

# What “blindness” to gender differences helps women see and do: Implications for confidence, agency, and action in male-dominated environments



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## ABSTRACT

The ways in which we discuss gender (embracing vs. downplaying difference) has implications for women's workplace confidence and behavior, especially in male-dominated environments and positions of power. In five total studies ( $N = 1453$ ), across a variety of samples, we found that gender-blindness—the belief that gender differences should be downplayed—is a more adaptive strategy for increasing female workplace confidence than gender-awareness—the belief that gender differences should be celebrated. In addition to increasing confidence, gender-blindness was related to actions necessary for reducing gender disparities (e.g., risk-taking, negotiation). We found that perceived gender differences in agency (i.e., assertiveness, independence) accounts for gender differences in workplace confidence, especially in male-dominated environments (e.g., business school) and positions of power (managerial positions). Finally, we found that gender-blindness either lessened or had no effect on men's confidence, demonstrating the unique positive effect of gender-blindness on women's confidence. Together, this research highlights the potential for downplaying differences, instead of emphasizing them, to combat the confidence gap.

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## 1. Introduction

*“People say ‘how can we get more girls into computer science?’ I think that's a hard question because I think just asking it can handicap progress. The interesting thing for me was that I got to live in a bubble. I think I've always been very gender unaware. . . . I think if I had felt more self-conscious about being the only woman along the way, I think it would have stifled me a lot more.”*

[Marissa Mayer, March 30, 2012 (92nd Street Y)]

Confidence is a key driver in attaining and maintaining positions of power and status, with implications for goal achievement and career success. However, past research has demonstrated a confidence gap between men and women, with men often being over-confident (Barber & Odean, 2001; Lundeberg, Fox, & Punčcohař, 1994; Reuben, Sapienza, & Zingales, 2012) and women sometimes being under-confident in their skills and performance in certain contexts (Kay & Shipman, 2014; Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007). This confidence gap occurs in a variety of domains including, salary negotiations (Babcock & Laschever, 2003),

self-promotion (Desvaux, Devillard-Hoellinger, & Meaney, 2008), and performance (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007), all precursors to success in managerial positions. Since confidence drives the attainment of status, signals competence, and increases an individual's power in groups (Anderson & Brion, 2010), some have argued that reduction of this confidence gap is a prerequisite for eliminating gender inequality (Kay & Shipman, 2014). Though gender differences in confidence are often discussed as a ‘systemic’ or ‘general’ gap (see Bleidorn et al., 2016; Kay & Shipman, 2014), it is important to note that these findings often occur in masculine domains: domains where masculine (i.e., agentic) qualities, such as assertiveness and dominance are more highly valued than feminine (i.e., communal) qualities, such as warmth and sensitivity (Cejka & Eagly, 1999).

Although some research has examined situations in which the confidence and performance gender gaps are successfully reduced, this research has mostly focused on changing women's behavior, or changing the framing or properties of the situation, to better align with stereotypical gender differences. For example, research has found that women are just as competitive as men when competing on a feminine task (Günther, Ekinci, Schwierien, & Strobel, 2010), or are just as likely to negotiate, when communal behaviors are portrayed as more effective (Kray, Galinsky, & Thompson, 2002), negotiation is framed as communal (i.e., as asking; Small, Gelfand,

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Babcock, & Gettman, 2007), or when negotiation includes communal properties (i.e., as negotiating on behalf of someone else; Amanatullah & Morris, 2010). Changing the context and framing clearly has positive effects on women's outcomes; however, it does so with constraints, allowing women to be confident and successful only in contexts and circumstances that align with gender prescriptions. This leaves the basic problem in place, where women often feel excluded and proscribed from agentic contexts and behavior. Much less research has examined how to change the very nature of how we view gender in agentic workplaces—where stereotypical masculine behaviors are privileged—and the implications for women's confidence.

In this paper, we examine the potential for gender-blindness, a strategy that advocates for the downplaying of difference and focus on similarities between men and women, to increase women's perceived fit and therefore confidence in workplace environments. We draw from social role theory (Eagly, 1987, 1997) and "lack of fit" arguments (Heilman & Eagly, 2008), to suggest that gender ideologies (i.e., strategies that prescribe how to approach our differences) intervene on stereotype content related to agency, either highlighting or downplaying women's fit in these environments and affecting their confidence at work.

According to social role theory (Eagly, 1997) the historic division of labor between men and women placed them into different social roles, where men took on agentic tasks (e.g., hunting) and women took on communal tasks (e.g., child-rearing). These roles created divergent stereotypes about men and women, where men were associated with agency (e.g., assertive, competitive) and women with communality (e.g., warm, kind). Although these roles are no longer necessary for the functioning of society, these stereotypes continue to be pervasive, persistent, and resistant to change (Heilman, 2001). Importantly, agency is in line with qualities valued in and expected of leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Since agency overlaps with the male social role but not the female social role, it creates the expectation that men will be more likely to possess skills required for success (Eagly & Karau, 2002), creating a "lack of fit" (Heilman, 1983; Heilman & Eagly, 2008) for women in many agentic workplace contexts. As such, gender-awareness may highlight an incongruence between women's stereotypical characteristics and those required for success, undermining their workplace confidence (i.e., belief in one's ability to accomplish a number of goals and actions related to workplace success). Thus, we argue that in male dominated environments (which ostensibly reward and value agency more highly), gender-blindness may be a more productive strategy than gender-awareness, reducing perceived gender-differences in agency, increasing women's identification with agentic traits, and subsequently increasing women's confidence and agentic behavior.

## 2. Awareness vs. blindness ideologies

In the popular press, many books and articles recommend bringing the "unique" aspects of being female to work, understanding the value of feminine qualities, and embracing gender differences to build more functional and productive organizations (Annis & Merron, 2014; Gerzema & D'Antonio, 2013). These proponents espouse a 'gender-aware' view, arguing that the best way to achieve gender equality and productive male-female relations is to embrace the distinctive qualities of men and women. By celebrating what is uniquely female, women can home in on their strengths, become more authentic, and use these qualities to progress in their careers. In contrast, a 'gender-blind' camp argues that gender differences are overstated in media, politics, and research, and that emphasizing differences between men and women reifies the gender hierarchy by attributing gender inequality to

fundamental, natural differences between men and women (Barnett & Rivers, 2006). Those who advocate gender-blindness believe that downplaying gender differences, and focusing on gender similarities, is a more productive way to approach gender relations (Koenig & Richeson, 2010; Martin, Phillips, & Sasaki, 2016).

These contrasting diversity ideologies, defined as beliefs and practices regarding how to best approach group differences in diverse settings to foster intergroup inclusion, have been examined on different social groups, and are often pitted against each other (Rattan & Ambady, 2013). More recently, they have been extended to workplace contexts, offering recommendations on how to approach differences at work to better foster recruitment, retention, inclusion, and success (Apfelbaum, Stephens, & Reagans, 2016; Galinsky et al., 2015). Although awareness and blindness ideologies are sometimes considered distinct (Hahn, Banchevsky, Park, & Judd, 2015), they are most meaningful relative to one another as two ends of the same spectrum, as they are often negatively related constructs representing two *divergent* strategies that aim to achieve the same goal: positive intergroup relations (Sasaki & Vorauer, 2013).

Gender-blindness is different from many other related gender constructs that tap into types of sexism (e.g., benevolent, modern) or the causes and consequences of gender differences (e.g., gender essentialism, determinism). Gender-blindness is a *strategy* that one uses to approach gender differences: an explicit set of beliefs that can be used and leveraged to change behavior. Although gender ideologies are descriptive beliefs about gender differences (men and women *are* different vs. the same), they are largely prescriptive, (we *should* celebrate vs. downplay these differences), advising individuals on how to approach our differences to create better intergroup relations and interactions. Further, unlike biases, many of which are unconscious, ideologies are conscious strategies that are amenable to change. Since both blindness and awareness are well-intentioned, many people express benevolence, but uncertainty, around how to approach group differences (MTV Bias Survey, 2014). As such, many people are receptive to these strategies (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Todd & Galinsky, 2012), making them potentially powerful interventions to reduce stereotypes and their downstream consequences. Notably, gender-blindness does not advocate for being "completely blind" to gender (an impossible task); like colorblindness in the domain of race, gender-blindness serves to de-emphasize and reduce ones focus on differences, instead focusing on individual attributes or group similarities.

## 3. Differentiating gender and race ideologies: Stereotypes and self-evaluation

Empirical research on diversity ideologies is well-developed for racial groups, especially Black-White relations, in the United States. Past research has found that these ideologies, though dispositional, are also malleable, and have powerful influences on bias reduction (see Sasaki & Vorauer, 2013 for review), and intergroup interaction (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008; Vorauer, Gagnon, & Sasaki, 2009). Racial ideologies have been used in organizational settings to show that how we approach our group differences can be used to motivate, engage (Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009) and retain employees (Apfelbaum et al., 2016).

Past work has found that compared to (color)blindness, multiculturalism (an awareness approach) can be beneficial for race relations, where recognizing, acknowledging, and embracing racial differences can lead to more minority empowerment and improved intergroup relations (Plaut et al., 2009; Verkuyten, 2005; Vorauer et al., 2009). However, there are important distinctions between race and gender that impact the effectiveness of awareness and blindness ideologies: notably stereotype content

(Martin et al., 2016). Stereotypes for racial minorities are often negatively valenced, where Blacks are seen as violent, aggressive, criminal, poor, and unintelligent (Devine & Elliot, 1995; Tucker, 2007). As such, many Blacks do not endorse, and seek to disconfirm, stereotypes associated with their group (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002). Multiculturalism, a positive ideology that encourages the celebration of *valued cultural differences* between Whites and Blacks, seems to increase in-group identity and evaluation by minorities (Verkuyten, 2005). This in turn, can increase confidence and engagement amongst racial minorities in performance and workplace contexts (Plaut et al., 2009; Wilton, Good, Moss-Racusin, & Sanchez, 2015; but see Apfelbaum et al., 2016).

Notably, the positive effects of multiculturalism are specific to contexts where negative racial differences are suppressed, creating anxiety around acknowledging race. In these contexts, awareness has the potential to alleviate anxiety and redirect *which* differences to recognize and emphasize. However, in contexts where stereotypes are positive and readily embraced, as with gender, awareness can exacerbate stereotypes (Gutiérrez & Unzueta, 2010) and increase representational concerns (Apfelbaum et al., 2016). For example, for Asians, where stereotypes are often positive (e.g., intelligent) and endorsed, awareness can create a 'minority spotlight' or 'positive stereotype threat' effect (Zou & Cheryan, 2015), leading to negative consequences. Thus, as with gender-blindness, multiculturalism is effective within certain, not all, contexts and environments.

