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(2017)

*Leaning out: how negative recruitment experiences shape women's decisions to compete for executive roles.*

Administrative Science Quarterly, 62 (3). pp. 405-442. ISSN 0001-8392

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839216682728>

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<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0001839216...>

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**Leaning Out: How Negative Recruitment Experiences Shape Women's Decisions to Compete for Executive Roles**

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*August 30, 2016*

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The authors are grateful to audiences at INSEAD, the London Business School, MIT and New York University, as well as to Martin Kilduff, Donal Crilly, Herminia Ibarra, Madan Pillutla, Aneeta Rattan, Tiziana Casciaro, Bart Vanneste, the members of the “slump management group,” the Associate Editor and three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on previous versions of this paper. The Adecco Chair at London Business School provided partial funding for this research.

## **Leaning Out: How Negative Recruitment Experiences Shape Women's Decisions to Compete for Executive Roles**

### **Abstract**

This paper proposes gender differences in responses to recruitment rejections as a previously unexamined mechanism contributing to women's under-representation in top management. We show that women are less likely than men to consider another job with a prospective employer that has rejected them in the past. We build a theoretical model whereby, because of women's minority status in senior roles, recruitment rejection triggers uncertainty about their general belonging in the executive domain. Belonging uncertainty, in turn, both leads women to place greater weight than men on fair treatment and negatively affects their perceptions of the fairness of the treatment they receive. This dual process makes women more disinclined than men to apply again to a previously rejecting firm. We test our theory with three studies: A field study using longitudinal archival data from an executive search firm, a survey of executives, and an experiment using executive respondents. The results, which are consistent with our model, have implications for theory and practice regarding gender inequality at the labor market's upper echelons. In particular, we highlight that women's supply-side decisions to "lean out" of competition for senior roles must be understood in light of their previous experiences with demand-side employers' practices.

Despite organizational and legislative safeguards and a lively debate over the business case for gender diversity in top management teams (Campbell and Mínguez-Vera, 2008; Post and Byron, 2015), women remain under-represented at the top echelons of organizations. Women hold about 16% of senior executive roles in Fortune 500 companies and only 5% of CEO positions (2020 Women on Boards, 2014). One set of explanations for this under-representation is based on the different career choices made by men and women, which result in a limited pipeline of women who are both available and willing to fill senior management jobs (e.g., Parrotta and Smith, 2013). Popular interpretations of this pipeline problem place the spotlight on the women themselves and their ambitions, encouraging them to “lean in” to leadership roles (Sandberg, 2013). An underlying argument in many of these accounts is that women in general have a distaste for performing in the competitive environments typical of executive-level roles and so avoid striving for those jobs altogether (Niederle and Vesterlund, 2007; Charness and Gneezy, 2012; Flory, et al., 2014). Yet even though laboratory experiments have found gender differences in the willingness to compete, there is not much research establishing the relevance of these differences for labor market outcomes (Bertrand, 2011; Sutter and Glätzle-Rützler, 2015). Most evidence in this field concerns women’s choices of college majors before even starting their careers (Correll, 2001; Buser, et al., 2012), and only a handful of studies examine women’s actual job application choices (Barbulescu and Bidwell, 2013; Flory, et al., 2014).

Beyond the lack of direct evidence, another problem with extant accounts of women’s reluctance to strive for senior roles is that the decisions to compete (or not) for these jobs are usually treated as being independent of women’s actual experiences in executive selection systems. There is, after all, substantial evidence that female under-representation in top management is due not only to women’s choices but also to employers’ practices – that is, to the demand side of the labor market (Reskin and Roos, 1990; Haveman and Beresford, 2012).

Laboratory studies have pointed to unconscious bias and stereotyping as drivers of employers' preferences for male candidates during screening and evaluation processes (Eagly and Karau, 2002). At the same time, considerable field research establishes that women face promotion barriers within organizations (Cohen, et al., 1998; Barnett, et al., 2000) and are often disadvantaged in external hiring processes (Petersen and Saporta, 2004; Fernandez-Mateo and King, 2011; Azmat and Petrongolo, 2014). Most authors who study women's career choices acknowledge that these choices are not entirely driven by intrinsic preferences (Goldsmith, et al., 2004; Bertrand, 2011; Barbulescu and Bidwell, 2013; Sutter and Glätzle-Rützler, 2015); however, we have little knowledge of how women's past experiences with gender inequality in recruitment and selection may influence their tendency to "lean out" of competing for top management jobs.

That is the issue we address here. We situate our research in the context of repeat interactions between recruiters and individuals, focusing on gender differences in individuals' willingness to consider another role with a firm by which they were previously rejected. We claim that direct and vicarious experiences with gender inequality in executive realms may differentially shape the effect of recruitment rejections for men and women. In particular, we suggest that because of women's "outsider" status in executive labor markets, rejection triggers uncertainty about the extent to which they belong in executive domains (cf. Walton, and Cohen, 2007). As a consequence of this belonging uncertainty, women place more emphasis on fair treatment in the selection process (the *greater-weighting* effect) and perceive treatment to be less fair (the *confirmation* effect) when they are rejected. Both effects influence their decision-making when they consider whether to put themselves forward for a role with a previously rejecting firm. Our model thus integrates research on motivational theories of procedural justice (Tyler and Blader, 2003) with work on belonging

uncertainty (Walton and Cohen, 2007) to propose that women pursuing executive roles are less likely than men to consider an opportunity with a firm that has rejected them in the past.

