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Linda M. Gallant

Emerson College, linda_gallant@emerson.edu

Kathleen J. Krone

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, kkrone1@unl.edu

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Tensions in Talking Diversity

Linda M. Gallant¹ and Kathleen J. Krone²

1. Department of Communication, Emerson College, Boston, Massachusetts, USA

2. Department of Communication Studies, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA

Corresponding author – Kathleen J. Krone, Department of Communication Studies, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE 68588-0329, USA, email kkrone1@unl.edu

Abstract

Diversity policies and programs continue to be a prominent yet problematic feature of organizational life. This study explored tensions arising as 30 employees talk about their experience with Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Affirmative Action (AA), and diversity in a midwestern human service organization. Tensions related to fairness and fear emerged as interpretive themes prompting majority group members to avoid interacting about racial differences and minority group members to do the work of making difference meaningful. We argue that formal policies and diversity programs be reimagined so as to ease interaction constraints between groups.

Keywords: diversity policies and programs, interaction about differences, tensions

Formal organizational policies and programs shape workplace interaction about social and cultural differences in both intended and unintended ways (Kirby & Krone, 2002). Historically designed to comply with Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and Affirmative Action (AA) legislation, diversity policies and programs seek to promote more inclusive working environments and continue to be vital features of organizational life (Lawson, 2011; Roberge, Lewicki, Hietapelto, & Abdyltaeva, 2011). Debates remain, however, on how organizational members experience and enact these programs, and on the problematic ways in which majority group members continue to position themselves in relation to nonmajority group members (Allen, 2004; Grimes, 2002; Hafen, 2005; Munshi, 2005). Deeper understanding of how organizational members experience EEO/AA and diversity

can help guide policy development and the process of building more just and inclusive workplace environments. Our project contributes to these efforts by examining closely how members of one organization talk about their EEO/AA and diversity program experiences. Through our use of a grounded theoretical thematic analysis, we answer the call for increased sensitivity to race in organizational communication scholarship (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003). In the process we hope to deepen understanding of the everyday experience of diversity, and to encourage leadership for interacting more meaningfully about differences in organizations.

Conceptual Background

At least two central discursive tensions related to diversity circulate in the larger society and are embedded in the implementation of EEO/AA policies and programs: (a) identity-blind vs. identity-conscious discourses, and (b) the business case vs. sociopolitical case for diversity. Together, they form a discursive backdrop complicating how organizational members experience and talk about diversity. As the next section details, these discourses sometimes compete creating conflicting communicative demands for those responsible for the everyday implementation of EEO/AA policies and programs.

Identity-Blind vs. Identity-Conscious Discourses

Two major EEO/AA discourses circulate throughout America (Dovidio, Mann, & Gaertner, 1989; Glazer, 1988, Lipset & Schneider, 1978). An identity-blind discourse is rooted in the American ideals of individuality and meritocracy, and conflicts with the decision to emphasize minority status in the selection and promotion of employees. In contrast, an identity-conscious discourse emerges from the ideal of racial and gender equality and the need to highlight minority status in order to overcome historically based discrimination in employment decisions. When developing EEO/AA policies and programs, it would be helpful if organizations recognized the tensions embedded between these two discursive spheres.

For example, aligned with an identity-blind approach, organizations design EEO/AA systems to downplay minority status in employment and other business decisions. An identity-conscious approach, on the other hand, involves working more explicitly and purposefully with social differences and designing systems specifically to improve working conditions and opportunities for advancement for minority group members (Konrad & Linnehan, 1995a). Organizations exercise some discretion when adopting identity-blind and/or identity-conscious approaches to the development and implementation of EEO/AA policies, although it remains unclear whether they do so with much awareness of the implications for everyday communication about diversity among employees who must work with and implement these policies.