For gender, stereotypes associated with women revolve around social roles that ascribe men and women with different, positive, and oftentimes complimentary, qualities. Though both men and women perceive communality as a positive attribute, agency is in line with qualities valued and rewarded in the workplace (i.e. independent, assertive; Heilman, 2001). Since agency is perceived as overlapping with the male, but not the female, social role, it creates the expectation that men are better leaders than are women (Eagly & Karau, 2002). As such, although gender-awareness highlights *valued differences* between men and women, women's differences are valued *outside* the workplace, and men's are valued within it. Consequently, gender-blindness should create the perception that women's qualities are more in line with the qualities that are valued and encouraged in the workplace and therefore make women feel more confident within them.

**Hypothesis 1a.** There will be a positive relationship between women's endorsement of gender-blindness and their workplace confidence.

Building off Hypothesis 1a, if gender-blindness increases confidence because it diminishes gender differences in agency and leads women to feel more efficacious within agentic contexts, this relationship should be especially true for women in male-dominated environments, where agentic qualities are presumed to be more highly valued. Therefore, we hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 1b.** The relationship between gender-blindness and workplace confidence will be moderated by workplace environment, such that this relationship will be stronger for women in male-dominated contexts.

Indeed, the few studies to date that have examined gender ideologies show that gender-awareness may be maladaptive in agentic environments, leading to more benevolent sexism, a form of sexism that denies women agency, by seeing them as dependent on and in need of protection by men (Koenig & Richeson, 2010). In addition, women who hold stronger gender-blind beliefs place greater value on career success than on work-life balance (Martin, Gündemir, Phillips, & Homan, 2017). Finally, gender-blindness has been shown to reduce men's stereotyping of women

on a number of agency dimensions, leading men to view women as more 'leader-like' (Martin et al., 2016). Importantly, while the baseline ideology for race tends to be more (color)blind (Plaut, 2002), where Whites feel anxiety over acknowledging differences and seeming racist (Apfelbaum et al., 2008), the baseline for gender seems to be awareness (Koenig & Richeson, 2010), as many individuals endorse gender stereotypes explicitly (Prentice & Carranza, 2002) and feel comfortable acknowledging them (Czopp & Monteith, 2003). Together, this research highlights that being aware of gender differences seems to highlight and exacerbate perceptions of agency differences between men and women that are already embraced and celebrated, and suggests that blindness may be a way to diminish this stereotyping.

Though we argue that a blindness approach to gender differences may be more adaptive for women's confidence in male-dominated environments, it is important to note that gender-blindness also has the potential to backfire. For example, blindness strategies may ignore factors that shape and bias women's performance (Castilla & Benard, 2010) or unique experiences that women face as a function of their gender (e.g., motherhood, sexism). Thus, we do not argue blindness strategies are always adaptive; nor do we argue that awareness strategies cannot increase women's confidence (see Apfelbaum et al., 2016). What we do argue, is that the types of gender differences being embraced revolve around gender-role agency stereotypes, an assumption we test in Study 1. Thus, emphasizing *agency differences* highlights gender roles/stereotypes, decreases women's identification with agency-related traits, and undermines confidence in domains where those qualities are valued and rewarded (i.e., masculine domains).

#### 4. Gender ideologies and workplace confidence

Although past research has provided a foundation for our understanding of gender ideologies, demonstrating their associations to a number of variables (i.e., benevolent sexism, attributions for difference), this research has only been applied to overall gender perceptions (Hahn et al., 2015; Koenig & Richeson, 2010) and men's views of and interaction with women (Martin et al., 2016). Little work has examined how gender-ideologies affect the very group they aim to benefit: women. Additionally, past work has looked at these ideologies as individual orientations towards difference, devoid of context. Ideologies are personal perspectives on the best ways to approach difference, but they are also embedded in organizational structures and are affected by context, with consequences for one's self-perception, confidence, and behavior. We demonstrate empirically for the first time, the link between gender-blindness, confidence, and action. Specifically, we propose a theoretical model for gender-blindness' effect on women's confidence, demonstrating when, where, and for whom gender-blindness is effective. We do so by clarifying the specific differences embraced vs. downplayed through these ideologies, showing that when women think of gender differences, they think of agency differences—differences valued and rewarded in the workplace—affecting their confidence in these contexts.

Confidence (measured in multiple ways) is a precursor for success in many domains, enhancing status, power, and promoting action (Anderson & Brion, 2010; Fast, Sivanathan, Mayer, & Galinsky, 2012), and has the potential to diminish gender inequality and lessen the gender gap in workplace success. As such, examining the effects of ideologies, which are both individually held and entrenched and encouraged in organizational culture, may have powerful implications: not only for women, informing best practices for how to approach and internalize differences, but also for organizations, advising how the strategies they adopt affect women's inclusion and potential in the workplace. Here we

specifically test and measure an ‘agentic’ form of confidence, relevant to workplace domains, not only because agency is fundamentally tied to our theory on gender differences, but also because agency is intrinsically linked to action-taking, referring to qualities relevant for goal-attainment (i.e., action), such as assertiveness, competence, or persistence (Abele, 2014). This confidence is designed to capture one’s beliefs in their ability to accomplish a number of goals and achieve success (Instone, Major, & Bunker, 1983; Kay & Shipman, 2014), in essence, measuring one’s “action-taking efficacy” at work. We validate this measure in Study 2.

Our measure of confidence differs from two related constructs, self-esteem (Borders, 2014; Rosenberg, 1965) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Self-esteem is a *broad*, emotional view about one’s *generalized* worthiness as an individual, devoid of context (Borders, 2014; Rosenberg, 1965). Whereas our measure of confidence is more *specific*, capturing the belief that one can achieve and accomplish a *number of goals* (i.e., actions) related to workplace success. Self-efficacy on the other hand, is a *narrow* belief in one’s ability to achieve a *certain* task or goal (Bandura, 1997). Our measure of confidence is more *broad*, encapsulating a number of beliefs about one’s abilities and efficacy to accomplish *numerous* desired tasks and goals, relevant to workplace success, without specifying the exact task or situation.

Importantly, we created a confidence measure that operationalizes the psychological component of behavioral action-taking. That is, confidence measures the belief that you can and will take action at work (i.e., taking on challenges, motivation to achieve goals), with the hope that it will be related to behavioral action-taking. This is important, as in order for confidence to have any meaningful impact, it must be paired with behavior. Indeed, past research supports this claim, demonstrating the link between confidence (and related variables, such as power) and action, where one’s belief in their capabilities has been consistently shown to drive many forms of behavior: persistence, achievement striving, performance accomplishments, and career pursuits (Bandura, 1982). Importantly for our theory, confidence has been shown to be especially important for women’s willingness to enter, expend effort, and gain success in competitive, male-dominated environments, such as STEM fields (Betz & Hackett, 1986), tournaments (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007, 2010), and entrepreneurship (Urban, 2010). Thus, if gender-blindness increases confidence, it is reasonable to assume that gender-blindness will also lead women to act on these beliefs and take action towards these goals.

**Hypothesis 2a.** There will be a positive relationship between women’s endorsement of gender-blindness and their likelihood to take action.

**Hypothesis 2b.** Workplace confidence will mediate the relationship between gender-blindness and action-taking.

Along with agency, communality (i.e., one’s selfless concern with others) is a dimension on which men and women are perceived to (and often do) differ that can undermine women’s success at work (see Rudman & Phelan, 2008); however, we believe confidence differences will be driven by expectations around and identification with agency, and not communality, an assumption we test in Studies 1, 2 and 5. Our theory supposes that the characteristics of high-power work environments overlap with the male quality of agency, which is why gender-blindness is effective: it reduces women’s perception that agency is reserved only for men, *increases women’s identification with agentic qualities*, and leads them to feel more confident within these environments, and therefore take more action. We believe it is this *identification* with agentic qualities (i.e., assertiveness, competitiveness) that

leads women to feel more confident (as they feel they possess qualities necessary for success in agentic environments). As such, identification with agency should increase confidence in agentic (i.e., male-dominated) environments, mediating the relationship between gender-blindness and confidence.

**Hypothesis 3a.** There will be a positive relationship between women’s endorsement of gender-blindness and their identification with agentic traits.

**Hypothesis 3b.** The relationship between gender-blindness and workplace confidence will be mediated by identification with agency.

**Hypothesis 3c.** The relationship between gender-blindness and action-taking will be mediated by a serial relationship between identification with agency and workplace confidence, such that gender-blindness will lead to greater identification with agentic traits, which will lead to greater workplace confidence, which will increase action-taking amongst women.

## 5. Overview of studies

In five studies, we test our hypotheses that gender differences undermine (Study 1), and gender-blindness relates to and increases, women’s workplace confidence (Studies 2–5) and in turn action-taking (Study 4 and 5), implicating agency as a key mechanism in this relationship (Studies 1, 2 and 5). In Study 1, we set the stage for why gender-blindness may be more effective in agentic environments. We show that women believe gender differences undermine their success at work, an effect driven by the number of agency related differences listed. With the agentic nature of gender differences implicated as salient for women, we next turn to gender-blindness as a strategy for increasing confidence, validating scales and showing that gender-blindness relates to workplace confidence, a relationship mediated by identification with agency for women (but not men), and moderated by male-dominated work environments. In Study 3, we show that women primed with gender-blindness feel more confident (Study 3a), and this effect is more likely to occur when women are in male-dominated environments (Study 2 and 3b). In Study 4, we find a direct association between gender-blindness and action-taking, an effect mediated through confidence for women (but not men) amongst a sample of MBAs. Finally, in Study 5, we manipulate female managers’ gender-blindness and demonstrate a serial mediation, whereby gender-blindness leads women to identify more strongly with agentic qualities, leading them to feel more confident and take more action. Together these studies demonstrate the types of differences currently being evoked through awareness to gender differences (gender-role stereotypes), and the potential for gender-blindness to reduce the salience of gender roles in male-dominated environments to increase confidence, action, and agency—all important for eliminating the workplace gender gap.

## 6. Study 1: which gender differences do women focus on?

### 6.1. Methods

In order to understand why ‘embracing’ vs. ‘downplaying’ gender-differences would affect women’s confidence, we examined the types of gender differences and similarities women were likely to naturally generate. If our assumption that agency differences (differences more valued in the workplace) are the ones naturally evoked when thinking of gender differences, then women



should list more agency-related than other types of words, and they should believe that these differences undermine their confidence at work.<sup>1</sup>

One hundred and sixty-three MTurk women were recruited to take part in a study on “making lists” and “attitudes and perceptions” for financial compensation. The sample consisted of 121 (74%) White, 8 Asian (5%); 19 Black (12%); 11 Hispanic (7%); and 4 (2%) Other-Race participants, with a mean age of 34.36 years ( $SD = 9.74$ ). Participants had an average of 13.98 years of work experience ( $SD = 6.87$ ) and 49% had a Bachelor’s degree or more. Participants were given one of two conditions, either being told “In the exercise below, please list out 1) differences or 2) similarities between men and women. These could be *differences [similarities] in personalities, physical characteristics, experiences, hobbies, opportunities, etc. There are no right or wrong answers, so be creative!*” Participants were then given eight blank spaces to write out qualities, adjectives, and traits. Participants listed 7.37 items on average ( $SD = 1.50$ ), with an equal number of items listed in each condition,  $F(1, 161) = 0.10$ ,  $p = 0.75$ ,  $\eta^2 < 0.00$ .

