

Are the “best” better for everyone? Demographic variation in employee perceptions of Fortune’s “Best Companies to Work For”

Are the “best” better for everyone?

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to assess how employees from historically marginalized groups (men and women of color and white women) perceive Fortune’s “100 Best Companies to Work For”® (BCWF) in terms of two outcomes that are related to diversity and inclusion: fairness and camaraderie. The authors focus on fairness as a way to measure perceptions of general treatment with respect to demographic characteristics associated with bias and discrimination, and on camaraderie as a way to measure perceptions of the inclusiveness of coworker relationships.

Design/methodology/approach – Hierarchical linear regression models are used to analyze survey responses from 620,802 employees in 1,054 companies that applied for the BCWF list between 2006 and 2011 in the USA. The authors compare the perceptions of employees in firms that are selected for the list to those of their demographic counterparts in firms not selected for the list. The authors also compare the perceptions of employees from historically marginalized groups to those of white men within firms that make the list and examine how these differences compare to the same differences within firms that do not make the list.

Findings – The findings reveal that the perceptions of men and women of color and white women in companies that make the “best” list are more positive than their demographic counterparts in companies that do not make the list. The authors also find, however, that the perceptions of employees from historically marginalized groups are more negative than those of white men in the “best” workplaces, and these patterns are similar to those in firms that do not make the list. For perceptions of fairness, the differences between employees from historically marginalized groups and white men are smaller in companies that make the list.

Research limitations/implications – The findings are based on average effect sizes across a large number of companies and employees, and the data do not provide insight into the actual organizational processes that are driving employee perceptions. In addition, the employee survey data are self-reported, and may be subject to recall and self-serving biases. Finally, the authors use measures of fairness and camaraderie that have not been rigorously tested in past research.

Practical implications – Managers seeking to improve experiences of fairness and camaraderie should pay particular attention to how race/ethnicity and gender influence these experiences, and how they do so intersectionally. Attending to these differences is particularly important to the extent that experiences of fairness and camaraderie are related to organizational trust, the key metric on which companies are selected for the “best” workplaces list, and a quality of organizational relationships that previous research has found to be positively related to key individual and firm-level outcomes.



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Originality/value – The paper provides the first assessment of demographic variation in the outcomes of employees in companies selected for the BCWF. Since selection to this list is based on the presence of trust, the authors’ findings also provide potential insight into how informal organizational processes that are associated with trust, such as leadership behaviors, peer relationships, and workplace norms, are viewed and experienced by men and women of color and white women. Finally, the authors analyze outcomes relating to camaraderie, a construct that has received little attention in the literature.

Keywords Gender, Ethnic minorities, Employee attitudes, Corporate rankings, Organizational fairness, Workplace camaraderie

Paper type Research paper

Corporations continue to play a central role in creating and mitigating inequality, not only through formal practices that define how pay, power, and opportunities are allocated, but also through the informal norms, values, and routines that shape the behavior of managers and employees. Organizational efforts to mitigate workplace inequality have most often taken the form of promoting equal opportunities through formal human resource practices (Dobbin, 2009), and promoting inclusion into core organizational activities, decisions, and relationships (Nishii, 2013). Although high-status firms like the Fortune 500 remain exemplars that other companies look to as sources of new management ideas to promote diversity and inclusion (Briscoe and Safford, 2008), corporate rankings lists have created new groups of exemplars along a number of criteria (Fombrun, 2007). In terms of workplace quality, Fortune’s annual list of the “100 Best Companies to Work For®” (BCWF) has become one of the most visible and highly regarded assessments. The list has been compiled annually since 1988 by Great Place to Work® (GPW), a research and consulting firm that operates and publishes lists in over 40 countries. As the list has gained status and visibility, and its choices are endorsed by the media, firms selected for this list are increasingly viewed as representative of high-quality workplaces.

Broad assessments of worker outcomes within these companies remain scarce, however, particularly the outcomes of employees from historically marginalized groups. Are the “best” better for all employees regardless of race/ethnicity and gender? In this paper, we provide insight into this question by analyzing survey data from 620,802 employees in 1,054 companies that applied for the BCWF list between 2006 and 2011 in the USA. The primary data are employee responses to survey items contained in the GPW’s Trust Index©. Our analysis assesses the extent to which men and women of color and white women perceive the “best” workplaces in terms of two outcomes that are related to diversity and inclusion: fairness and camaraderie. We focus on fairness as a way to measure employee perceptions of general treatment with respect to demographic characteristics associated with bias and discrimination, and camaraderie as a way to measure perceptions of the inclusiveness of coworker relationships. Since race/ethnicity and gender intersect to produce durable, historically specific social locations with permeable but cohesive bonds of experience (Marfelt, 2016; McCall, 2005; Sayce *et al.*, 2012), our analysis examines employee perceptions intersectionally (Crenshaw, 1991).

In addition to providing the first assessment of whether and how employee perceptions of the “best” workplaces differ by race/ethnicity and gender, our analysis extends the literature on workplace inequality, which has focused significant attention on the relationship between formal management practices and employee outcomes (Carberry, 2010; Castilla, 2012; Kalev, 2009; Kelly *et al.*, 2010), but less on the role of informal norms, behavior, and values. Selection to the BCWF list is not based on the presence of formal practices but on the presence of trust, particularly trust that employees have in their leaders and managers. Our findings, therefore, provide provisional insight into how informal organizational processes that are associated with trust – such as leadership behaviors, peer relationships, and workplace norms – are viewed and experienced by employees from historically marginalized

groups. In addition, perceptions of fairness and camaraderie also have the potential to provide insight into how employees view company support of diversity and inclusion, respectively. Although commonly studied outcomes such as occupational mobility and income are obvious cornerstones of inequality, employee perceptions of workplace environments reflect how employees are treated and are “a more telling indicator of the organization’s actual support for diversity than what management says about or the practices it implements to promote diversity” (Herdman and McMillan-Capehart, 2010, p. 40). These perceptions have also been found to influence important employee outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and motivation (Colquitt *et al.*, 2002; Gonzalez and Denisi, 2009; Hicks-Clarke and Iles, 2000; Kossek and Zonia, 1993; Mor Barak, 1998).

To set up the empirical analysis, we first describe in more detail the characteristics of the companies that are selected for the BCWF list (hereafter “BEST”) and why we expect them to be better for employees from historically marginalized groups. Our analysis then proceeds in two stages. We first compare the perceptions of employees in the BEST to those of employees in companies not selected for this list (hereafter “NONBEST”). Second, we compare the perceptions of employees from historically marginalized groups to those of white men within the BEST, and examine how these differences compare to the same differences within the NONBEST. After presenting our analysis, we discuss the implications of our findings for research and management practice.

