RESEARCH REPORT

Actions Speak Louder Than Words: Outsiders' Perceptions of Diversity Mixed Messages

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To attract a gender diverse workforce, many employers use diversity statements to publicly signal that they value gender diversity. However, this often represents a misalignment between words and actions (i.e., a diversity mixed message) because most organizations are male dominated, especially in board positions. We conducted 3 studies to investigate the potentially indirect effect of such diversity mixed messages through perceived behavioral integrity on employer attractiveness. In Study 1, following a 2 × 2 design, participants ($N = 225$) were either shown a pro gender diversity statement or a neutral statement, in combination with a gender diverse board (4 men and 4 women) or a uniform all-male board (8 men). Participants' perceived behavioral integrity of the organization was assessed. In Study 2, participants ($N = 251$) either read positive or negative reviews of the organization's behavioral integrity. Employer attractiveness was then assessed. Study 3 ($N = 427$) investigated the impact of board gender composition on perceived behavioral integrity and employer attractiveness using a bootstrapping procedure. Both the causal-chain design of Study 1 and 2, as well as the significance test of the proposed indirect relationship in Study 3, revealed that a diversity mixed message negatively affected an organization's perceived behavioral integrity, and low behavioral integrity in turn negatively impacted employer attractiveness. In Study 3, there was also evidence for a tipping point (more than 1 woman on the board was needed) with regard to participants' perceptions of the organization's behavioral integrity.

Keywords: diversity, mixed message, employer attractiveness, women on board, behavioral integrity

Organizations are reflections of the members of their upper echelons (Hambrick & Mason, 1984), and an organization's top management is a highly visible organizational attribute (McMillan-Capehart, Aaron, & Cline, 2010). The lack of female representation in top management, and especially in boards, has therefore generated longstanding interest in the business and political world and has led to increased public scrutiny (Torchia, Calabrò, & Huse, 2011). Given the positive relation between the number of women on organizations' boards and corporate social responsibility (Bear, Rahman, & Post, 2010), corporate reputation (Brammer, Millington, & Pavelin, 2009), financial performance (Campbell & Mínguez-Vera, 2008; Erhardt, Werbel, & Shrader, 2003), and likelihood of being viewed as an ethical organization (Larkin, Bernardi, & Bosco, 2012), attracting top female talent is also key to organizational success (Cabrera, 2009).

Despite the importance of women on organizations' boards to organizational success, attracting and retaining them (especially at top levels of management) remains a challenge because of systemic discrimination and pipeline issues (de Vries, 2015). One approach for overcoming this challenge is diversity management, which has been found to positively impact individuals' (especially those belonging to traditional workforce minority groups) attraction to organizations (for a discussion, see Avery, McKay, & Volpone, 2013). A key strategic issue in diversity management

consists of managing perceptions of the organization (i.e., its employer image) with regard to gender diversity (e.g., Williamson, Slay, Shapiro, & Shivers-Blackwell, 2008). To this end, many organizations develop gender diversity statements and publish them on their corporate websites, thereby signaling that they welcome and value the contributions of women (Jayne & Dipboye, 2004; Point & Singh, 2003). Research indicates that many (potential) applicants perceive such messages favorably (Avery et al., 2013; Williams & Bauer, 1994). Often, however, the employer image intended to be created by diversity statements is inconsistent with the reality within the organization (Kirby, 2000). Avery and Johnson (2008) refer to this misalignment between an organization's words and actions as a "diversity mixed message."

This article examines the impact of a misalignment between gender diversity-related words and past actions (resulting in a gender diversity mixed message) on the attractiveness of an organization. As depicted in Figure 1, our central premise is that the link between employer attractiveness and a gender diversity mixed message is mediated by the perception of an organization's behavioral integrity. To test this model, we conducted three studies. The first two studies followed an *experimental causal-chain design*, which is regarded as a powerful approach for demonstrating causality in experiments (Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, & Petty, 2011; Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). The basic idea underlying an experimental causal-chain design is to perform two experiments; one demonstrating the effect of the independent variable on the mediator, and the other demonstrating the effect of the mediator on the outcome. In Study 1, we investigated the link between a gender diversity mixed message and the perceived behavioral integrity of an organization sending such a message. Next, in Study 2, we assessed the effect of an organization's behavioral integrity on its employer attractiveness. On the basis of recommendations of Spencer et al. (2005) that it is best to use combinations of different designs for showing evidence of mediation, Study 3 utilized a measurement-of-mediation design and tested our model via mediation analyses (Hayes, 2012) that allow for significance testing of indirect effects. Study 3 also scrutinized how many women on the board of an organization with a pro gender diversity statement were needed for the organization to not be perceived as sending a mixed message.

Study Background and Hypotheses

Employer attractiveness is a key intangible asset for today's organizations (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005). Signaling theory (Bangerter, Roulin, & König, 2012; Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011; Jones, Willness, & Madey, 2014; Spence, 1973) helps to understand how organizations might influence their attractiveness among potential applicants and how

these applicants in turn might interpret organizations' signals. So, although organizations can try to manage their employer attractiveness by signaling specific attributes, perceptions of their attractiveness as employers are based not only on the messages and signals they send but also on "inferences drawn by the applicants receiving those signals" (Celani & Singh, 2011, p. 228).