## 6.2. Dependent variables

### 6.2.1. Relation to confidence

To measure confidence, we asked, “To what extent do the differences [similarities] you listed before... (1) “Undermine your ability to be seen as an effective leader;” (2) “Decrease your influence;” (3) “Compromise your ability to be seen as a powerful woman.” Participants rated their agreement on a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ). Higher scores reflect more negative effects on workplace confidence.

### 6.2.2. Agency

We captured the extent to which the differences and similarities listed by participants were related to agency in two ways. First, we had two independent coders categorize the differences and similarities women listed. Coders were told that agency was defined as “the capacity of individuals to act independently, demonstrate assertion, and goal achievement; specifically, behavior regarding self-assertion, self-expansion and independence from others (Abele, 2014; Diehl, Owen, & Youngblade, 2004).” Coders were given 25 example words (e.g., competitive, dominant). Ratings were consistent ( $r = 0.55$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and discrepancies were resolved by an independent third coder. In addition, we created a LIWC dictionary to capture words related to agency (Pennebaker, Boyd, Jordan, & Blackburn, 2015), using 50 words found in studies on agency (see Diekmann & Eagly, 2000) and based off of the agency LIWC dictionary used in Madera et al. (2009). The LIWC program analyzes text files and computes the percentage of words from a file that fall into a possible linguistic category.

## 7. Results

### 7.1. Confidence

As expected, we find a significant effect on confidence,  $F(1, 161) = 24.94$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.13$ , such that women who listed out gender differences believed that these adjectives and traits undermined their confidence at work ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 1.77$ ) more so than those who listed out similarities ( $M = 2.52$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ).

<sup>1</sup> We also examined whether gender differences and similarities related to another commonly used gender dimension: communality. We used coders and created a communality LIWC dictionary (Madera, Hebl, & Martin, 2009). We find women did not differentially list out communality related words between conditions, both with coders,  $F(1, 161) = 0.09$ ,  $p = 0.77$ ,  $\eta^2 < 0.00$ , and the LIWC dictionary,  $F(1, 161) = 0.36$ ,  $p = 0.55$ ,  $\eta^2 < 0.00$ .

### 7.2. Agency

We divided the number of agency-related words by the number of words the participant listed to create an agency percentage score. Using coder ratings, we found that women listed out more agency words ( $M = 23.3\%$ ;  $SD = 16.8\%$ ) in the gender differences condition compared to the gender similarities condition ( $M = 14.7\%$ ;  $SD = 14.6\%$ ),  $F(1, 161) = 12.15$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.07$ . Consistent with the coders, we find the same effects for the LIWC analysis, where those in the differences condition listed out more agency-related words ( $M = 5.36$ ,  $SD = 6.98$ ) than those in the similarities condition ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = 5.88$ ),  $F(1, 161) = 6.80$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.04$ .

### 7.3. Mediation

We next examined whether the relationship between gender differences undermining women’s confidence was driven by the amount of agentic traits listed by participants. To test this, we used PROCESS model 4 in SPSS (Preacher & Hayes, 2004, 2008) with 95% confidence intervals using 5000 resamples. Indeed, we find that the relationship between the differences or similarities condition and negative effects on confidence was mediated by agency-related words, both by coders (*indirect effect* =  $-0.13$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $CI_{95} = -0.37, -0.001$ ) and LIWC (*indirect effect* =  $-0.09$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $CI_{95} = -0.27, -0.01$ ). See Fig. 1.

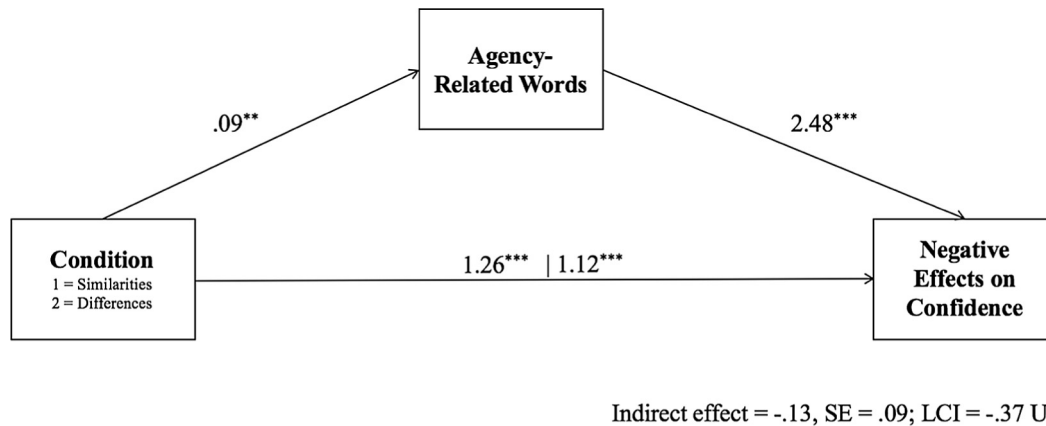
## 8. Study 2: capturing gender-blindness and workplace confidence

After supporting our assumption that focusing on gender differences undermines women’s confidence at work, and that this relationship is driven by the number of agency related differences listed, we seek to establish that gender-blindness is a strategy that can increase women’s self-identification with agentic traits and as a consequence, their confidence. As such, the purpose of Study 2 is threefold. First, we aim to show that our measures of gender-blindness and workplace confidence have internal, convergent, and divergent validity, relate to past measures in expected ways, and are positively and negatively correlated with other related constructs as expected. Second, we include men in our sample to show which effects of gender-blindness are shared and which are unique to men and women. Finally, we provide an initial test that gender-blindness is related to our measure of workplace confidence for women (but not men), that agency plays a key role in this relationship, and that these effects are strongest in male-dominated environments, testing Hypotheses 1a, 1b, 3a, and 3b.<sup>2</sup>

### 8.1. Method

Two hundred and five participants were recruited from Amazon’s MTurk to take part in a “scale validation” study for financial compensation. The sample consisted of 110 women (54%) and 95 (46%) men, with an average age of 35.76 ( $SD = 11.85$ ). The sample consisted of mostly White (80%) participants, where the rest were Asian (7%), Black (9%), Hispanic (4%) and Other-Race (1%). Ninety-nine (48%) had a Bachelor’s degree or higher and participants had an average of 14.60 years of work experience (8.14%). Participants worked in environments that were comprised of 56% men on average ( $SD = 27.68$ ) and 67 (33%) were in managerial positions.

<sup>2</sup> Our main effect between gender-blindness and confidence was also replicated with a sample of 33 female executives. Scales, correlations, and supplemental studies can be found in SOM.



**Fig. 1.** Gender differences undermine confidence through agency in Study 1. Note: Agency-related words were coded by two independent coders, with discrepancies resolved by a third.

Endorsement of gender-blindness was unaffected by any of these demographics, both overall, and within men and women, with the exception of women endorsing gender-blindness more in male-dominated environments (51% or more men;  $r = 0.21$ ,  $p = 0.028$ ). Participants completed a number of scales, were thanked, debriefed, and paid.

## 8.2. Independent variable

### 8.2.1. Gender-blindness

To measure gender-blindness, we used an eight-item scale that captures people's beliefs, both prescriptively and descriptively about the importance of gender-differences and the emphasis we should place on them (see Appendix A). Example items include, "we should describe others in terms of their individual traits rather than their gender" and "differences between men and women should be acknowledged and celebrated (reversed)." To ensure this measure truly captured 'gender-blindness,' we collected all measures used in past research, ensuring our measure related to and converged with the measures used in past work and their operationalizations of gender-blindness (Hahn et al., 2015; Koenig & Richeson, 2010; Malicke, 2013). Participants indicated their endorsement on a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

## 8.3. Gender related measures

### 8.3.1. Identification measures

We included a number of measures to capture how gender-blindness relates to one's identity. Since those who are higher in gender-blindness aim to de-emphasize gender differences, we believed that they would identify less (more) with (counter) stereotypical gender traits, imbue their gender-identity with less import, support feminist initiatives (one of which is "de-gendering"; Lorber, 2000), and be more sensitive to the incongruence between their professional (agentic) and gender identities. We measured identification with stereotypical traits, using agency ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ) and communality ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ) dimensions of the BSRI (Bem, 1981). We measured gender-identity using the four-item scale in Eliezer, Major, and Mendes (2010;  $\alpha = 0.87$ ). We measured feminist identity, using four-items from the feminist identity development scale (FIDS; Bargad & Hyde, 1991;  $\alpha = 0.82$ ). We measured gender-professional identity integration (amongst the managers in our sample) using five items from Sacharin, Lee, and Gonzalez (2009) and Tan (2014;  $\alpha = 0.68$ ). See SOM.

### 8.3.2. Beliefs about men and women

We believed gender-blindness would be negatively related to forms of sexism, as gender-blindness seeks to de-emphasize qualities that create inequality between men and women. To test this, we measured benevolent sexism (women as "wonderful", yet dependent on men;  $\alpha = 0.85$ ), hostile sexism (antagonistic beliefs about women's desire to control and manipulate;  $\alpha = 0.91$ ; Glick & Fiske, 2001) and modern sexism (denial of inequality and opposition of equal opportunity;  $\alpha = 0.90$ ; Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). Since gender-blindness de-emphasizes traditional gender traits, we believe it will be negatively related to beliefs about the fixedness or essential qualities of gender. To test this, we used both the gender determinism scale (Tinsley, Howell, & Amanatullah, 2015;  $\alpha = 0.92$ ), which measures the extent to which individuals believe one's gender will determine how they will behave as well as the gender-essentialism scale (Coleman & Hong, 2008;  $\alpha = 0.86$ ), which measures the extent to which one believes that gender is a fixed trait in humans.

## 8.4. Workplace confidence

To capture workplace confidence, we used six items designed to tackle action-based, agentic confidence, revolving around "achieving goals," "making decisions," "challenging others," "accomplishing tasks," and "outperforming others," several of which were taken from Rogers, Chamberline, Ellison, and Crean (1997). We believed that these items would be most relevant to measuring an agentic form of confidence, as the items capture the fundamental components of agency and workplace efficacy. These items included, "I think I am performing better than others in the same role/position as myself at work," "I am confident in my ability to attain any goal I set for myself," "I am confident in most of the decisions I make," "I never feel uncomfortable challenging a coworker's idea in front of other people," "I feel comfortable tackling any work-related challenge that comes my way," "I can accomplish anything I set out to do." ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ).

## 8.5. Confidence related items

To validate our confidence measure, we also captured other commonly used measures of confidence, such as the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (1965;  $\alpha = 0.91$ ), stigma consciousness, a scale that measures internalized stereotype threat, undermining confidence (relevant for women only;  $\alpha = 0.83$ ), and the personal sense of power scale (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012;  $\alpha = 0.92$ ), which is

highly related to action-taking. Although we believed our confidence measure would be related to these constructs, we believed gender-blindness' effects would be specific to our agentic, workplace confidence and unique to women.

