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Enhancing the Representation of Women: How Gender Diversity Signals and Acknowledgement Affect Attraction to Men-Dominated Professions

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ENHANCING THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN: HOW GENDER DIVERSITY SIGNALS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AFFECT ATTRACTION TO MEN-DOMINATED PROFESSIONS

Thomas P. DePatie¹, Anmol Sachdeva¹, Comila Shahani-Denning¹, Rebecca Grossman¹, and Kevin P. Nolan¹

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ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS

recruitment, diversity, gender, organizational impression management, acknowledgement, policing

Although organizations around the world recognize the importance of gender diversity and inclusion, many struggle to reach gender parity (Sneader & Yee, 2020). Particularly, women account for less than 15% of all sworn police officers (Donohue Jr., 2020). Considering signaling theory and novel research in organizational impression management, we examined the utility of various recruitment messaging techniques for attracting female job seekers to professions dominated by men, at both a consulting firm and law enforcement agency. Women evaluating consulting firm materials perceived greater behavioral integrity and were subsequently more attracted to the organization if recruitment messages included both high gender diversity signals and an explicit acknowledgement of the lack of gender diversity. With the law enforcement agency, a direct effect of the proposed interaction was identified, in that women were more attracted to police recruitment materials signaling gender diversity and explicitly acknowledging the lack of gender diversity within the agency. Materials had no adverse effect on men's attraction. Last, research questions surrounding person–organization fit and risk propensity were analyzed to further explore the acknowledgement tactic.

Although organizations around the world recognize the importance of gender diversity and inclusion, many struggle to reach gender parity (Sneader & Yee, 2020). For example, policing is a profession highly dominated by men, with only 12% of sworn officers being women (Donohue Jr., 2020; Reaves, 2015). This figure is concerning considering men engage in greater police use of physical force than women, which may result in serious bodily injury, the discharge of a firearm, or even death (King, 2018; Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2005). This misconduct has placed increasing pressure on law enforcement agencies to reform their law enforcement recruitment tactics (Peeples, 2020). Promisingly, a gender representative police force not only presents a potential remedy for excessive force but helps establish community trust, partnerships, mutual understanding, and cultural understanding (Donohue Jr., 2020; Novich et al., 2018). Moreover, in general organizational contexts, gender diversity helps organizations broaden their per-

spective, build strategic tactics, and foster idea generation (Adler, 2002; Eagly, 1987). Unfortunately, although the benefits of gender parity are clear, law enforcement agencies and some organizations have experienced longstanding trouble recruiting women (Jordan et al., 2009).

As such, active recruitment efforts are often required to motivate women to apply to law enforcement jobs (Belknap, 2020; Doerner, 1995; Kringen, 2014). For one, perceptions of misfit between women and stereotypically masculine careers have been shown to have negative implications for job choice. Here, women may find organizations dominated by men, such as law enforcement agencies, “hostile to their interests” (Jordan et al., 2009, p. 335). For example,

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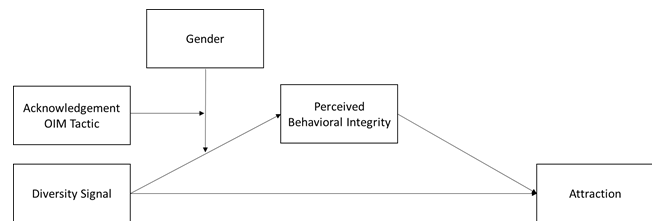
some leaders at law enforcement agencies have pushed back against supporting and enacting diversity messaging (Jordan et al., 2009). Further, a man's biased perception of a woman's lack of fit in law enforcement may result in discriminatory "selection, performance appraisal, promotion, and compensation" decisions (Froehlich et al., 2020, p. 502). Therefore, in an active effort to ensure a more gender diverse applicant pipeline, law enforcement agencies must recognize and understand the barriers facing female job seekers as they navigate the job search.

One potentially fruitful avenue for increasing the number of female applicants to law enforcement and other underrepresenting organizations is targeted recruitment practices. Here, organizationally relevant information is tailored and presented to desired individuals with the intention of influencing their decision making (Boswell et al., 2003; Volpone et al., 2014; Windscheid et al., 2018). Rooted in signaling theory, which suggests job seekers draw "inferences based on whatever information is available" (Gregory et al., 2013, p. 1951), targeted recruitment practices are highly influential in the early stages of recruitment and drive first impressions of organizations. Further, in attracting women, law enforcement agencies should note that greater value is placed on gender diversity signals by women (Avery & McKay, 2006; Thomas & Wise, 1999). Thus, in attracting female applicants, law enforcement agencies may benefit from incorporating gender diverse signals (i.e., images and messages) into their recruiting materials. In fact, previous research suggests both image displays depicting diversity and messages emphasizing the value of diversity effectively attract diverse applicants (Avery & McKay, 2006).

Moreover, impression management theory suggests organizations can control how job seekers perceive their gender diversity practices (Schlenker, 1980; Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981; Windscheid et al., 2018). The present study addresses the unexplored organizational impression management tactic acknowledgement. "Acknowledgement" is aimed at *acknowledging* an organization's *lack* of diversity through signals communicating diversity statistics, statements, or both (Windscheid et al., 2018). Due to perceptions of clarity and honesty surrounding acknowledging the lack of gender diversity (Windscheid et al., 2018), women may recognize organizations employing acknowledgement tactics as honorable or as having integrity, thus positively influencing their attraction (Windscheid et al., 2016). Therefore, acknowledgement has the potential to be a critical piece of the puzzle in attracting women toward organizations that lack representation. Little is known, however, on how job seekers interpret acknowledgement tactics (Windscheid et al., 2016, 2018).

Thus, our theoretical model (see Figure 1) and empirical studies answer calls for research on targeted recruitment by incorporating, together, gender diversity signals, and acknowledgement impression management tactics. This

FIGURE 1.
Conceptual Model for Studies 1 and 2



research is timely in that Ployhart et al. (2005) describe targeted recruitment as a topic that "is important, but for which there is essentially no research" (p. 291). Further, previous research suggests perceived behavioral integrity as a mediator between targeted recruitment signals and attraction (Windscheid et al., 2016). Perceived behavioral integrity concerns the perceived alignment between what an organization says and does (Simons, 2002). For example, aligned diversity messages in the form of images and statements can positively influence perceptions of behavioral integrity, which can positively influence attraction (Windscheid et al., 2016). Therefore, in investigating gender diversity signals and acknowledgement, the present study presents a unique opportunity for law enforcement agencies to attract women applicants. Further, through research questions, we investigate the impact acknowledgement has on person–organization fit and the influence risk propensity has on attraction. Person–organization fit was important to investigate due to the influence recruitment signals have on job seeker perceptions of fit and subsequent job choice decisions (Swider et al., 2015). Risk propensity was investigated to "better understand how people make choices and judgements" during their job search (Kausel & Jackson, 2020, p. i). Beyond our theoretical model, our research questions provide further context into job seeker attitudes and decisions through a gender diversity and acknowledgement lens.

From a practical standpoint, our research, through theories grounded in targeted recruitment and impression management, provides evidence for the utility of a scalable targeted recruitment tactic. Implementing these strategies is an easy step in the right direction toward achieving gender parity. Therefore, law enforcement and other organizations dominated by men, which support but rarely enact targeted recruitment practices, can employ these strategies to increase the percentage of female applicants while maintaining the current percentage of male applicants (Cordner & Cordner, 2011; Jordan et al., 2009; Schuck, 2020).

Theoretical Background

Diversity Signals

During the initial stages of recruitment, applicants often have limited knowledge on any one organization (Cable &

Turban, 2003). In making a first impression, organizations interested in recruiting women may benefit from sending signals highlighting gender diversity. According to signaling theory, which suggests individuals make inferences about firms from information readily available, job seeker understanding of the “views and perceptions of the actors involved in the process” and diversity signals help reduce information asymmetry (e.g., questions surrounding women representation; Taj, 2016, p. 346). This leads job seekers to draw inferences about demographic similarity (Ng et al., 2016). In this vein, social identity theory proposes individuals have a natural inclination toward categorizing themselves and others using salient characteristics, such as gender (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Here, relational demography suggests high degrees of group similarity, relative to those of the perceiver, elicit favorable recruitment outcomes, such as attraction (Avery, 2003). As such, signaling gender diversity to women may enhance the perceived value an organization places on diversity, thus influencing women job seeker attraction (Avery & McKay, 2006).

Organizations deploy signals to influence desired outcomes, such as more female applicants (Gregory et al., 2013; Taj, 2016). Regarding recruitment advertisements, both pictorial representations and written statements regarding gender diversity have been found to be effective in attracting women applicants (Avery & McKay, 2006; Volpone et al., 2014). Gender diversity statements signal, in phrases, an organization’s espoused support for and commitment to gender diversity; gender diverse images signal a visual representation, or enactment, of whether an organization employs a gender diverse workforce (Avery & McKay, 2006; Volpone et al., 2014). Unfortunately, law enforcement agencies may unknowingly create obstacles barring a representative workforce. For example, at some agencies, high ranking officers may fail to “reinforce the diversity message” (Jordan et al., 2009, p. 335). For example, the “brass” ceiling suggests women experience difficulties advancing their careers within law enforcement agencies “despite their qualifications” (Poleski, 2016, p. 6). These shortcomings, in particular, highlight a critical need for law enforcement agencies and other organizations to more effectively recognize, communicate, and enact the value of diversity.