Why the “best” should be better for everyone: the role of trust

What is distinctive about BEST companies and how might this distinctiveness create work environments that are fairer and more inclusive? The defining feature of the companies selected for the BCWF list are “high-trust cultures,” which are defined by the “level of trust that employees experience in their leaders, the level of pride they have in their jobs, and the extent to which they enjoy their colleagues” (Great Place to Work, 2017a). One of the most common ways that trust has been defined in the literature is as a “psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations about the intention or behaviors of another” (Rousseau *et al.*, 1998, p. 395). This “vulnerability evolves over the course of a relationship through repeated interactions and a history of reciprocity” (Burke *et al.*, 2007, p. 610). In terms of outcomes, a growing literature has found that organizational trust is positively related to individual-level job performance, as well as organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Burke *et al.*, 2007; Dirks and Ferrin, 2002).

How do companies develop high levels of trust, and does trust develop differently for employees across race/ethnicity and gender? The literature has emphasized the importance of a range of managerial behaviors that promote trust, which can be grouped under the broader categories of respect, support, fairness, engagement, competence, and accountability (Burke *et al.*, 2007; Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). Similarly, over the course of 30 years of selecting organizations for its list and consulting with a large number of organizations, GPW has identified nine “areas” of organizational life where “leader and manager actions, behaviors, and communications have the greatest impact on the level of trust in an organization” (Great Place to Work, 2017a). Eight of these areas include: “hiring for fit, speaking honestly and transparently, listening to employees, thanking employees regularly, developing employees, celebrating success, and sharing the rewards of mutual efforts” (Great Place to Work, 2017a). The ninth area is “caring,” which is expressed partly through managerial behaviors that demonstrate that the “workplace is inclusive and embraces diversity” (Great Place to Work, 2017a).

A key priority of both the academic literature and GPW’s research, therefore, is examining how high levels of organizational trust depend in part on the actions of managers to create fair and inclusive work environments. We propose that if high-trust work environments are truly

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fair and inclusive, they should be so across race/ethnicity and gender. Since companies are selected for the BCWF list for their high levels of trust, we therefore expect that employees will perceive them as fair and inclusive regardless of race/ethnicity and gender. If not, these workplaces may not actually be experienced as high-trust for everyone. Given the status and visibility of this list, gaining insight into how race/ethnicity and gender potentially affect variation in perceptions and experiences is important.

Hypotheses: fairness and camaraderie in the BEST

We had access to extensive survey data about employee perceptions of work experiences in companies that applied for the BCWF lists[1]. To focus on data that would allow us to better understand the perceptions of employees from historically marginalized groups, we first considered the broader discourse and research on diversity and inclusion, which are two foundational – but separate – constructs that refer to different organizational-level phenomena that can have important consequences for employees from historically marginalized groups. The GPW's employee survey did not include items that have been previously used in the literature to measure employee perceptions of organizational climates for diversity (McKay *et al.*, 2008) or inclusion (Nishii, 2013), but did include items that allowed us to assess employee perceptions relating to two more narrow constructs that underlay these broader constructs: fairness and camaraderie. In this section, we highlight the centrality of “fairness” to “diversity” research and application, and a similar centrality of “camaraderie” to “inclusion.” We then motivate our hypotheses about how we expect employee perceptions of fairness and camaraderie to vary (or not) by gender and race/ethnicity.

Diversity discourse initially focused on ethnoracial and gender heterogeneity, and then other significant categories like age and sexuality (Embrick, 2011). Although research on diversity has contained critical strands (Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014), diversity managers and many scholars have largely cast demographic differences as problems to be managed or as resources to be utilized (Cox, 1993; Cox and Blake, 1991; Milliken and Martins, 1996). Efforts to promote diversity and redress historical discrimination have focused on reducing bias in formal human resource practices such as hiring, promotion, evaluation, and compensation (Dobbin, 2009). In their goal of “leveling the playing field” (Giscombe and Mattis, 2002) by reducing the salience or effect of categorical boundaries such as those of race/ethnicity and gender (Vallas and Cummins, 2014), these efforts to promote such fairness in the USA have helped to protect some of the gains of the Civil Rights era from backlash (Kelly and Dobbin, 1999) and preserve awareness of the effects of social inequality (Meyers and Vallas, 2016).

At the core of organizational efforts to promote diversity, therefore, is fair and unbiased treatment with respect to demographic characteristics that are associated with discrimination (Mor Barak, 1998). Roberson and Stevens (2006), for example, found that concerns about justice are central to employee interpretations of and reactions to diversity-related events in the workplace. The construct of fairness has also been central to research on diversity (Choi and Rainey, 2014; McKay *et al.*, 2008; Mor Barak, 1998), even though the literatures on diversity and organizational justice have developed mostly independent of each other (Kulik and Li, 2015). In addition, although Thomas and Ely (1996) identified three paradigms for managing diversity, the “fairness and discrimination” one has dominated research on diversity (Dwertmann *et al.*, 2016). This framework focuses on organizational efforts to promote fairness, equalize opportunity, and reduce discrimination (Thomas and Ely, 1996).

The first construct that we use in our analysis, therefore, is organizational fairness, specifically in relation to demographic characteristics that are associated with discrimination and bias. Similar to Colquitt and Zipay (2015), we see this construct as capturing broad perceptions of organizational fairness that emerge out of assessments of the appropriateness of specific decisions and actions. Employee perceptions of organizational fairness may emerge out of their own experiences and/or their

observations of how others have been treated. To the extent that employees perceive the workplace to be fair regardless of demographic characteristics, they are likely to perceive a supportive organizational approach to workforce diversity.

In its focus on productivity and innovation outcomes – “the business case for diversity” (Cox, 1993) – diversity discourse has been criticized for redefining inequality on managerial terms (Edelman *et al.*, 2001; Zanoni and Janssens, 2004), placating some demographic groups of workers at the expense of other demographic groups (Berrey, 2014; Knights and Omanović, 2016; Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012), ignoring processes of exclusion (Roberson, 2006), and settling for quantity (demographic ratios) over quality (status, power, longevity, influence) (Fredette *et al.*, 2015; Shore *et al.*, 2011). These and other critiques produced a shift to a discourse of inclusion, which differs from diversity in terms of its focus, goals, and path to achievement (Fredette *et al.*, 2015; Nishii, 2013; Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014; Shore *et al.*, 2011). First, inclusion embraces everyone as unique individuals rather than as members of any group (Pless and Maak, 2004), thereby avoiding triggering stereotyping by members of dominant groups (Chatman, 2010; Ely and Meyerson, 2000). Inclusion attempts to address the qualitative desire of individuals for “belongingness and uniqueness” (Shore *et al.*, 2011) or strong reciprocal bonds with others while still recognizing personal distinctiveness. Second, the managerial goals of inclusion center on the incorporation of heterogeneous workers’ knowledge, experience, skills, and abilities (Ely and Thomas, 2001), while reducing productivity-inhibiting conflict attributed to workforce heterogeneity (Chatman, 2010; Ely *et al.*, 2012; Herring, 2009). By reducing these barriers to participation, inclusion most broadly elicits employees’ skills and talents (Gilbert and Ivancevich, 2000; Roberson, 2006). And third, managerial efforts to promote inclusion are usually “culturalist” in the sense that they focus on everyday norms, values, and behaviors rather than formal policies and practices. However, because this path to achievement is normative rather than formally prescribed, it requires a higher level of internalization and enactment across the ranks of workers than does managerial enforcement of formal rules and regulations (Kunda, 2009).