By highlighting men's and women's differing responses to recruitment rejections, we identify a novel phenomenon that may contribute to women's under-representation in senior executive roles. In order to reach an organization's highest echelons, individuals must win a series of competitions – both within and across firms – for jobs (Rosenbaum, 1979). Each of these competitions carries the risk of being rejected for the role, since there is seldom more than one person selected among those who are considered. Thus individuals competing for an executive job will likely have accumulated multiple recruitment rejections, often by the same firm that is considering them for another position.<sup>1</sup> Given the sequential nature of executive selection processes, rejection-driven differences in willingness to compete in a given round would affect the proportion of available women in subsequent selection rounds, contributing to a cumulative gender disadvantage and thus possibly increasing gender inequality over time (DiPrete and Eirich, 2006).

We test our theoretical arguments using a combination of field, survey, and experimental data from three separate studies that we shall describe in detail. This paper makes a threefold contribution to the literature. First, by identifying the previously unexplored role of recruitment rejections, we contribute to theories of gender differences in career trajectories (Rosenfeld, 1980; Barnett, et al., 2000; Ridgeway, 2011); those theories have yet to examine the possibility that recruitment interactions not resulting in job placement may have consequences for gender inequality. Second, we provide a theoretical link between two major streams of research on gender inequality that have heretofore been

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics on the prevalence of repeat interactions between candidates and firms are unavailable because researchers usually have neither access to the job candidate pools nor information (over time) on who rejected whom. A few hiring studies note that as many as a quarter of job applications are from applicants who had previously been rejected by the firm (Fernandez and Fernandez-Mateo, 2006; Fernandez and Mors, 2008). This phenomenon is likely to be even more common in the context of internal recruitment processes (e.g., competitions for promotions).

mostly independent: studies focusing on employers' actions (the demand side) and studies focusing on workers' choices (the supply side). We connect these streams by explicitly modeling women's decisions to compete for jobs as being influenced, in part, by their past experiences with employers' practices – rather than by intrinsic preferences alone. In particular, we highlight that women's experiences as members of a negatively stereotyped minority in the executive domain both shape their sense of belonging in top management and their reactions to firms' recruitment practices. Finally, we contribute to a nascent stream of research on procedural justice in selection and recruitment that examines the internal processes underlying fairness judgements (Brockner, et al., 2015). Our evidence that rejection triggers belonging uncertainty and shapes perceptions of procedural justice for women but not men allows us to identify a psychological mechanism driving gendered perceptual differences in the operation of theories of justice. These three theoretical contributions have significant implications for organizations and organizational policy.

### **Responses to Rejection in Executive Recruitment**

Rejection is an undesirable experience because it represents a threat to the fundamental human goals of value and acceptance (Richman and Leary, 2009). Individuals who are rejected may withdraw entirely from future interactions with the person who rejects them (Vangelisti, 2001), especially if they feel that they have been treated unfairly (Richman and Leary, 2009). The importance of fair treatment extends beyond the interpersonal realm to interactions between individuals and organizations, particularly in the domain of selection and recruitment where rejections frequently occur (Gilliland, 1994; Hausknecht, et al., 2004). Individuals care a great deal about the perceived fairness of the procedures used to arrive at a selection decision – that is, procedural justice (Folger and Greenberg, 1985). The dominant theoretical perspective on procedural justice and applicant reactions is social justice theory, which suggests that candidates expect hiring organizations to observe procedural justice rules

and that, when those rules are perceived to have been violated, candidates tend to react negatively (Gilliland, 1994). Hence much research has examined the objective features of selection processes that affect applicants' perceptions of procedural justice. Factors such as whether selection procedures are applied consistently, whether hiring criteria are related to the focal job and/or predictive of future job performance, and whether individuals are given adequate feedback are highly predictive of how procedural justice is perceived (Hausknecht, et al., 2004). In turn, perceptions of procedural justice have been linked empirically to organizational attractiveness, recommendation intentions, and acceptance intentions (Gilliland, 1994; Hausknecht, et al., 2004) and have been linked theoretically (but not yet empirically) to candidates' willingness to apply for a position at a previously rejecting organization (Hausknecht, et al., 2004).

Whereas research in selection and recruitment has focused on *how* individuals arrive at perceptions of procedural justice, another line of work in the literature on groups has examined *why* individuals care about procedural justice at all. People are generally more concerned about fair treatment (i.e., procedural justice) than about fair outcomes (i.e., distributive justice). Indeed, research suggests that individuals are less concerned about whether a decision favors them when they view the decision-making procedures as fair (Lind and Tyler, 1988; Tyler and Blader, 2003). According to motivational theories of procedural justice, fair treatment is important because the procedures used to make decisions communicate identity-relevant information (Tyler and Blader, 2003; De Cremer and Tyler, 2005). In particular, fair treatment sends symbolic messages to individuals, communicating that they are valued and belong within the particular group where the treatment occurs (De Cremer and Tyler, 2005). Fair treatment, in turn, affects individuals' behavior within the group, motivating them to cooperate and engage (De Cremer and Tyler, 2005).