Corporate gender diversity statements represent a public declaration of an organization's values. Hence, such statements and other diversity related organizational attributes have been argued to be "salient messages" about life in an organization (Backhaus, Stone, & Heiner, 2002, p. 298) and as such they might serve as signals for potential applicants to evaluate employers (e.g., Martins & Parsons, 2007; Windscheid, Bowes-Sperry, Mazei, & Morner, 2015). Avery and Johnson (2008) introduced their work on *diversity mixed messages* with the English proverb "Actions speak louder than words." According to Avery and Johnson, a diversity mixed message represents an inconsistency between what organizations say about diversity and what they do to promote diversity. A firm that claims to value gender diversity, while exhibiting male dominance in top management positions, is transmitting a gender diversity mixed message.

We posit that potential applicants who are exposed to such mixed messages by organizations will interpret them as signaling a mismatch between the organizations' words and deeds (Jones et al., 2014). Simons (2002) referred to such discrepancies between what one says and does as indicative of a lack of behavioral integrity. He defined behavioral integrity as "[t]he *perceived* pattern of alignment between an actor's words and deeds. It entails both perceived fit between espoused and enacted values, and perceived promise-keeping. Thus, it includes the perception of behavioral adherence to psychological contracts, as well as to . . . corporate value statements . . . and simple follow-through on expressed commitments" (Simons, 2002, p. 19, italics added). Simons further proposed that the *actual* alignment between words and actions is an antecedent of behavioral integrity.

Thus, as diversity mixed messages constitute a misalignment between an organization's diversity-related words and actions (Avery & Johnson, 2008), we expect that potential applicants will perceive organizations sending such messages as lacking in behavioral integrity. Given that an organization's behavioral integrity is an important symbolic attribute (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003), we further posit that it will have a significant impact on employer attractiveness. This proposed mediating role of an organization's perceived behavioral integrity in the diversity mixed message–organizational attractiveness relationship is consistent with evidence that leaders lose credibility when they do not "walk the talk" (Lorinkova & Perry, 2014), that organizations are perceived as lacking integrity when they decouple their values from implemen-
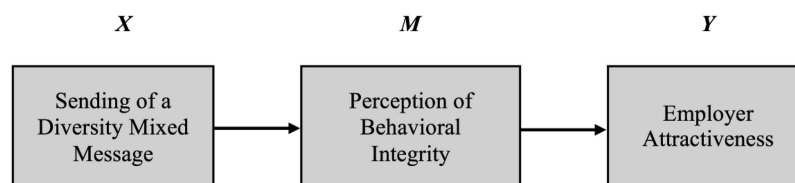

Figure 1. Research model with the proposed mediation.

tation (MacLean, Litzky, & Holderness, 2015; Palanski & Yammarino, 2011), and that broken promises lead to distrust, anger, and cynicism (Chiaburu, Peng, Oh, Banks, & Lomeli, 2013; Lorinkova & Perry, 2014).

Taken together, we expect that a gender diversity mixed message will negatively influence the perceived behavioral integrity of an organization and in turn its attractiveness. This leads to the following two hypotheses, which the experimental causal-chain design will test in Study 1 and 2, respectively.

> *Hypothesis 1:* Board gender composition and gender diversity statement interact such that potential applicants report high behavioral integrity when presented with a balanced, gender diverse board and a pro gender diversity statement, whereas they report low behavioral integrity, when presented with a uniform, all-male board and a pro gender diversity statement.

> *Hypothesis 2:* There will be a positive relationship between an organization's behavioral integrity and its attractiveness as an employer.

Study 1

Method

An invitation e-mail to our online survey was sent to approximately 2,000 subscribers of a noncommercial German research panel (Leiner, 2014). Subscribers of the panel had previously agreed to voluntarily participate, without payment, in scientific research projects. Surveys sent through the panel are peer-reviewed by researchers engaged in the panel administration to ensure adherence to strict ethical and quality standards. The invitation e-mail mentioned that the study dealt with perceptions of corporate websites. This was stated to reduce self-selection bias because of the sensitivity of gender diversity issues. We received 274 completed surveys (response rate = 13%). The final sample size was $N = 225$ (70 male, 155 female) because of excluding participants who indicated at the end that their data should not be used, or who were older than 35 or younger than 18 years. Participants were mainly German (90.2%), Austrian (5.8%), or Swiss (2.2%). The average age was 23.4 years ($SD = 3.1$), and participants had on average 2 years of work experience. Thus, they had experience in applying for jobs. The proportion of participants holding a university degree (44.9%) or currently attending university (37.8%) indicated that the sample was well educated.

We designed the corporate website of a fictitious company using a digital graphics program by combining (and altering) elements from three existing German corporate websites. To ensure the material's realism, a website designer evaluated the website and suggested minor changes. Participants read that they would evaluate a service and consulting company that was currently recruiting new employees in Germany. This company description was similar to those given in previous diversity studies (e.g., Martins & Parsons, 2007) and was expected to lead to general attractiveness among individuals from different backgrounds. Next, participants were told that they would be shown two subpages from the company's corporate website. To reduce participants' hypothesis guessing we stated that the pages were randomly chosen from the website sections: The Company, Products, or News.

