women on the theory that they can provide social support and collegial networks to combat feelings of isolation that may lead to attrition. Affinity groups may be company wide (open to all employees) or function specific, and they may organize informal gatherings for socializing as well as more formal professional development events. According to the research (Dobbin et al., 2007; Kalev et al., 2006), these programs have very little impact on increasing the representation of women in management.

The women we interviewed gave mixed reviews to these groups. Some told us that they do not like women-only groups, while others loved the opportunity to network with other

women. One woman told us that she enjoys the social and emotional support she gets from these groups, but she is doubtful that they will enhance her career:

The problem with that is that there aren't a lot of female strategists. In the women's network, there's a few, but not a whole lot. So the women's network is not going to advance my career. It's not going to hurt my career, because it's always good to have people who know who you are.

Her impression, that women's groups are enjoyable but not particularly useful for career progress, is understandable given the dearth of women in the upper echelons of the industry. Networking is successful only if members gain contact with powerful individuals who can enhance their careers (Dreher & Cox, 1996; Ibarra, 1992). Men's careers may benefit more than women's careers from networking because of increased access to more powerful players (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Kay & Wallace, 2009).

We interviewed one woman who was the president of the Hispanic affinity network at her multinational corporation, a group that includes more than 1,000 employees. Management selected her for this position because, they told her, "There are not enough of you." The goal of her group is not to change corporate culture, however; it is to inspire Hispanic employees to fit into that culture and to aspire to leadership roles. She said,

I'm not supposed to be like a union leader of any kind. I'm basically being funded by [my company]. I'm trying to do attraction, development, and retention of Hispanic talent. So I try to provide workshops and learning programs for individuals to develop the soft skills that they are lacking. Also I'm trying to put together education for management. Why does your Hispanic staff not talk in your meeting? What can you do about it? Or differences between U.S. and Latin culture, and the values. It's also about educating the management as well, so they don't discount people based on their own cultural bias. We are trying to educate them.

From her perspective, the goal of corporate affinity groups is to provide emotional support and encouragement to Hispanic women and men to develop skills and aspirations for leadership positions. While management must be educated to see the potential of these employees, the thrust of this network is to encourage them to become leaders. She asks her membership, "Can you step up, take on a leadership role?"

And they say, no, no, no. But if we all say that, we will never have anyone represent us. At the same time, many people just want to be technical professionals, and that's fine. But if they have an inkling that they might be good at doing a more leadership role, then I want to push them to challenge themselves. I'm trying to be that person.

In keeping with diversity discourse, she does not fault management for the dearth of Hispanic men and women in powerful positions. Rather, she attributes their underrepresentation to their inadequacies, which she believes can be remedied with leadership training. Research suggests that managers often rely on *soft skill* explanations to justify discriminatory practices that harm women and minority men (Byron, 2010); in this case, the Hispanic affinity group imparts this same logic—that the lack of soft skills is the reason that Hispanics are failing to secure leadership roles. As is typical in diversity

discourse, racism and sexism are not addressed; trainings focus on individual and group differences, rather than structure and inequality (Collins, 2011; Embrick, 2011; McGuire, 2000; Sharp et al., 2012). From her perspective, higher management is almost exclusively composed of White men because underrepresented groups lack the willingness to step up.

In addition to providing leadership training, some corporate-sponsored affinity groups provide information on achieving work–family balance. For example, a few years after joining the major at which she works, one respondent and her colleagues started an online *family support network* to provide employees with children a chance to connect and give them a place to ask questions and receive advice. This *grass-roots network* received immense support from top managers and has since become institutionalized.

Now, commonly, new people coming in, one of the first things that they hear about is this group—“Hey, I’ve just joined the company, I have two kids, I’m looking for a pediatrician and a dentist in the Woodlands area”—and people email them back with a list.

This respondent was extremely positive about her company’s family support network. To her, it demonstrated that the company was indeed family friendly and devoted to gender equality. However, it is important to note that this network actually requires no resources from the employer, nor does it challenge the company’s limited support for new parents. By allowing an employee-maintained listserv, the company maintains the illusion of corporate fairness and support for diversity (Kaiser et al., 2013).