Individuals' judgments about the fairness of the selection procedures used to reject them are therefore likely to inform both their assessment of the hiring organization as well as their perception of whether they belong in that organization, in the profession, or in any other social identity group relevant to the selection process. Although all individuals care about belonging and are as such likely to care about procedural justice, perceptions of fair treatment are likely to be more relevant for individuals who are members of social identity groups that are negatively stereotyped in an academic or professional domain. We next build on these ideas to develop a theoretical understanding of gender differences in responses to recruitment rejections.

### **Belonging Uncertainty and Perceptions of Procedural Justice**

When deciding whether to enter a professional or academic domain, individuals often ask themselves “Do I belong?” (Walton and Cohen, 2007). Their answer partly depends on their assessment of whether “people like them” are seen as legitimate members of that domain. Individuals who are members of negatively stereotyped groups in a domain frequently experience latent *belonging uncertainty* – a global uncertainty about whether they will be accepted or rejected in that context (Cohen and Garcia, 2008). When *belonging uncertainty* is high, members of negatively stereotyped groups may opt out of the domain; even if their performance is high (Good, et al., 2012) and even if they do not necessarily fear that they themselves will be stereotyped (Walton and Cohen, 2007).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The construct of *belonging uncertainty* is closely related to (but different from) *stereotype threat*. Stereotype threat is defined as the fear of confirming a negative stereotype about one's group, and it has been shown to undermine the performance of stereotyped individuals – e.g. women in math (Dar-Nimrod & Heine, 2006). Belonging uncertainty also arises from negative stereotypes about one's group and, as such, it includes an element of stereotype threat. However, belonging uncertainty is a more general term, which can manifest with or without the evaluative tests that trigger stereotype threat (Walton and Cohen, 2007). In other words, while stereotype threat primarily operates through individuals' self-efficacy, belonging uncertainty also includes social concerns. According to Good et al. (2012), traditional stereotype threat primarily accounts for underperformance; belonging uncertainty accounts for under-participation.

We argue that women's behavior in competitions for top management roles is similarly shaped by concerns about their belonging to the executive domain. Women are not only dramatically under-represented in executive jobs (2020 Women on Boards, 2014), but they often encounter negative stereotypes about their leadership abilities in these positions. In particular, women are seen as a poor fit for organizational leadership roles, given that the qualities stereotypically associated with femininity are viewed as being irrelevant to or even incompatible with the qualities desired of leaders (Eagly, 2007). The perceived mismatch between being a woman and being a leader is more acute at the executive level, where employers often define the ideal candidate in explicitly masculine terms (Acker, 1990; Meriläinen, et al., 2013). These negative stereotypes are consistent with the observed unequal distribution, representation, and treatment of women in executive positions. For example, women are less likely to be considered for executive roles than men (Dreher, et al., 2011). Women who do succeed at attaining an executive-level role are more likely to be appointed (than are men) to positions where the risk of failure is high (Ryan, et al., 2011); and female executives are often paid less than their male peers (Carter, et al., 2014). Women pursuing executive roles are more than likely to have had direct or vicarious experiences with this unequal gender treatment over the course of their career, and these experiences will necessarily affect their answer to the question "Do people like me belong here?"

In particular, women executives' direct and vicarious experiences with negative gender stereotyping are likely to underlie a latent sense of belonging uncertainty to the executive domain. As a consequence, threats to belonging are likely to trigger this latent uncertainty in women. Indeed, prior research suggests that belonging uncertainty is accentuated for negatively-stereotyped individuals who experience rejection, especially if there is a possibility that the rejection could be based on their social identity, with negative consequences for their perception of the interactions they have in those contexts (Cohen and

Garcia, 2008) and their willingness to persist in the domain where their belonging is in question (Good, et al., 2012). We build on this prior work to propose that gender differences in belonging uncertainty in executive domains will differentially shape men's and women's perceptions of the recruitment procedures and their responses to recruitment rejections. Although all individuals are reluctant to engage with a firm that has rejected them in the past - particularly if they believe that the process was unfair (Fernandez-Mateo and Coh, 2015), we argue that women who are rejected for an executive position will be less inclined than men to apply for another position at the rejecting firm. We formalize this baseline hypothesis as follows:

***Hypothesis 1:** Women are less willing than men to consider a job opportunity from a firm that has rejected them in the past.*

Building on motivational theories of procedural justice (Tyler and Blader, 2003) and belonging uncertainty research (Walton and Cohen, 2007), we propose that two psychological mechanisms are associated with this hypothesized gender difference, both of which focus on the interplay between women's increased belonging uncertainty after experiencing a recruitment rejection and their perceptions of procedural justice. Specifically, we suggest that, to the extent that women experience belonging uncertainty after a rejection, they (1) assign more weight to unfair treatment (the *greater-weighting* effect) and (2) perceive less fair treatment in the selection process (the *confirmation* effect). Key to this dual-process model is the idea that belonging uncertainty is at the same time a question ("Do I belong here?") and a belief ("I do not belong here") (Walton and Cohen, 2007), and thus has the power to both shape individuals' appraisal of information that provides cues about their belonging, as well as influence their interpretation of this information so as to confirm their beliefs about their lack of belonging. We elaborate on each of these processes below.