## 9. Results

### 9.1. Gender-blindness

Our gender-blindness measure was reliable ( $\alpha = 0.73$ ) and is used as a single scale. Subjecting the items to a principal components factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation (Conway & Huffcutt, 2003), yielded two factors with eigenvalues greater than one (2.85 and 1.70), representing gender-blindness and gender-awareness items and capturing 35.67% and 21.20% of the variance respectively. However, we chose to measure gender-blindness as a unitary construct, reversing gender-awareness items and creating a scale ranging from 1 = *more gender-aware* to 7 = *more gender-blind*. We did so for several reasons: for one, past work on gender-blindness has shown both theoretically and empirically that this scale represents a single construct (see Koenig & Richeson, 2010). These ideologies, while distinct, are negatively related and represent two divergent and advocated strategies to approach difference aiming to achieve the same goal: positive intergroup relations (Sasaki & Vorauer, 2013). We believe examining gender-blindness relative to gender-awareness is a more meaningful comparison. Separating gender-awareness and gender-blindness into two four-item scales, they are negatively related constructs ( $r = -0.27$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), neither of which have significantly improved reliabilities ( $> 0.80$ ).

The mean for this scale was 3.86 ( $SD = 0.90$ ), with a range of 1–7, and was significantly below the midpoint of 4.00,  $t(204) = -2.28$ ,  $p = 0.028$ . Men and women differed on this scale, where women were higher in their endorsement of gender-blindness ( $M = 3.97$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ) compared to men ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ),  $F(1, 203) = 3.85$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.02$ . Our measure of gender-blindness related highly to past scales used by Koenig and Richeson (2010) ( $r = 0.93$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), Hahn et al. (2015) ( $r_{\text{blind}} = 0.65$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ;  $r_{\text{aware}} = -0.44$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and Malicke (2013;  $r_{\text{blind}} = 0.63$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ;  $r_{\text{aware}} = -0.58$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), showing convergent validity for gender-blindness.

### 9.2. Workplace confidence

Our workplace confidence scale was reliable ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ). Subjecting the items to a principal components factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation, yielded one factor with an eigenvalue greater than one (3.38) capturing 56.39% of the variance. The mean for this variable was 4.96 ( $SD = 0.95$ ), with a range from 1.67 to 7. There were no differences between men's ( $M = 4.96$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ) and women's ( $M = 4.96$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) workplace confidence,  $F(1, 203) < 0.00$ ,  $p = 0.997$ ,  $\eta^2 < 0.00$ , which is consistent with past research and our assumption that confidence differences only arise in agentic or male-dominated contexts. Importantly, we find that our measure of confidence is related to beliefs about self-worth (self-esteem:  $r = 0.66$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and one's ability to influence others (personal sense of power:  $r = 0.55$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).<sup>3</sup> The strong relationship between our confidence measure and self-worth and power (constructs correlated with confidence; see Fast et al., 2012; Judge & Bono, 2001), demonstrate convergent validity of our confidence construct.

<sup>3</sup> We did not find a relationship between confidence and stigma consciousness ( $r = -0.09$ ,  $p = 0.37$ ). However, this result is consistent with research showing stigma consciousness affects confidence only in domains of stereotype threat (Brown & Piel, 2003). The lack of (agentic) context, may explain the non-significant correlation.

### 9.3. Relationship to other variables

#### 9.3.1. Women

For our identification variables, we find that gender-blindness is significantly related to greater identification with agency ( $r = 0.20$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ), supporting Hypothesis 3a, but not communality ( $r = -0.01$ ,  $p = 0.93$ ), less gender-identification ( $r = -0.33$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), greater feminist identity ( $r = 0.21$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ), and less gender-professional identity integration ( $r = -0.43$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ). For forms of sexism, we find that gender-blindness is related to less benevolent ( $r = -0.36$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), hostile ( $r = -0.30$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), and modern ( $r = -0.20$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ) sexism. Finally, we find that gender-blindness is related to less endorsement of gender-determinism ( $r = -0.25$ ,  $p < 0.008$ ) and -essentialism ( $r = -0.41$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Supporting Hypothesis 1a, which predicts that gender-blindness will be positively related to confidence for women, we find that gender-blindness was positively related to workplace confidence ( $r = 0.23$ ,  $p = 0.016$ ), but not significantly so for self-esteem, sense of power, or stigma consciousness ( $p$ 's  $> 0.23$ ). We believe this represents the specificity of gender-blindness' influence on the agentic, workplace, and action-taking nature of women's confidence. See Table 1. In support of Hypothesis 1b, which proposes that the relationship between gender-blindness and confidence will be stronger in workplaces with more men, we find a significant Gender-blindness X Workplace Gender Composition (% male) interaction,  $B = 0.01$ ,  $t = 2.16$ ,  $p = 0.03$ . That is, the more men in women's work environments, the more beneficial gender-blindness was for workplace confidence. This result did not occur for men ( $p = 0.37$ ).

#### 9.3.2. Men

We find that for men, gender-blindness was related to more identification with communality ( $r = 0.22$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ), less gender identification ( $r = -0.52$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), more feminist identity ( $r = 0.46$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), less hostile ( $r = -0.32$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and modern ( $r = -0.24$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ) sexism, less gender-determinism ( $r = -0.38$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and gender-essentialism ( $r = -0.55$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). For men, unlike women, gender-blindness did not relate to identification with agency, gender-professional identity integration, or benevolent sexism ( $p$ 's  $> 0.13$ ). In line with our hypotheses, gender-blindness did not relate to confidence measures for men, with no significant correlation with workplace confidence, self-esteem, or sense of power ( $p$ 's  $> 0.16$ ), showing the unique relationship between gender-blindness and women's confidence.

### 9.4. Mediation

We tested whether the relationship between gender-blindness and workplace confidence was mediated through more identification with agentic traits (and qualities valued in agentic workplace environments; Hypothesis 3b). To test this, we used PROCESS model 4 in SPSS (Preacher & Hayes, 2004, 2008) with 95% confidence intervals using 5000 resamples. As expected, we found that the relationship between women's gender-blindness and workplace confidence was mediated by their identification with agentic traits (*indirect effect* = 0.07,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $CI_{95} = 0.02, 0.18$ ). Unsurprisingly, since gender-blindness was unrelated to men's identification with agency and workplace confidence, there was no indirect effect for men (*indirect effect* = -0.01,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $CI_{95} = -0.12, 0.11$ ).

## 10. Discussion Study 2

This study established that both our gender-blindness and workplace confidence scales are reliable measures. Gender-blindness

**Table 1**  
Correlations between variables for women in Study 2.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Gender-blindness	3.97	0.92	(0.75)														
2. Bem Masc	4.13	1.24	0.20 <sup>†</sup>	(0.86)													
3. Bem Fem	5.54	1.02	-0.01	0.18 <sup>†</sup>	(0.85)												
4. Gender Identity	5.15	1.21	-0.33 <sup>**</sup>	-0.05	0.14	(0.84)											
5. Feminist Identity	4.77	1.16	0.21 <sup>†</sup>	0.36 <sup>**</sup>	0.01	0.14	(0.82)										
6. GPII	4.39	0.97	-0.43 <sup>**</sup>	-0.25	0.30	-0.09	-0.41 <sup>†</sup>	(0.75)									
7. Benev Sexism	2.95	1.25	-0.36 <sup>**</sup>	0.13	0.18 <sup>†</sup>	0.23 <sup>†</sup>	-0.08	0.15	(0.86)								
8. Hostile Sexism	2.48	1.28	-0.30 <sup>**</sup>	0.17 <sup>†</sup>	0.11	0.05	-0.27 <sup>**</sup>	0.05	0.61 <sup>**</sup>	(0.91)							
9. Modern Sexism	1.94	0.62	-0.20 <sup>†</sup>	0.04	0.16 <sup>†</sup>	-0.05	-0.46 <sup>**</sup>	0.06	0.41 <sup>**</sup>	0.65 <sup>**</sup>	(0.89)						
10. G Determinism	2.98	1.48	-0.25 <sup>**</sup>	-0.01	-0.01	0.04	-0.15	-0.07	0.42 <sup>**</sup>	0.37 <sup>**</sup>	0.44 <sup>**</sup>	(0.87)					
11. G Essentialism	3.86	1.15	-0.41 <sup>**</sup>	0.05	0.28 <sup>**</sup>	0.03	-0.31 <sup>**</sup>	0.34 <sup>†</sup>	0.49 <sup>**</sup>	0.47 <sup>**</sup>	0.54 <sup>**</sup>	0.60 <sup>**</sup>	(0.93)				
12. Work Conf	4.96	0.94	0.23 <sup>†</sup>	0.39 <sup>**</sup>	0.31 <sup>**</sup>	0.01	0.30 <sup>†</sup>	-0.24	-0.05	-0.00	0.16	-0.10	0.00	(0.79)			
13. Self Esteem	3.16	0.63	0.12	0.31 <sup>**</sup>	0.29 <sup>**</sup>	-0.11	0.12	-0.25	-0.12	-0.07	0.12	0.04	0.14	0.62 <sup>**</sup>	(0.90)		
14. Sense of Power	4.76	1.14	0.06	0.51 <sup>**</sup>	0.32 <sup>**</sup>	0.12	0.25 <sup>**</sup>	-0.39 <sup>**</sup>	-0.01	0.19 <sup>†</sup>	0.21 <sup>†</sup>	0.08	0.08	0.52 <sup>**</sup>	0.53 <sup>**</sup>	(0.91)	
15. Stigma Consc	4.48	1.02	0.11	-0.10	-0.17 <sup>†</sup>	0.27 <sup>**</sup>	0.33 <sup>**</sup>	-0.31	-0.14	-0.33 <sup>**</sup>	-0.60 <sup>**</sup>	-0.21 <sup>†</sup>	-0.43 <sup>**</sup>	-0.09	-0.25 <sup>**</sup>	-0.10	(0.83)

N = 110. Values on in parenthesis are alpha reliability coefficients; GPII = Gender professional identity integration.

<sup>\*</sup> p < 0.05.

<sup>\*\*</sup> p < 0.01.

<sup>†</sup> p < 0.10.

was highly related to previously used gender-blindness scales (in one case above 0.90), and both gender-blindness and workplace confidence had convergent and divergent validity to related constructs. Similarly, workplace confidence represented a coherent construct, relating to self-esteem and personal sense of power, constructs both shown to correlate with both confidence and action. For both men and women, gender-blindness related negatively to gender-identification measures, sexism/unequal treatment, and essentialist beliefs about gender. However, there were several effects unique to women. Important to our theory, for women, gender-blindness was related to more identification with agency (Hypothesis 3a) and workplace confidence (Hypothesis 1a), and was endorsed in, and affected confidence more strongly in, environments with more men (Hypothesis 1b). Further, the relationship between gender-blindness and confidence was mediated by identification with agentic traits (Hypothesis 3b). These results, suggest that gender-blindness is especially relevant for women's but not men's workplace confidence, and highlights the importance of agency and agentic contexts in this relationship.