Although identity-conscious approaches produce more positive working environments for minority employees, more organizations use identity-blind EEO/AA strategies (Konrad & Linnehan, 1995a). In fact, both majority and many minority members report preferring identity-blind EEO/AA programs. For minority group members, the use of identity-blind approaches helps challenge the assumption that beneficiaries of affirmative action are less competent than their majority counterparts (Konrad & Linnehan, 1995a; 1995b). At the

same time, majority group members prefer identity-blind programs due to their own self-interest, and the belief that discrimination and racism no longer exist (Konrad & Linnehan, 1995a, 1995b). Regardless of the approach adopted by an organization, the use of affirmative action policies remains controversial and the source of contentious debates (Harris, 2009; Harrison, Kravitz, Mayer, Leslie, & Levy-Arey 2006; Kravitz, 2008; Martin, 2007). Such tensions likely become embedded in the everyday interaction about EEO/AA policies and programs in organizations.

Business Case vs. Socio-Political Case for Diversity

Differences between the business case for diversity and a legally grounded sociopolitical case also can complicate everyday interaction and attempts to work well with gender and racial differences in the workplace. While not mandated by law, organizations frequently implement and require diversity training programs. Grounded in the business case, such initiatives historically framed the ability to work well with diversity as a strategic, competitive advantage that would increase profit, reduce turnover, better match employment pools to multicultural consumer bases, and reduce the organizational inefficiencies of group-based conflict (Cox & Blake, 1991; Fine, 1996; Muir, 1996; Wheeler, 1995; Witherspoon & Wohler, 1996). The majority of discourse surrounding organizational diversity continues to be rooted in concerns for the bottom line and arguments that managing diversity well creates a competitive advantage leading to improved organizational effectiveness (Okoro & Washington, 2012). Grounded in the business case, then, the ability to work well with diversity is instrumentalized, valued mainly as a tool for interacting more efficiently and working more effectively with customers and clients across organizational boundaries.

The sociopolitical case for diversity is grounded in a larger national struggle for gender and racial equality, and the legal mandates designed to legitimate those efforts. As implemented in organizations, however, employees sometimes resist the sociopolitical case for diversity, frequently interpreting organizational policies and programs as nothing more than required governmental legal mandates (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Kossek & Zonia, 1994). The use of quotas, in particular, tends to be associated with negative attitudes toward diversity (Harrison et al., 2006) Interpreting diversity as quotas demanded by the federal and state governments, and even sometimes by minority group members themselves, creates resistance and over time can erode the strategic advantages claimed by the business case. Moreover, most diversity training programs are grounded in the implicit assumption that difference is “deficient” which leads employees to perceive such training as “remedial” in nature (Limaye, 1994). Ironically, under these conditions diversity programs may be more likely to constrain meaningful interaction about gender and racial differences than they are to enable it in organizations. To further explore the communicative tensions produced by diversity policies and programs we ask: How do members of a human service organization experience and talk about Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Affirmative Action (AA), and organizational diversity programming?

Method

Data Collection

To address our research question, we chose a single case study design and feature an organization that represented itself as conscious of and committed to diversity (Yin, 2009). The first author contacted many organizations, however, only one was comfortable allowing employees to participate in the research—a midwestern human service organization devoted to addiction treatment and recovery. The organization's commitment to diversity was made explicit in its mission statement and treatment guidelines. For example, the mission statement characterizes its diverse staff as a resource to better serve the community, while the treatment guidelines express a commitment to individualizing treatment according to a variety of differences including race, gender, physical ability, religious preference, and sexual orientation.

In addition, before conducting interviews and to learn more about the nature of this organization's commitment to diversity, the first author met with the organization's diversity coordinator, an African American woman who was both a manager and trained professional therapist. Because the organization employed more than 50 people and received federal grants for the treatment and prevention of substance abuse, it was required to submit annual EEO/AA reports to the federal government. Diversity policy in this organization consisted of adherence to EEO/AA regulations, including hiring practices, commitments to diversity expressed throughout formal documents and a variety of required training programs offered both by the organization and by outsiders. The organization had just held its first annual diversity training program required of all employees, but all clinical staff had been required for some time to receive six hours of diversity training every two years.

The first author then conducted face-to-face interviews with 30 of the 96 employees of this organization. Guided by a purposeful sampling strategy (Patton, 2002) we sought a representative sample with respect to hierarchical position, gender, race, and age within the organization. The demographic breakdown of the organization's overall population by gender, race, and managerial status versus the same breakdown for the interview sample is presented in Tables 1–3 in Appendix A.