Using a 2×2 factorial between-subjects design, participants were then randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions. In each condition, they were presented with two subpages. The first factor, *gender diversity statement*, contained two types of statements. Participants assigned to the pro gender diversity statement were shown a subpage entitled "We value gender diversity," which contained a pro gender diversity statement (Appendix A).[1] In line with prior diversity research (Avery, Hernandez, & Hebl, 2004; Casper, Wayne, & Manegold, 2013; Williamson et al., 2008), we built our statement as an aggregation of statements found on 30 websites of major German employers. Participants assigned to the neutral statement were shown a subpage entitled "careers at LOVAN" (the fictitious company's name), which contained a short description of where to find vacancies on the website.

After this first subpage, the second factor, *board gender composition*, was manipulated by showing participants a second subpage about the company's "board" with eight pictures of the board managers (Appendix B). Participants assigned to the balanced board saw a gender diverse board composed of four men and four women, whereas the other participants saw a uniform, all-male board (8 men).

After having seen the two subpages, participants rated the perceived behavioral integrity of the organization, using the scale of Simons, Friedman, Liu, and McLean Parks (2007). This five-item scale was designed to measure the match between enacted and espoused values of leaders. In this study, we adapted the items to measure perceived behavioral integrity at the organizational level ($\alpha = .97$). Finally, participants answered a manipulation check (How many women are on the board?) and reported their demographic information.

Results and Discussion

We ran the manipulation check analyses using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), which indicated a significant main effect. The actual number of women depicted on the board was significantly related to the number reported by participants, $F(3, 221) = 1363.28$, $p < .00$, $\eta_p^2 = .95$. Thus, the manipulation of board gender composition worked as expected. Next, we conducted a one-way ANOVA to test Hypothesis 1 of an interaction between board gender composition and diversity statement. The main effects for both the board gender composition, $F(1, 221) = 136.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .38$, and diversity statement, $F(1, 221) = 15.17$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, were significant. As predicted in Hypothesis 1, the board gender composition $\times$ gender diversity statement interaction was significant, $F(1, 221) = 82.02$, $p < .001$,

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[1] In the original material (written in German) we used the term "Geschlechtervielfalt" as equivalent for the term gender diversity (Appendix A). It is important to note that the term "Geschlechtervielfalt" is also used to refer to transgender related issues in German. As German translation for gender diversity we therefore also suggest the terms "Geschlechterdiversität" and "Chancengleichheit für Frauen."

$\eta_p^2 = .27.^2$ Organizational behavioral integrity perceptions were highest for a gender diverse board and pro gender diversity statement (Table 1, Figure 2). Conversely, organizational integrity perceptions were lowest for an all-male board and pro gender diversity statement.

In short, results of Study 1 suggest that potential applicants' perceptions of an organization's integrity decrease when the organization sends a gender diversity mixed message. Thus, a discrepancy between words and actions of an organization that publicly espouses to value gender diversity, while simultaneously maintaining male dominated boards, negatively affects its behavioral integrity. Given that Study 1 empirically established the negative impact of a gender diversity mixed message on perceptions of an organization's behavioral integrity, Study 2 implements the next step in the experimental causal-chain design methodology (Rucker et al., 2011; Spencer et al., 2005). That is, we examine the extent to which the perceived behavioral integrity of an organization influences its attractiveness.

Study 2

Method

The link to this study was distributed via postings in social and professional job networks (the number of individuals receiving the link is hence unknown). It was addressed to "students of all fields," to reach a sample similar to the one in Study 1. To avoid self-selection bias, we did not mention the gender diversity issue. Participation was motivated by the chance to win one of three prizes (value of $70.00 in total). Two hundred eighty-seven completed surveys were returned. We excluded participants who indicated at the end of the survey that their data should not be used ($n = 16$) as well as those who spent over 5 hr or less than 2.5 min responding to the survey ($n = 15$). We also restricted the age range to 18 to 35 years (exclusion of 5 participants) to ensure the sample's comparability to that in Study 1. The final sample size was $N = 251$ (70 male, 181 female). Participants were mainly German (98%). Their average age was 21.6 years ($SD = 3.3$), and 84% were students. On average, they had 1.3 years of work experience ($SD = 2.1$).

All participants were shown a fictitious website that was described as a platform where employees anonymously review their employers. The website was similarly designed in terms of structure and content as actual websites that provide such reviews in Germany and the United States (e.g., glassdoor.com, vault.com). It
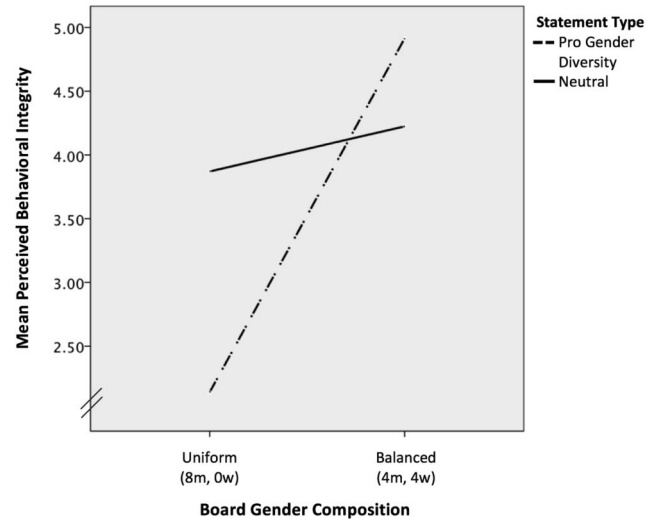

Figure 2. Perceived behavioral integrity as function of statement type and board gender composition. The number of "m" = male and "f" = female board members is given in parentheses.