To increase the percentage of women in applicant pipelines, Doverspike et al. (2000) suggest depicting “successful minority incumbents” (p. 452) in recruitment materials. In fact, diverse signals in recruitment materials suggest the target organization is likely to hire diverse employees (e.g., women; Avery & McKay, 2006). For example, signaling diversity has been shown to enhance both fit perceptions and attraction for minorities (Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001; Thomas, 1993). Moreover, targeted recruitment practices by law enforcement agencies have been shown to be related to the percentage of women employed by the respective

agency (Harrington, 2000; Jordan et al., 2009). On the other hand, demographic dissimilarity may influence perceived gender discrimination, which highlights feelings of isolation and alienation in minorities; thus, women may rule out organizations that are perceived as non-gender diverse (Avery et al., 2008; Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Thaler-Carter, 2001). In the context of law enforcement agencies, “underrepresentation might be self-reinforcing” as women may view law enforcement recruitment and hiring practices opposite to their interests (Jordan et al., 2009, p. 335). Research suggests gender diverse recruitment materials are more salient to women than to men, as women “consciously look for evidence that women are successfully employed” on their search (Avery & McKay, 2006, p. 160; Thomas & Wise, 1999). Thus, for law enforcement agencies and beyond, signaling diversity in recruitment materials via statements and images may be useful in increasing the percentage of female applicants.

Organizational Impression Management and the Acknowledgement Tactic

Organizational impression management has been identified as a useful tool in targeted recruitment (Avery & McKay, 2006). In this context, organizational impression management is considered the deliberate controlling of signals that are presented to job seekers (Schlenker, 1980; Tsai & Huang, 2014). By incorporating gender diverse signals, organizations have been able to leverage these impression management tactics as a means of increasing perceptions of fit and attraction for women (Avery, 2003; Avery & McKay, 2006; Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001). Prior to Windscheid et al. (2018), researchers identified two primary impression management tactics: assertive and defensive tactics (Mohamed et al., 1999).

Assertive tactics are employed to portray a favorable image among target audiences. Avery and McKay (2006) suggest four types of assertive tactics: ingratiation, promotion, exemplification, and supplication. Ingratiation concerns tactics designed to increase a firm’s likability or attractiveness (Mohamed et al., 1999; Windscheid et al., 2018); for example, an organization may put forth gender diverse images in recruitment advertisements or recruit from an all-women’s college to enhance attraction. When an organization’s “success does not speak for itself,” it may engage in promotion tactics, which concern the strategy of publicizing success. In the context of recruitment, promoting success can be actions that draw attention to gender diverse recruitment accomplishments (e.g., participating in and placing on AnitaB.org’s 2021 Top Companies for Women Technologists—a survey concerning intersectional gender and pay parity; Avery & McKay, 2006; Mohamed et al., 1999; Windscheid et al., 2018, p. 999). Next, organizations employing exemplification tactics attempt to posi-

tion themselves favorably by engaging in corporate social responsibility (Avery & McKay, 2006). For example, an organization may “sponsor events and organizations with direct connection” to women’s groups (Avery & McKay, 2006, p. 170). Last, supplication concerns the degree to which an organization portrays itself as dependent on its target population. Companies embracing this assertive tactic may signal their dependence on the target population by demonstrating great interest in them applying.

Defensive tactics, on the other hand, are aimed at protecting an organization’s image and are built toward mitigating negative press; these tactics can be employed to avoid “driving potential candidates away from the applicant pool” (Tsai & Huang, 2014, p. 328). Defensive tactics come in the form of disclaimers, apologies, accounts, organizational handicapping, prosocial behavior, and restitution. The purpose of disclaimers is, for example, to get ahead of potential embarrassing outcomes or to propose a more realistic set of expectations (Avery & McKay, 2006). Further, organizations wielding apology defensive tactics admit blame for negative events that happened under their watch. Account defensive tactics work to protect an organization’s image through defense or denial. Through defense or denial, the organization hopes account tactics minimize faux pas gravity and mitigate any subsequent repercussions (Bolino et al., 2008; Windscheid et al., 2018). Organizational handicapping hopes to minimize expectations of firm success in order to provide an excuse for failure, making it seem “less undesirable” (Avery & McKay, 2006, p. 163; Windscheid et al., 2018). Prosocial behavior suggests an organization, despite past wrongdoings, maintains a positive identity; here, the organization may involve itself in acts of atonement. Finally, restitution offers compensation to those that the organization has harmed, which signals that the behavior was not intended and that the firm is acting benevolently. Some defensive tactics, such as apologies, can repair relationships and reestablish cooperation between the organization and the potential applicant (Avery & McKay, 2006).

Windscheid et al. (2018), however, recently uncovered *acknowledgement*, an impression management tactic “that has not been identified previously in the impression management literature” (p. 1007). Acknowledgement tactics, although conceptually similar to defensive tactics, “do not fit into existing categories of defensive tactics,” and are considered a third impression management tactic (Windscheid et al., 2016, p. 1008). In fact, acknowledgement is uniquely suited to address the issue of gender diversity in organizations in that it *directly addresses a lack of diversity* (Windscheid et al., 2016). As such, opposed to assertive or defensive tactics, acknowledgement tactics intend to bring direct attention to an organization’s current lack of diversity. This issue is especially salient to law enforcement agencies. Two acknowledgement tactics are commonly em-

ployed by organizations: implicit and explicit (Windscheid et al., 2018). Implicit acknowledgement recognizes the current lack of gender diversity by providing a demographic statistic yet no commentary on the statistic. For example, “women make up 27% of our consulting workforce.” Explicit acknowledgement takes this notion a step further by providing commentary on the lack of gender diversity, such as “Women make up 27% of our consulting workforce/We know our work is never done in this area and we are committed to drive greater equity for all employees” (Windscheid et al., 2018, p. 1007).

Research suggests job seekers consider workforce demographics as a signal of an organization’s commitment to diversity (Avery & McKay, 2006); however, research has yet to explore how implicit or explicit acknowledgement tactics impact job seeker attitudes. For example, an organization lacking representation of women employing implicit acknowledgement tactics on gender diversity may be perceived unfavorably by women due to clear demographic dissimilarity, the threat of discrimination, and the lack of behavioral control on securing employment. On the other hand, some racial minorities have been shown to hold favorable attitudes toward diverse commentary; for example, African Americans responded positively to the statement *Black workers are employed at all organizational levels in this company* (Avery, 2003; Avery & McKay, 2006). Thus, incorporating explicit acknowledgement tactics may provide clarity around current demographic disparities. It is suggested that through employing explicit acknowledgement tactics, organizations may salvage or attain moral legitimacy and be perceived as just or having integrity (Windscheid et al., 2016, 2018). For example, explicit acknowledgement tactics, in particular, may evoke stronger positive attitudes from women due to the fact that (a) the organization is communicating its commitment toward becoming an equal opportunity employer and (b) diversity management programs are seen as attractive. Further, with only 12% of sworn police officers identifying as women, the explicit acknowledgement tactic may be particularly useful in communicating a department’s active steps toward fostering an equitable police force. However, research has yet to investigate the utility of commentary and its coupling with relevant statistics surrounding the *lack* of diversity—little is known on the mechanisms underlying these potential effects (Avery & McKay, 2006).

Perceived Behavioral Integrity

One understudied mechanism linking diversity signals and attraction is perceived behavioral integrity (Windscheid et al., 2016). Perceptions of behavioral integrity are defined as the “perceived pattern of alignment between an actor’s words and deeds” (Simons, 2002, p. 19). This alignment not only speaks to job seekers’ perceptions of fit between enacted and espoused values, but also to the “perceived

promise-keeping” of organizations (Simons, 2002, p. 19). Often, as in our study, these “words and deeds” are communicated by organizations in the form of signals. Signals carry weight in that they are representative of an organization’s values and may influence job seeker decision making (Avery & McKay, 2006; Windscheid et al., 2016). Words and deeds can either be aligned or misaligned, which, when misaligned, may result in mixed messages. For example, in pairing low diversity signals with explicit acknowledgement tactics, a human resource management professional may unknowingly misalign words and deeds. This pairing may warp one’s perceptions of behavioral integrity as the organization’s espoused commitment to gender diversity does not reflect, pictorially, the enacted successful employment of women. In fact, this approach threatens an organization’s moral legitimacy (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006; Windscheid et al., 2018). In the public eye, moral legitimacy is obtained and maintained through deliberate moral judgements rather than through manipulation or persuasion (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006; Suchmann, 1995; Windscheid et al., 2018). Firms can increase their perceived moral legitimacy through what is considered active justification (Windscheid et al., 2018). Truthfulness is critical to active justification communications; thus, firms lacking in gender diversity looking to appeal to women must, in the pursuit of moral legitimacy, *acknowledge* their lack of diversity via “expressions of emotions and intentions” (Windscheid et al., 2018, p. 1009). Thus, perceptions of behavioral integrity may be enhanced through “simple follow-through[s] on expressed commitments” (Simons, 2002, p. 19). Thus, to enhance moral legitimacy and influence perceptions of behavioral integrity, an organization would not only want to signal, pictorially, that women are indeed employed and valued, but sincerely suggest in the form of words that women are valued and gender parity is being actively worked toward.