The research was conducted with the approval of the Institutional Review Board of the University of Nebraska. A full interview protocol is available from the first author. Participants were asked to describe their communication with colleagues at work about EEO/AA and diversity, their day-to-day experience with EEO/AA and diversity, and how they knew what was appropriate regarding their communication and behavior related to EEO/AA and diversity. At times, interviewees would respond in ways that addressed questions designed to formally arise later in the interview. When that occurred, the first author confirmed her understanding of the earlier response, and asked whether the participant would like to elaborate further. In exchange for their participation, the first author provided the organization with a summary of research findings. Employee identities were protected as much as possible, but since employee identity might be revealed through detailed descriptions of their experiences, the first author also secured from the organization a formal written agreement that no employee participant would experience retribution.

Data Analysis

Relying on the constant-comparative method (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), the first author analyzed the interview data through the use of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). During open coding, initial concepts were developed based on their repetition and forcefulness (Owen, 1984); then, in the axial coding phase, distinctions and similarities were identified in emergent categories. In the final step of selective coding, relationships of core major themes to their subordinate themes are established. Overall, the analyses of interviews were conducted until “theoretical saturation” was reached and when further analysis did not produce new insights or themes (Bowen, 2006; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

The interpretive process was guided by a search for indigenous and sensitizing concepts so as to allow the voice of the participants to inform the thematic categories (Patton, 2002). When the participants provided a pattern of naming an issue or process, that indigenous name was developed into a category. When the participants’ discourse described a particular process or issue without naming it, categories were developed matching the literature related to the process or concept. Representative participant quotes were selected and are provided throughout the analysis to illustrate key themes.

Interpretation of Data

Fairness and apprehension emerged as two primary themes in our interpretation of this group’s talk about EEO/AA and diversity. With respect to fairness, respondents spoke at length about fairness as “golden rule” and violations of fairness, although what fairness meant varied between dominant and nondominant group members. With respect to apprehension, these respondents detailed their fears of breaking social and cultural rules, as well as formal laws related to EEO/AA and diversity.

Fairness

As many as 21 of the 30 research participants drew upon the language of fairness when discussing EEO/AA and diversity. As they did, they highlighted the ideas of “fairness as golden rule” and “violations of fairness.” These two subthemes provide insight into the tensions experienced around EEO/AA and diversity in this organization.

Fairness as “golden rule”

Organizational members frequently evoked fairness as an existential moral principal guiding their interpretations of EEO/AA. Here, fairness is framed as an extension of the “golden rule” or “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” For example:

Interviewee #5 (European American Nonmanager)

Woman: “So when I think of, when someone says Affirmative Action, a lot of times I think of, you know, California and colleges and stuff like that and their entrance requirements . . . I mean, as far as my interaction, it’s just, I don’t know, you just treat a person the way you’d want to be treated. Just equal no matter what no biases, you know.”

Interviewee #7 (European American Nonmanager)

Woman: "Because I would not treat somebody that way, is how I would look at it. I mean, you don't treat somebody, if you don't want to be treated that way. So that's how I would look at it."

Interviewee #18 (European American Nonmanager)

Woman: "To me what's appropriate [with EEO] is what I would want for myself. If I were in any situation. What I hope would be considered for me would be considered for anyone else."

Interviewee #26 (African American Nonmanager)

Woman: "My parents have raised me to, I just, I don't really have any qualms about many people. I find I'm very open minded and regardless of what that person is or wants to be, or has become, my parents have always talked to me and my sisters about being open and really, accepting people for what they are."

Violations of fairness

The frequently endorsed principle of fairness also figured into their characterizations of what's not fair with respect to EEO/AA. These participants denounced the use of bureaucratic quotas, departures from the use of merit-based rewards, and the practice of differential treatment all as violations of fairness. For White employees, violations of fairness included specific processes such as reverse discrimination and various forms of special treatment. For non-White employees, however, violations of fairness included the exclusive use of non-White employees to serve non-White clients and the additional, voluntary effort required of them to get to know and relate more effectively to the non-White clients they served.