The family support network is open to both men and women employees. Interestingly, so are the other women’s groups that we learned about in our interviews. This geophysicist explained that at her company, the women’s network had been mostly an informal social group until the head of HR became involved. She said,

She tried to transform it into more of a group that is ... dealing with issues that are relevant not just to women, but to professionals across the board. The interesting thing is that a lot of the sessions I’ve been to have been attended by both men and women. They are trying to appeal to drawing in a broad audience of folks. They had a panel discussion of five women across the company, some fairly senior management, some early career, midcareer, so a really good balance of folks. And the questions ranged from work–life balance, to a lot of it was stuff that is applicable to both men and women. “How have you managed to progress in your career?” “What sacrifices do you feel like you had to make?” “What have been the key stepping stones to make those big jumps?” And I think her goal is to make the group have a broader appeal but also a bigger impact.

This geophysicist is proud of her company for supporting and revamping the women’s network. However, reading between the lines, her comments suggest ways that this initiative reflects and reproduces gender inequality. She maintains that it is important for men to participate because in her company, a woman-only group would lack legitimacy, impact, and broad appeal. It would also suggest special treatment for women, contradicting the corporate commitment to diversity. Diversity discourse does not permit the exclusion of any group—not even White men (Collins, 2011). Thus, in her eyes, including men in the

women's network is a sign of progress toward greater diversity, not a reflection of the company's devaluation of women.

Corporations provide little space for the development of alternative or critical discourses. Elsewhere we have written about informal women's networks in the industry (Williams et al., 2012). We find that these groups may be dismissed as frivolous bitching sessions, forcing some to operate under the radar. Women's affinity groups are not intended to criticize the corporation but rather to transform women to fit into and succeed in a male-dominated environment. They may succeed in their goal of making women feel connected and supported by their peers, but our interviews give little evidence that they are effective at altering the male domination of their companies.

Diversity training—Diversity training refers to corporate-sponsored seminars devoted to enhancing cultural sensitivity and awareness of unconscious bias. The theory behind these programs is that women's careers are stymied because of men's sexist attitudes. With the proper diversity training, it is believed that men will learn to change their attitudes and behaviors toward women, thus increasing diversity at every level. During these training sessions, men and women receive instruction in personality and behavioral differences between men and women. Diversity training is the least effective diversity program, but it is the most popular (Bielby et al., 2013; Kalev et al., 2006).

Diversity training events were extremely popular among our respondents. For example, this geophysicist expressed great enthusiasm for the "women's career development program" offered at her major oil and gas company:

They talked about gender differences. They didn't sweep them under the rug and pretend they didn't exist. They said, "Oh, no, they are very real. Let's talk about that and help you navigate your way better." And sometimes it was something as simple as men don't read facial expressions. They've done scientific studies/their brains don't read a face the way a woman's does. If you're trying to tell a man you're upset at him by making faces at him, he's not going to get it. You actually have to tell him. So it was just eye opening.

Earlier in the interview she had described working at a company where she encountered discrimination. She said,

I was working with some very old-fashioned geologists who just did not treat me very well. My boss helped perpetuate that. This was a really miserable year where I kept trying to do work, and they weren't including me in discussions or team meetings.

Learning about gender differences at her new company helped her make sense of these experiences. She continued:

This class was just shocking to me. Because I also learned that women tend to work at a flat structure and men are very hierarchical. And I can see situations at my old job where I had definitely stuck my nose in that hierarchy and that was not appreciated.

She was certain that her prior experiences would not have been as miserable had she understood gender differences then because she would have known not to challenge men's hierarchy.

Similarly, this woman attended a diversity seminar that helped her make sense of her experiences with discrimination and harassment. The seminar leaders divided the men and the women into separate groups and instructed them to discuss the disadvantages associated with their gender. According to our respondent, the women at the seminar shared their perception that "in order to be the same kind of strength as the guys, you kind of get labeled a bitch." She continued:

It was actually really interesting. The women felt that we had to sacrifice what makes us women to get ahead. Being the nurturing compassionate ones, you have to let some of that go to succeed in some of these meetings. That you couldn't just be friends with some of the guy coworkers because they take it the wrong way, even if you're married. I've had that experience twice now.