Windscheid et al. (2016) evidence this notion by finding that individuals perceived the greatest behavioral integrity when evaluating both high diversity images (e.g., a “balanced” board: 4 men, 4 women) coupled with high diversity statements (e.g., “We value gender diversity”). Their findings, too, suggest a significant effect of perceived behavioral integrity on attraction. Thus, in the context of attracting women where they lack representation, it would be essential to enhance job seeker perceptions of behavioral integrity. As evidenced by Windscheid et al. (2016), providing diversity signals in the form of both images and statements is effective in positively influencing perceived behavioral integrity. Although perceived behavioral integrity denotes a perception of adherence to value statements, psychological contracts, and the follow-through of expressed commitments (Simons, 2002), organizations lacking in gender diversity (e.g., law enforcement agencies) may still be able to increase job seeker perceptions of perceived behavioral integrity through other mechanisms.

Targeted recruitment strategies taking advantage of both gender diversity signaling and acknowledgement tactics may be employed to increase female job seeker perceived behavioral integrity and attraction. Freeman (2003) provided evidence that women, as opposed to men, place significantly greater value on gender-related organizational attributes, such as inclusiveness. Moreover, men might be oblivious to the organizational barriers women often face (Mor Barak et al., 1998). For example, men may perceive similar behavioral integrity from the recruitment materials due to ignorance of their status, which “creates an overall perception of more inclusiveness and fairness” (Mor Barak et al., 1998, p. 98). Further, although the effects of acknowledgement tactics in a recruitment context are widely unknown, there is potential moral legitimacy and perceived integrity to be gained from *explicitly* acknowledging a lack of gender diversity (Windscheid et al., 2016, 2018). In doing so, an organization would communicate that they value diversity and are committed to keeping their promise of striving toward an equitable work environment through providing gender diversity images and explicit acknowledgement tactics. Together, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985), signaling theory (Bangerter et al., 2012), and diversity attraction (Schäpers et al., 2020) suggest, for women, the gender images would be attractive in recruitment materials. Further, impression management theory (Schlenker, 1980) suggests organizations attempt to control the impressions job seekers form, and, through acknowledgement, firms can be perceived as being truthful or having integrity. Thus, when women perceive firms as valuing diversity and having moral legitimacy/being truthful, even if they fall short, they may perceive greater behavioral integrity and, as demonstrated by Windscheid et al. (2016), be more attracted to the organization. Therefore, we hypothesize the following.

Hypothesis 1: Diversity signal and gender will interact in predicting perceived behavioral integrity such that women evaluating high diversity (versus low) signals will report greater perceived behavioral integrity, whereas men will report no difference.

Hypothesis 2: Diversity signal, gender, and acknowledgement will interact in predicting perceived behavioral integrity such that perceived behavioral integrity will be higher for women evaluating high (versus low) diversity signals with explicit (versus implicit) acknowledgement tactics, whereas men will report no difference.

Hypothesis 3: The relationship between the three-way interaction of diversity signal, gender, and acknowledgement on attraction will be mediated by perceived behavioral integrity. It is predicted that women who eval-

uate high diversity signals (versus low) with explicit (versus implicit) acknowledgment tactics will demonstrate higher perceived behavioral integrity, which will, in turn, lead to higher attraction. For men, it is expected that diversity signals and acknowledgment will have no impact on perceived behavioral integrity and attraction.

Person–Organization Fit

Confidence in the police, as of 2020, is at record lows (Ortiz, 2020). As such, mistrust and cynicism, which are integral pieces of a population’s feelings toward those in positions of authority, may surround the heightened feelings toward the words and actions of law enforcement agencies (Browning et al., 2021). Interestingly, in a study of law enforcement officials, Rameez and Rainayee (2017) found cynicism to be inversely related to perceptions of person–organization fit. Person–organization fit is defined as the compatibility between a job seeker and an organization’s culture, primarily concerning value, belief, and personality congruence, and is a widely recognized component of organizational attraction (Cable & Judge, 1994; Carless, 2005a; Kristof, 1996). Further, individuals evaluate their person–organization fit through either a complementary or supplementary lens (Cable & Edwards, 2004; Kristof, 1996; Piasentin & Chapman, 2007). Complementary fit concerns the degree to which one’s attributes complement, or “make whole,” the characteristics of a target organization (Piasentin & Chapman, 2007, p. 341). On the other hand, supplementary fit concerns the degree to which one’s characteristics are like those of the target organization (Cable & Edwards, 2004). Due to our study’s interest in diversity signals and relational demography, and that individuals primarily assess their fit according to the similar-to-me phenomenon (Piasentin & Chapman, 2007), we assess subjective person–organization fit through the supplementary fit lens.

As such, during recruitment, job seeker perceptions of subjective person–organization fit are developed through the degree to which the one feels there is congruence between themselves and their target (e.g., police) organization’s culture (Cable & Judge, 1996). Unfortunately, stereotypes regarding gender-typed occupations, such as law enforcement, are often reinforced due to “culturally shared inferences” surrounding them (Heilman et al., 2015, p. 92). As such, “incongruity between conceptions of women and beliefs about the [organization]” instigate a perceived lack of fit (Heilman et al., 2015, p. 92). However, the attraction-selection-attrition model (Schneider, 1987) and the theory of work adjustment (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Rounds et al., 1987) suggest individuals are attracted to organizations that have similar others in them and match their individual characteristics. Further, research suggests diversity signals in recruitment materials can enhance perceptions of person–organization (P–O) fit for minority (e.g., women) applicants (McKay & Avery, 2005). For example, in a study

of Australian state police force applicants, Carless (2005b) found applicant perceptions of diversity policies positively affected their career commitment and intentions to remain; perceptions of diversity policy were also positively correlated with perceptions of person–organization fit (Carless, 2005b). To more clearly investigate person–organization fit in this context, we propose the following research question:

Research Question 1: How will diversity signal, gender, and acknowledgement interact to predict subjective person–organization fit?

Risk Propensity

Last, considering targeted recruitment’s grounding in interactional psychology and the varying motivations behind pursuing a particular law enforcement agency, we explored risk propensity as a factor influencing attraction to law enforcement agencies (Schuck, 2020). First, signaling theory outlines how organizations communicate desired information and how job seekers make inferences from this information (Connelly et al., 2011). In this exploration, we aimed to further explain which acknowledgement tactics, if any, signal “safety” or “threat” cues to minority (e.g., women) or majority (e.g., men) job seekers (Gutiérrez & Saint Clair, 2018, p. 111). Safety cues are likely to affirm identities, while threat cues are likely to discriminate against them (Avery & McKay, 2006; Avery et al., 2013; Gutiérrez & Saint Clair, 2018). For example, men job seekers may perceive implicit acknowledgement tactics in recruitment materials as “safe” in that a low percentage of women signals that the organization is comprised of mostly men, affirming their identity; on the other hand, men may perceive explicit acknowledgement tactics as “threats” in that they may perceive exclusion in an active strive toward gender parity (Dover et al., 2016; Gutiérrez & Saint Clair, 2018; Olsen & Martins, 2016). Alternately, female job seekers may perceive implicit acknowledgement tactics as “threats” due to perceived discrimination regarding an extremely low diversity statistic (Avery & McKay, 2006) and explicit acknowledgement tactics as “safe” in that the strive toward gender parity signals the affirmation of their identities and that they are valued as people and employees (Avery et al., 2013; Baum et al., 2016; Gutiérrez & Saint Clair, 2018).

The threat-rigidity model of decision making (Staw et al., 1981) suggests individuals faced with threats will “turn inward and avoid responding” (Highhouse & Paese, 1996, p. 131). In this context, decision makers view threats as a loss to their current position and opportunities as gains. (Highhouse & Paese, 1996). Interestingly, consistent with the threat-rigidity model, some risk-prone job seekers may perceive events that are framed negatively as opportunities (Highhouse & Paese, 1996). Thus, high risk takers may be more comfortable with notions of “threat” in police hiring contexts. This is likely because those who are risk prone

have a greater “tendency to engage in behaviors with a prospect of negative consequences such as loss, harm, or failure” (Zhang et al., 2019, p. 2). Also, it is important to recognize that the opportune outcome is employment. Thus, risk-prone job seekers may be less sensitive to the threat factors that could cause loss. On the other hand, according to the threat-rigidity model, risk-averse job seekers are likely to shy away from situations where they feel threat. Therefore, in recognizing that risk-prone individuals are less sensitive to these notions, men evaluating explicit acknowledgement materials and women evaluating implicit acknowledgement materials high in risk propensity may demonstrate greater attraction in these situations than those who are low in risk propensity.

Research Question 2: How will acknowledgement, gender, and risk propensity interact to predict attraction?

METHOD

Two studies were conducted to investigate job seeker attitudes toward organizations employing diversity signaling and novel acknowledgement tactics in their recruitment materials. Study 1 explored job seeker attitudes toward a general consulting firm, due to the recruitment and retention of women remaining being a concern for these organizations (Prism Executive Recruitment, 2018; Reid et al., 2018). Recruitment materials were intended to reflect what job seekers may encounter during their search. Materials were kept vague enough to attract a wide variety of individuals from differing employment backgrounds. Study 1 was conducted as an investigation into the newly uncovered acknowledgement tactic and its application to existing theory surrounding targeted recruitment (Fisher & Aguinis, 2017). To better meet the aim and scope of the *special issue*, Study 2 applied a policing frame to the approach taken in Study 1. We recognized this application as appropriate due to the current lack of women representation in law enforcement agencies (Donohue Jr, 2020; Reaves, 2015). Further, this approach provides a test of the generalizability of the phenomena being investigated. Both studies, by providing novel insight on attracting women to careers dominated by men, build on and extend existing literatures in management and industrial-organizational psychology concerning diversity and inclusion, organizational impression management, and recruitment. All hypotheses were tested in both Study 1 and 2. We collected data for Study 1 prior to Study 2. Participants took part in either Study 1 or 2.