contained a brief company profile of a fictitious company (see Study 1: "LOVAN," a service and consulting company, currently recruiting in Germany). The website also contained four reviews, described as being submitted anonymously by employees of the company (Appendix C). The first two reviews were about communication and professionalism within the company. Both were primarily positive. In the last two reviews, we manipulated the behavioral integrity of the organization, because a key requirement in experimental causal-chain designs is that the "proposed psychological process as it is measured [in Study 1] and as it is manipulated [in Study 2] are in fact the same variable" (Spencer et al., 2005, p. 846). Recall that in Study 1, we measured behavioral integrity as an outcome of participants' understanding of organizational gender diversity related attributes. To comply with the requirement of causal-chain designs, we manipulated the last two reviews in terms of an organization's behavioral integrity in Study 2 by using gender diversity related stimuli (i.e., female representation in employment and promotion). That is, participants were randomly assigned to one of the following two conditions. In the *high behavioral integrity* condition (Appendix C), the last two reviews described the organization as being effective with regard to achieving a more balanced gender representation in upper management positions because of the promotion and retention of qualified women and by offering a working environment that values gender diversity. Both reviews highlighted that the organization's gender diversity efforts were driven by real conviction. In contrast, in the second condition with *low integrity* (Appendix C), the last reviews described the organization as being ineffective in terms of attaining gender balanced upper echelons, as its gender diversity efforts were not driven by real conviction but reflected window-dressing. Upon reading the reviews, participants rated the

Table 1
Means of Perceived Behavioral Integrity as a Function of Type of Gender Diversity Statement and Board Gender Composition

Board gender composition	Type of gender diversity statement	
	Pro gender diversity statement	Neutral statement
Gender diverse board (4 men, 4 women)	4.91 (1.14)	4.22 (.66)
Uniform board (8 men, 0 women)	2.14 (1.20)	3.87 (.81)

Note. SDs are in parentheses. N ranged from 50 to 65.

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[2] To test for potential confounding effects, we ran the same analyses with participants' gender, age, and years of work experience as covariates. Neither gender, nor age, nor work experience impacted the findings.

attractiveness of the organization using four items (e.g., "For me, this company would be a good place to work"; α = .92.) of Highhouse, Lievens, and Sinar (2003) on 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

To ensure the external validity (realism) of the manipulations, we developed the reviews on the basis of materials from websites and from previous diversity research (Martins & Parsons, 2007). To check the internal validity of our manipulations, participants completed Simons et al.'s (2007) behavioral integrity scale (see Study 1) (α = .98) at the end of the survey. Results revealed that our manipulation worked well: Participants' perception of behavioral integrity was significantly lower, $t(249) = 15.40$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.95$, in the low behavioral integrity condition ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.27$) than in the high behavioral integrity condition ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 1.05$). Finally, to minimize the potential activation of gender stereotypes, participants completed their demographics on the last page of the survey.

Results and Discussion

In line with Hypothesis 2, there was a significant effect of behavioral integrity on the organization's employer attractiveness, $t(249) = 7.83$, $p < .001$, $d = .73$, with individuals in the low behavioral integrity condition ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.18$) perceiving the organization as less attractive than those in the high behavioral integrity condition ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 1.07$).[3] We also tested for potential confounding effects via a one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) of behavioral integrity on organizational attractiveness, thereby controlling for participants' gender, age, years of work experience, remaining time to apply for a job (in years), and remaining time to finish studies (in years). None of the covariates reached statistical significance.

In combination with Study 1, the results of Study 2 support our model (Figure 1) that a gender diversity mixed message negatively influences the perceived behavioral integrity of organizations and that organizations lower on behavioral integrity are perceived as less attractive than organizations higher on behavioral integrity. Study 3 was conducted with two goals: (1) to provide another test of our model using nonparametric bootstrapping mediation analyses (that overcomes a series of drawbacks of more traditional mediation analyses; see Preacher & Hayes, 2004) and (2) to examine more closely the number of women on the board required for participants to perceive consistency between the espoused (pro gender diversity statement) and enacted (number of women on the board) values of the organization, that is, to decrease participants' perceptions of a diversity mixed message.

Study 3

In Study 1, our design used only two values (uniform, all male vs. balanced) to represent gender board composition. This was done to permit us to conduct a full 2 × 2 design that showed that the combination of a specific board gender composition and a progender diversity statement impacts the perception of behavioral integrity. Use of such extreme values, however, does not enable the examination of possible nonlinear effects of gender board composition on employer attractiveness (see Martins & Parsons, 2007). At a practical level, it also leaves open the question as to how many women need to be on the board for a pro gender

diversity statement to be perceived as credible. In other words, does a tipping point exist with regard to perceived behavioral integrity? To shed light on these issues, we conducted a third study in which we manipulated the board gender composition at a more fine-grained level. The remaining measures used in Study 3 were the same as those in our prior studies, thereby allowing us to conduct another test of our model.

For the purpose of this study, we distinguished between five different types of board gender composition, in accordance with Kanter's (1977) definitions: A *uniform* board is all male. In a *token* board there is only one token woman, whereas in a *skewed* board there are two women. A *tilted* board, on which there are three women, is characterized by a gender distribution that is less extreme, which allows women to overcome token-status and build a minority that is "differentiated from the majority" (Kanter, 1977, p. 966). Finally, a *balanced* board consists of an equal number of men and women.