Thus, she reported that women felt disadvantaged because (a) they experience a double standard, (b) they are not comfortable expressing themselves in meetings, and (c) their male coworkers sexualize them. In contrast, she learned that men felt disadvantaged by the women's groups:

The guys actually were offended by the women's networks. They felt that we were making connections that they couldn't make because they were guys. Which was kind of interesting. Our argument to that was, well, you guys do a lot just because you're guys. We don't get to chat up the senior management in the bathroom because they're all guys. We don't go out shooting or golfing because those are guy sports. It was an interesting interplay with a lot of strong feelings.

Hemphill and Haines (1997) argue that diversity training may stir up resentments and increase hostility toward underrepresented groups. This may have been the consequence here. Moreover, as previously discussed, diversity training may naturalize and equalize differences between groups (Collins, 2011). At this training session, women's and men's disadvantages were equated, although, clearly, those that women described are much more damaging to their professional careers.

This equivalence is also evident in the diversity training experience described by a geologist at a different major:

We were told that women and men are very different, have different cultures altogether. We don't speak the same language, we don't use the same body language. For example, they showed a video of psychologists and talked about the difference in women's and men's perception of teamwork. Men's perception of teamwork is hierarchy, top-down, you follow the old order. Very team sport, you have a coach. Women have more lateral—you probably know this as social scientists (laughs)—culture. So the teamwork, the idea of teamwork is everyone pitching in an opinion. We might argue back and forth but we all collectively decide on something. So when a woman works on a male-dominated team, and she

offers an opinion that is different, then she is not following orders, meaning she is not a team player. Whereas to her, the guy telling her what to do is not being a team player. That is not her idea of a team player. So/and that is just one example that just stuck with me. There are like 25 different things that we don't do, or that we do things differently. And I think a lot of us do get perceived as being weak or unreliable or pushy.

Diversity training taught her that on a male-dominated team, a woman should not *offer an opinion* but instead let *the guy tell her what to do*. With these gender norms articulated and reinforced by diversity training, it is perhaps inevitable that women are perceived as *weak or unreliable or pushy*.

Why are these programs so popular despite their apparent enforcement of damaging gender stereotypes? Perhaps it is because they offer a palatable explanation for the male domination of the industry. Cech and Blair-Loy (2010) find that depending on their location in the institutions of work and family, women scientists typically blame either themselves or their work institutions when they encounter discrimination. Stated differently, they invoke either human capital explanations or structural explanations when they experience blocked opportunities. We suspect that diversity programs are popular because they offer a third explanation for women's exclusion from top jobs: In this narrative, the underrepresentation of women in top positions is due to benign gender differences. There is nothing *wrong* with women (or men, for that matter). Women and men are simply *different* in ways that occasionally result in a breakdown of communication—a problem that can be remedied with diversity training. The training programs emphasize that women are not deficient (i.e., they are not lacking in human capital), so they cannot be blamed for their exclusion from top jobs. But neither are structural barriers at fault. The very existence of these training programs absolves the employer from any discriminatory intent toward women and demonstrates their commitment to fostering diversity (Kaiser et al., 2013). Thus, diversity training may make it easier for women to work for a male-dominated company that acknowledges their special, essentialized qualities—easier, that is, than working at a male-dominated company that either ignores women or denigrates them for their differences.

Regardless of the reasons for their popularity, our interviews indicate that the effects of diversity training can be insidious. Consider this final example from a geophysicist with more than 20 years of experience in the industry. When her company merged with another multinational, she became the assistant of an executive who had previously been at her same level. When asked why he did not become her assistant, she referred to results from the Myers-Briggs personality testing sponsored by the corporation:

His personality type is very much to be a leader. On the other hand, my personality type—because we do get involved in understanding our personality types—is more to be a supporter And I really/I like to be somebody who supports a person that I believe in So I'm taking over those softer skills because I just do that well. And he needs to handle the high-end geological questions. And risk questions about risking/do we drill this or do we drill that? Do we stay in this country or do we leave this country? Those are the questions he needs to be focused on. If he can rely on me to have his back on the soft skills part, and if the people who work in the

company know that somebody like me is there, they are more like to engage because he's kind of intimidating.

As a result of a corporate-sponsored personality test, this woman learned that supporting others is what she truly wants and needs to thrive and that she lacks the personality to be a leader. Diversity training experienced by the women we interviewed essentializes gender differences, providing a justification for why men monopolize the top positions in the corporation, and why women with their soft skills are men's ideal supporters.