*The greater-weighting effect.* There are many reasons why individuals are rejected for executive roles, from skill gaps to lack of cultural fit or personality clashes (Khurana, 2002). For members of groups that are negatively stereotyped in the executive labor market, there is also the (generally unstated) possibility that the rejection was somehow based on their social identity. Thus, women who are rejected for an executive role may suspect that they were rejected on the basis of their gender (as may or may not have been the case). This suspicion, based on women's direct and vicarious labor market experiences with unequal treatment on the basis of their gender, triggers uncertainty about the extent to which they belong in executive realms. When belonging uncertainty is heightened, individuals pay particular attention to any cue that may inform their concerns, by signaling their acceptance or exclusion within the domain where their belonging uncertainty arises (Cohen and Garcia, 2008).

Given its symbolic value in terms of communicating belonging, procedural justice is likely to be a key indicator that women attend to when questions about their value and fit arise in executive domains. Although all individuals care about and pay attention to how fairly they are treated in recruitment contexts (Gilliland, 1994) some authors have suggested that procedural justice attracts more attention and has stronger behavioral consequences for individuals who are uncertain about their belonging (De Cremer and Tyler, 2005). As such, we suggest that women who are rejected by an organization are likely to pay more attention to the treatment they receive in the selection process than men and, as a consequence of this heightened salience, are likely to weigh procedural justice more heavily when deciding whether to re-apply to the firm. Thus, although all executive candidates are less likely to re-apply if they believe they have been treated unfairly by a firm that has rejected them in the past (and vice versa, Hausknecht, et al., 2004), we propose that this tendency will be more evident in women than men. Accordingly, we propose:

***Hypothesis 2:** Perceived procedural justice will be more strongly associated with women's than with men's willingness to consider a job opportunity from a firm that has rejected them in the past.*

***The confirmation effect.*** Whereas the greater-weighting effect suggests that women's belonging uncertainty will lead them to place more emphasis on fair treatment than men, the confirmation effect suggests that it will differentially shape women's and men's perceptions of whether or not they were treated fairly to begin with. The confirmation effect stems from the fact that belonging uncertainty is an implicit hypothesis that members of negatively stereotyped groups hold about their lack of belonging in certain domains, which consequently shapes their interpretation of events and experiences that take place within those realms. In other words, the same objective event may be perceived differently by different groups (Walton and Cohen, 2007). In particular, negatively-stereotyped individuals' beliefs about their lack of belonging are subject to confirmation bias (Nickerson, 1998), such that information consistent with the hypothesis "I do not belong here" is more likely to be searched for, noticed and accepted than information that is inconsistent with this hypothesis (Walton and Cohen, 2007). In the context of executive recruitment, this implies that when women's belonging uncertainty is triggered by a rejection they are likely to notice and remember treatment that confirms their lack of belonging, to interpret ambiguous treatment as confirming their lack of belonging (rather than as a neutral or positive signal), and to be skeptical of treatment that seems to confirm their belonging. We therefore postulate that recruitment rejection will trigger belonging uncertainty in women, negatively affecting their perceptions of procedural justice. Negative perceptions of procedural justice will in turn mean that women are disinclined to apply to firms that have rejected them in the past. In contrast, because male applicants have little reason to suppose that they were rejected because of their gender (since men are typically positively stereotyped and over-represented

in executive domains), they are not primed to make belonging-related negative evaluations of their treatment in recruitment settings. We formalize this argument as follows:

***Hypothesis 3:** Recruitment rejection triggers belonging uncertainty in women, negatively affecting their perceived procedural justice and in turn, their willingness to consider a job opportunity from a firm that has rejected them in the past.*

## **OVERVIEW OF STUDIES**

We test our hypotheses in three studies using field, survey, and experimental data to examine men's and women's willingness to be considered for a job by an organization that has rejected them in the past. We define rejection as occurring when an individual does not succeed in attaining the applied-for position and we shall therefore examine gender differences in the responses to rejections occurring throughout the executive selection process. Table 1 presents a summary of the data used in the three studies. In Study 1 we use longitudinal field data to test our core proposition that women are less likely than men to consider a job opportunity from a firm that has rejected them in the past. The data were obtained from the archives of an executive search firm, and they include all its interactions with 10,292 candidates considered for senior management jobs over a five-year period. In Study 2 we seek to replicate our core proposition in a broader sample – via a survey of men and women executives – and examine the *greater-weighting* of perceived procedural justice in women's responses to rejection, relative to men. The final study is an experiment in which we test the *confirmation effect*, by randomly assigning participants to adopt the perspective of a candidate who was rejected or accepted after applying for an executive role and examining the consequences of rejection on men's and women's belonging uncertainty, perceived procedural justice and subsequent willingness to apply for another role with the rejecting employer.