### 11. Study 3a: manipulating gender-blindness

In Studies 1 and 2, we established that gender-blindness was related to women's workplace confidence. These results do not, however, address causality. Thus, in Study 3 we manipulated gender-blind beliefs amongst women and examined its effects on their confidence. One goal is to demonstrate that inducing a gender-blind perspective in a workplace or agentic context can actually increase women's confidence. As such we examine causation in this direction, as it provides a lever for changing women's confidence.<sup>4</sup> Further, given the tendency for gender-awareness to be the baseline gender ideology (see Study 2; Koenig & Richeson, 2010; Martin et al., 2016), we believe that gender-blindness will increase confidence from a control baseline rather than gender-awareness decreasing confidence.

#### 11.1. Participants and procedure

One hundred and forty-six female participants were recruited from Amazon's MTurk to complete an online study on "Reading

and Comprehension in Newspapers" and "Attitudes and Perception" in exchange for financial compensation. Twenty-eight participants had already read an article manipulating gender or racial ideologies and three participants failed a comprehension check. These participants were subsequently removed from the analyses; results do not change when including them. The final sample consisted of 115 women, ranging in age from 18 to 63 years ( $M = 35.59$ ;  $SD = 10.60$ ). Participants were White (81%), Asian (7%), and Black (3%). Forty-one percent of the sample had at least a Bachelor's degree and participants had an average of 12.70 years of work experience ( $SD = 7.65$ ). Participants were told that they would be given a randomly selected article to read and were given one of three articles. One article discussed the merits of gender-blindness, encouraging a focus on similarities between the sexes (*gender-blindness*). The second article emphasized gender-awareness and the importance of embracing and celebrating differences between men and women (*gender-awareness*; adapted from Malicke (2013); See Appendix B). The third, control, article was about a local recycling program and was used to measure baseline workplace confidence. Thus, we had a three factor (ideology: gender-blind vs. gender-aware vs. control) between-subjects design. Participants answered several questions to support the cover story and reinforce the article's message and completed a quality check.<sup>5</sup> Participants were then asked to complete the gender-blindness and confidence measures used in Study 2, and were then thanked, debriefed, and paid.

#### 11.2. Dependent variables

##### 11.2.1. Manipulation check

To ensure the articles were having the intended effect on participants, we used the eight-item gender-blindness scale employed in Study 2 ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ). Participants rated their endorsement of these items on a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*, where higher numbers on this scale reflect higher gender-blind beliefs.

##### 11.2.2. Workplace confidence

To capture confidence, we used the same measure used in Study 2 ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ). Participants rated their endorsement on a scale from

<sup>4</sup> We do not argue that reverse causation is not possible, but rather that the ability to increase confidence is more relevant to our theoretical and practical motivation. We find that, in fact, experimentally increasing women's confidence also increases their endorsement of gender-blindness compared to gender-awareness and a control condition. See SOM.

<sup>5</sup> To ensure articles were comparable in quality, in experimental studies, participants rated each article (1 = *not at all*–7 = *very much*) on the following dimensions: convincing, clear, interesting, fair, believable. No significant differences were found between ideological conditions in all studies ( $p$ 's > 0.11).



1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*, where higher numbers on this scale reflect greater workplace confidence.

## 12. Results

### 12.1. Manipulation check

In support of the manipulation there was a significant effect of our ideological manipulations on the gender-blindness scale,  $F(1, 112) = 4.49, p = 0.036, \eta_p^2 = 0.04$ . Women in the gender-blind condition were significantly more gender-blind ( $M = 4.22; SD = 0.93$ ) than those in the gender-aware condition ( $M = 3.70, SD = 1.26$ ). The control condition ( $M = 3.97; SD = 0.99$ ) was not significantly different from the gender-blind,  $F(1, 112) = 1.05, p = 0.31, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$ , or gender-aware condition,  $F(1, 112) = 1.23, p = 0.27, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$ .

### 12.2. Workplace confidence

Supporting Hypothesis 1a, there was a significant influence of ideological condition on confidence,  $F(2, 112) = 6.62, p = 0.002, \eta_p^2 = 0.11$ . Women in the gender-blind ideology condition reported higher workplace confidence ( $M = 5.31, SD = 0.92$ ) than women in the gender-aware condition ( $M = 4.81, SD = 0.90$ ),  $F(1, 112) = 4.79, p = 0.03, \eta_p^2 = 0.04$ . The control condition ( $M = 4.49; SD = 1.15$ ) was significantly different from the gender-blind condition,  $F(1, 112) = 13.05, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.10$ , but not the gender-aware condition,  $F(1, 112) = 1.99, p = 0.16, \eta_p^2 = 0.02$ , suggesting that gender-blindness increased women's confidence in comparison to baseline levels. See Fig. 2.

## 13. Study 3b: For whom is gender-blindness effective? Manipulating gender-blindness and moderating by agentic environments

Thus far we have established that gender-blindness has positive effects on women's confidence, bringing them up from baseline levels. However, our argument rests on gender-blindness affecting confidence because it de-emphasizes male/female agentic workplace differences, especially in upper echelons of power or male-dominated environments. As such, in Study 3b, we collect demographic variables that we did not collect in Study 3a (workplace composition and industry), to show that gender-blindness is especially effective for women in male-dominated environments and industries.

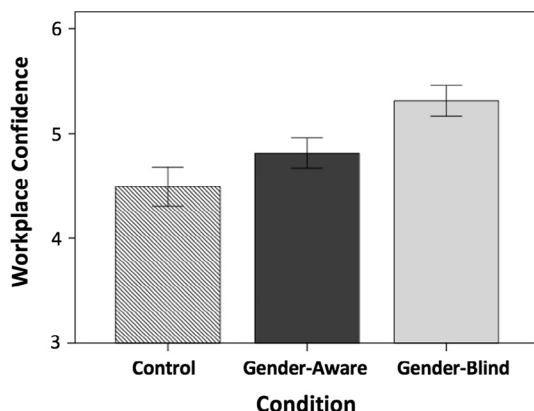


Fig. 2. Gender-blindness vs. gender-awareness vs. control on workplace confidence in Study 3a.

### 13.1. Participants and procedure

One hundred and forty female participants from Amazon's MTurk were recruited to complete an online survey in exchange for financial compensation. Eight participants had already read an article on gender or racial ideologies and were subsequently removed from analysis. The final sample consisted of 132 women, ranging in age from 19 to 65 years ( $M = 36.67; SD = 10.81$ ). Participants were White (76%), Asian (5%), Black (12%), and other races (4%). Fifty-eight percent of the sample had at least a Bachelor's degree and participants had an average of 15.77 years of work experience ( $SD = 7.15$ ). Participants made an average of \$40,497 per year ( $SD = \$29,652$ ) and worked in environments made up of 51% men on average. Fourteen percent worked in healthcare, 11% in retail, 11% in education, 10% in service/hospitality, 10% in STEM, 9% in media, design, or fashion, 8% in warehouse or construction, 6% in finance, 4% in sales, 4% in non-profit, 2% in law enforcement, 2% in clerical positions, and 2% were homemakers, 2% were students, and 4% were unemployed. Participants followed the same procedure as Study 3a, reading an article priming gender-blindness or gender-awareness. Thus, we had a two-condition (ideology: gender-blind vs. gender-aware) between-subjects design. After reading the article, participants answered several questions about their memory and comprehension of the article, completed a quality check, gender-blind scale, and measures of confidence. Participants were then thanked, debriefed, and paid.

### 13.2. Dependent variables

#### 13.2.1. Manipulation check

We measured gender-blindness using the eight-item gender-blindness scale ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ) on a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

#### 13.2.2. Workplace Confidence

We used the workplace confidence scale ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ) used in studies thus far. Participants rated their endorsement on a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.<sup>6</sup>

### 13.3. Demographic moderators: male dominated environments

In this study, we captured the gender-composition of the workplace and industry to tease apart for whom gender-blindness was effective. Our theory posits that gender-blindness downplays agentic differences, where male qualities are more valued. As such, we should find that this is especially effective for women in male dominated environments and/or industries (Hypothesis 1b). This moderation strategy complements the mediation shown in Study 2 allowing us to show the importance of agency or agentic contexts using multiple methods (see Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). Participants were asked to "estimate what proportion of your workplace is composed of each group." They were given the category of "women" (embedded in other social categories) and given a scale between 1 and 100. Results are analyzed where 1–50% = male dominated" and 51–100% = "female dominated".<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> We also included a different confidence measure, better-than-average, to further support our findings. We discuss and test this measure in SOM.

<sup>7</sup> Several participants were unable to complete workplace composition (unemployed, homemakers, etc.). To ensure we were capturing "agentic environments" with workplace composition, we coded male-dominated industries using "warehouse or construction," "law enforcement," "STEM," and "finance" (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010; Catalyst, 2015; U.S. Census, 2013). Male dominated industries were related to male-dominated environments ( $r = 0.30, p < 0.001$ ) and results were also significant when using this variable.

## 14. Results

### 14.1. Manipulation check

In support of the manipulation we again found there was a significant difference in gender-blindness,  $F(1, 130) = 8.52, p = 0.004, \eta_p^2 = 0.062$ , such that women in the gender-blind condition were significantly more gender-blind ( $M = 4.18, SD = 1.13$ ) than women in the gender-aware condition ( $M = 3.63, SD = 1.04$ ).

### 14.2. Workplace confidence

As predicted in Hypothesis 1a, there was a significant difference in confidence,  $F(1, 130) = 4.30, p = 0.04, \eta_p^2 = 0.032$ . Women in the gender-blind condition were significantly more confident ( $M = 5.43, SD = 0.87$ ) than those in the gender-aware condition ( $M = 5.07, SD = 1.10$ ).

### 14.3. Demographic moderators

#### 14.3.1. Male dominated environments

Consistent with Hypothesis 3b, we found a significant interaction between Ideological Condition X Workplace Gender Composition on workplace confidence,  $F(1, 124) = 10.38, p = 0.002, \eta_p^2 = 0.077$ . For women in male-dominated environments, those who received a gender-blind message ( $M = 5.60, SD = 0.84$ ) were significantly,  $F(1, 124) = 14.60, p < 0.001, \eta_p^2 = 0.11$ , more confident than those who received a gender-aware message ( $M = 4.74, SD = 1.19$ ). In contrast, women in female-dominated environments were unaffected by the manipulation ( $M_{\text{Gender-blind}} = 5.23, SD = 0.86; M_{\text{Gender-aware}} = 5.48, SD = 0.89, F(1, 124) = 0.94, p = 0.33, \eta_p^2 = 0.01$ ). This Ideological Condition X Workplace Gender Composition interaction is also significant using a continuous measure of “workplace gender composition,”  $B = 0.02, t = 2.32, p = 0.02$ . See Fig. 3.