Discussion

Companies today brand themselves as *prodiversity* by putting images of women and racial/ethnic minority men employees in corporate advertisements and recruiting materials and by instituting diversity management programs. Our interviews with women geoscientists in the oil and gas industry highlight the contradictions of corporate diversity discourse and programs. The women we interviewed expressed ambivalence about programs that target women for hiring and promotions, even though this particular approach has been shown to result in greater representation of women in management (Kalev et al., 2006). Preferential hiring and promotion practices appear to violate the principle of equality promoted by diversity discourse, which insists on treating all differences the same. Mentoring programs connect women with formal technical and career advisors, but informal advice from mentors about dealing with gender discrimination appears largely ineffective if not counterproductive at addressing structural barriers to women's careers. Affinity groups, set up to counter the isolation women feel and build career networks, are not perceived as effective avenues for advancement in the industry. And diversity training reifies gender differences, teaching men and women that they have personality differences that suit them to different roles in the organizational hierarchy, with men cast as natural leaders and women as supportive team players.

Our findings thus provide insight into why diversity policies are generally ineffective at remedying the underrepresentation of women in management positions. Corporations put the onus on women employees to speak up when they encounter gender discrimination, but mentoring programs, corporate-sponsored affinity groups, and diversity training exercises do not help women (or their sympathetic supporters) to identify and fight discrimination. On the contrary, these programs can convince women to accept their marginalized status, or worse, to leave the industry altogether.

Conclusion

Our study highlights reasons why different diversity strategies are ineffective at promoting women's careers. However, our study is limited because it is based on the experiences of mostly White women professionals in a single industry. As we have noted, diversity more or less means gender (and age) to these women, in part because they wrongly perceive that the global oil and gas industry has already achieved racial and ethnic diversity. Additional research is needed to explore diversity management programs that focus on race and ethnicity. On the basis of our limited evidence of the Hispanic network discussed earlier, we suspect that affinity groups organized around race/ethnicity may bolster stereotypes in the

same ways as they do gender. Future studies should also explore whether diversity discourse essentializes race/ethnicity, sexuality, and other targeted characteristics, and what the consequences of these programs are for those who participate in them.

In conclusion, we are left with the question of whether organizations can become more inclusive in practice and not just in principle. Although effective policies for increasing the number of women in leadership roles remain elusive (Glass, 2004), our study points to some possible avenues for change.

First, because preferential hiring and promotions policies can be effective at increasing the representation of women in management (Kalev et al., 2006), companies could work harder to legitimize this particular strategy for diversifying their workforce, as it is unpopular even among some women who stand to benefit from it. Targeting women for promotions may seem to contradict the emphasis on equality that is promulgated by diversity policy, but this does not have to be the case. The companies we studied are characterized by extreme gender inequality, a fact that no amount of positive thinking can change. Powerful measures are needed to alter that stubborn reality, including the legal enforcement of equal opportunity. Vican's (2013) study suggests that returning Affirmative Action enforcement to HR departments may be a useful first step in restoring the legal mandate for diversity policy.

Second, corporations should rethink mentoring as a means to increase the representation of women in management. Although mentors can help individual women strategize and negotiate gendered obstacles to their careers, they are powerless to remove those obstacles. As an individual solution to a structural problem, mentoring can address the consequences of gender discrimination but not its causes. Mentors can help women to survive a hostile working environment by offering sympathy and strategic advice for coping, but unless they have the power to alter the conditions of women's employment, they cannot advance women to leadership positions (Ibarra et al., 2010).

Third, we believe that affinity groups could play a stronger advocacy role in increasing the representation of women in leadership positions. Currently, corporate-controlled affinity groups are tasked with the job of helping women succeed in a White male-dominated industry (e.g., to step up or lean in). These groups are not permitted to develop alternative discourses about the barriers to successful careers. Encouraging these groups to cover a wider scope of issues—including discrimination and harassment—may be the key to forcing greater recognition of gendered power, and the source for more effective policies at addressing both the attrition of women from the industry and their exclusion from top positions.

We are not holding our breath. Organizations do not typically tolerate—let alone cultivate—critique. For this reason, we believe that professional organizations could play an important role in providing spaces for alternative discourses to emerge. We observe this in the case of PROWESS, a small group of highly influential and dedicated women who convinced their professional association to systematically address the attrition of women scientists in the oil and gas industry. A similar dynamic can be observed on Wall Street, where women in the 1970s formed the Financial Women's Association, generating a powerful counternarrative to

account for and respond to the discrimination women faced in the financial industry (Fisher, 2012). Thus, professional associations can be incubators for feminist activism. As Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey (2012) have shown, feminism and the civil rights movement played an important role in gaining employment opportunities for women and minority men in the past and may be essential to addressing discrimination in the future.