In assessing the literature on inclusion, Shore *et al.* (2011, p. 1267) note that despite differences in how different researchers define it, “belongingness and uniqueness” are common elements across most definitions. They define inclusion as “the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness” (Shore *et al.*, 2011, p. 1265). Nishii (2013), however, defines inclusion in terms of three dimensions: fairness of employment practices, participation in decision making, and “integration of differences.” Although these first two dimensions broaden the construct of inclusion beyond coworker relationships, the third dimension, which Nishii (2013, p. 1756) defines as “collective expectations and norms regarding the openness with which employees can enact and engage core aspects of their self-concept and/or identities without suffering unwanted consequences,” is similar to Shore *et al.* (2011) in its focus on belongingness and uniqueness.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to adjudicate between different definitions of “inclusion,” but the literature’s common focus on the extent to which employees feel a sense of belonging with their coworkers highlights its importance as a quality of coworker relationships. This quality of belongingness (or the emotional sense of being intimately accepted by one’s peers) is most closely related to the construct of camaraderie, which Rego *et al.* (2009, p. 149) define as the “degree to which interpersonal relationships in the organization are characterized by friendship, team spirit, and mutual concern.” When work relationships have this quality, we argue that employees will be more likely experience their unique selves as belonging within the social interactions and networks of collaboration that

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define most work organizations. Camaraderie, therefore, is the second construct used in our analysis. In contrast to organizational fairness, which captures perceptions of how organizations treat individuals across demographic categories, camaraderie focuses on the quality of social relationships with coworkers without specific reference to demographic characteristics. Camaraderie obviously emerges out of the social dynamics of specific groups of individuals, but it is also likely influenced by organizational norms, expectations, and values that promote behaviors of openness and acceptance.

Although camaraderie has been the focus of little attention by organizational researchers, it relates to other constructs that have been examined more extensively, such as team cohesion (Beal *et al.*, 2003; Chiocchio and Essiembre, 2009) and coworker satisfaction (Chiaburu and Harrison, 2008; Simon *et al.*, 2010). Camaraderie, however, is distinct from these two constructs. Team cohesion focuses on the quality of a specific set of relationships, i.e., those within a team. In addition, although cohesion was originally conceptualized as social (i.e. based on the interpersonal attraction of team members to each other), more recent definitions (Carless and De Paola, 2016; Molleman, 2005) also include task cohesion (i.e. commitment to the task of the group). Furthermore, while camaraderie can characterize a cohesive team, it is not specific to teams, and can characterize work relationships more generally or a specific set of relationships that do not comprise a team. Finally, cohesion is often viewed instrumentally as a characteristic that facilitates team action (Beal *et al.*, 2003), while camaraderie is a characteristic that may or may not facilitate action. Camaraderie, which captures a quality of relationships, is also distinct from coworker satisfaction, which focuses on an individual's cognitive assessment of and general affective reaction to coworkers (Smith *et al.*, 1969). Although all three constructs are similar in focusing on the positive qualities of work relationships, camaraderie most closely captures the extent to which coworker relationships are defined by a sense of belonging that is central to most definitions of inclusion (Nishii, 2013; Shore *et al.*, 2011).

How might the BEST's high-trust work environments influence perceptions of fairness and camaraderie for employees from different demographic groups? There have been few studies that have examined generally how perceptions of fairness vary by demographic characteristics. Mor Barak (1998) provides one exception, and found that white men had more positive perceptions of organizational fairness and inclusion than men and women of color and white women. A number of studies have also examined how race/ethnicity moderates the relationship between perceptions of fairness and workplace attitudes (Avery *et al.*, 2007; Choi and Rainey, 2014; Gonzalez and Denisi, 2009; McKay *et al.*, 2007). Despite the important contributions of this literature, it has offered little insight into how individual-level perceptions of organizational fairness vary by race/ethnicity and gender in different types of organizations. In addition, there has been no research to date (to our knowledge) examining how perceptions of camaraderie differ by gender and race/ethnicity.

Another body of literature, however, has examined demographic variation in workplace attitudes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions. In reviewing this literature, Dickerson *et al.* (2010, p. 47) concluded that nonwhite men and women and white women not only have more negative job attitudes than white men, but also "feel less integrated and have fewer positive relationships with peers." In other words, they feel less camaraderie, i.e., inclusion into their coworker relationships. Similarly, in terms of perceptions of fairness, McKay *et al.* (2007) point to a wealth of evidence that employees from underrepresented groups commonly feel discriminated against – that is, they feel they have been treated unfairly. This variation in workplace experiences by race/ethnicity and gender is also reflected in views of practices designed to address workplace inequality, such as affirmative action (Kravitz and Klineberg, 2000; Kravitz and Platania, 1993).

The more negative work experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of men and women of color and white women have been attributed to a number of causes, including past

experience with bias and discrimination, inequality in pay and opportunities for promotion, less access to power, and fewer “advantages from allocation and evaluation decisions” (Dickerson *et al.*, 2010, p. 48). We therefore expect that since trust is based in part on managerial behaviors that emphasize fairness and inclusion, the high levels of trust that distinguish the BEST companies will be associated with more positive perceptions of fairness and camaraderie among employees from historically marginalized groups. We propose the following empirical predictions based on this claim.

First, we should observe more positive perceptions of both fairness and camaraderie among workers from historically marginalized groups in the BEST firms than among demographically similar workers in NONBEST firms. That is:

- H1. Perceptions of fairness of employees from historically marginalized groups in the BEST will be more positive than the perceptions of fairness of employees from historically marginalized groups in the NONBEST.
- H2. Perceptions of camaraderie of employees from historically marginalized groups in the BEST will be more positive than the perceptions of camaraderie of employees from historically marginalized groups in the NONBEST.

Second, if firms that make the list are supportive of fairness and camaraderie equally across race/ethnicity and gender, we should observe no meaningful differences in employees’ perceptions of support for fairness and camaraderie by race/ethnicity and gender:

- H3. There will be no statistically significant differences between the perceptions of fairness of employees from historically marginalized groups and white men in BEST companies.
- H4. There will be no statistically significant differences between the perceptions of camaraderie of members from historically marginalized groups and white men in BEST companies.

In contrast, in firms that do not make the list, we should observe the same differences between these employees and white men that have been found in the literature on workplace attitudes, i.e., employees from historically marginalized groups should have more negative perceptions than white men. Stated more formally:

- H5. Perceptions of fairness in NONBEST companies will be more negative among members of historically marginalized groups than among white men.
- H6. Perceptions of camaraderie in NONBEST companies will be more negative among members of historically marginalized groups than among white men.