Study 1: General Consulting Firm

Participants and Procedure

We collected data from United States Amazon Mechan-

ical Turk workers ($N = 337$). To determine their eligibility for the study, participants were asked which most appropriately reflected their job search status (active: regularly searching for and applying to jobs; passive: open to alternative employment opportunities, but not actively applying; or not searching: not considering active employment opportunities) and if were they a full-time Mechanical Turk worker. Those who were answered “yes” to being a full-time Mechanical Turk worker were filtered out of the study. Being interested in the attitudes of job seekers, participants who were “not searching” were filtered out of the study. 776 careless respondents were identified and removed via the response pattern approach and the response time approach (Huang et al., 2012). Those who fully completed the survey were paid 25 cents. Participants reported a mean age of 34.05 years ($SD = 11.57$), 56.38% of which were men and 43.62% of which were women. Participants were mainly White (64.39%), followed by Asian (19.59%), Hispanic or Latino (10.68%), Black or African American (4.45%), and American Indian and Alaska Native (0.89%). 57.27% were passive job seekers (as opposed to active) and held an average of 3.94 ($SD = 3.96$) previous jobs.

Participants responded by completing a one-time Qualtrics-based survey. First, participants stated their job-seeker status (active, passive, not searching). Then, participants were informed they would be evaluating an organization’s recruitment materials. The recruitment material proposed a fictitious general consulting firm, “Nexure.” We used a 2 (gender diversity signal: high, low) by 2 (acknowledgement impression management tactics: implicit, explicit) between-subjects experimental design. Diversity signals contained both pictorial representations and statements: the low gender diversity signal pictorial representation contained five men, zero women, an image of a leader who was a man, and a statement saying the following “ensuring our next-level culture is reflected in the everyday behaviors demonstrated and experienced by our people.” The high gender diversity pictorial representation contained two men three women, an image of a woman leader, and the statement said the following “ensuring our inclusive culture is reflected in the everyday behaviors demonstrated and experienced by our people.” The implicit acknowledgement tactic stated, “Women make up 27% of our consulting workforce.” The explicit acknowledgement impression management stated, “Women make up 27% of our consulting workforce; we know our work is never done in this area and we are committed to drive greater equity for all employees.” See Figure 2 and Figure 3 for manipulation examples regarding the general consulting firm. Language reflects that currently espoused on diversity and inclusion pages of consulting firms on the 2020 *Vault Consulting 50* (Vault Consulting Rankings|Vault.com, n.d.).

After the presentation of the fictitious recruitment materials, participants rated the attractiveness of the organi-

FIGURE 2.

Study 1 Low Diversity Signal With Explicit Acknowledgement Manipulation



FIGURE 3.

Study 1 High Diversity Signal With Implicit Acknowledgement Manipulation



zation (Highhouse et al., 2003), their perceived behavioral integrity of the organization (Simons et al., 2007), and their perceived person–organization fit (Cable & DeRue, 2002). Risk propensity was not measured in Study 1. Finally, participants reported their demographic information. A manipulation check included in our pilot test, using the same fictitious recruitment materials, found participants to recall significantly more women in the high gender diversity condition ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 0.91$) than the low condition ($M = 0.75$, $SD = 1.05$), $t(23) = 3.18$, $p < .01$, $d = 1.27$. Pilot data were not included in the final sample. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert type scale, with choices ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*.

Measures

Perceived Behavioral Integrity. Perceived behavioral integrity was measured using four adapted items from Simons et al. (2007). Two example items are: “This company conducts itself by the same values it talks about” and “There is a match between this organization’s words and actions.” The scale demonstrated reliability ($\alpha = 0.92$).

Attraction. Organizational attraction was measured using four adapted items from Highhouse et al. (2003). Two sample items are: “I think this company would be a good place for me to work” and “I’m interested in learning more about this company as an employer.” The scale demonstrated reliability ($\alpha = 0.91$).

Subjective Person–Organization Fit. Subjective person–organization fit was measured using three adapted items from Cable and DeRue (2002). Two example items are: “The things that I value in life are similar to the things that this organization values,” and “My personal values match this organization’s values.” This scale demonstrated reliability ($\alpha = 0.90$).

Control Variable. We controlled for ethnicity due to its potential influence on perceptions of behavioral integrity and attraction (Avery & McKay, 2006; Bernerth & Aguinis, 2016). Ethnicity was controlled as a nominal variable with five measured categories aligned to United States Bureau of Labor Statistics reporting.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

To provide evidence for the construct and discriminant validity of study variables perceived behavioral integrity, subjective person–organization fit, and organizational attraction, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. Results showed the two-factor model (CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.07, $X^2(41) = 98.77$, $p < .001$) demonstrated satisfactory fit.

Results

Main Hypotheses

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations), alpha coefficients, and Pearson correlations of relevant study variables can be found in Table 1.

Hypothesis 1 was analyzed using an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), controlled for ethnicity, and predicted an interaction of gender diversity signal and gender in predicting perceived behavioral integrity (see Table 2). We found support for this hypothesis in that the interaction of diversity signal and gender was significant, $F(1, 328) = 7.59$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$. A Tukey’s HSD post-hoc test revealed women evaluating high diversity signals in recruitment materials reported significantly greater perceived behavioral integrity ($M = 3.77$, 95% CI 3.56 to 3.97) than those evaluating low diversity signals ($M = 3.10$, 95% CI 2.90 to 3.30). Men reported no difference in perceived behavioral integrity. Results were also supportive of Hypoth-

TABLE 1.

Means, Standard Deviations, and Pearson Correlations for Relevant Variables, Study 1 and Study 2

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
Study 1						
1. Organizational attraction	3.64	0.87	-			
2. Perceived behavioral integrity	3.48	0.90	0.70***	-		
3. Subjective person-organization fit	3.63	0.87	0.77***	0.71***		
Study 2						
1. Organizational attraction	3.90	0.61	-			
2. Perceived behavioral integrity	3.77	0.64	0.76***	-		
3. Subjective person-organization fit	3.79	0.68	0.70***	0.64***	-	
4. Risk propensity	3.55	0.79	0.28***	0.35***	0.33***	-

Note. *** $p < .001$; values in the diagonal represent Cronbach's alpha for each scale.

esis 2, which was analyzed using ANCOVA, controlling for ethnicity, and predicted a three-way interaction of gender diversity signal, gender, and acknowledgement tactic on perceived behavioral integrity, $F(1, 328) = 4.13, p < .05, \eta^2 = 0.01$ (see Table 2). A Tukey's HSD post-hoc test indicated that women evaluating high gender diverse signals paired with explicit acknowledgement tactics reported significantly greater perceived behavioral integrity ($M = 4.00, 95\% \text{ CI } 3.70 \text{ to } 4.31$) than those evaluating low gender diverse signals paired with explicit acknowledgement tactics ($M = 2.95, 95\% \text{ CI } 2.64 \text{ to } 3.25$). Men reported no difference in perceived behavioral integrity. Figure 4 depicts the interaction of diversity signal, gender, and acknowledgement

tactic in predicting perceived behavioral integrity. It is important to note that the higher order three-way interaction, demonstrated in Hypothesis 2, supersedes the lower order interaction of diversity signal and gender, demonstrated in Hypothesis 1.

Hayes' PROCESS v3.4.1 macro in SPSS, Model 11 was used to analyze Hypothesis 3 (Hayes, 2017). We employed the bootstrapping procedure at a 95% confidence interval in PROCESS. Hypothesis 3 predicted a three-way interaction of diversity signal, gender, and acknowledgement mediated through perceived behavioral integrity to predict attraction. Hypothesis 3 was supported in that the index of moderated mediation did not contain zero, (index=0.53,

TABLE 2.

Results of ANCOVA Omnibus Tests Demonstrating a Three-Way Interaction of Diversity Signal, Gender, and Acknowledgement on Perceived Behavioral Integrity, Study 1

	Sum of squares	<i>df</i>	Mean square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Diversity signal	13.556	1	13.556	17.852	<.001	0.049
Acknowledgement	0.255	1	0.255	0.335	0.563	0.001
Gender	0.678	1	0.678	0.893	0.345	0.002
Ethnicity	1.416	1	1.416	1.864	0.173	0.005
Diversity Signal X Acknowledgement	2.824	1	2.824	3.719	0.055	0.010
Diversity Signal X Gender	5.767	1	5.767	7.594	0.006	0.021
Acknowledgement X Gender	1.512	1	1.512	1.991	0.159	0.005
Diversity Signal X Gender X Acknowledgement	3.135	1	3.135	4.128	0.043	0.011
Residuals	249.070	328	0.759			

TABLE 3.