**[[ INSERT Table 1 about Here ]]**

## **STUDY 1: LONGITUDINAL FIELD DATA FROM AN EXECUTIVE SEARCH FIRM**

The purpose of Study 1 was to investigate, in a field setting, whether men and women differ in their responses to being rejected in executive selection processes. We posit that men's and women's responses are affected by their prior interactions with employers. In order to test this theory, we must observe candidates – some of whom are rejected – competing for various jobs over time. Obtaining data of this type is a challenge because most organizations do not keep good records of previously rejected individuals. However, executive search firms maintain detailed archives of their interactions with candidates and thus enable what is practically the only means of testing our theory against longitudinal real-world data.

Although search firms aim to fill jobs for their clients, not for themselves, research on this sector documents that search firms keep tight control of the entire recruitment process and also limit the amount of direct interaction between client and candidate even during later stages of the process (Finlay and Coverdill, 2002; Cappelli and Hamori, 2013). In particular, it is nearly always the search firm's (not its client's) job to inform the candidate of rejection outcomes. Candidates' rejection experiences are thus shaped by their interactions with the search firm and, according to our theory, should affect their willingness to engage with the same search firm or (by proxy) its clients in the future.

### **Setting and Data**

We use data from the records of a UK-based executive search firm that we refer to as “Execo” (not its real name). The jobs for which Execo recruits are highly paid, with an average wage of GBP160,000 - within the top 1% of the UK salary distribution. We obtained information on all the candidates whom this search firm considered for jobs between 2005 and 2009. The selection process begins when a client firm asks Execo to fill a job vacancy, at which time search consultants assemble a ‘long’ list (of about 60 potential candidates) by

searching their database and asking their contacts for leads. Most of these candidates are initially unaware that they are being considered – unless the job is an advertised one to which they have applied. Once this *consideration set* is assembled, search consultants evaluate the candidates more closely and decide whom to phone for a possible interview. The ensuing phone conversation can lead to one of three outcomes: the candidate decides not to participate in a formal interview (“candidate declines to interview”); the consultant decides that the candidate is not suitable for the role (“search firm rejects candidate”); or the candidate interviews with the search firm.<sup>3</sup> These categories are mutually exclusive in the data set.

After a candidate is interviewed by the search firm, again there are three possible (and mutually exclusive) outcomes: the search firm decides not to have the candidate interview with the client; the candidate declines an offered interview with the client; or the candidate interviews with the client. The client is not involved in the process until presented with a short list of candidates to interview. After interviewing with the client, the candidate may or may not be offered the job; if offered, the candidate must then decide whether or not to accept it. Our outcome of interest is the candidate’s decision at the very first stage of the process – that is, whether the candidate agrees to proceed to a formal interview with the search firm. We focus on this outcome for two reasons. First, it is the nearest equivalent to applying for a job, which is our theoretical construct of interest. Second, at the start of a hiring process the interaction is limited to candidate and search firm; there is no client involvement. In fact, candidates who are approached for an interview are seldom given any information about the client firm. This procedure ensures that candidates’ decisions to

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<sup>3</sup> We do not have information on which candidates were contacted by Execo. If the candidate was interviewed or refused to interview then we do know that they were contacted and hence were aware of being considered. However, some candidates whom the search firm rejects at this stage may not have been contacted by a consultant and so are unaware of the rejection. Because we cannot identify when this occurred, *all* instances in which the search firm rejects a candidate are treated equally at this stage. This approach renders the data noisier to the extent that candidates do not perceive their (unknown) rejection as such. Therefore, our empirical test is likely to be conservative because noise in the independent variable can only make it *more* difficult to identify the effect of past rejections.



interview are not affected by client identity or behavior but only by past interactions between candidate and *search* firm.

The data set is a panel of individuals who are considered for multiple jobs over time. So each time a candidate is considered for a job, we know whether she had previously been rejected (at any stage of the recruitment process) for other roles presented to her by the search firm. Our goal is to identify gender differences in the effect of these past rejections on the candidate's decision to be considered for the current job. Yet there are several reasons why this is not a trivial identification task. First, the willingness (or lack thereof) to be considered for a job is likely driven at least in part by individual characteristics that may be correlated with candidates' past rejections. For example, one may expect that lower-quality candidates are both more likely to have been rejected in the past and more willing to be considered for future jobs. We isolate the effect of rejection from such idiosyncratic factors by employing an estimation that incorporates candidate fixed effects to control for unobserved heterogeneity in stable individual characteristics. In essence, this approach compares a given candidate with herself over time and under different "rejection regimes" – that is, when she has versus has not been rejected in the past.

An approach based on individual fixed effects requires at least two observations per candidate, a requirement that has two implications for our analysis. First, the main effect of gender on rejection is not estimated because it does not vary by candidate. Second, the models do not predict the probability that a given candidate will be considered for a job after a rejection, but rather the probability that, if they are considered again, the candidate will reject that opportunity. We have complete data on 23,555 observations, which correspond to 10,292 candidates who were considered for at least two jobs by Execo between 2005 and 2009. Our unit of analysis is the candidate–job pair.