## 15. Discussion Study 3

Study 3 made four central contributions. First, we showed that gender-blindness can be manipulated, creating the potential to intervene and increase women’s workplace confidence. Second, we showed that gender-blindness increases (and gender-awareness does not decrease) confidence from a baseline level, suggesting that the baseline ideology and confidence levels held

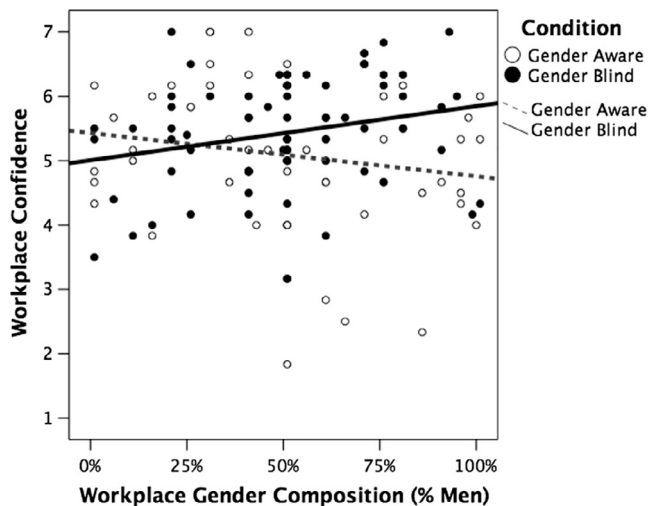


Fig. 3. Condition X workplace gender composition on workplace confidence in Study 3b.

by women are consistent with gender-awareness. This result differentiates our findings from a stereotype threat effect, where making salient undervalued differences increases motivation to disconfirm *negative* stereotypes, undermining confidence and performance (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Rather than highlighting negative “threatening” stereotypes, awareness seeks to highlight positive differences—albeit those where men’s stereotypical characteristics are more valued in the workplace. Since baseline views are more gender-aware (see Koenig & Richeson, 2010), gender-blindness seems to be empowering women (rather than awareness being threatening to them). Finally, we showed for whom a gender-blind message is especially adaptive, specifying an important boundary condition for our effects: women in male dominated environments. As such, in the remainder of the studies, we solely focus on women in agentic environments and positions of power, as these findings appear to be specifically relevant to these contexts.

## 16. Beyond confidence: moving to action

Thus far, we have demonstrated the relationship between gender-blindness and workplace confidence mediating this effect through (Study 2) and moderating this effect by (Studies 2 and 3) agency. In Studies 4 and 5, we seek to show that heightened levels of confidence for gender-blind women will manifest into real behavior. We first test Hypothesis 2a, that gender-blindness will be related to action-taking for women (and not men), and Hypothesis 2b that this effect will be mediated through confidence, on an MBA sample.

## 17. Study 4: gender-blindness amongst MBAs

### 17.1. Participants and procedure

One thousand one-hundred and thirty-five first-year MBA students completed a decision-making survey as part of a leadership course during the first week of their program. We restricted the sample to American citizens, as we observed differences in our dependent variable between cultures and had concerns about English as a second language amongst the non-American population. Controlling for American vs. other culture, all results remain significant. The final sample consisted of two hundred and seventy-one women (38%) and four hundred forty-one men (62%). The sample consisted of White (64%), Asian (18%), Black (6%), Latino (5%), and Other-Races (7%), with an average age of 27.70 ( $SD = 2.38$ ) and 4.54 ( $SD = 2.26$ ) years of work experience.

### 17.2. Independent variable

#### 17.2.1. Gender-blindness

Participants rated their endorsement on the gender-blindness measure ( $\alpha = 0.68$ ) on a scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

### 17.3. Dependent variables

#### 17.3.1. Workplace confidence

To capture confidence, we used the same six item confidence scale ( $\alpha = 0.65$ ), slightly adapted to an MBA (to reflect the nature of their business school workplace) context (see SOM for changes).

#### 17.3.2. Action

Action was captured using the Carter Racing exercise (Brittain & Sitkin, 1988; Menon & Phillips, 2011), where students assumed the role of an automobile racing team manager who decides whether

to race (potentially winning a large endorsement) or not race (because of a potential engine failure). Racing was a riskier, action-based choice, and thus coded as taking action, where 0 = “do not race” and 1 = “race”.

**18. Results**

We tested Hypothesis 1a (gender-blindness on workplace confidence) and Hypothesis 2a (gender-blindness on action-taking) using linear and binary logistic regressions, respectively, with gender-blindness and gender of the participant entered in the first step, and the Gender (male, female) X Gender-blindness interaction variable entered in the second step. Gender is coded such that male = 1, female = 2, where positive relationships indicate women rated themselves higher on that dimension. Overall and within gender means for independent and dependent variables are listed in Table 2.

**18.1. Workplace confidence**

We found a main effect for gender whereby women overall, rated themselves lower on workplace confidence items than men,  $B = -0.23, t(709) = -4.21, p < 0.001$ . There was no main effect

of gender-blindness on confidence,  $B = 0.001, t(709) = 0.04, p = 0.97$ ; however, this was qualified by a significant Gender X Gender-blindness interaction,  $B = 0.24, t(708) = 3.76, p < 0.001$ . As women endorsed gender-blindness more they rated themselves higher on confidence,  $B = 0.14, t(269) = 2.92, p = 0.004$ ; whereas as men endorsed gender-blindness more, they rated themselves lower on confidence,  $B = -0.10, t(439) = -2.37, p = 0.018$ . See Fig. 4a.

**18.2. Action**

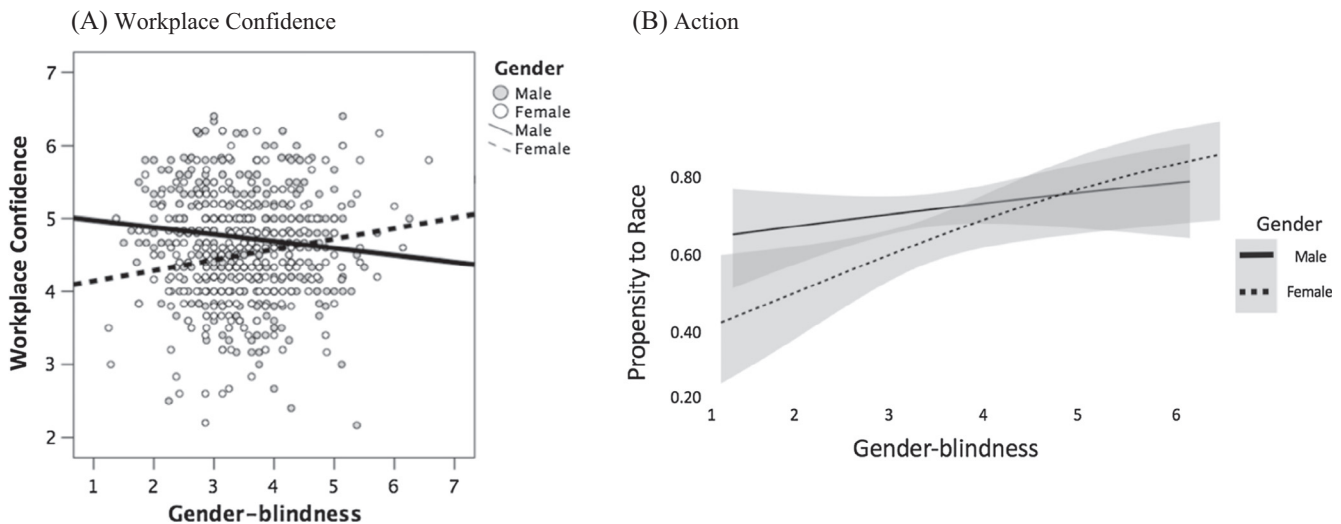
There was a significant effect of gender on action-taking,  $B = -0.36, SE = 0.17, p = 0.03, Wald z = 4.71$ , such that women were less likely to “take action.” Further, there was a significant effect of gender-blindness,  $B = 0.24, SE = 0.10, p = 0.01, Wald z = 6.26$ , such that those higher on gender-blindness were more likely to “take action.” Although there was no significant Gender X Gender-blindness interaction,  $B = 0.25, SE = 0.20, p = 0.21, Wald z = 1.56$ , it was only for women,  $B = 0.39, SE = 0.16, p = 0.009, Wald z = 6.41$ , and not men,  $B = 0.14, SE = 0.13, p = 0.28, Wald z = 1.19$ , that gender-blindness significantly related to “action-taking.” See Fig. 4b.

**Table 2**  
Means, standard deviations, and tests of significance for Study 4.

Descriptives	Gender-blindness				Overall confidence				Action			
	N	M	SD	F	p	M	SD	F	p	Race (%)	$\chi^2$	p
<i>Overall</i>												
Male	361	3.53	0.82	0.26	0.61	4.73	0.70	17.70	<0.001	71%	4.92	0.03
Female	211	3.50	0.86			4.50	0.71			64%		
Overall	712	3.52*	0.84			4.65	0.71			68%		
<i>Low gender-blind</i>												
Male	157	2.67	0.41	0.01	0.95	4.86	0.70	24.40	<0.001	70%	4.47	0.046
Female	103	2.67	0.43			4.41	0.76			57%		
Overall	260	2.67	0.41			4.68	0.76			65%		
<i>High gender-blind</i>												
Male	158	4.40	0.45	0.57	0.45	4.69	0.72	1.12	0.29	74%	0.13	0.77
Female	89	4.45	0.58			4.59	0.64			72%		
Overall	247	4.42	0.50			4.65	0.69			73%		

High and low gender-blindness was determined using a tri-partite split, chosen for increased sample size and a more conservative test.

\* Variable mean falls below the midpoint of the scale,  $t(712) = -15.36, p < 0.01$  suggesting the baseline view is more gender-aware than-blind.



**Fig. 4.** Gender X gender-blindness interactions on workplace confidence and action in Study 4.

### 18.3. Moderated mediation

We next sought to test Hypothesis 2b that confidence would mediate the relationship between gender-blindness and action, but that this relationship would be moderated by gender, such that gender-blindness would lead to more workplace confidence, and in turn, action, for women, but this relationship would not occur for men. To test this hypothesis, we used PROCESS model 8 (Preacher & Hayes, 2004, 2008), which tests whether both the direct and indirect effects are moderated by gender. According to Hayes (2013), a bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect of the highest-order product term can be used for inference as to whether moderation is mediated, testing whether the indirect effect of the independent variable (gender-blindness) on the dependent variable (action) through the mediator (workplace confidence) is moderated by gender (male vs. female). We find a significant indirect effect of the highest-order product term through confidence (*indirect effect* = 0.05, *SE* = 0.03, *CI*<sub>95</sub> = 0.02, 0.13). This suggests that, for women, the relationship between gender-blindness and action was significantly mediated by increased workplace confidence (*indirect effect* = 0.03, *SE* = 0.02, *CI*<sub>95</sub> = 0.002, 0.09) and that these effect were reversed for men (*indirect effect* = -0.02, *SE* = 0.02, *CI*<sub>95</sub> = -0.07, -0.003). See Fig. 5.