Moderated Moderated Mediation Estimates for the Organizational Attraction Outcome, Study 1

Conditional indirect effects	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Men and implicit acknowledgement	0.10	0.11	-0.11	0.33
Men and explicit acknowledgement	0.09	0.11	-0.13	0.31
Women and implicit acknowledgement	0.20	0.15	-0.09	0.49
Women and explicit acknowledgement	0.71	0.16	0.40	1.04
Index of moderated moderated mediation	Index	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Gender and acknowledgement	0.53	0.27	0.01	1.07
Indices of conditional moderated mediation by acknowledgement	Index	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Men	-0.02	0.16	-0.33	0.29
Women	0.52	0.22	0.09	0.93

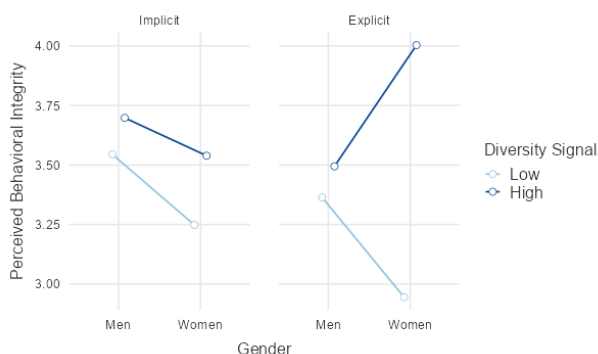
$SE = 0.27$, 95% CI 0.01 to 1.07; see Table 3). High explicit diversity signals coupled with explicit acknowledgement tactics significantly predicted perceived behavioral integrity for women, ($B = 0.71$, $SE = 0.16$, 95% CI 0.40 to 1.04), which predicted attraction. As expected, high explicit diversity signals coupled with explicit acknowledgement tactics had no effect on men, ($B = 0.09$, $SE = 0.11$, 95% CI -0.13 to 0.31).

Research Questions

Research Question 1 was analyzed using ANOVA and aimed to investigate an interaction of diversity signal, gender, and acknowledgement on subjective person–organization fit. There was not a significant interaction of diversity signal, gender, and acknowledgement on subjective person–organization fit, $F(1, 328) = 2.14$, $p = .15$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$.

FIGURE 4.

Interaction of Diversity Signal, Acknowledgement, and Gender in Predicting Perceived Behavioral Integrity, Study 1



Post Hoc Analyses

In line with the idea that there could be potential explanatory variables beyond perceived behavioral integrity, the interaction of diversity signal, gender, and acknowledgement was tested directly on organizational attractiveness. This was analyzed using ANOVA. The interaction was not significant, $F(1, 329) = 0.59$, $p = .44$, $\eta^2 = 0.00$.

Discussion

In Study 1, we investigated a Type 1 moderated mediation model, where the “moderation occurs between the initial variable and the mediator” (Langfred, 2004, p. 395). Thus, our theoretical model suggests information in organizational recruitment materials can influence perceptions of behavioral integrity and, thus, organizational attraction (Langfred, 2004). We found support for all three hypotheses, together suggesting that organizations lacking in women representation may incorporate gender diverse signals coupled with explicit acknowledgement tactics to enhance the perceived behavioral integrity and organizational attraction of women recruits. These efforts were shown to not adversely affect the perceived behavioral integrity or organizational attraction of men. In line with the requirements of the special issue on “Rethinking the Future Police Department,” a second study was conducted to test our original hypotheses in the context of police recruitment.

Study 2: Law Enforcement Agency

Participants and Procedure

Data for Study 2 was collected via Amazon Mechanical Turk ($N = 313$). The response pattern and response time approached were applied to remove 455 careless responders (Huang et al., 2012). The average age of participants was 35.19 ($SD = 10.87$). 64.22% of participants identified

as men and 35.78% identified as women. Similar to Study 1, participants were majority White (56.86%), followed by Asian (22.68%), Hispanic or Latino (8.94%), and Black or African American (5.75%). Respondents, 56.87% of which were active (as opposed to passive) job seekers, reported an average of 2.90 ($SD = 3.10$) previous jobs held.

Study 2 replicated Study 1 in the context of police recruitment. However, the recruitment material proposed messages from a fictitious local law enforcement agency, “The Academy.” The low diversity pictorial representation contained nine men and zero women, whereas the low diversity statement was the same as in Study 1. The high diversity image representation contained 11 men and 6 women, with the same high diversity statement from Study 1. Both the implicit and explicit acknowledgement manipulations were reflective of those used in Study 1 (see Figure 5 and Figure 6). Survey flow was reflective of study Study 1. Along with the variables measured in Study 1, risk propensity (Zhang et al., 2019) was measured. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert type scale, with choices ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*.

Measures

Perceived Behavioral Integrity. Perceived behavioral integrity was measured using four items. Two example items are “There is a match between the Academy’s words and actions” and “The Academy acts in ways that are consistent with its stated values.” The scale demonstrated reliability ($\alpha = 0.75$).

Attraction. Organizational attraction was measured using six adapted items. An example item is “The Academy would be a good place to become a cadet.” The scale demonstrated reliability ($\alpha = 0.78$).

Subjective Person–Organization Fit. Subjective per-

son–organization fit was measured using three adapted items from Cable and DeRue (2002). Two example items are: “The things that I value in life are similar to the things that this organization values” and “My personal values match this organization’s values.” This scale demonstrated reliability ($\alpha = 0.71$).

Risk Propensity. Risk propensity was measured using five items from Zhang et al.’s (2019) GRIPS scale. Two example items are: “I enjoy taking risks makes life more fun” and “I am attracted to rather than scared by risk.” This scale demonstrated reliability ($\alpha = 0.85$).

Control Variable. We controlled for ethnicity due to its possible influence on perceived behavioral integrity and attraction (Windscheid et al., 2016). Ethnicity was controlled as a nominal variable with seven measured categories aligned to United States Bureau of Labor Statistics reporting.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to provide evidence for discriminant validity between constructs perceived behavioral integrity, person–organization fit, risk propensity, and organizational attraction. The two-factor model (CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.04, $X^2(129) = 187.12, p < .001$) demonstrated satisfactory fit.

Results

Main Hypotheses

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations), alpha coefficients, and Pearson correlations can be found in Table 1.

Hypothesis 1 was conducted using ANCOVA, controlling for ethnicity, and was not supported in that the interaction of gender diversity signal and gender on perceived

FIGURE 5.
Study 2 Low Diversity Signal With Explicit Acknowledgement Manipulation



FIGURE 6.
Study 2 High Diversity Signal With Implicit Acknowledgement Manipulation



behavioral integrity was nonsignificant, $F(1, 304) = 3.12, p = .08, \eta^2 = 0.01$ (see Table 4). Hypothesis 2 was conducted using ANCOVA, controlling for ethnicity, and predicted a three-way interaction of diversity signal, gender, and acknowledgement tactic on perceived behavioral integrity and was not supported, $F(1, 304) = 3.12, p = .08, \eta^2 = 0.01$ (see Table 4). Here, women evaluating policing recruitment materials incorporating high diversity signals coupled with explicit acknowledgement tactics reported the highest perceived behavioral integrity ($M = 3.97, 95\% \text{ CI } 3.73 \text{ to } 4.20$); women evaluating low diversity signals paired with explicit acknowledgement tactics, for example, experienced lower perceived behavioral integrity ($M = 3.60, 95\% \text{ CI } 3.35 \text{ to}$

3.86) (see Figure 7). However, this difference was not statistically significant.

Hypothesis 3 was conducted using model 11 of Hayes' PROCESS v3.4.1 macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2017), employing the bootstrapping procedure at a 95% confidence interval. Hypothesis 3 predicted a three-way interaction of diversity signal, acknowledgement, and gender mediated through perceived behavioral integrity, predicting attraction. Hypothesis 3 was not supported in that the index of moderated moderated mediation contained zero, (index = 0.39, $SE = 0.22, 95\% \text{ CI } -0.05 \text{ to } 0.84$; see Table 5).

TABLE 4.

Results of ANCOVA Omnibus Tests for the Proposed Three-Way Interaction of Diversity Signal, Gender, and Acknowledgement on Perceived Behavioral Integrity, Study 2

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	η^2
Diversity signal	0.216	1	0.216	0.526	0.469	0.002
Acknowledgement	0.636	1	0.636	1.546	0.215	0.005
Gender	0.659	1	0.659	1.602	0.207	0.005
Ethnicity	0.133	1	0.133	0.322	0.571	0.001
Diversity Signal X Acknowledgement	1.284	1	1.284	3.122	0.078	0.010
Diversity Signal X Gender	0.117	1	0.117	0.284	0.594	0.001
Acknowledgement X Gender	0.004	1	0.004	0.009	0.923	0.000
Diversity Signal X Gender X Acknowledgement	1.282	1	1.282	3.117	0.078	0.010
Residuals	125.022	304	0.411			

TABLE 5.