Quotas

Affirmative Action was often characterized as a numbers game played mainly between the organization and the federal government. Here White and non-White supervisors raised questions related to the fairness of requiring organizations to hire based on gender or race rather than simply on merit. For example:

Interviewee #14 (European American Manager)

Woman: "Well, I think Affirmative Action is very misunderstood sometimes, and it's abused in both ways. OK. For example, my husband knows when he's getting set up—and it has to do with the whole push of quotas and how many Blacks or non-whites have you interviewed in—you know, how many are being sent your direction. And so, on both sides, there's been some fighting about it. Games. OK. So, that made it difficult, I think, for people to recognize that it's a necessary step, because all the politics have gotten in the way. You know, the nastiness has gotten in the way . . . you have to have certain doors open so that you can get there and raise yourself out of the ghetto or whatever it is. And I

think people of white background forget that. They forget where their roots came from. They forget how their people had to claw their way out of the ghetto, you know, and I'm thinking in particular—I'm of Irish descent—we just watched that show on PBS about the Irish in America. And it very graphically displayed what it took, and how many generations, and that the key for most of them was education."

Interviewee #15 (African American Manager)

Woman: "Affirmative Action means to me that and I'm just thinking about this. It does not mean. Let me tell you what it doesn't. It does not necessarily mean quotas. I mean quotas were set up, businesses set quotas. When the original was set up, Affirmative Action law, was written, quotas were not in and it was the way of businesses to say this . . . we will need quotas. We'll hire so many blacks or so many Indians and they established the quotas, the quota system has failed because people didn't intend to look at the entire Affirmative Action and see the quota system and that we look at quotas you only hire a person based on race more so than based on qualifications."

Interviewee #29 (European American Manager)

Woman: "I disagree with the concept of it [Affirmative Action]. The concept of it is that it identifies specific groups within the community, whether it be the Asian community, or Latino community, or gender—female—community. Gives more rights to others to gain equal opportunity to be employed. In my opinion, if you have equal opportunity to be employed, that's enough. . . . If you have equal opportunity, and your philosophy, then Affirmative Action is an impediment—as opposed to equal opportunity. Then it isn't equal opportunity, in my—that's my opinion. If there's an Affirmative Action program in place, and I am going out for the job against an equally qualified male, then that's one thing. That's one thing to say, "You know, we'd like to hire more females." However, what if I'm a little less qualified, but, because I help fill some quota that might exist. Well, we think that what's going to go with that to fill that quota, what is that—that is not equal opportunity. That is giving me more benefits than the other . . . I would never personally want to be hired because I was the female to help fill a quota."

Merits

Guided again by the principle of fairness, several White respondents lamented quota-based hiring and promotion in part because it sometimes required hiring less-qualified minority applicants, but also because it unfairly called into question the qualifications of minority employees who in fact demonstrated the necessary skills and abilities to succeed. Examples of both follow:

Interviewee #1 (European American Nonmanager)

Woman: "Sometimes, I think minority takes precedence over, um, experience in qualification, but not frequently, but I think occasionally it happens. Simply, because they say we have this slot we have to fill and we need an African-American person in the slot. Or we need an Hispanic person in the slot or we need an Asian person in the slot. And I think sometimes, well, I think Affirmative Action is good, I . . . have no problem with. . . . But I think it occasionally handicaps employers sometimes because they are limited in who they can hire."

Interviewee #2 (European American Nonmanager)

Woman: "It [Affirmative Action] allows someone in a minority situation whether race, religion or gender the opportunity to apply for jobs which, um. They may not meet the minimum qualifications but because they fall in a certain category that they would still be evaluated for the job."

Interviewee #10 (European American Nonmanager)

Woman: "What I think is sad is that I think some people see the few people of color that we have here as being here because we need to have them not because that they're talented and qualified to do the job. I feel that very much and I hear those things from the people."