Data and methods

To test these hypotheses, we analyze data collected by GPW from 668,839 employees in 1,054 firms between 2006 and 2011[2]. GPW receives hundreds of firm applications annually for the list, and evaluates each applicant company through extensive surveys of management and a random sample of employees. Any company with over 1,000 employees and in business for at least five years can apply. While the application-based nature of this data set means all applicants are likely drawn from the small pool of companies providing “good jobs” (Kalleberg, 2011; Tilly, 1997), they nevertheless show a degree of gender and ethnoracial occupational segregation common to the larger labor market (Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012). More specifically, in both BEST and NONBEST companies, white women and most men and women of color are more likely to be hourly workers, and less likely to hold salaried and sales positions than white men. Table I provides more details about the distribution of the sample by demographic category, year, and occupation.

	All companies		BEST		NONBEST	
	Respondents	% of sample	Respondents	% of sample	Respondents	% of sample
<i>Demographic group</i>						
White male	240,855	38.0	73,890	40.0	163,463	37.5
White female	255,220	40.3	69,624	37.7	180,750	41.5
Asian male	23,683	3.7	8,526	4.6	14,693	3.4
Asian female	19,821	3.1	6,670	3.6	12,659	2.9
African American male	17,156	2.7	5,007	2.7	11,618	2.7
African American female	30,526	4.8	8,031	4.3	21,400	4.9
Hispanic male	22,497	3.6	6,525	3.5	15,262	3.5
Hispanic female	23,514	3.71	6,605	3.6	16,079	3.7
<i>Year</i>						
2006	99,471	15.7	23,978	13.0	73,363	16.8
2007	96,775	15.3	24,999	13.5	69,830	16.0
2008	87,490	13.8	24,456	13.2	61,411	14.1
2009	77,219	12.2	24,090	13.0	51,703	11.9
2010	147,053	23.2	42,036	22.7	102,312	23.5
2011	125,264	19.8	45,319	24.5	77,305	17.7
<i>Occupational category</i>						
Hourly production	30,225	16.4	28,269	15.3	72,417	16.6
Hourly clerical	73,522	11.6	20,453	11.1	51,364	11.8
Hourly professional	103,938	14.2	20,154	10.9	68,043	15.6
Salaried professional	176,418	27.9	58,011	31.4	115,421	26.5
Salaried manager	118,257	18.7	34,530	18.7	82,548	18.9
Salaried executive	34,208	5.4	11,898	6.4	22,079	5.1
Sales	30,255	4.8	10,077	5.5	19,647	4.5
Distribution of sample Total	620,802	100	184,878	100	435,924	100

Table I.
Distribution of sample

Our data set includes firm- and employee-level data from every company that applied for the list between 2006 and 2011, and we analyze data for both BEST and NONBEST companies. Although the annual number of firms chosen for the list is consistently 100, the number of applicant firms varies each year. In our sample, the number of annual applicants ranged from 315 to 470, with some firms appearing in multiple years and others only once. The sample contained 2,294 unique company years: 565 companies appear in one year, 177 in two years, 101 in three, 74 in four, 46 in five, and 91 in all six. We removed observations that were missing data, which reduced the sample to 620,802 employees.

The data on employee perceptions were collected from GPW's Trust Index[©] survey, which contain 57 statements that relate to the "honesty and quality of communication by managers, degree of support for employees' personal and professional lives, and the authenticity of relationships with colleagues" (GPW, 2017b). Responses on all items are measured on a 1-5 scale for each statement with 1 = "almost always untrue," 2 = "often untrue," 3 = "sometimes untrue/sometimes true," 4 = "often true," and 5 = "almost always true." Data are collected anonymously from a random sample of employees from each company that applies. In addition, managers of applying companies complete the Culture Audit[©], which "includes detailed questions about benefits, programs, and practices" (GPW, 2017b). Selection for the list is based on data collected from both surveys.

Dependent variables

Since the data were collected by GPW prior to our access to it, we needed to identify survey items that theoretically measured our two underlying constructs of organizational fairness

and camaraderie. For the construct of fairness, we focus on fairness with respect to demographic characteristics that are associated with discrimination. Although scales have been developed that measure organizational justice (Colquitt *et al.*, 2001) and fairness (Choi and Rainey, 2014; Hassan, 2013), these measures have seldom focused on fairness with respect to demographic characteristics such as gender and race/ethnicity. We identified three questions in the GPW's Trust Index[©] survey, however, that focused on an organization's support for fair treatment of employees based on demographic characteristics that are bellwethers in the present moment:

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- People here are treated fairly regardless of their race.
- People here are treated fairly regardless of their sex.
- People here are treated fairly regardless of their sexual orientation.

We used these three items to create a "fairness index," which is equal to the mean of an employee's responses on these three items. The index had acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$). The phrasing of these questions is similar to those in the "Diversity Perceptions Scale" developed by Mor Barak (1998), which is one of the most commonly used scales in the diversity literature (Kulik and Li, 2015). This scale includes such items as: "I feel I have been treated differently here because of my race, sex, religion, or age," and "Managers here give feedback and evaluate employees fairly, regardless of employees' ethnicity, gender, age, or social background," and "Managers here have a track record of hiring and promoting employees objectively, regardless of their race, sex, religion, or age" (Mor Barak, 1998, p. 93). Although the GPW items do not refer to specific practices like Mor Barak's (1998) scale, they refer to organizational fairness with specific reference to demographic characteristics. In line with Colquitt and Zipay (2015), we view these survey items as capturing overall perceptions of an organization's objectivity and evenhandedness in making decisions across demographic characteristics based in personal experience and observation. This measure likely captures perceptions of the fairness of both formal policies as well as informal practices and behavior.

To select the Trust Index[©] survey items that capture perceptions of camaraderie, we relied on Rego *et al.* (2009, p. 149), who define camaraderie as the "degree to which interpersonal relationships in the organization are characterized by friendship, team spirit, and mutual concern." We then examined the only scale of camaraderie (to our knowledge) developed by Rego and e Cunha (2008, p. 744), which included the following four items: "A sense of family exists among employees," "People show concerns for the well-being of others," "A great team spirit characterizes the organization," and "The organization atmosphere is friendly." We selected similar items from the GPW's Trust Index[©] to measure camaraderie:

- People care about each other here.
- This is a friendly place to work.
- This is a fun place to work.
- When you join the company, you are made to feel welcome.
- When people change jobs or work units, they are made to feel right at home.
- There is a "family" or "team" feeling here.
- We are all in this together.
- People celebrate special events around here.
- You can count on people to cooperate.
- I can be myself around here.

Our “camaraderie index,” therefore, contained ten survey items, and the measure we use in our models is the mean for these ten items for each employee. The index had acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.94$).