Moderated Moderated Mediation Estimates for the Organizational Attraction Outcome, Study 2

Conditional indirect effects	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Men and implicit acknowledgement	0.01	0.09	-0.18	0.19
Men and explicit acknowledgement	-0.13	0.09	-0.32	0.06
Women and implicit acknowledgement	0.01	0.14	-0.26	0.29
Women and explicit acknowledgement	0.26	0.12	0.03	0.49
Index of moderated moderated mediation	Index	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Gender and acknowledgement	0.39	0.22	-0.05	0.84
Indices of conditional moderated mediation by acknowledgement	Index	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Men	-0.14	0.13	-0.39	0.12
Women	0.25	0.18	-0.11	0.60

FIGURE 7. Plot of Diversity Signal, Acknowledgement, and Gender on Perceived Behavioral Integrity, Study 2

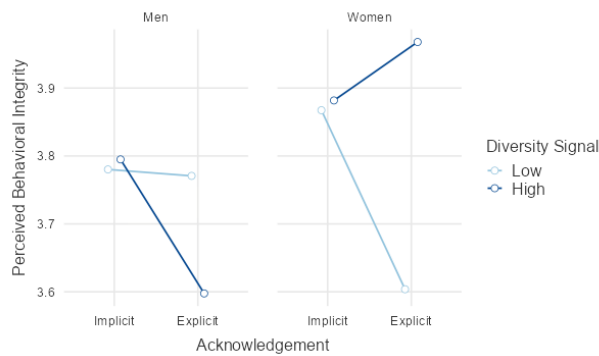


FIGURE 8. Interaction of Diversity Signal, Gender, and Acknowledgement on Subjective Person-Organization Fit, Study 2

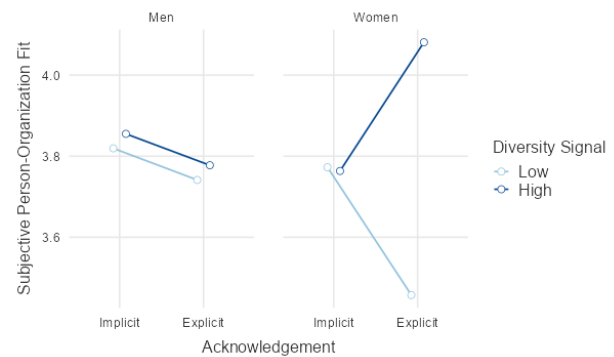


TABLE 6. Results of ANOVA Omnibus Tests Demonstrating a Three-Way Interaction of Diversity Signal, Gender, and Acknowledgement on Subjective Person-Organization Fit, Study 2

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	η ²
Diversity signal	2.103	1	2.103	4.660	0.032	0.015
Gender	0.063	1	0.063	0.139	0.709	0.000
Acknowledgement	0.105	1	0.105	0.233	0.630	0.001
Diversity Signal X Gender	1.314	1	1.314	2.911	0.089	0.009
Diversity Signal X Acknowledgement	1.792	1	1.792	3.970	0.047	0.012
Gender X Acknowledgement	0.111	1	0.111	0.246	0.621	0.001
Diversity Signal X Gender X Acknowledgement	1.786	1	1.786	3.958	0.048	0.012
Residuals	137.656	305	0.451			

Research Questions

Research Question 1 was conducted using ANOVA and investigated an interaction of diversity signal, gender, and acknowledgement on subjective person-organization fit. The interaction of diversity signal, gender, and acknowledgement on subjective person-organization fit was significant, $F(1, 305) = 3.96, p < .05, \eta^2 = 0.01$ (see Table 6). In line with what was predicted in Hypothesis 2, a Tukey’s HSD post-hoc test revealed women evaluating high gender diverse signals paired with explicit acknowledgement tactics reported significantly greater subjective person-organization fit ($M = 4.08, 95\% \text{ CI } 3.84 \text{ to } 4.33$) than those evaluating low gender diverse signals paired with explicit acknowledgement tactics ($M = 3.46, 95\% \text{ CI } 3.19 \text{ to } 3.73$; see Figure 8).

Research Question 2 was conducted using ANOVA and investigated an interaction of acknowledgement, gender, and risk propensity on attraction. Results support the inter-

action of acknowledgement, gender, and risk propensity on attraction, $F(1, 305) = 9.60, p < .01, \eta^2 = 0.03$ (see Table 7). High risk-prone men were more attracted ($M = 4.14, 95\% \text{ CI } 3.96 \text{ to } 4.22$) to the law enforcement agency in explicit acknowledgement contexts than low risk-prone men ($M = 3.61, 95\% \text{ CI } 3.41 \text{ to } 3.79$). Moreover, high risk-prone women were more attracted ($M = 4.10, 95\% \text{ CI } 3.91 \text{ to } 4.29$) to the law enforcement agency than low risk-prone women in implicit acknowledgement contexts ($M = 3.56, 95\% \text{ CI } 3.35 \text{ to } 3.76$). High and low risk-prone men and women reported no difference in attraction in “safe” acknowledgement contexts. See Figure 9 for interaction plot. Although this research question uncovers an interesting and novel finding, more research is needed to fully understand the relationship acknowledgement and individual differences play in job seeker attitudes toward recruitment materials and organizations.

TABLE 7.

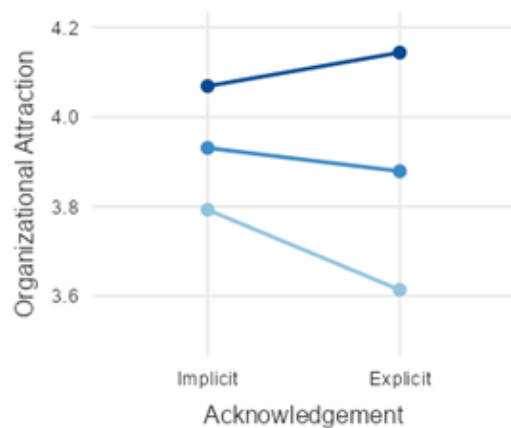
Results of ANOVA Omnibus Tests Demonstrating a Three-Way Interaction of Acknowledgement, Gender, and Risk Propensity on Organizational Attraction, Study 2

	SS	df	F	p	η^2
Model	13.073	7	5.523	<.001	0.112
Acknowledgement	0.077	1	0.228	0.634	6.624e-4
Gender	0.028	1	0.082	0.775	2.389e-4
Risk propensity	7.788	1	23.031	<.001	0.067
Acknowledgement X Gender	0.514	1	1.520	0.219	0.004
Acknowledgement X Risk Propensity	0.511	1	1.510	0.220	0.004
Gender X Risk Propensity	0.436	1	1.291	0.257	0.004
Acknowledgement X Gender X Risk Propensity	3.246	1	9.598	0.002	0.028
Residuals	103.136	305			
Total	116.209	312			

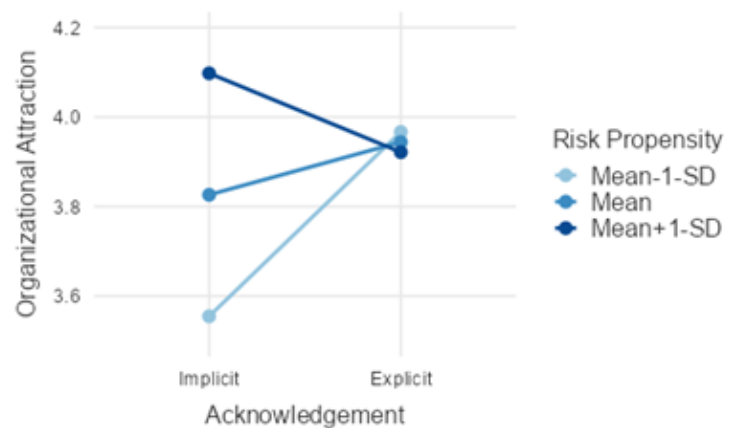
FIGURE 9.

Interaction of Acknowledgement, Gender, and Risk Propensity on Organizational Attraction, Study 2

Men



Women



Post Hoc Analyses

In recognizing there may be alternate explanations transmitting the effect of diversity signal, gender, and acknowledgement on law enforcement agency attraction, and to provide a robust evaluation of Study 2, we tested the three-way interaction directly on attraction. The interaction of diversity signal, gender, and acknowledgement on attraction was significant, $F(1, 305) = 4.05, p < .05, \eta^2 = 0.01$ (see Table 8). Women evaluating police recruitment materials with both high diversity signals and explicit acknowledgement tactics had the highest organizational attraction ($M = 4.15, 95\% \text{ CI } 3.92 \text{ to } 4.37$; see Figure 10).