## 19. Discussion Study 4

In Study 4, we found that in a male dominated MBA program (62% men), women higher on gender-blindness were more confident (Hypothesis 1a). We found that women who were higher on gender-blindness were also more likely to take action (Hypothesis 2a), and race, in a risky situation. Importantly, these effects did not occur for men, where men's gender-blindness was related to less confidence and unrelated to action-taking. We find that for women, workplace confidence mediated our effects between gender-blindness and action-taking (Hypothesis 2b), suggesting that confidence is an important pre-cursor to action-taking. Importantly, men were more confident and more likely take action, overall, but for men and women both high in gender-blindness these effects attenuate (see Table 2), suggesting that gender-blindness may indeed be a strategy to diminish the gender gap in confidence and action-taking.

## 20. Study 5: agency, confidence, and action

### 20.1. Participants and procedure

One hundred and thirty-six female managers were recruited from Amazon's MTurk to take part in a study on "Reading and

Comprehension" and "Choices and Decision Making". Ten participants were removed for already having read our manipulation or one similar to it or for failing a manipulation check. The final sample consisted of 11 (9%) Asian, 14 (11%) Black, 3 (2%) Hispanic, 93 (74%) White, 5 (4%) Other-Race participants, with an average age of 36.42 years (*SD* = 10.60). Participants had on average 15.96 years of work experience (*SD* = 7.62) and made on average \$45,965 (*SD* = \$26,719) annually. Participants followed the same procedure as Study 3a, reading an article priming gender-blindness or gender-awareness. Thus, we had a two-condition (ideology: gender-blind vs. gender-aware) between-subjects design. After reading the article, participants answered several questions to support the cover story, completed a quality check, manipulation check, as well as our dependent variables.

### 20.2. Dependent variables

#### 20.2.1. Manipulation check

To ensure the articles were having the intended effects, we used the eight-item gender-blindness scale ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ) as a manipulation check.

#### 20.2.2. Workplace confidence

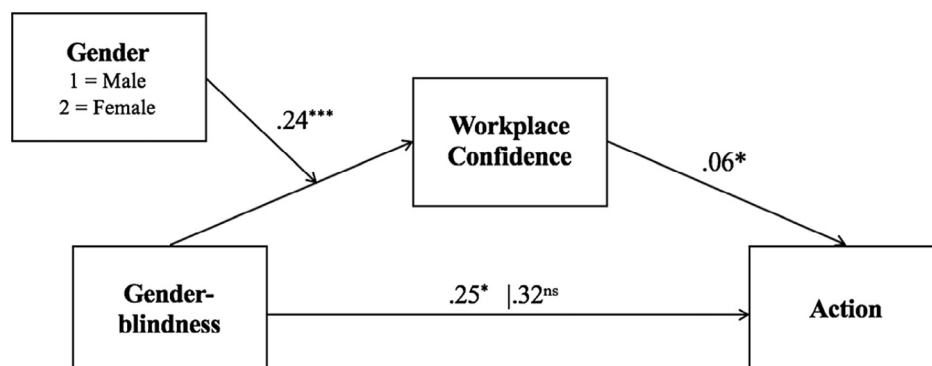
To capture confidence, we used the measure from Study 2 ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ).

#### 20.2.3. Identification with agency

To measure identification with agency, participants were asked, "how well does the following adjective describe you" and given the six adjectives used in Study 2: assertive, leader, dominant, forceful, aggressive, and defends beliefs ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ). They rated their identification on a scale from 1 = *almost never true* to 7 = *almost always true*.

#### 20.2.4. Action

To measure action, we used action based tasks and scenarios used in previous research. The first was a decision in a simulated blackjack game in which the participant possessed a hand totaling 16 and the dealer's face-up card was a 10. They were asked whether they wanted to take a card. Taking a card was coded as taking action (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003). The second was a scenario in which they had to decide whether to speak first in a debate (Magee, Galinsky, & Gruenfeld, 2007). Going first was coded as taking action. The third was a scenario where the participant needed to decide whether to join a movement to free a prisoner who was wrongly imprisoned (Huang, Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Guillory, 2010). Finally, the fourth was a scenario where the participant was given the opportunity to negotiate.



**Fig. 5.** Moderated mediation of gender-blindness on action through workplace confidence moderated by gender in Study 4. Conditional indirect effects of gender-blindness on action at value of moderators: Men: *indirect effect* = -0.02, *SE* = 0.02, *CI*<sub>95</sub> = -0.07, -0.003; Women: *indirect effect* = 0.03, *SE* = 0.02, *CI*<sub>95</sub> = 0.002, 0.09. Indirect effect of highest order interaction: 0.05, *SE* = 0.03; *LCI* = 0.002 *UCI* = 0.14.



Choosing to negotiate was coded as taking action (Magee et al., 2007). Scenarios can be found in SOM. Our measure was the total number of times the participant chose to act (0–4).

## 21. Results

### 21.1. Manipulation check

There was a significant difference in gender-blindness,  $F(1, 124) = 4.88$ ,  $p = 0.029$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.038$ , such that women in the gender-blind condition were significantly more gender-blind ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ) than women in the gender-aware condition ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ).

### 21.2. Confidence

There was a significant difference in confidence,  $F(1, 124) = 5.05$ ,  $p = 0.026$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.039$ , such that women in the gender-blind condition were significantly more confident ( $M = 5.23$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ) than women in the gender-aware condition ( $M = 4.87$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ).

### 21.3. Identification with agency

There was a significant difference in identification with agency,  $F(1, 124) = 6.53$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.050$ , such that women in the gender-blind condition identified with agency significantly more ( $M = 4.65$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ) than women in the gender-aware condition ( $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ).<sup>8</sup>

### 21.4. Action

There was a significant effect of condition on action taking,  $F(1, 124) = 4.99$ ,  $p = 0.027$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.039$ , such that women in the gender-blind condition took significantly more action ( $M = 2.21$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) than women in the gender-aware condition ( $M = 1.79$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ).

### 21.5. Mediation

We predicted in Hypothesis 2b that the relationship between gender-blindness and action would be mediated through confidence. To test for mediation, we used PROCESS model 4 in SPSS (Preacher & Hayes, 2004, 2008) with 95% confidence intervals using 5000 resamples. The relationship between condition and action was mediated by confidence, *indirect effect* = 0.11,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $CI_{95} = 0.02, 0.28$ , supporting the idea that gender-blindness increases action-taking by increasing women's confidence.

Importantly, in this study, we sought to show that it is through increased identification with agency (i.e., male qualities valued at work) that this process takes place (Hypothesis 3c). That is, gender-blindness, by down-playing traditional gender differences, where male qualities are more valued at work, should lead women to identify more with these qualities, lead them to feel more confident, and then in turn, take more action. Thus, below we test for serial mediation to test the link between gender-blindness (+) → agency (+) → confidence (+) → and action (+). To test the hypothesis, we ran a PROCESS script for serial mediation (Model 6) by Preacher and Hayes (2004, 2008). This indirect relationship between gender ideology and action orientation through agency

and confidence was significant, *indirect effect* = 0.06,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $CI_{95} = 0.004, 0.18$ . Importantly, although both agency and confidence mediated the relationship between condition and action independently, the serial mediation provided the best model fit. See Fig. 6.

## 22. Discussion Study 5

This study found that amongst a sample of female managers, gender-blindness led to increased identification with agentic traits, more confidence, and increased action-taking. In line with the expectation that gender-blindness' focus on downplaying agentic differences should lead women to identify more with agentic traits, we indeed found that it is through identification with more agentic qualities that women feel more confident and therefore take more action.

## 23. General discussion

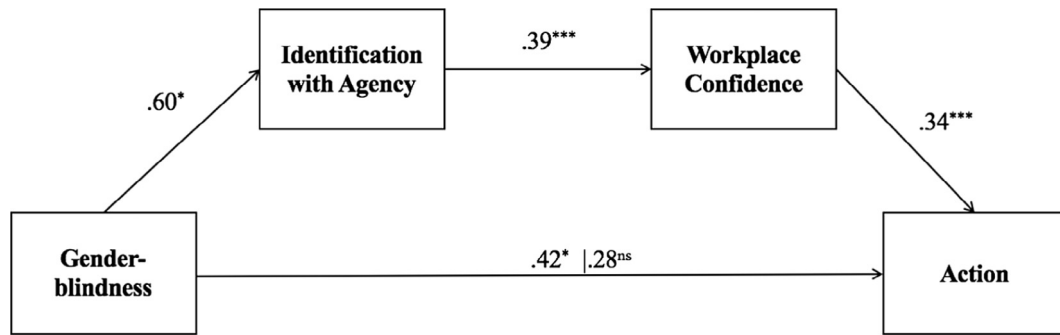
The present research examined the impact of gender-blindness on women's workplace confidence and behavioral outcomes targeted at reducing gender disparities. We first tested our assumption that the types of differences being generated when eliciting gender-differences are agentic ones, and these differences affect women's confidence at work. To address this problem, we proposed that reducing gendered agency perceptions through gender-blindness, a strategy that advocates for downplaying (rather than embracing) gender differences, would diminish, and even close, the gender-gap in confidence. We found that gender-blindness was related to and increased women's workplace confidence. These effects were driven by the perceived misalignment of women's and workplace qualities, where gender-blindness was related to and increased women's identification with agency. Further, the effects of gender-blindness were especially helpful for women in masculine contexts. In addition to confidence, we find gender-blindness affected action-taking through a two-step process, such that gender-blindness increased women's identification with agency, which in turn increased confidence, and led to action taking. Finally, we found that although gender-blindness was related to men's egalitarianism, it either lessened or had no effect on men's confidence and action-taking.

### 23.1. Theoretical and practical implications

This research makes a number of theoretical and practical contributions, with applications for women's empowerment, organizational policies, and diversity ideologies.

In this paper, we show that gender-blindness affects the psychology and behavior of women, providing a simple intervention to empower women and motivate behavior targeted at reducing gender-disparities in male-dominated workplaces. Gender-blindness seems to re-direct the way women see gender differences, and importantly, the extent to which these perceived differences affect women's beliefs and actions. This seems especially important, as mass media, policy dialogue, and scholarly research send mixed messages about the importance of emphasizing gender differences. Although some advocate for gender-blind approaches (Barnett & Rivers, 2006; Fine, 2013), many scholars and practitioners argue that men and women are inarguably different, and that these differences should be acknowledged, embraced, and celebrated (Annis & Merron, 2014; Baron-Cohen, 2003). Surprisingly little research has examined the implications of these ideologies for women, and without empirical support, advocating this approach seems remiss. Here we show that, awareness strategies

<sup>8</sup> To again show the importance of agency (and not communality) we measured identification with communality using the same scale from Study 2 ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ). We find no significant differences,  $F(1, 124) = 0.001$ ,  $p = 0.947$ ,  $\eta_p^2 < 0.01$ , between women in the gender-blind ( $M = 5.47$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) and gender-aware ( $M = 5.48$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ) conditions.