Since the two measures we developed were not identical to existing scales, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Although EFA and CFA are not usually performed on the same data, since we did not have access to other data we used the method described by Spicer (2005) and Keyes *et al.* (2002), which first involved splitting our sample randomly into two halves (using the “random” command in Stata). We then ran an EFA using all 13 survey items on one-half of the sample (using the “factor” command in Stata). Following the EFA approach articulated by Costello and Osborne (2005), we used factor analysis as the extraction method and oblique rotation. The latter allows the factors to be correlated, which is likely the case with our data. Table II shows these results, revealing that the survey items we identified loaded on two distinct factors, one that included all of the proposed fairness items and one that included the proposed camaraderie items. An examination of the graph of the scree plot of the eigenvalues also supported the two-factor structure (Costello and Osborne, 2005). The results from the EFA provided confidence that fairness and camaraderie were distinct factors in the data, but to further assess the validity of our two constructs, we also conducted CFA on the other half of the sample (using the “confa” command in Stata). The results confirmed the two-factor structure, with the values for four common goodness-of-fit indicators (CFI = 0.979, RMSEA = 0.055, SRMR = 0.015, TLI = 0.975) all at acceptable levels (Hair *et al.*, 2013; Schreiber *et al.*, 2006).

Independent variables

Our analysis includes two core independent variables. First, we created a nominal variable with eight demographic categories: African American men, African American women, Asian men, Asian women, Hispanic men, Hispanic women, white men, and white women. Second, we created a nominal variable equal to “1” if the company was selected for the BCWF list and “0” if not selected. Table III provides descriptive statistics and the correlation matrix for all variables.

Since one of our independent variables (BEST) was partially determined by survey responses that also define the dependent variables, we were initially concerned about endogeneity. These concerns are minimal, however, for three reasons. First, we used only 13 of the 57 questions from GPW’s employee survey to create our two

Survey item	Fairness	Camaraderie
People here are treated fairly regardless of their race	0.78	0.07
People here are treated fairly regardless of their sex	0.79	0.08
People here are treated fairly regardless of their sexual orientation	0.79	0.06
People care about each other here	0.19	0.64
This is a friendly place to work	0.11	0.51
This is a fun place to work	0.00	0.76
When you join the company, you are made to feel welcome	0.18	0.51
When people change jobs or work units, they are made to feel right at home	0.11	0.47
There is a “family” or “team” feeling here	0.07	0.86
We’re all in this together	0.09	0.73
People celebrate special events around here	0.11	0.66
You can count on people to cooperate	0.05	0.53
I can be myself around here	0.19	0.52

Table II.
Exploratory factor analysis, factor loadings

dependent variables. Second, selection onto the BCWF list is based on multiple sources of data: not only responses from the employee survey, but also the GPW’s Culture Audit©, which collects data from managers about benefits, programs, and practices (GPW, 2017b). Third, one of the primary components of our analysis involves comparing the outcomes of seven groups to those of white men within the BEST. If a company was selected for the list because of a high mean score among all of its employees, this does not necessarily mean that there is agreement between these groups on all questions or, more importantly, on the smaller group of the 13 questions we used. A company could have a high mean score on the survey items, for example, but this could mask substantial variation in responses by race/ethnicity and gender. Our concerns about endogeneity were further mitigated when we examined the correlation coefficients between the BEST variable and our two outcomes, both of which were low. The correlation between the BEST and the fairness index was 0.09 ($p < 0.05$), and between the BEST variable and the camaraderie index was 0.13 ($p < 0.05$).

Models

We tested the hypotheses using hierarchical linear regression models and the “xtmixed” command in Stata, with employees nested in firms and firms nested in years. This modeling approach allows us to use the nested structure of the data to account for the lack of independence among observations from the same company and from the same year; it also allows both fixed and random effects (Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal, 2008).

Results

In this section, we discuss the results of our quantitative analyses. Since our sample contained a large number of observations, we only discuss those results that were significant at $p < 0.001$. In large samples, there is a higher chance for Type 1 error (i.e. a “false positive”), so reducing our threshold to $p < 0.001$ mitigates the possibility for these errors (Allison, 1999).

Employee perceptions in the BEST vs the NONBEST

Table IV reports results from the first set of hierarchical linear models comparing the perceptions of employees in the BEST to employees in the NONBEST within each demographic group. We ran separate models for each subgroup, and report the estimates of the coefficients for our two key outcomes: fairness and camaraderie. The results indicate that employees in every demographic group in the BEST (including white men) have more positive perceptions of both fairness and camaraderie than their demographic counterparts in the NONBEST. For example, the coefficient for African American men for the camaraderie index is 0.185 and statistically significant at $p < 0.001$, meaning that on average the responses of African American men in the BEST on the camaraderie index are more positive than the responses of African American men in the NONBEST. These models do not compare the outcomes of these groups to those of white men, but simply compare the outcomes of these groups in the BEST to their counterparts in the NONBEST.

	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	1	2	3	4
1. Fairness index	4.574	0.702	1	5	1.00			
2. Camaraderie index	4.289	0.837	1	5	0.724**	1.00		
3. Racial gender group	–	–	1	8	-0.115**	-0.023**	1.00	
4. Best	0.298	0.457	0	1	0.094**	0.135**	-0.006**	1.00

Note: ** $p < 0.05$

Table III.
Descriptive statistics
and correlation matrix

For all groups, the results support *H1* and *H2*, and suggest that employees in the BEST companies experience their workplace as promoting more fairness and camaraderie across demographic category than employees in NONBEST companies.

Employee perceptions within the BEST and within the NONBEST

Table V presents the results from models predicting the differences between the perceptions of white men and all other demographic groups, both within the BEST and within the NONBEST. Models 1 and 3 were run in the BEST subsample and therefore compare the outcomes of white men in the BEST to those of employees from each of the other demographic groups within the BEST. Models 2 and 4 were run in the complete sample,

Table IV.
Results from hierarchical linear models predicting the effects of working in the BEST on fairness and camaraderie indices

	Fairness index		Camaraderie index	
	Coefficient (SE)	<i>n</i>	Coefficient (SE)	<i>n</i>
White female	0.074*** (0.006)	249,749	0.114*** (0.008)	240,089
Asian male	0.111*** (0.015)	23,127	0.154*** (0.016)	22,303
Asian female	0.138*** (0.016)	19,271	0.162*** (0.017)	18,423
African American male	0.131*** (0.020)	16,590	0.185*** (0.019)	15,808
African American female	0.148*** (0.018)	29,367	0.173*** (0.017)	27,792
Hispanic male	0.123*** (0.017)	21,757	0.180*** (0.018)	20,768
Hispanic female	0.123*** (0.017)	22,652	0.169*** (0.018)	21,447
White men	0.069*** (0.006)	236,530	0.114*** (0.009)	229,133

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ****p* < 0.001

Table V.
Results from hierarchical linear models predicting employee perceptions by demographic subgroup