Finally, we believe that diversity training could be made into a more substantive and transformative experience. Currently, as we have shown, these seminars are based on psychological perspectives that reify differences and may reinforce stereotypes, encouraging women to accept their place, instead of analyzing, criticizing, or resisting gender inequality. We suggest that a sociological framework drawing on feminist and critical race theory could offer a new set of insights into the re-creation of White male privilege in organizations. For example, diversity training seminars could teach workers to spot and respond to gender disparities and stereotypes, and help them to develop a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of privilege and exclusion in the workplace that reproduce the White male domination of their industry. Diversity training could also be an occasion to educate workers about their employment rights; some research suggests that this type of training can result in increases in the filing of discrimination charges against employers (Hirsh & Kmec, 2009). In any case, these programs should be constantly evaluated for the positive and negative impacts they have on diversifying the workforce.

Corporations' commitment to diversity does not in itself translate into more opportunities for women. Instead, the diversity policies we investigated reinforce gender inequality. Alternative discourses are needed to remedy gender discrimination in the corporate world.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the editor and reviewers of *Work and Occupations* for their helpful comments and Anthony Chen for his excellent suggestions. The authors also acknowledge the support received from the Professional Women in Earth Sciences Committee of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was supported by a grant from the UT IC² Institute, and by grant 5 R24 HD042849 awarded to the UT Population Research Center by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

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Biographies

Christine L. Williams is a professor and chair of sociology at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research and teaching focus on the topics of gender, sexuality, and work. She has studied gender discrimination, homophobia, and sexual harassment in a wide variety of occupations, ranging from low-wage retail work to the professions. She served as the editor of *Gender & Society* from 2004 to 2006.

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Table 1

Diversity in the Major Oil and Gas Companies.

Major oil and gas companies	Diversity in core values	Sample statements about diversity	Representation of diversity	Board of directors, including CEO if applicable ^a	CEO ^b	Corporate officers (not including CEO) ^c
BP	What we value	We respect the world in which we operate. It begins with compliance with laws and regulations. We hold ourselves to the highest ethical standards and behave in ways that earn the trust of others. We depend on the relationships we have and respect each other and those we work with. We value diversity of people and thought. We care about the consequences of our decisions, large and small, on those around us.	Videos of 8 employees telling their stories (4 women)	16 (2 women)	Man (Robert Dudley)	12 men
Chevron	The Chevron Way	We learn from and respect the cultures in which we work. We value and demonstrate respect for the uniqueness of individuals and the varied perspectives and talents they provide. We have an inclusive work environment and actively embrace a diversity of people, ideas, talents, and experiences.	Video of 3 employees (3 women) entitled "Chevron encourages female leadership in the energy industry."	12 (2 women)	Man (John S. Watson)	17 (3 women)
ConocoPhillips	SPIRIT values	We respect one another, recognizing that our success depends on the commitment, capability, and diversity of our employees.	Video profiles of 2 employees (2 women)	10 (1 woman)	Man (Ryan Lance)	8 (3 women)
ExxonMobil	Our guiding principles	The exceptional quality of our workforce provides a valuable competitive edge. To build on this advantage, we will strive to hire and retain the most qualified people available and to maximize their opportunities for success through training and development. We are committed to maintaining a safe work environment enriched by diversity and characterized by open communication, trust, and fair treatment.	Written statements from 4 employees (1 woman); video of women and men at work	12 (2 women)	Man (Rex Tillerson)	4 men
Shell	Our values	At Shell, working to promote inclusion is not merely a human resources initiative. It is at the very core of how we do business. We believe that only through many points of view comes true wisdom. And it is the wisdom of many that will be most definitely needed to solve the energy challenges we face today and into the future.	13 employee profiles (5 women)	13 (2 women)	Man (Peter Voser)	7 men

Note. Data recorded on December 7, 2012.

^a 14.3% of board of directors are women.

^b 0% of CEOs are women.

c 12.5% of corporate officers are women.

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