**Fig. 6.** Serial mediation between condition and action through identification with agency and workplace confidence in Study 5. Model 1: Condition → Agency ID → Action ( $effect = 0.05$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $CI_{95} = -0.06, 0.20$ ). Model 2: Condition → Agency ID → Confidence → Action ( $effect = 0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $CI_{95} = 0.00, 0.18$ ). Model 3: Condition → Agency ID → Action ( $effect = 0.03$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ ,  $CI_{95} = -0.02, 0.16$ ). Note: All models are significant independently; comparatively, Model 2 provides the best fit.

can backfire, and offer blindness as an alternative for women in male-dominated workplace environments.

In addition, the confidence gap between men and women in domains of power, is a pressing issue and drives much of the inequality we see in salary, promotion, and performance (Kay & Shipman, 2014). Our findings suggest that a well-intentioned strategy for embracing difference can have deleterious consequences for women's confidence. Instead, espousing the similarities of men and women (gender-blindness) may be one way to close the gap on this persistent problem. Ameliorating the gender gap takes systematic changes to work-place environments and a reduction in bias from everyone; however, it also requires women to 'lean in,' take more risks, and have more confidence in their own abilities to ultimately take action (Kay & Shipman, 2014; Sandberg, 2013). We show that gender-blindness has the potential to increase confidence and action, providing an intervention to encourage women to take charge of their careers. More importantly, we find that gender-blindness can be manipulated, which offers a strategy for improving women's confidence at work. Women's endorsement of workplace confidence does not differ between gender-aware and control conditions, as a result, these findings suggest that women's baseline ideology is gender-aware, and further, that exposing women to a message of gender-blindness has the potential to increase confidence from the baseline.

Along this vein, it is important to note the relativity of gender-blindness and for whom it is effective. While gender-blindness was adaptive for women's confidence and behavior—especially in male-dominated environments—endorsement on the gender-blind scale was below the midpoint, and only slightly above the midpoint after manipulating gender-blind beliefs, suggesting that it may not be adaptive to be "blind" to gender, but rather less "aware." The manipulation may be pushing women to be open to the idea that gender differences are over-emphasized and should not be seen as defining or limiting. This strategy does not call for the elimination, but rather a de-emphasis (or redirection) of the current focus on gender differences.

We found that the gender-blind strategy was effective in masculine environments and for women who were in positions of power: environments where women's qualities are less valued than men's. These findings should not be extended beyond this context, as gender-blindness may undermine women who value, and whose environments value, communal, feminine qualities more highly. Further gender-blindness may disregard differences that should be acknowledged, like the systematic inequality women face in society or the different experiences women encounter (i.e. pregnancy, child-care demands). For example, recent research has found that women high on family orientation are less likely to endorse gender-blindness and desire gender-blind organizational policies (Martin et al., 2017), which suggests that

gender-blindness is not an adaptive or effective strategy for all women. Indeed, past work has found that policies that ignore the systemic factors that shape and bias women's performance at work, seem to exacerbate prejudice towards women in occupational domains (Castilla & Benard, 2010).

Consequently, it is imperative to understand the limitations of a gender-blind approach to difference. We believe that if qualities associated with women were to be valued more highly in the workplace, it would likely change the efficacy of this intervention. Indeed, communal leadership styles can enhance employee motivation, morale, and performance (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996). Gender-blindness may provide a short-term fix, allowing women to feel included and compatible with agentic environments, but it leaves structural problems in place where agentic qualities and contexts are more valued than communal ones. Since women are more likely to lead with communal styles (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001), there is hope that gender-blindness may help women rise to power within the current system and promote organizational change.

Finally, these findings stand in contrast to research showing the positive effects of awareness ideologies on race (Plaut, 2010; Plaut et al., 2009). This result suggests that applying research on race to gender to create universal strategies for approaching diversity can backfire. We hypothesized that the unique ways that we view racial compared to gender differences affects the impact that awareness ideologies have on minority and female confidence. As both minorities and women face challenges being incorporated into the upper echelons of power, companies have developed strategies, programs, and policies to better include marginalized groups. Although it is well intentioned to apply the findings from research conducted on race to other social categories, it is also remiss. In this case, we believe it is critical to distinguish the effects of ideologies on race from gender, as these groups have important differences that require unique and customized strategies. As such, we warn against universal strategies for approaching diversity and encourage more tailored solutions, addressing the needs of and best practices for each social group (see Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008).

### 23.2. Limitations and directions for future research

While the present studies offer implications for our understanding of gender ideologies, confidence, and diversity management, it does so with several limitations. For one, although we used a variety of demographic samples, participants were, for the most part, younger, white, career-focused women. It is not clear whether the same confidence boost would occur for women in differing situations (i.e., race, marital status, work experience, age, children), where gender differences are more salient, or when confronted with differences in treatment (i.e. sexism, paternalism) and

experiences (i.e. pregnancy, child-care demands). Although our research aims were to examine these ideologies in masculine, agentic, environments, future research should measure and manipulate gender-blindness across broader samples, with more variance in age, race, employment status, and contexts to understand the boundaries of this effect.

In addition, gender is not a monolithic category, and research has found that individuals differ in their levels of gender subtyping (Deaux, Winton, Crowley, & Lewis, 1985), gender-identification (Bem, 1981, 1993) and consciousness around gender-stigma (Pinel, 1999); therefore, it seems clear that there are important moderators and domains in which gender-blindness vs. gender-awareness may differentially affect attitudes and beliefs. Future research is needed to understand individual differences that are likely to influence the effects of gender ideologies on women self-perception and behavior. Although we demonstrated that priming gender-blindness could increase women's ratings of confidence as well as action taking, it is not clear how long these effects will last. Future research should examine these effects of priming ideologies over time to examine whether changing one's ideology can have long-lasting effects on confidence as well as action taking in real world settings.

Interestingly, we found that gender-blindness decreased men's confidence (Study 4) or had no effect (Study 2) and further, that gender-blindness did not affect men's action-taking. Since masculine qualities are already embraced and celebrated in the workplace, men may be less receptive to the positive effects of gender-blindness compared to women, and at times, may feel less of a perceived advantage over women (and therefore less confidence), if women also possess qualities required and rewarded in the workplace. Future research should examine when and where gender ideologies are likely to impact men.

### 23.3. Conclusion

Many people conjecture that understanding differences between men and women is important, touting research from all disciplines, from neurology, to physiology, to personality. Likewise, our everyday experiences with gender reinforce the notion that natural and acceptable differences between men and women are immutable and diagnostic, shaping our interpretation of behavior and outcomes. While acknowledging gender differences attempts to signal an embrace of the differences between men and women, we must be careful: providing a traditional awareness message about gender may reinforce traditional stereotypes about men and women and constrain the confidence and actions of women. It appears that decreasing our focus on gender may be a more adaptive ideology in the workplace for closing the confidence gap and helping women take action to shape their career outcomes.

### Acknowledgements

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### Appendix A. Gender-blindness scale

- (1) All people are basically the same regardless of their gender.
- (2) We should describe others in terms of their individual traits rather than their gender.

- (3) Talking about differences between men and women causes unnecessary tension.
- (4) We should try not to notice or think about when an individual is male or female.
- (5) It is easier for men and women to get along if they acknowledge they approach things differently (reversed).
- (6) We need to recognize and celebrate cultural differences between men and women to create an equal society (reversed).
- (7) The differences between men and women should be acknowledged and celebrated (reversed).
- (8) We should adjust our behavior when interacting with men and women because men and women are different (reversed).

### Appendix B. Ideological manipulations

#### B.1. Gender awareness

##### B.1.1. Science advocates gender-awareness

Sociologists, psychologists, economists, and political scientists all agree that gender issues are a #1 concern for the U.S. Social scientists note that it is extremely important to embrace our differences, rather than denying them. According to this perspective, we will be in a better position to advance as a society if we embrace that the two genders bring different perspectives to life, providing a richness in viewpoints, styles of interaction, and problem solving strategies. Each gender can contribute in its own unique way. Recognizing this diversity would help build a sense of harmony and complementarity amongst men and women. Men and women have their own talents, as well as their own problems, and by acknowledging both these strengths and weaknesses, we validate the identity of each gender.

Dr. Katherine Richardson, author of *The Gender Paradox*, suggests that modern American society would be better off if people would recognize that women and men have their own strengths, weaknesses, experiences, and issues. Acknowledging this diversity would help build a sense of harmony and unity amongst men and women. "That is really the story here – the most striking thing about men and women is how different they are. There is great variety between the two groups. The most important thing is to pay attention to these differences - recognizing these differences builds a sense of harmony and complementarity to each group".

"The notion of 'the opposite sex' has some truth," says Michael Klein, a Sociology Professor at Columbia University, who agrees with Richardson's point of view. "The genders are more different than they are alike." Klein points out that these differences could be due to biological make-up or they may simply be learned and socialized through our culture. According to Klein, where the differences come from is unimportant. "Understanding men and women approach life tasks in different ways is productive to society," says Klein.

Klein believes that men and women would be more successful, more satisfied with their lives, and interact more cooperatively if people embraced the idea that the genders often approach situations and problems differently. According to Klein, understanding and utilizing women and men's unique strongpoints would not only contribute to a more cooperative and efficient workplace, but could help people in interpersonal relationships between men and women. Thus, social scientists encourage us to see the larger picture, and to appreciate that at our core, we really are all different.

#### B.2. Gender-blindness

##### B.2.1. Science advocates gender-blindness

Sociologists, psychologists, economists, and political scientists all agree that gender issues are a #1 concern for the U.S. Social



scientists note that it is extremely important to heed our creed in the Declaration of Independence that “all men and women are created equal.” According to this perspective, we will be in a better position to advance as a society if we remember that we are all, first and foremost human beings, and second, we are all American citizens. According to this perspective, we will be in a better position to advance as a society if we stop thinking of men and women as different from each other, and instead see each person as an individual.

Dr. Katherine Richardson, author of *The Gender Paradox*, suggests that modern American society would be better off if people would recognize that women and men are much more similar than they are different. Acknowledging this similarity would help build a sense of harmony and unity amongst men and women. “That is really the story here – The most striking thing about men and women is how much they have in common. There is simply so much overlap between the two groups. The most important thing is to pay attention to the characteristics that make a person a unique individual rather than focusing on his or her gender.”

“The notion of ‘the opposite sex’ is really just a historical artifact,” says Michael Klein, a Sociology Professor at Columbia University who agrees with Richardson’s point of view. “The genders are much more alike than they are different.” Klein points out that these similarities may be due to the largely identical biological make-up that all humans share, or they may be shaped and molded through our culture. According to Klein, where the similarities come from is unimportant. “Pretending men and women approach life tasks in fundamentally different ways is counterproductive to society,” says Klein.

Klein believes that men and women would be more successful, more satisfied with their lives, and interact more cooperatively if people embraced the idea that the genders typically approach situations and problems in much the same way. According to Klein, understanding and focusing upon individual differences, not group differences, would not only contribute to a more cooperative and creative workplace, but could also help people in interpersonal relationships between men and women. Thus, social scientists encourage us to see the larger picture, and to appreciate that at our core, we really are all the same.

### Appendix C. Supplementary material

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2017.07.004>.

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