	Fairness		Camaraderie	
	Model 1 (BEST)	Model 2 (NONBEST)	Model 3 (BEST)	Model 4 (NONBEST)
White female	-0.068*** (0.003)	-0.080*** (0.003)	0.023*** (0.004)	0.031*** (0.003)
Asian male	-0.125*** (0.007)	-0.171*** (0.006)	-0.059*** (0.008)	-0.030*** (0.006)
Asian female	-0.234*** (0.008)	-0.288*** (0.006)	-0.102*** (0.008)	-0.074*** (0.007)
African American male	-0.322*** (0.009)	-0.379*** (0.007)	-0.105*** (0.010)	-0.093*** (0.007)
African American female	-0.364*** (0.007)	-0.488*** (0.005)	-0.114*** (0.008)	-0.123*** (0.005)
Hispanic male	-0.120*** (0.008)	-0.165*** (0.006)	-0.021 (0.009)	-0.009 (0.006)
Hispanic female	-0.153*** (0.008)	-0.194*** (0.006)	-0.015 (0.009)	-0.001 (0.006)
<i>Interaction effects (Models 2 and 4) – comparing differences in BEST vs NONBEST</i>				
White female × BEST company		0.011 (0.005)		-0.009 (0.005)
Asian male × BEST company		0.045*** (0.010)		-0.030 (0.011)
Asian female × BEST company		0.052*** (0.011)		-0.028 (0.011)
African American male × BEST company		0.057*** (0.012)		-0.012 (0.013)
African American female × BEST company		0.084*** (0.010)		0.009 (0.010)
Hispanic male × BEST company		0.045*** (0.010)		-0.011 (0.011)
Hispanic female × BEST company		0.040*** (0.011)		-0.014 (0.011)
BEST company		0.050*** (0.011)		0.110*** (0.011)
Constant	4.739*** (0.008)	4.620*** (0.005)	4.433*** (0.010)	4.219*** (0.006)
Observations	184,878	620,802	178,655	597,179

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. ****p* < 0.001

but include interaction terms of each demographic subgroup and the BEST variable. The first seven rows in Models 2 and 4, therefore, show the “uninteracted” effects for each subgroup. These coefficients compare the perceptions of each demographic group in the NONBEST to white men in the NONBEST.

The findings for the fairness index (Models 1 and 2) reveal that in both the BEST and the NONBEST, all of the coefficients are negative and statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). For the BEST (Model 1), these coefficients are the following for each group: white women: $\beta = -0.068$; Asian men: $\beta = -0.125$; Asian women: $\beta = -0.234$; African American men: $\beta = -0.322$; African American women: $\beta = -0.364$; Hispanic men: $\beta = -0.120$; and Hispanic women: $\beta = -0.153$. Since the reference group for each these is white men within the BEST, the results show that each of the demographic groups have more negative perceptions of fairness than white men in the BEST. We therefore do not find support for *H3*, which predicted that there would not be differences in the BEST. We find the same results for the NONBEST (Model 2), i.e., all effects are negative and statistically significant. However, since *H5* predicted that these groups would have more negative perceptions of fairness than white men in the NONBEST, we find support for this hypothesis.

When we examine the results for perceptions of camaraderie (Models 3 and 4), we find more variation across groups. In the BEST (Model 3), when compared to white men, the effects for Asian men ($\beta = -0.059$), Asian women ($\beta = -0.102$), African American men ($\beta = -0.105$), and African American women ($\beta = -0.114$) are all negative and statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). These results suggest potential mechanisms of social exclusion in coworker relationships for Asian men and women, and for African American men and women. In contrast, there are no statistically significant differences between the perceptions of white men and either Hispanic men or women in the BEST. In addition, for white women, Model 3 shows that their perceptions of camaraderie are more positive than those of white men in the BEST ($\beta = 0.023$, $p < 0.001$). *H4* predicted that there would be no differences between the perceptions of camaraderie of white men and other demographic groups in the BEST. Overall, we only find this to be the case for Hispanic men and women, so do not find support for *H4*.

In the NONBEST (the first seven rows of Model 4), we find almost the exact same results as those found in the BEST, with only slight differences in magnitude. *H6* predicted that the perceptions of camaraderie of all demographic groups would be more negative than those of white men in the NONBEST. Since we find statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) negative effects for four out of seven groups (Asian men ($\beta = -0.030$), Asian women ($\beta = -0.074$), African American men ($\beta = -0.093$), and African American women ($\beta = -0.123$)), the results provide mixed overall support for *H6*.

The first set of analyses in Table IV compared the perceptions of employees from historically marginalized groups in the BEST directly to employees from historically marginalized groups in the NONBEST. We found that the perceptions of those in the BEST were more positive than those in the NONBEST. The second set of analyses in Table V compared the outcomes of employees from historically marginalized groups to those of white men within the BEST and NONBEST separately. There we found differences between the perceptions of most groups and white men in both the BEST and NONBEST, and in most cases, the perceptions of these groups were more negative than those of white men. Overall, although BEST men and women of color and white women consistently had more positive perceptions than their demographic NONBEST counterparts, in neither the BEST nor the NONBEST were they consistently better than their white male coworkers. This raises the question of whether the differences that we find between white men and the other groups in the BEST are of the same magnitude as what we find in the NONBEST. To provide further insight into this question, we conducted an additional set of post-hoc analyses.

Supplementary analysis: comparing differences within the BEST to differences within the NONBEST

Our final analysis compares the differences between each group and white men within the BEST to the differences between each group and white men within the NONBEST. Doing so allows us to assess the magnitude of the relative differences between employees from historically marginalized groups and white male employees across the two groups of companies. To do so, we examine the interaction effects in Models 2 and 4 in Table V, which allow us to compare the effect sizes for each group in the BEST (i.e. how each group compares to white men in the BEST) to the effect sizes for each group in the NONBEST (i.e. how each group compares to white men in the NONBEST). More technically, the coefficients of the interaction terms represent the additional effect that working in the BEST has for each group beyond the effect found for the same group in the NONBEST.

For example, looking at the results for the fairness index (Model 2), the interaction effect for “Asian Male \times BEST company” is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.045$). Although the second analysis showed that Asian men in both the BEST and the NONBEST have more negative perceptions of fairness than white men in their respective companies, the interaction effect indicates that the difference between Asian men and white men in the BEST is more positive (in this case, less negative) than the difference between Asian men and white men in the NONBEST. This means that the perceptions of fairness of Asian men and white men in the BEST are more alike than those of Asian men and white men in the NONBEST.

For fairness, since all the interaction effects reported in Model 2 are positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), this is true for all groups of employees from historically marginalized groups, suggesting greater similarity between groups in terms of perceptions of fairness within the BEST than in the NONBEST. The results for camaraderie are different: none of the interaction effects in Model 4 are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). This means that for all groups, the differences between them and white men are about the same in the BEST as the differences between each group and white men in the NONBEST.