Different treatment

Majority and minority respondents also viewed differential treatment due to race and gender as unfair. Members of both groups agreed that fairness should be the rule in organizational decision-making but there were differing views of what fairness meant with respect to hiring, advancement, and assigning work. As the following examples illustrate, both majority and minority employees experienced ambivalence and raised questions about the fairness of privileging minority group members. For these minority employees, however, the unfairness of differential treatment was grounded in concerns of being marked as a "token," and for the additional responsibility placed on them to work well with difference. For example:

Interviewee #3 (European American Nonmanager)

Man: "Oh, it's all about fairness, you know, for me. I'm a fair-minded guy. I mean, that's my main tool of, as far as I see things, it's fairness and you know. That's why, you know, that equal opportunity thing, it's a tough thing, personally, because, sure a lot of people got screwed over a long time ago and a lot of people get screwed over continually, I mean people of color. And so I'm not against it, but when you got humans making these decisions, you know, it gets out of whack and this and that, and you know, I think there's some injustice with Affirmative Action and equal opportunity is one of them . . . I understand that they're trying to make things fair. I understand that. But it's bad for morale."

Interviewee #9 (African American Nonmanager)

Woman: “[The most important issues she has dealt with in relationship to EEO is] not being hired because I’m an African-American female. But, being hired because I’m qualified to do the job. I refuse to be a token for anybody whether I’m qualified for the job or not. I don’t want to be hired because you need to fill a quota. I want them to hire me because I’m qualified for the position. And, I have had to deal with that and walk away from a job because I knew that’s why I was being hired. The agency that wanted to hire me had some federal funding coming down the pike and it was important that they had people of color on staff, and at that point that they didn’t, and somebody who worked at that particular agency—I knew that I was more than qualified for the job, that wasn’t the question. But, somebody let me know that was the reason why it was very important that they hire a person of color. I wasn’t that person. Even though it was a job that I would have liked to have had. I wasn’t going to be that person.”

Interviewee #9 (African American Nonmanager)

Woman: “I make that extra effort to get to know that individual, something about their culture or their ethnicity or something that’s very important to them . . . I get irritated when people don’t take time to find out about people from other cultures, especially when you know they’re going to come to your door for services or whatever the case may be. . . . Because you’ve got to know something about the people that you’re serving and it’s so easy in that thing to go and have your stereotype and say things to people that are so, just inappropriate, and just unnecessary because you haven’t taken the time to learn about those people . . . certain people, they’ll come to me and say, “Well, do you know so and so?” And, I’ll say, “no.” “Well, you know they’re black.” Well, I’m sorry, I don’t know every African American person that lives in [Name of city]. And, I just don’t. But, I should because I’m African American, too . . . And, I’m just blunt. I say, “I don’t know all black people? Do you know all white people? No, I don’t know all black people, either.”

Interviewee #22 (European American Nonmanager)

Man: “I don’t think that they [minorities] should get 10 points ahead of you because they’re a minority, I think that we should all start on the same level. I’m not a believer in them, but, again, not everybody’s in the same spot maybe where I’m at. I’m sure there are some places they need it [Affirmative Action].”

Interviewee #9 (African American Nonmanager)

Woman: “We need to be more diverse in those terms because oftentimes there’s a Hispanic person comes in and the one counselor who is Hispanic is always called to deal with that person, when that’s not fair. I mean, it shouldn’t just fall to them . . . so, we talk about it in that sense.”

Apprehension

Members of this organization also expressed caution, and feelings of discomfort and apprehension related to the subject of EEO/AA and diversity. They wanted to avoid saying or doing things that might be offensive to people who were culturally, sexually, or racially different from themselves. More specifically, their concerns arose around the possibilities of violating social and cultural rules, and/or of breaking formal laws.