We draw on critical mass theory to make predictions regarding a tipping point at which the number of women on a board in an organization espousing to value gender diversity is sufficient to elicit perceptions of organizational behavioral integrity and organizational attractiveness (Granovetter, 1978; Kanter, 1977; Torchia et al., 2011). When there are only one or two women in a male-dominated group, they are easily "kept apart" allowing men to remain dominant because the women are then viewed as tokens, which leads to detrimental effects (lower performance, isolation, discomfort, perceptions of untrustworthiness, inability to influence group decisions, e.g., Kanter, 1977; Powell, 1993). Thus, to acquire influence a minority group must establish a critical mass (Caul, 2001; Kanter, 1977). Qualitative research (Konrad, Kramer, & Erkut, 2008, p. 160) suggests that this critical mass occurs when there are three women—"three women normalizes women directors' presence" (see also Torchia et al., 2011).

Although the theoretical and empirical research described previously deals with influence processes within groups, we posit that it is also applicable to outsiders' perceptions of boards. Indeed, as tokens are viewed negatively by individuals both outside and inside the group (e.g., Heilman, Block, & Lucas, 1992), we might assume that potential applicants will view one or two women on boards as tokens who are either lacking competence and/or unable to influence board decisions. For organizations espousing to value gender diversity, this further implies that organizations with boards that consist of at most two women are perceived as sending a diversity mixed message, which we have already found to decrease perceived behavioral integrity. Thus, we hypothesize:

> *Hypothesis 3:* There will be a tipping point in the board gender composition of organizations that espouse to value gender diversity, and the perception of their behavioral integrity: The increase in perceived behavioral integrity will be greatest when the board gender composition overcomes the skewed status, that is, when there are three women.

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[3] We also assessed individuals' pursuit intentions (Highhouse et al., 2003) toward the company and ran the same analysis with it as outcome variable. The findings did not differ from the general attractiveness outcome and hence will not be discussed.

Method

The link to our survey was sent to 2,677 subscribers of a noncommercial German online panel used exclusively for scientific purposes (Study 1). Participation was motivated by the chance to win one of four prizes (value of $85.00 in total). Four hundred eighty-nine completed surveys were returned. This represents a response rate of 18.3%. Data from $N = 427$ participants (171 male, 256 female) were usable (exclusion criteria were similar to those in Study 1 and 2). Participants were mainly German (90%), Austrian (8%) or Swiss (2%). Their average age was 36.2 years ($SD = 13.5$, range = 18–75), and the majority of participants was employed (49.2% full-time, 31.6% part-time) with on average 12.8 years ($SD = 13.3$) of work experience. Although the participants are older and more experienced than those in Study 1 and 2, it can also be reasonably assumed that they have job application experience.

Participants were given the same general description of the company and read the same instructions as in Study 1 (they would see *two* subpages from the company's corporate website). Participants were then assigned to one of five experimental conditions. In all five experimental conditions, participants were first shown a subpage containing the pro gender diversity statement (Appendix A and Study 1). As in Study 1, participants were then shown a second subpage of the company's "board" with eight portraits of managers. We manipulated the board gender composition, following Kanter's (1977) framework described above, by varying the number of women on the board. So, there were five conditions ranging from uniform (8 men, 0 women) to balanced (4 men, 4 women) and participants were randomly assigned to one of these board composition types.

After the general company description and the presentation of the two subpages, participants rated the employer's attractiveness ($\alpha = .91$; Highhouse et al., 2003) and, on a consecutive page, the extent of perceived behavioral integrity of the organization ($\alpha = .97$; Simons et al., 2007). The items were the same as in Study 1 and Study 2, respectively. Participants then answered a manipulation check item ("Please indicate how many women [were] on the board"). A one-way ANOVA indicated that the actual number of women depicted on the board was highly related to the number reported by participants ($F(4, 423) = 1004.27$, $p < .00$, $\eta_p^2 = .90$). The manipulation of board gender composition was hence recognized and worked as expected. Finally, participants filled in their demographic information.

Results and Discussion

We conducted our analyses in SPSS with PROCESS, a bootstrapping application provided by Hayes (2012) that allows for significance testing of indirect effects via bias corrected confidence intervals. Therefore, we built, as recommended (Hayes & Preacher, 2014), $k - 1$ dummy variables (k was 5, according to the five board composition types), with the uniform board (8 men, 0 women) representing the reference group. Parameters in our models are thus quantifications relative to this group (for a discussion, see Hayes & Preacher, 2014).

Results are based on 20,000 bootstrapped samples and as recommended (Hayes & Preacher, 2014) for multicategorical mediation analyses, we set a conservative p value criterion of .01. Table 2 shows the results of our analyses. Because we applied dummy-coding, the effects have to be interpreted as relative to the reference category (i.e., the uniform board).

As can be seen in Table 2, we found relative indirect effects that were different from zero for the skewed, tilted, and balanced board. In mediation analyses with multicategorical independent variables, evidence of at least one significant relative indirect effect supports the conclusion of the proposed mediation (Hayes & Preacher, 2014). These findings hence support our model's indirect effect (see Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2).