Discussion

Are the “Best Companies to Work For” better for employees regardless of race/ethnicity and gender? This paper provides insight into this question by comparing employee perceptions of fairness and camaraderie in companies selected and not selected for this list. We focused on fairness as a way to measure perceptions of fair treatment with respect to demographic characteristics associated with bias and discrimination, and on camaraderie as a way to measure perceptions of the inclusiveness of coworker relationships, a key dimension of different definitions of inclusion (Nishii, 2013; Shore *et al.*, 2011). Our findings provide three primary insights.

First, our results reveal that employees from historically marginalized groups working in the BEST companies have more positive perceptions of both fairness and camaraderie than their demographic counterparts in the NONBEST. On these two measures, therefore, the BEST appear to be better for women and men of color and white women, suggesting a relationship between the high-trust cultures of the BEST and the work experiences of these employees. The perceptions of white men in the BEST are also more positive than those of white men in the NONBEST, suggesting that BEST efforts to improve fairness and camaraderie do not elicit a backlash from white men. Since fair and unbiased treatment with respect to demographic characteristics that are associated with discrimination are central to most organizational efforts to promote diversity (Mor Barak, 1998), these results suggest that the BEST might be better at promoting diversity. Similarly, to the extent that camaraderie captures the inclusiveness of work relationships, the BEST might be better at promoting inclusion more generally. Creating high-trust work environments is not

commonly viewed as a managerial approach for promoting inclusion and supporting diversity objectives, but our findings suggest that it merits more serious consideration as such an approach. However, since our constructs of fairness and camaraderie are narrower than constructs of diversity climate (McKay *et al.*, 2007) and inclusion climate (Nishii, 2013), our findings are only suggestive regarding these matters. To fully assess these claims, additional research is needed that employs more comprehensive scales to measure perceived organizational support for diversity and inclusion.

Are the “best”
better for
everyone?

Second, we had also expected that there would be few differences within the BEST between the perceptions of employees from historically marginalized groups and those of white men. Our results, however, reveal that employee perceptions within the BEST are fractured along racial and gender lines, and this pattern is very similar to what we find in the NONBEST. This finding is not surprising. Although the BEST are better for employees from historically marginalized groups than companies that do not make the list, it is unrealistic to expect that the BEST will completely eliminate deeply entrenched mechanisms that a large sociological literature has demonstrated to generate unequal treatment and outcomes in the workplace along racial and gender lines, such as cognitive biases and stereotypes (Castilla and Benard, 2010; Kalev, 2009; Ridgeway and Correll, 2004) and occupational segregation (Reskin and Cassirer, 1996). This does not mean that the “best” companies are not good places to work, but that they may have not fully equalized opportunity and outcomes for all employees. These companies may be making progress on this goal, but have yet to arrive.

A related, but speculative, explanation is that the managerial behaviors that promote organizational trust – the primary criteria that distinguish companies that make the list – may be experienced and perceived differently depending on the race/ethnicity and gender of employees. For example, although the BEST may be better at promoting trust, they may still do so with similar ethnoracial and gender biases and discrimination that other research have found to be common in organizational settings (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004; Smith, 2002). However, even if such biases are absent or weak, trust in leaders and coworkers may not offset the generally negative perceptions that employees from historically marginalized groups typically have of their work experiences and work environments (Dickerson *et al.*, 2010; McKay *et al.*, 2007; Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012). That is, employees from these groups may be more likely to cynically experience even genuine efforts to build trust. Although also speculative, this explanation would be in line with research that has found that an individual’s propensity for trust will influence their perceptions of trustful behaviors (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). Our findings do not allow us to assess the validity of these different explanations for the observed differences between white men and all other demographic groups within the BEST. They do, however, highlight the need for future research to focus in more depth on how employees from historically marginalized groups experience workplaces deemed as the “best” and, more generally, how they perceive managerial and peer behaviors typically associated with trust.

Finally, for perceptions of fairness, we find that the differences between those of employees from historically marginalized groups and white men in the BEST are smaller than those same differences within the NONBEST. This is not the case for perceptions of camaraderie, where the differences are the same within the BEST. One possible explanation for these findings is that it may be easier for firms to show that they are taking legal and cultural mandates for fair treatment by gender and race/ethnicity seriously than it is to transform managers’ and workers’ informal interactional “repertoires” (Frankenberg, 1993) of exclusion into ones of inclusion at the level of coworker relationships.

Overall, our findings suggest that the BEST are better for nonwhite men and women and white women than companies not selected for the list, but the BEST may have not fully equalized opportunity and outcomes. In addition, by intersectionally analyzing employee

perceptions, the disparities we find within the BEST demonstrate that any impediments to fairness and camaraderie – and thus possibly to diversity and inclusion – are not additive, but that race/ethnicity and gender converge as distinct social locations, and create distinct obstacles or benefits. Where categories like “women” or “minorities” can hide dissimilar social locations (Bowleg, 2012), our expanded range of demographic categories allow access to different perceptions within these categories. For instance, in contrast to other employees of color, the perceptions of camaraderie of Hispanic women and men were not significantly different from white men in both BEST and NONBEST firms. Also only visible through this intersectional analysis is how white women were unlike all other women (indeed, all other groups) in having more positive perceptions of camaraderie than white men in both BEST and NONBEST firms.

Broader implications for research

Beyond providing new insights into demographic variation in employee perceptions of fairness and camaraderie in the “best” workplaces, our findings have broader implications. First, despite a well-developed literature on organizational fairness and organizational justice (Colquitt and Zipay, 2015), analyses of how race/ethnicity, gender, and their interactions are related to variation in the experience and perceptions of fairness and justice remain less common. Our findings, however, are in line with Mor Barak (1998), who found that men and women of color and white women have more negative perceptions of organizational fairness than white men. Although our construct of fairness based on demographic characteristics is narrower than those more commonly used in the literature on employee perceptions of climates for diversity (McKay *et al.*, 2011), our findings are consonant with a large number of studies demonstrating more generally that white women and nonwhite men and women feel that they are treated unfairly in the workplace (Dickerson *et al.*, 2010; McKay *et al.*, 2007). The variation we find by race and gender both within the BEST and the NONBEST highlight the need for future research on fairness and justice to take demographic variation more seriously, and to connect this variation to variation in organizational-level efforts to promote diversity, whether these are specific practices or more informal managerial behaviors that attempt to promote trust in the workplace.

Second, our analysis also focused on demographic variation in perceptions of camaraderie, a construct that has received little attention in the organizational psychology and diversity/inclusion literatures. Although the strength and quality of social relationships has been central to research on team cohesion (Carless and De Paola, 2016; Molleman, 2005) and coworker satisfaction (Chiaburu and Harrison, 2008; Simon *et al.*, 2010), camaraderie captures a similar but distinct element of most definitions of inclusion, i.e., the extent to which employees feel a sense of belonging, friendship, and mutual concern with their coworkers. Our analysis is the first (to our knowledge) to examine how perceptions of camaraderie differ by race and gender. Considering the more dominant role that interpersonal relationships play in how work is organized and executed (Grant, 2007), we hope our findings spark new interest in the examination of coworker relationships, particularly in the context of efforts to promote diversity and inclusion.