DISCUSSION

Similar to Study 1, women evaluating policing recruitment materials using both high diversity signals and explicit acknowledgement tactics reported the highest perceived behavioral integrity and attraction. In recognizing the benefits of greater representation of women in police workforces, any effort aimed at increasing equity amongst workers, especially those as scalable as targeted recruiting, is worth employing. Moreover, post hoc analyses investigating the interaction of diversity signal, gender, and acknowledgement tactic provide supplementary evidence for law enforcement agencies suggesting high gender di-

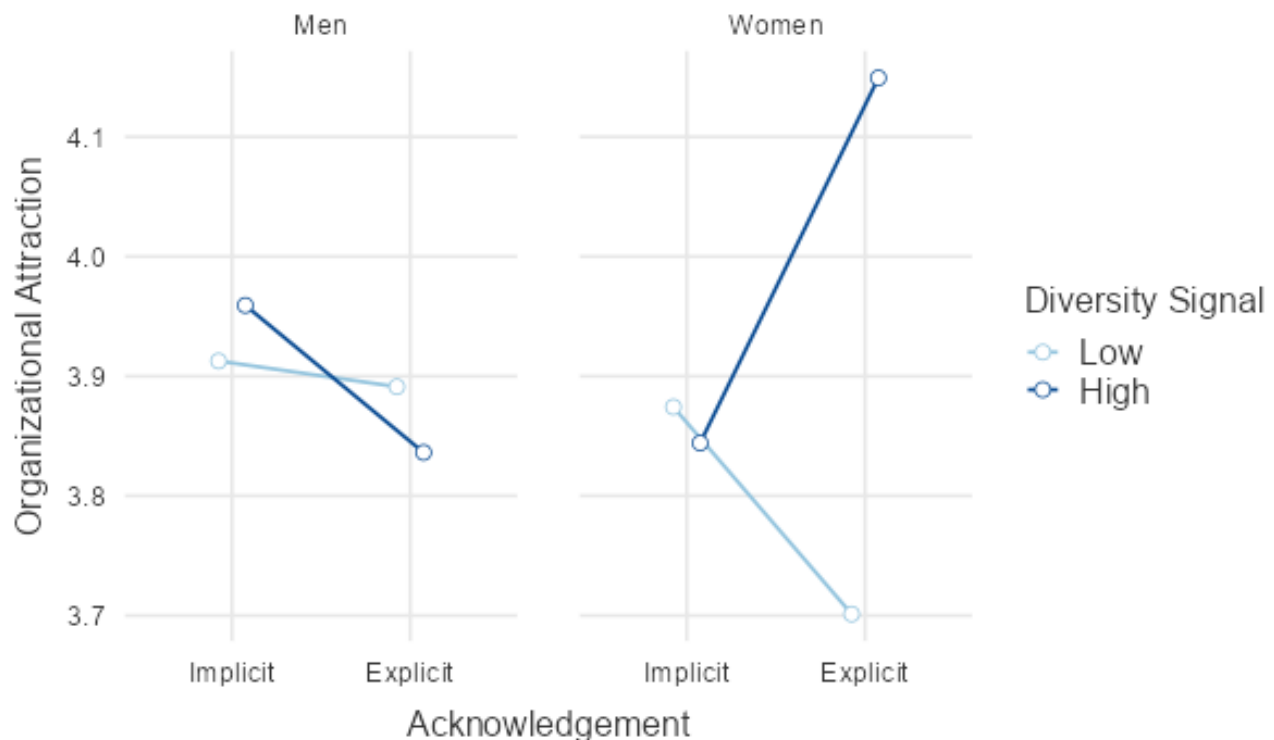
TABLE 8.

Results of ANOVA Omnibus Tests Demonstrating a Three-Way Interaction of Diversity Signal, Gender, and Acknowledgement on Organizational Attraction, Study 2

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p	η^2
Acknowledgement	6.840e-4	1	6.840e-4	0.002	0.966	0.000
Diversity signal	0.749	1	0.749	2.024	0.156	0.006
Gender	0.004	1	0.004	0.011	0.916	0.000
Acknowledgement X Diversity Signal	0.634	1	0.634	1.712	0.192	0.005
Acknowledgement X Gender	0.342	1	0.342	0.923	0.338	0.003
Diversity Signal X Gender	0.812	1	0.812	2.193	0.140	0.007
Diversity Signal X Gender X Acknowledgement	1.501	1	1.501	4.054	0.045	0.013
Residuals	112.939	305	0.370			

FIGURE 10.

Interaction of Diversity Signal, Gender, and Acknowledgement on Organizational Attraction, Study 2



diversity signals and explicit acknowledgement tactics are useful in attracting women to law enforcement agencies. For example, “70% of job seekers said they want to work for a company that demonstrates a commitment to diversity and inclusion” (Maurer, 2021, para. 18); therefore, law en-

forcement agencies can apply this methodology to communications campaigns and recruitment materials in curating targeted outreach programs for women.

Further, research questions demonstrated that women report greater subjective person–organization fit upon eval-

uating law enforcement agency recruitment materials containing both diversity signals and explicit acknowledgement tactics. Further, in considering job seeker risk propensity, explicit acknowledgement tactics may signal “safety” to women. However, although the results of Study 2 yielded statistically different findings than those of Study 1, we suggest that incorporating these signaling tactics may still hold practical significance to policing organizations. Thus, in attracting women applicants, law enforcement agencies may still benefit from incorporating high diversity signals and explicit acknowledgement impression management tactics into their academy recruitment materials.

General Discussion

Notably, organizations with more women in top management positions supersede the performance of those without (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020). Moreover, law enforcement agencies with greater female representation provide a potential remedy against brutality while bringing heightened community trust and cultural understanding (Catalyst, 2004; Donohue Jr., 2020; Novich et al., 2018). However, both general and law enforcement agencies have struggled to employ a gender representative workforce (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020; Windscheid, 2016). Therefore, it was imperative we went beyond identifying gender disparities toward uncovering ways to mitigate them. Considering the clear and compelling evidence that gender diverse images and statement signals can be attractive to women, we focused on how new advances in organizational impression management could influence women’s perceived behavioral integrity and attraction to both general consulting firms and law enforcement agencies (Thomas & Wise, 1999). Recognizing salient gender disparities seen in both commercial organizations and law enforcement agencies, we identified the acknowledgement tactic as appropriate in communicating the *lack* of gender diversity to job seekers. In doing so, we answered recent calls for research on acknowledgement, particularly through the lens of “organizational outsiders’ behavior,” by incorporating both implicit and explicit acknowledgement tactics into organizational recruitment materials (Windscheid et al., 2018, p. 1010). Not only did the findings elaborated in this paper extend our knowledge on job seeker reactions to recruitment materials, they also highlighted the utility of targeted recruitment materials explicitly acknowledging an organization’s lack of gender diversity.

Study 1 analyses provided support for the hypothesized Type 1 moderated mediation model in that women evaluating general consulting recruitment materials containing both high gender diversity signals and explicit acknowledgement tactics would perceive greater behavioral integrity and be, subsequently, more attracted to the organization. Not only do these results support evidence suggesting gender diversity signals positively influence the attitudes held by

women (Avery & McKay, 2006; Gregory et al., 2013; Taj, 2016; Volpone et al., 2014), they provide support for the notion that disclosing the *lack* of gender diversity via explicit acknowledgement tactics may be positive (Windscheid et al., 2018). Thus, when aligned messaging was sent, the positive attitudes driving perceptions of behavioral integrity, for women, drove their stated organizational attraction. However, Study 1 post hoc analyses revealed that the direct effect on attraction was not significant. For general consulting firms, this suggests the necessity of truthfulness and transparency in communication, which influences perceived behavioral integrity, drives job seeker perceptions of fit, and influences attraction.

Study 2 hypotheses, however, were found to be nonsignificant. Considering “a police force with integrity is one with little or no misconduct” (*Police Integrity and How to Improve It*, 2016, para. 1) and the current salience surrounding police misconduct and reform, we recognize perceived behavioral integrity as potentially confounded by personal attitudes toward law enforcement. For example, consider salient movements such as Abolish the Police or Blue Lives Matter. The former emphasizes “the complete end of policing as an organization” (Fine & Del Toro, *in press*, p. 4) due to perception that law enforcement agencies uphold broken, troubled, and racially charged systems, whereas the latter intends to “raise awareness and enlist the public’s aid for the needs of police officers” and “provide a police officer’s family with comfort and support as they go through hard times” due to the perception that police officers are “easy targets for slander and physical attacks” (Thomas & Drinnon, 2021, p. 6, 7). For many, the integrity of law enforcement is likely wrapped up between these competing ideologies. For example, among liberal Americans, social protests following the killing of George Floyd decreased favorability and politicized attitudes toward the police (Reny & Newman, 2021). Thus, attitudes surrounding integrity and law enforcement may be more salient and static via political polarization, which denotes alignment to one’s ideological identity (Rekker, 2021), than attitudes toward consulting firms, which can be effectively managed through relationships (e.g., recruitment channels) with internal and external stakeholders (Macioschek & Katoen, 2007).

Study 2 post hoc analyses investigated the direct effect of the three-way interaction on attraction and found support for the effectiveness of explicit acknowledgement coupled with gender diverse signals. This finding aligns with the notion that perceived behavioral integrity was possibly confounded by other attitudes toward law enforcement. Moreover, research questions revealed subjective person–organization fit as a potential mediator in a policing context. This finding is particularly interesting in that while subjective fit may be “influenced by industry culture stereotypes,” it appears to be less so, in police contexts, than perceived behavioral integrity (Kristof-Brown et al., 2014, p. 445). Further,

considering job seeker risk taking in a policing context, research questions revealed explicit acknowledgement tactics may suggest “safety” to women. These results not only provide support for and extend theoretical frameworks on targeted recruitment, they provide law enforcement agencies and commercial organizations lacking female representation an easy-to-implement strategy designed at increasing female job seeker attraction.

Theoretical Implications

Our study provides several theoretical contributions to the recruitment literature. First, we contribute to the literature on targeted recruitment by providing evidence supporting notions of relational demography via diversity signals. Here, women’s attitudes toward organizations may be positively shaped through high diversity signals, whereas men’s attitudes may remain unaffected. Second, our study is one of the first to experimentally investigate the acknowledgement tactic. Because many organizations, pressingly, law enforcement agencies, fall behind in gender representation, it was critical we identify an effective way to incorporate this tactic into recruitment materials. Thus, we contribute to the literature on organizational impression management by studying both explicit and implicit acknowledgement and demonstrating the effectiveness of explicit acknowledgement, when paired with high diversity signals, in attracting women to careers dominated by men and shaping perceptions of person–organization fit. Further, we provide insight into the construct of perceived behavioral integrity as a mediator in contexts where diversity mixed-messages may easily be sent. Last, through a judgement and decision-making lens, we provide insight into how job seekers derive safety and threat cues from acknowledgement tactics and how risk propensity drives subsequent attraction to the law enforcement agency.