## Measures

**Outcome variable.** The outcome variable is *Candidate declined to interview* with the search firm (for the focal job). This dummy variable is set equal to 1 if the candidate declines an interview with Execo; it is set equal to 0 if the candidate does not decline an interview – in other words, if the candidate either *is* formally interviewed or is rejected by Execo prior to the interview stage. Note that this variable measures the *lack* of willingness to consider an opportunity, which is therefore reverse coded with respect to our theoretical hypothesis. The reason is that these data cannot support a “candidate willing to be interviewed” measure that is independent of the search firm’s own decision to interview the candidate. In contrast, declining an interview is clearly the candidate’s decision, which is the theoretical outcome we care about.<sup>4</sup>

**Predictor variable.** The predictor variable is an interaction effect between two dichotomous indicators: *Candidate was previously rejected* and *Female candidate* (1 = female, 0 = male). The former dummy variable is set equal to 1 if the focal candidate was ever rejected in a previous job consideration at any stage of the hiring process (and is set to 0 otherwise).<sup>5</sup> Although our data set includes only those jobs that Execo attempted to fill between 2005 and 2009, it includes information on candidates’ interactions with Execo from 2001 onward. So if a candidate was considered for a position before 2005, we know whether the search ended up in rejection even when we know nothing else about that job. We use a

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<sup>4</sup> To see why *Candidate agreed to interview* would make for a problematic dependent variable, imagine that previously rejected candidates are in fact less likely to be interviewed. In this case we would be unable to tell whether that trend resulted from the search firm being less willing to interview such candidates or from the reduced willingness of those candidates to be interviewed. Yet if we observe that previously rejected candidates decline to interview for the focal job, then it can be only their decision to pass on the opportunity.

<sup>5</sup> Candidates may have been rejected at any stage of the hiring process in the past (before interviewing with the search firm, after interviewing with the search firm, or after interviewing with the client). This measure aggregates all past rejections into a single indicator, and we use it for three reasons. First, we do not theorize about the effects of rejections at different stages. Second, as already mentioned, the search firm’s heavy involvement in the process suggests that rejected candidates will attribute some of that rejection to the search firm – even if they were rejected at later stages of the process. Finally, the analysis becomes much more complicated once we splice rejections into different categories (for details, see the Results subsection to follow).

dichotomous measure of past rejections because the average number of jobs for which candidates have been rejected is small; we therefore expect that rejection effects arise from experiencing any rejection, not just a high number of them. Nonetheless, in separate results we confirmed that our findings are not substantively altered when we instead use a continuous measure of past rejections.

***Control variables.*** The probability of a candidate declining to interview may be affected by her own past history of rejecting Execo, so we controlled for whether the *Candidate declined past opportunity* from the search firm. We also controlled for *Candidate was previously placed by Execo* (1 = yes, 0 = no) and the number of jobs for which Execo previously considered the candidate (our *Candidate jobs considered by Execo* count variable). Candidates may have other interactions with Execo; for instance, search consultants sometimes call once and future candidates to chat about the industry, ask for referrals, and so forth. We controlled for the number of such interactions (by way of our *Candidate contacts in other roles* variable) to account for the possible transmission of information between Execo and candidates when the latter are not being evaluated for jobs. The final control on this side was whether *Candidate answered advertisement* for the focal job (1 = candidate applied, 0 = candidate did not apply).

In addition, the analysis included a number of controls about the focal job itself. We controlled for: the (log of the) base *Job salary*, in British pounds sterling (GBP), that the client firm was willing to pay a hired candidate; the *Number of candidates considered* for the focal job (also logged, since this variable is skewed); the number of job searches that Execo conducted for the hiring firm between January 2005 and the start date of the focal job (the *Prior search firm–client relationship* variable); and whether or not the *Job was advertised* (1 = yes, 0 = no). We also controlled for *Job function* and *Job industry*. We included dummies for 18 job functions (plus a dummy for cases where this information is missing):

board member, chief executive officer, chief financial officer, consultant, divisional finance director, divisional managing director, divisional sales director, financial services professional, government, human resources (HR) director, legal and governance, marketing director, nonexecutive director, operations director, pharmaceutical scientist, sales director, other management position, and “other”. For job industry, we include dummies for 16 industries (plus a dummy for cases in which this information is missing): agriculture, education, energy, engineering and manufacturing, finance, government, health, information technology (IT), infrastructure, leisure, media, nongovernmental organization (NGO), pharmaceuticals, professions, retail, and “other”. Finally, we included *Year* dummies to control for such exogenous factors as the economic climate. Table 2 gives descriptive statistics for the main variables used in the analysis, and Table 3 reports their correlations.

**[[ INSERT Table 2 about Here ]]**

**[[ INSERT Table 3 about Here ]]**

## **Analysis**

We estimated a linear probability model (LPM), with candidate fixed effects, in which *Candidate declined to interview* was the dependent variable. We chose a linear specification rather than a logit model for two reasons. First, linear models yield coefficients that are easier to interpret (see Sorenson and Waguespack, 2006 for a similar procedure); second, logit models with panel data and individual fixed effects cannot be estimated for candidates who exhibit no variation in the dependent variable. This means that candidates who either always declined or always agreed to interview would be dropped from the estimation. The effect would be a dramatic reduction in the statistical power of our models because the number of candidates for which the regression could be estimated would decrease from 10,292 to 2,990. Given that women constitute only 16% of the sample, there would then not be enough female

observations in the reduced sample to identify – while using a logit model – any gender differences in rejection effects.