A one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences for perceived behavioral integrity (Welch's $F(4, 206.06) = 103.81$, $p < .001$.) between the different board types. As can be seen in Table 3, the increase in perceived behavioral integrity ratings was largest between the organization with the skewed board (6 men, 2 women) and the organization with the tilted board (5 men, 3 women). The 95% confidence intervals of post hoc tests, however, revealed that this difference was not significantly bigger than the difference between the token board (7 men, 1 woman) and the skewed board (6 men, 2 women). Hypothesis 3 was not supported. Nonetheless, it should be noted that according to Table 3, all board types lead to higher behavioral integrity ratings than the uniform (8 men, 0 women) and the token board (7 men, 1 woman). Hence, when female representation on the board of an organization that espouses to value gender diversity overcomes token status (i.e., one single woman), the perceived behavioral integrity of the organization increases significantly. Thus, as shown in Figure 3, there is evidence of a tipping point. However, it does not occur where we hypothesized.[4]

Taken together, the findings from Study 3 support our model and our proposition of an indirect relationship between the gender composition of an organization that espouses to value gender diversity and its employer attractiveness such that a critical mass of women on the board has to be reached; our findings show that having a token female on the board is not enough for an organization to be perceived as having behavioral integrity and as an attractive place to work.

General Discussion

Main Contributions and Implications

To attract a gender diverse workforce, many organizations seek to positively affect their employer attractiveness by signaling that they value gender diversity (e.g., Singh & Point, 2006; Stevens & Szmerekovsky, 2010). However, this often represents a misalignment between words and actions (a diversity mixed message) because the majority of organizations are still male dominated, especially in boardrooms, where female representation rarely overcomes token status (Bernardi, Bosco, & Vassill, 2006;

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[4] We exploratively found an interaction between board type and participants' gender. Whereas the link between the number of women on the board and integrity perceptions was almost linear for men, there was a clear kink for women. Among women participants, the mean difference in perceived behavioral integrity was not significantly different between the uniform (0 women) and the token board (1 woman), however, mean differences between all other conditions reached significance. The mean difference was biggest between the skewed (2 women) and the tilted board (3 women).

Table 2
Regression Results for the Proposed Mediation With the Uniform Board as Reference Category

Regression	B	SE	t	p	LL CI	UL CI
Relative total effects						
Employer attractiveness on board type						
Uniform (Intercept)	3.51	.13	28.13	.00	3.19	3.83
Token	.02	.18	.12	.90	−.44	.49
Skewed	.52	.19	2.82	.01	.04	1.00
Tilted	.85	.19	4.46	.00	.36	1.34
Balanced	.77	.20	3.89	.00	.26	.13
Relative direct effects						
Perceived behavioral integrity on board type						
Uniform (Intercept)	2.18	.11	19.58	.00	1.89	2.47
Token	.25	.16	1.53	.13	−.17	.66
Skewed	1.10	.17	6.69	.00	.68	1.53
Tilted	2.13	.17	12.58	.00	1.69	2.56
Balanced	2.73	.18	15.46	.00	2.28	3.19
Employer attractiveness on perceived behavioral integrity, controlling for board type	.59	.05	12.70	.00	.47	.71
Employer attractiveness on board type, controlling for perceived behavioral integrity						
Uniform (Intercept)	2.22	.15	15.16	.00	1.84	2.60
Token	−.12	.15	−.80	.42	−.52	.27
Skewed	−.13	.17	−.77	.43	−.56	.30
Tilted	−.41	.19	−2.16	.03	−.90	.81
Balanced	−.84	.21	−3.99	.00	−.14	−.30

Relative indirect effects (uniform board as reference category)				
	M	Boot SE	LL CI	UL CI
Board type				
Token	.14	.10	−.11	.42
Skewed	.65	.12	.37	.97
Tilted	1.25	.15	.91	1.66
Balanced	1.61	.17	1.20	2.09

Note. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. *N* = 427. Regression coefficients are reported unstandardized. Bootstrap sample size 20,000. Board types: uniform = 8 men, 0 women, token = 7 men, 1 woman, skewed = 6 men, 2 women, tilted = 5 men, 3 women, Balanced = 4 men, 4 women. Confidence intervals are at the 99% level.

Catalyst, 2013; Vinnicombe, Doldor, & Turner, 2014). The present study is among the first to investigate the organizational effects of sending such diversity mixed messages (see also Martins & Parsons, 2007).

One key conclusion is that a diversity mixed message can negatively affect an organization's employer attractiveness. Another key conclusion is that an organization's perceived behavioral integrity serves as the underlying mechanism for this link. Taken

Table 3
Means of Perceived Behavioral Integrity and Employer Attractiveness as a Function of Board Type

Board type	N	Perceived behavioral integrity			Employer attractiveness		
		M	Mean difference	Cohen's d	M	Mean difference	Cohen's d
A: Uniform	102	2.18 (1.10)	—		3.51 (1.34)	—	
B: Token	95	2.42 (1.22)	B −A = .24	.21	3.53 (1.17)	B − A = .02	.02
C: Skewed	85	3.28 (1.27)	C − B = .86***	.69	4.03 (1.28)	C − B = .50	.41
D: Tilted	78	4.31 (.99)	D − C = 1.02***	.90	4.35 (1.19)	D − C = .32	.26
E: Balanced	67	4.91 (.95)	E − D = .61**	.62	4.28 (1.30)	E − D = −.07	−.06

Note. SDs are in parentheses. Mean differences tested for significance using the Tukey criterion. Board types: uniform = 8 men, 0 women, token = 7 men, 1 woman, skewed = 6 men, 2 women, tilted = 5 men, 3 women, balanced = 4 men, 4 women.
Significance levels: ** p < .01. *** p < .001.