For example, our findings that white women and nonwhite men and women in the BEST have more negative perceptions than white men in the BEST provide support for the observation of Dickerson *et al.* (2010, p. 47) that employees from historically marginalized groups “feel less integrated and have fewer positive relationships with peers.” New research is needed, however, to identify the mechanisms that create or limit camaraderie across racial and gender boundaries, and to examine whether and how camaraderie might actually promote inclusion. No less important is research that deepens our understanding of the consequences of camaraderie. The more positive views of camaraderie that we find

in the BEST relative to the NONBEST could have a number of consequences. At the individual level, for example, coworker support has been found to be positively related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job performance (Chiaburu and Harrison, 2008), and coworker satisfaction has been found to be positively related to job satisfaction and life satisfaction (Simon *et al.*, 2010). Does camaraderie have similar relationships with workplace attitudes and behaviors, and how do race/ethnicity and gender influence these relationships? In addition, Rego *et al.* (2009) found that camaraderie is positively related to affective well-being, but did not examine in depth how race/ethnicity and gender influence this relationship. At the team level, although research has found that ethnoracial and gender diversity can increase conflict and reduce team cohesion (Molleman, 2005; Thatcher and Patel, 2011), a climate for inclusion can reduce this conflict (Nishii, 2013). Since camaraderie captures a key dimension of inclusion, and we found that employees from historically marginalized groups have more positive perceptions of camaraderie in the BEST, this suggests that diverse teams in the BEST may have lower levels of conflict. Exploring the connections between camaraderie, team cohesion, and team performance, therefore, is another fruitful line of inquiry for future research on camaraderie generally, but also for research on the relationship between camaraderie, diversity, and inclusion.

Finally, although our analysis provides insight into how employee perceptions differ by race/ethnicity and gender, our data did not allow us to assess how these perceptions are related to other outcomes central to research on inequality, such as occupational segregation and mobility, representation in management, and the distribution of income (Avent-Holt and Tomaskovic-Devey, 2014; Dobbin *et al.*, 2015; Kaley, 2009; McTague *et al.*, 2009; Reskin and Padavic, 2006). While perceptions are important indicators of how employees view their treatment within these companies, future research should also seek to discover the link between the best workplaces, trust, perceptions of fairness and inclusion, and these other types of outcomes.

Implications for management practice

Our findings also have practical implications for managers. First, managers seeking to promote fairness and camaraderie should pay particular attention to how employee experiences of both can differ demographically, using a lens that takes into account intersectionality. Second, management's ability to influence the experiences and perceptions of employees is likely different for fairness and camaraderie, which are two different constructs. Perceptions of fairness relating to demographic characteristics likely stem from employee assessments of formal practices and day-to-day treatment that employees experience from top-level managers, supervisors, and coworkers. Managers can play a prominent role in influencing the implementation of practices and the overall treatment of employees. In contrast, camaraderie emerges from an entirely different set of processes at the level of coworker relationships, collaboration, and team work. Although managers can engage in efforts to create an environment that supports camaraderie, they will have less direct influence over a quality of relationships that fundamentally emerges out of coworker interactions. However, to the extent that managers can promote camaraderie, this may also help to reduce conflict and promote cohesion in work groups, particularly those with high levels of demographic diversity (Molleman, 2005; Nishii, 2013; Thatcher and Patel, 2011).

Although fairness and camaraderie are valuable outcomes on their own, they are also important to the extent that they influence trust, which can have a positive influence on individual-level job performance, organizational citizenship behaviors, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Dirks and Ferrin, 2002). Moreover, to the extent that trust reflects an absence of cynicism (Dean *et al.*, 1998) and can promote innovation-generating risk taking (Rousseau *et al.*, 1998), attending to the complex ways in which trust emerges is

crucial in the face of turbulent environments (Aslam *et al.*, 2016). Indeed, trust appears to have potentially significant effects on firm performance: Fulmer (2003), for example, found that BEST companies outperform similar firms that do not make the list.

Limitations

It is important to highlight some additional limitations of our analysis. First, our findings are based on average effects across a large number of companies and employees, and they do not provide insight into the actual organizational processes that are driving perceptions. Similarly, even though we reduced our threshold for statistical significance to $p < 0.001$, the large sample size still means that some of our findings may be false positives. Either way, an important direction for future research on the BEST firms is to better illuminate the organizational processes shaping employee experiences and perceptions by collecting and analyzing qualitative data. Second, the employee survey data are self-reported, and may be subject to recall and self-serving biases. Finally, although many firms appear multiple times in our sample, our data did not allow us to identify individual employees across years and whether specific employees were surveyed multiple times. We therefore treat all employees as unique. If the same employees appeared more than once, therefore, our modeling structure did not capture this lack of independence of these observations.

A broader limitation is that we did not have access to consistent, longitudinal information about practices that have often been the focus of the diversity literature, such as those relating to hiring, promotion, diversity training, mentoring, or affirmative action. We were therefore unable to assess whether differences in perceptions of fairness and camaraderie between the BEST and NONBEST were due to any higher frequency in the use of these practices in the BEST. We did, however, have data on eight distinct practices that may influence employee perceptions of fairness (Carberry, 2010; Clawson and Gerstel, 2014; Jacobs and Gerson, 2004; Stone, 2007; Williams, 2000), including: flexible scheduling, compressed work weeks, job training, job-sharing, health care for part-time employees, profit-sharing, employee stock ownership plans, and broad-based stock option plans. We found that all of these practices except for one were more common in the BEST, but when we ran additional multilevel regression models, we did not find any evidence that any of these practices were associated with more positive perceptions of fairness for nonwhite women and men and white women within the BEST[3]. Ultimately, to better assess the role of specific practices aimed to support diversity, it is necessary to analyze standardized, longitudinal data on practices relating to hiring, promotion, performance evaluations, mentoring, diversity training, and affirmative action.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, this paper provides the first in-depth analysis of how employee perceptions of their experience in companies selected as best vary by race/ethnicity and gender. Our findings provide evidence that these workplaces, when compared to those not selected for this list, are indeed experienced more positively by employees who continue to face the most negative consequences of discrimination and bias in the workplace. However, the findings also reveal that these employees' experiences of fairness and camaraderie in the "best" are generally less positive than those of their white male coworkers. This paper has suggested some possible explanations for these differences, although these are only tentative at this point. Additional research is needed that analyzes in more depth the experiences and outcomes of employees from historically marginalized groups in these companies. Since corporations continue to play a key role in shaping economic and social inequality (Cobb, 2016; Dobbin, 2009), such research is essential for developing a better understanding of the effects and limits of the full range of their efforts to create better workplaces.

Notes

1. The Great Place to Work® generously provided access to these data under strict confidentiality guidelines and procedures.
2. The data set to which the GPW provided access (under strict confidentiality guidelines and procedures) was limited to these years.
3. Results available from authors upon request.

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