The linear probability model has two main drawbacks. First, it imposes heteroskedasticity in the errors, a concern that is easily addressed by using robust estimates of the standard errors (Angrist and Pischke, 2008). Second, it generates predicted values that may be outside the 0-1 interval. Yet Wooldridge (2003) argues that such values are not a serious concern when the goal is simply to estimate the independent variable's marginal effect, averaged across the distribution. This is precisely our purpose.

## **Results**

The main baseline effects are presented in Model 1 of Table 4. As expected, previously rejected candidates (of either gender) were more likely to decline a formal interview than were non-rejected candidates ( $\beta = .158$ ). This effect is net of any individual stable unobserved heterogeneity and so is unrelated to candidates' qualities.

### **[[ INSERT Table 4 about Here ]]**

Model 2 of Table 5 presents the test of Hypothesis 1: that women are less willing than men to consider a job opportunity if they were rejected in the past. This hypothesis translates into female candidates being more likely to decline an interview with the search firm after having been rejected, and it is supported by a significant positive coefficient of the interaction term (*Candidate was previously rejected*  $\times$  *Female candidate*):  $\beta = .077, p = .001$ . Ceteris paribus, men's probability of declining to interview is 14.6% higher if they have been rejected in the past whereas that increase is 22.3% for women (i.e., 7.7% greater than for men). In separate analyses we estimated models without candidate fixed effects in order to identify a main effect of *Female candidate*. We found that the *Female candidate* coefficient is positive and statistically significant both in ordinary least-squares (OLS) and random-effects specifications; that is, women are more likely than men to decline an interview

regardless of whether they were rejected in the past ( $\beta = .028$  in the OLS model;  $\beta = .026$  in the random-effects model). However, these models fail to account for candidates' qualities that could be correlated with the probability of rejection; hence they do not appropriately identify the effects of previous rejections. Indeed, a Hausman test strongly rejects the hypothesis that the random-effects and fixed-effects estimations are comparable ( $p < .001$ ).

We performed a number of additional robustness checks on the main results shown in Model 2. First we conducted an analysis with both candidate and job fixed effects (Table 3, Model 3). This allows us to examine the possibility that women's greater likelihood of declining an opportunity after having been rejected is due to their being considered for less desirable post-rejection jobs, which could account for their unwillingness to consider such positions. When both candidate and job fixed effects are included in the analysis, the *Candidate was previously rejected*  $\times$  *Female candidate* interaction term remains significant; the implication is that, even when individuals are considered for the exact same job, previously rejected women are less willing than previously rejected men to put themselves forward for the role. Second, we examined whether women were less likely than men to be placed by Execo after being rejected. If they were, then the implication would be that women are accurately forecasting a low probability of success when considering future roles and hence removing themselves from consideration. Yet in separate analyses we found no gender difference in the probability that Execo places candidates whom they previously rejected. The interaction term *Candidate was previously rejected*  $\times$  *Female candidate* is not statistically significant in predicting probability of placement, which indicates that women's stronger reaction to being rejected is not "adaptive" in this setting.

Third, in separate analyses (available from the authors) we examined whether our findings were affected by the stage at which the rejection occurred. We disaggregated the *Candidate was previously rejected* predictor into three dummy variables depending on the

stage of the process at which the candidate had been previously rejected (before interviewing with Execo, after interviewing with Execo, or after interviewing with client). Although the resulting models became more complex and difficult to interpret, we found the same substantive pattern of results: women's reactions to past rejections are, on average, stronger than men's regardless of the stage at which the rejection occurs. Finally, we examined whether changing the base category for our dependent variable would affect the results. In the analysis reported here, the dependent (indicator) variable takes the value 1 if the candidate declines to interview with the search firm and takes the value 0 otherwise – namely, when the candidate is either interviewed or rejected for an interview by the search firm. Our motivation for this approach is twofold. First, we have no theoretical reason to distinguish between these two cases because we are interested only in candidates' decisions to decline consideration. Second, comparing the candidates' decisions to all other available observations allows us to use the full sample when estimating the models. An alternative approach would be to compare the *Candidate declined to interview* outcome with that of the other two categories (i.e., *Search firm rejected candidate* and *Candidate agreed to interview*) separately. We conducted this analysis and obtained the same substantive results in both cases. Our main findings are thus robust not only to the use of different statistical models but also to various specifications of the independent and dependent variables.

### **Discussion of Study 1**

In line with our theoretical model, Study 1 offers evidence that women are less willing than men to consider a job opportunity if they were rejected by the firm in the past (Hypothesis 1). Although the field data allow us to provide real-world evidence for our theory and show meaningful effect sizes, they have two drawbacks. First, despite the results supporting our core proposition, we were unable to test the psychological mechanisms proposed in Hypotheses 2 and 3, because the archival data do not include information about *why*

candidates decline to interview or about their perceptions of the process. Second, this setting is unusual in that the search firm is not the final employer. Previous research suggests that interactions with search firms are experienced by candidates in much the same way as with other recruitment processes (Khurana, 2002; Cappelli and Hamori, 2013; Fernandez-Mateo and Coh, 2015). Even so, we conducted the next study with the aim of testing our theory on a broader sample.