Practical Implications

Our study poses many practical implications worth noting. For general consulting firms, our results suggest that (a) women perceive greater behavioral integrity when evaluating recruitment materials containing gender diverse signals and explicit acknowledgement tactics (e.g., a diverse image paired with a phrase acknowledging a lack of diversity, similar to *women make up 27% of our consulting workforce; we know our work is never done in this area and we are committed to drive greater equity for all employees*), and (b) perceived behavioral integrity significantly influenced organizational attraction (e.g., a gender diverse image coupled with explicit acknowledgment demonstrates a firm’s commitment to the gender diversity of their workforce, which, for female job seekers, suggests integrity and is attractive). Acknowledgement tactics did not negatively impact men. These results reinforce the notion that gender diversity statements and pictorial representations commu-

nicating a lack of gender diversity, yet emphasizing active work toward equity, positively influence perceived behavioral integrity and attraction. Thus, in attracting women to general careers in which they lack representation, organizations may benefit from not only signaling diversity, but by statistically highlighting the lack of gender diversity and providing statements clarifying strides toward equity. Law enforcement agencies may find similar positive results in attracting women through implementing both diversity signals and explicit acknowledgement tactics into their recruitment materials. Although our theoretical model was not supported in Study 2, the results were congruent to Study 1 in that the law enforcement recruitment materials containing gender diverse signals and explicit acknowledgement tactics increased women’s attraction while providing no detrimental effects on men’s attraction. This finding provides a “practically significant” (van Knippenberg, 2011) approach to a recruitment outcome of great concern. Further, Study 2 post hoc analyses revealed a significant three-way interaction of diversity signal, gender, and acknowledgement tactic in the expected direction. Thus, we were able to provide supplementary evidence for the utility of incorporating explicit acknowledgement tactics into police recruitment materials to attract female job seekers.

To this note, many leaders, particularly women leaders, of law enforcement agencies recognize the value of relational demography and transparency in law enforcement. For example, in her acceptance speech of the 2020 Women in Federal Law Enforcement’s Outstanding Advocate for Women in Federal Law Enforcement award, Acting Chief of the United States Capitol Police Yogananda Pittman recognized the importance of the notion that positions in law enforcement are available and obtainable to women (Booker, 2021). Moreover, Juanita Holmes, the first woman to hold the role of New York Police Department Chief of Patrol, suggested “equality, fairness, and transparency” would be “at the core of how ... she plans to lead” (Eyewitness News, 2020, para. 3).

However, Ely and Thomas (2020) suggest “increasing diversity does not, by itself, increase effectiveness; what matters is how an organization harnesses diversity, and whether it’s willing to reshape its power structure” (para. 8). Further, *Recruiting & Retaining Women: A Self-Assessment Guide for Law Enforcement* suggests that targeted recruitment efforts aimed at increasing the representation of women “can only be successful in conjunction with a commitment to retention of ... women” (Harrington, 2000, p. 56). Thus, to enact sustainable change in recruitment and retention, law enforcement agencies must go beyond the “hire more women” trope to “dramatic policing culture and policy changes” (Shumaker, 2020, para. 11). For example, many law enforcement agencies have stood up formalized mentoring programs designed to provide new hires with role models and coaches that help them feel comfortable,

valued, and important as officers (Clary, 2020; Harrington, 2000). Nonetheless, in increasing the percentage of women applicants, targeted recruitment is a necessary first step (Kaul, 2021).

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

Our research offers several notable strengths. First, we are among the first to investigate the acknowledgement tactic. First uncovered by Windscheid et al. (2016), no other studies have experimentally investigated acknowledgement in a recruitment context. Next, the experimental nature of our design allows us to make causal inference on the influence diversity signals and acknowledgement have in shaping job seeker attitudes. Further, although our set of hypotheses did not replicate in Study 2, post hoc analyses provided evidence for the efficacy of the combination of high diversity signals and explicit acknowledgement tactics in positively shaping women's attraction toward law enforcement agencies. Last, both studies provided a demographically diverse sample, providing evidence for generalizability. Considering these strengths, however, our study is not without limitations.

First, the percentages used in our manipulations may overrepresent the representation of women in many law enforcement agencies. However, previous changes in recruitment policies have been found to dramatically impact the recruitment of women: for example, the Albuquerque Police Department and the Tucson Police Department increased their representation of women from 10% to 25% and from 10% to 29%, respectively. In Albuquerque, for example, this was achieved through the implementation of the New Workplace Project (Polisar & Milgram, 1998). Further, overestimation bias and modern sexism suggest laypeople will not have a good sense of the statistical representation of women in policing. Thus, laypeople are expected to overestimate the proportion of women in men-dominated occupations (Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Wolfram, 2017). Therefore, to many, 27% of the police force being women is likely to be considered low, whatever the occupation. Further, Highhouse (2009) suggests experiments do “not need to mirror the external environment for us to generalize inferences across populations, settings, and variables” (p. 2). That is, in generalizing theoretical explanations, it is more important that results generalize across situations (have external validity) where women lack representation than generalize to a specific situation (have ecological validity) in and of itself (Highhouse, 2009). Second, the addition of leaders in the general consulting firm manipulations could have had a confounding effect on the results of Study 1. In particular, women job seekers may find the symbolic value of a woman in top management particularly salient and attractive (Madera et al., 2019). Thus, it is suggested that separate studies explore the effect of leadership in this particular recruitment context. Third, although we randomly assigned

independent variables diversity signal and acknowledgement tactic, our mediator perceived behavioral integrity, dependent variable attraction, and research question variables person–organization fit and risk propensity were self-reported and measured in the same sitting. Self-reported constructs are susceptible to method biases (Podsakoff, 2003). Although we provided evidence, in both Study 1 and 2, that perceived behavioral integrity and attraction were indeed distinct, future research collecting mediator and dependent variable information separately, or through different means, is invited. Next, we evaluated only the attitudes of women. Considering the poignant intersection of race and law enforcement, research is welcomed in investigating the effects of these recruitment tactics on ethnic minorities. Moreover, researchers may benefit from looking into between-sex or between-ethnicity differences in attitudes, as well (Martins & Parsons, 2007). Further, concerns surrounding small effect sizes may call into question the practical significance of our findings. However, Prentice and Miller (1992) suggest that “the most minimal manipulation of the independent variable” “can be a very useful measure of the strength of an effect” (pp. 161, 163). Changes in the manipulation of the acknowledgement tactic consisted of the addition of one simple sentence, see, for example, Figure 2 and Figure 3. Next, for law enforcement agencies in particular, other mediators, moderators, control variables, dependent variables, and recruitment outcomes (i.e., post-hire) might be of value to investigate. For example, due to recent tensions between communities and the police (Wallace-Wells, 2020), perceptions of policing legitimacy, commitment to diversity, performance, or cooperation may have acted as confounding variables in Study 2. Thus, analyzing or controlling for variables such as these may provide a more clear picture on how targeted recruitment practices impact job seeker perceptions of behavioral integrity. Therefore, an extension of our study in this regard (e.g., controlling for or applying more nuanced measures concerning law enforcement; considering salient attitudes and movements regarding law enforcement—e.g., Defund the Police, Blue Lives Matter) may further contextualize the psychological phenomenon driving the divergence between Studies 1 and 2. Although our study provides initial support toward this model as an effective recruitment strategy for law enforcement agencies, the psychology driving attitudes toward them, as opposed to consulting firms, may need special attention in that they are likely subject to political polarization. Further, there was a unique lack of an overall gender effect. We suspect this to be due to the manipulation design in that our conditions may have created opposing effects that canceled each other out. Last, we only evaluated attitudes at the gender level. Investigating other demographics in this context would be helpful in more fully explaining applicant reactions to acknowledgement tactics. Further, research question analyses conducted in Study 2 surrounding subjective person–

organization fit and risk propensity pointed toward potential avenues for future research surrounding the constructs of interest and targeted police recruitment. We hope our results and posed future avenues stimulate further exploration surrounding the ideas brought forth by our study.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, our studies demonstrate initial support for the notion that gender diversity signals and explicit acknowledgement tactics, when paired together, are useful in positively influencing women attitudes toward organizations. We find that, for general consulting firms, when women evaluate recruitment materials signaling gender diversity and explicitly acknowledging the *lack* of gender diversity, they perceive greater behavioral integrity and are, thus, more attracted. For law enforcement agencies, however, the results are not as clear. Although results were nonsignificant, post hoc analyses revealed that the aforementioned combination in police recruitment materials is effective in directly increasing women attraction. Such evidence highlights, when women are in the minority, diversity management must go beyond checking boxes regarding diversity signals in recruitment materials to providing relevant statistics and commentary on their lack of equality and the strides they are taking to mitigate the discrepancy. Considering research surrounding acknowledgement is in its nascent stages, more studies will be necessary to more clearly understand its effect pre- and post-hire. Fortunately, these insights provide general organizations and law enforcement agencies with an initial framework on attracting women applicants where their representation lacks.

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