Social and cultural rules

The fear of violating informal social and cultural rules arose from the increased social complexity and the realization that they may not understand another person's situation due to differences in culture, race, and/or gender. The presence of multiple forms of difference challenged conventional understandings of what would be considered appropriate communication and behavior, and for these respondents caused them to be more cautious and careful in discussing differences, if they discussed them at all. For example:

Interviewee #12 (European American Nonmanager)

Man: "Because what may look inappropriate to me is appropriate for that population. I think it is a judgment call, but you better be quick. . . . By my own experience. Especially with Hispanics. What I thought was inappropriate come to elderly, well, come to find out that it was the way they treated certain people. I opened my mouth. I had to eat crow and apologize to that. So again, I think it is a judgment call. I think a person can sense that something isn't right. But I think it all depends on how it comes out of your mouth."

Interviewee #14 (European American Manager)

Woman: "It feels personal when someone's accusing you of saying, you're doing this because of the color of my skin when in fact you're saying it wouldn't matter what color of skin you have or whether you're male or female or gay or straight, the thing is that what you did wasn't acceptable. That's not acceptable job performance and it doesn't have anything to do with that. And that's, to me, a ploy to take it off track. And that tends to make me angry, because it's a game and it's manipulative. And in this day and age of political correctness you have no choice but to deal with it."

Interviewee #15 (African American Manager)

Woman: "We very seldom [discuss Affirmative Action]. I know [Name of the CEO] will talk about it a little bit, but I think. I'll be honest. I think it's lip service because they know I'm going to say something being the only person of color who's a manager in this agency and I will say something. I think it's more of a lip service and also our contracts are state and federal contracts. We've got to provide that lip service. So, it's good to talk about it every now and then, but I don't think we take action on it."

Interviewee #19 (European American Nonmanager)

Woman: "Well, I think we have to choose our words and our actions very carefully. And like another example, some wrote down 'the natives are restless.' Well, that I think it is an insensitive statement. A white person who wrote it. We had a Native American staff person see it and was very offended by that. Well, the person who wrote it didn't think anything of it and didn't mean anything by it which may have been true. But, she was told that these phrases are not used any more. You just don't say those things any more. For this white person to say she didn't mean anything by it, well OK you didn't mean anything by it but, you still made a negative reference."

Formal laws

Those respondents with greater knowledge of EEO/AA laws tended to express more fear about violating people's legal rights. Managers were characterized as needing to have more knowledge of EEO/AA and as having greater responsibility for adhering to the law. Gained through training, reading, and work experiences, this increased legal knowledge was associated with increased vigilance including avoiding casual conversations about the subject and the importance of documenting potentially problematic conversations related to difference.

Interviewee #2 (European American Nonmanager)

Woman: "I'm not in the position to supervise anyone. So, that's kind of nice. So, I don't have to worry about that [EEO/AA laws and lawsuits]. If I did I would, um, I know what you need if you go to court. So, I would document everything. I'm just more aware of peoples' motives. Um. So, if I have problems with an employee or something, it will be documented, definitely. I would be more conscientious of what I'm doing. . . . It [a EEO lawsuit by a coworker at a former place of employment] put a bad taste in my mouth. I mean—she could have ruined my career. . . . Oh! I'm very aware . . . I'm very aware. I'm very aware."

Interviewee #11 (European American Manager)

Woman: "Well, speaking as a manager I think we talk about it mainly from a legal standpoint. That if it would come in question, then that's when we talk about it. If there were like a legal risk or something. Otherwise I don't think we sit around and talk about it."

Interviewee #23 (European American Nonmanager)

Man: "If we were, you know, sitting in a break room, we could put our arms around each other and talk and things like that, but as a supervisor, you couldn't do that, because it could be seen as a sexual advancement. So everything you did you had to be methodical about and you had to think, OK, is this going to be seen as, as this person or as, by a third party as, you know, sexually harassing or offensive. So I think when you get into the management positions, it's a lot more intimidating and

it's hanging over your head like a shadow but, you know, now that I'm not in a management position, I could really care less."

To summarize, this relatively small, but rich set of exemplars helps clarify the contours of two central tensions arising in the process of implementing diversity policies and programs in organizations. The first and strongest of these becomes evident in a widely shared concern for fairness in which racial and gender differences arose in what it means to be fair. The second tension, though more subtly expressed in the data, illustrates that majority group managers and nonmanagers tend to avoid discussing diversity issues while the minority manager seems to welcome a more active engagement with these issues. Next, we further discuss these tensions and their relationship to differences between the business case and sociopolitical case for diversity.