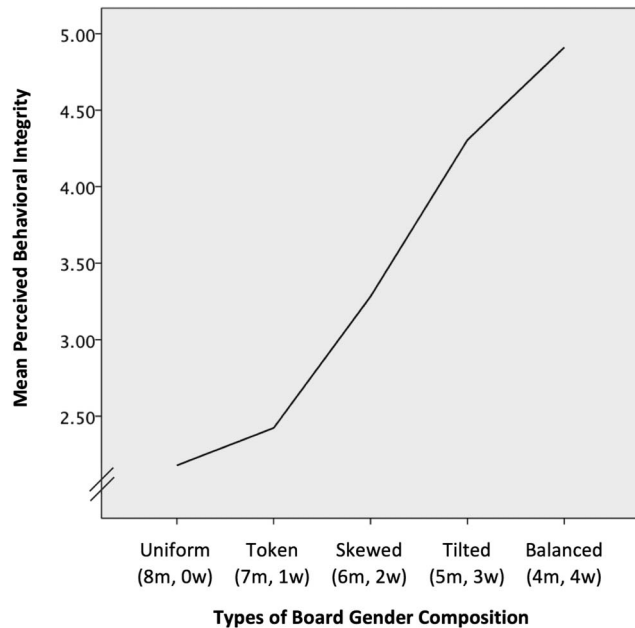*Figure 3.* Mean differences in perceived behavioral integrity as a function of type of board gender composition. The number of "m" = male and "f" = female board members is given in parentheses.

indicating that the effects "can" occur. One aspect of generalizability deals with examining whether these effects of diversity mixed messages "do" occur in actual job search contexts with actual job seekers. Actual job seekers who have fewer job alternatives might be more willing to overlook negative information or information suggesting a poorer fit relative to those with more job alternatives (see Harold & Ployhart, 2008). Because the cost of rejecting a job/organization for our participants was less than for actual job seekers, they might have been more sensitive to the effects of diversity mixed messages than actual job seekers who are more likely to balance the negatives and positives for various jobs. In actual job search contexts, applicants also have more information than the information provided in this study. Second, it is important to extend this research by examining the impact of diversity mixed messages on actual applicant behavior. Finally, this study was conducted in Germany. Although Germany shares various elements regarding organizational gender diversity (e.g., male dominance in upper echelons, high public scrutiny of the issue, and some sort of regulation) with other countries (Bernardi et al., 2006; Catalyst, 2013; German Ministry of Family Affairs, 2014; Pande & Ford, 2011; Vinnicombe et al., 2014), similar research in other societal contexts and countries is needed. In countries with strong gender egalitarianism, for instance, it is likely that the effects of diversity mixed messages might be stronger.

Future Research Directions

Now that we have shown that negative effects can occur when organizations "do not walk the talk," the next intriguing question deals with how organizations can avoid such effects. In particular, we recommend examining how (potential) applicants react to diversity mixed messages when organizations *admit* that they have not enacted their espoused diversity values and *explain* why they have not done so (Greenberg, Bies, & Eskew, 1991). Especially organizations with poor diversity records are expected to profit from such defensive impression management approaches (Avery & McKay, 2006). Another interesting question for future research would be to find out whether the tipping point refers to an absolute number of women (as often suggested, see Kanter, 1977; Konrad et al., 2008; Torchia et al., 2011) or a specific ratio of women to men. Such research might have implications for developing evidence-based guidelines and quotas for female representation in upper management. Future studies on the effects of diversity mixed messages should also make distinctions between female representation at different hierarchical levels and between different ethnic groups. For instance, ethnic minorities seem to be more sensitive to diversity related cues on recruiting websites (Walker, Feild, Bernerth, & Becton, 2012). In addition, future research might explore mixed messages that organizations send to prospective applicants about their behavioral integrity in areas other than diversity.

together, these findings represent an important conceptual and empirical extension of prior diversity research that investigated either minority representation (e.g., women in upper management) or corporate diversity statements on affective reactions without considering their potential interplay resulting in diversity mixed messages (for an exception, see Martins & Parsons, 2007). Notably, the indirect effect we investigated was supported by two different methodological approaches to mediation analysis. Study 1 and 2 followed a causal-chain design, which has the strength of proving causality but which also comes with some limitations (for a discussion, see Spencer et al., 2005). Therefore, in Study 3 we conducted a significance test of the proposed mediation using a nonparametric bootstrapping procedure, which is also not without limitations, but which overcomes potential drawbacks of causal-chain designs (for a discussion, see Preacher & Hayes, 2004, 2008).

A third important conclusion of this study is that a tipping point exists in terms of the effect of the number of women on the board of an organization that espouses to value gender diversity and perceived organizational behavioral integrity. Although the critical mass of women on the board was two (rather than three, as we hypothesized) for the tipping point to be reached, the key insight was that the presence of a single woman on an organization's board is perceived as window dressing rather than as a sincere attempt to move toward establishing gender diversity in the organization's upper echelons.

Limitations

The generalizability of our findings deserves attention. First, this study adopted an experimental design for investigating the effects of diversity mixed messages. Thus, we present evidence

Conclusion

Organizations generally tend to portray themselves as being concerned about or committed to gender diversity, ideally to reflect their commitment to a positive ethical organization (Verbos, Gerard, Forshey, Harding, & Miller, 2007), and pragmatically

to try to attract a more gender diverse workforce (Schaubroeck, Ganster, & Jones, 1998). However, as noted by Avery and Johnson (2008), merely stating that a company is committed to diversity is not enough, because stakeholders look for signals and evidence refuting or supporting such claims. In this study, we outlined the central role of women on boards for organizations that seek to attract a gender diverse workforce by publicly espousing their commitment to gender diversity. Our findings suggest that firms "walking the talk" in gender diversity management might be rewarded, while those sending diversity mixed messages might alienate applicants. Without reaching a critical mass of women (at least two) on the executive board, corporate gender diversity statements can be perceived as mere lip service. The negative effects of appointing no or few women to the board while espousing to value gender diversity support the conclusion that actions speak louder than words.

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(*Appendices follow*)

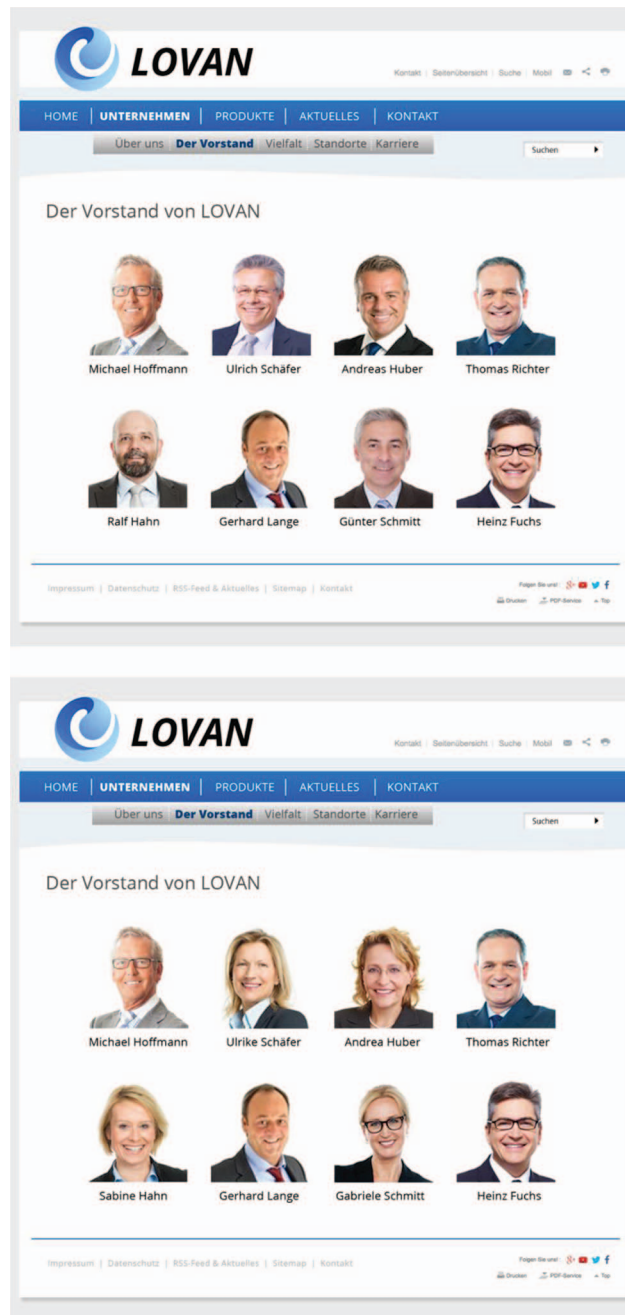**Appendix A**

Gender Diversity Statement

Note. The pro gender diversity statement above reads as follows in English: At LOVAN, gender diversity has been part of our social responsibility for a long time. The equality of opportunities for men and women is an essential part of our corporate culture and an integral component of our values and leadership principles.

We offer an environment that appreciates, respects, and accepts gender diversity, because at LOVAN we are firmly convinced of the outstanding importance of mixed leadership—the joint management strength of men and women. See the online article for the color version of this appendix.

(*Appendices continue*)

Appendix B

Board Gender Composition

See the online article for the color version of this appendix.

(Appendices continue)

Appendix C

Employee Reviews of Company

Note. The employee reviews in the *high behavioral integrity* condition read as follows in English: Review 2 – I believe that LOVAN has effectively implemented its policy of "promotion and equality" of qualified women. As an employee, I think that LOVAN's gender diversity efforts are driven by real conviction and that the company does what it says it will do.

Review 3 – In LOVAN's mission statement it says that the company is dedicated to employing and retaining qualified women. It further says that the company creates a working environment that values gender diversity and in which women AND men are supported to be highly competent and qualified in their jobs. My colleagues and I perceive this to be reality. The company keeps it promises.

The low *behavioral integrity* condition read as follows in English: Review 2 – I do not believe that LOVAN has effectively implemented its policy of "promotion and equality" of qualified women. As an employee, I think that LOVAN's gender diversity efforts are not driven by real conviction and that what the company is doing is window-dressing.

Review 3 – In LOVAN's mission statement it says that the company is dedicated to employing and retaining qualified women. It further says that the company creates a working environment that values gender diversity and in which women AND men are supported to be highly competent and qualified in their jobs. My colleagues and I do not perceive this as reality. It's an illusion. See the online article for the color version of this appendix.