Discussion

This study sought to better understand how employees of one human service organization with a commitment to diversity experienced and talked about EEO/AA and diversity programming. The results of our study provide insight into the communicative tensions arising from the implementation of diversity policies and programs, and illustrate the challenges associated with making differences between majority and minority group members more meaningful in organizations. Rather than promoting greater understanding or easing interaction about differences, employees of this organization talked about diversity in ways that conveyed discomfort, ambivalence and even avoidance of interaction, particularly among supervisors who have the additional responsibility of monitoring alignment with policies, both formally, and in everyday interaction.

While diversity policies and programs grounded in the sociopolitical case may align organizations with the letter of the law, our results highlight how the experience of these same policies and programs can raise questions and inadvertently reinforce resistance to diversity, further sedimenting unequal power relations between social groups. The high-profile case of Texaco executives appropriating the language of a diversity training program to joke that their black employees' complaints of discrimination were akin to "the black jelly beans getting stuck to the bottom of the bag" (Solomon, 1996, p. 48) is but another illustration of ways in which formal policies and programs can reproduce the very problematic assumptions and relationships they seek to change. Though less dramatic, the results of our study suggest that both majority and minority group members tended to question the implementation of these policies, and to equate diversity with government-mandated quotas. At the same time, minority group members were less free to distance themselves from the implementation of these policies and programs, and were more likely to speak to the additional effort required on their part to meet the needs of minority clients, thereby making differences more meaningful on behalf of this organization. Future research might further explore ways in which the standpoints of minority employees are shaped over time by such experiences and the kinds of changes needed to distribute "diversity" work more evenly across majority and minority group members. Recognizing the differences in values underlying the instrumental, business case for diversity and the

broader, sociopolitical quest for social justice may deepen an appreciation for the challenges and the promise of working well with diversity in organizations. Recognizing and respecting differences and similarities in how majority and minority groups characterize their experiences with diversity can become a starting point for conversations helpful to improving policies and programs. In the process, such conversations can produce opportunities to work more meaningfully with the full range of differences characteristic of contemporary organizational life and highlight the potential of work organizations to operate as sites for social change.

Grounded in the insight that discursive tensions related to fairness and fear can derail meaningful engagements with difference, diversity policies and programs might be reimagined through a more nuanced communication lens. Doing so requires surfacing the social contradictions embedded within these policies/programs and the ways in which they simultaneously promote and constrain meaningful interaction between groups. A communication lens requires carefully attending to the different values underlying the business case and the sociopolitical case for diversity, how majority and minority group members experience diversity policies/programs, and taking into account the interaction patterns produced when they share these experiences with each other. For example, our results suggest that organizational commitments to diversity are experienced as both restoring and denying fairness, and that employees in this organization are unlikely to surface this contradiction on their own. We believe in the potential of communication-centered policies and programs to contribute to the development of more meaningful understandings of difference and the ability to work well with those differences in organizations. The ability to surface and work with such tensions and contradictions may be one step toward realizing that potential.

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Appendix A**Table 1.** Gender of Actual Population versus Interview Population

Gender	Actual population Number (%)	Interview population Number (%)
Female	72 (75%)	21 (70%)
Male	24 (25%)	9 (30%)
Total	96	30

Table 2. Race of Actual Population versus Interview Population

Race	Actual population Number (%)	Interview population Number (%)
European Americans	90 (93%)	25 (83%)
African Americans	3 (3%)	3 (12%)
Hispanic Americans	2 (2%)	1 (3%)
Native American	1 (1%)	1 (3%)
Asian Americans	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	96	30

Table 3. Managerial Status of Actual Population versus Interview Population

Managerial status	Actual population Number (%)	Interview population Number (%)
Female Managers	7 (7%)	5 (16%)
Male Managers	4 (4%)	2 (6%)
Female Nonmanagers	65 (67%)	16 (53%)
Male Nonmanagers	20 (20%)	7 (23%)
Total	96	30