## **STUDY 2: SURVEY**

In Study 2 we sought to further examine our finding that women are less likely than men to put themselves forward for a position offered by a search firm or employer that has rejected them in the past (Hypothesis 1). For that purpose we used a diverse sample of executives reporting on their interactions in a range of recruitment environments that included search firms as well as prospective employers. In addition, we sought to test Hypothesis 2, – namely that perceptions of fair treatment will be weighted more heavily by women than men in their decisions to reapply to a firm that has rejected them in the past – by surveying men and women in executive roles about their subjective experiences of recent recruitment rejections.

### **Participants**

The participants were 99 US residents, 54 of whom were female. We paid a survey company to recruit 140 individuals who were currently employed full-time, who had a recent experience (within the last three years) of being rejected in the labor market, and who earned more than \$150,000. We excluded 41 individuals who wrote nonsense or gibberish responses to the questions about their recent rejection experience (Berinsky, et al., 2012; Goodman, et al., 2013; Paolacci and Chandler, 2014).<sup>6</sup> Most (82%) of the participants were white; their

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<sup>6</sup> Individuals undertaking to complete online surveys pay less attention to the materials presented than do participants in traditional face-to-face or laboratory settings, which means that data must be checked carefully and problematic responses excluded (Goodman et al., 2013). If inattentive respondents are not excluded, then statistical power is reduced and the results of statistical tests can become non-significant and can even be reversed (Berinsky et al., 2012). Our exclusion rate is higher than if workers from Amazon Mechanical Turk



average age was 45.32 years with a standard deviation (SD) of 10.01, and they had worked on average for 21.73 years (SD = 10.46).

## **Procedure**

After checking that respondents met our criteria for inclusion, we asked them to describe their most recent experience of being rejected for a role that met the following criteria: (1) they were not offered the job; (2) they wanted the job; and (3) they advanced further than the application stage and had some contact with the prospective employer. These criteria ensured that individuals were reflecting on experiences in which rejection was personally meaningful. After writing about their rejection experience, respondents were asked a number of other questions about the incident, about the likelihood of their applying again to the same employer, and about their perceptions of fair (or unfair) treatment. The respondents subsequently completed several questionnaire measures designed to capture, inter alia, career orientation and demographic particulars.

**Outcome variable.** The outcome variable was respondents' *Willingness to apply again* to a prospective employer that had rejected them in the past. Respondents were asked to "Imagine that tomorrow the company you wrote about approaches you about another role that is appropriate for your current career stage. They ask you to apply for this role. Will you?" Replies were on a scale ranging from 1 (definitely will not) to 5 (definitely will).

**Predictor variable.** The predictor variable was the gender of the respondent, coded as 1 = female or 0 = male.

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had been employed. The reason is that Amazon's Mechanical Turk allows requesters to review work and reject unsatisfactory responses, which in turn affects survey takers' ratings and thus their ability to participate in future surveys. Hence there are incentives for survey takers on Mechanical Turk to complete them faithfully, which increases the number of usable responses (Berinsky et al., 2012). In contrast, survey companies rely on one-time participants and have no way of penalizing survey takers who produce unusable responses; the result is a higher rate of exclusion.

**Moderator variable.** The moderator variable was *Perceived procedural justice*, measured via seven items adapted from Colquitt and Rodell (2011). The items consisted of the following statements. (i) I felt able to express my views during the recruitment process; (ii) I was able to influence the decisions arrived at by the recruitment process; (iii) the recruitment procedures were applied consistently; (iv) the recruitment procedures were free of bias. (v) The recruitment procedures were based on accurate information; (vi) I was able to appeal the decisions arrived at by the recruitment process; (vii) the recruitment process upheld ethical and moral standards. Respondents rated their agreement with these statements on a scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree),  $\alpha = 0.85$ .<sup>7</sup>

**Controls.** We controlled for respondents' demographic characteristics: age, marital status (1 = married, 0 = not married), log of household income, and ethnicity (1 = white, 0 = not white). We also controlled for respondents' managerial status with three dummy variables (one each for upper, middle, and lower management) while using "no managerial responsibilities" as the omitted category. In addition, we controlled for aspects of respondents' recent job search that may have affected the salience of the rejection they wrote about; these aspects include the number of months since the rejection occurred, how rejected the respondent felt (1 = not at all, ..., 5 = very rejected), and the number of rejections experienced while on the job market. Since men's and women's career aspirations may differ (Litzky and Greenhaus, 2007), we also controlled for career orientation (Warr, et al., 1979). An example item is "My career is an important part of my identity"; this statement was rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree),  $\alpha = 0.81$ . Finally, to control for perceived distributive justice we used the following four items, which

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<sup>7</sup> We conducted an exploratory factor analysis that yielded one factor with an eigenvalue greater than 1. All items loaded onto the scale with a value of greater than .56. We dropped two questions that loaded onto the scale with a value of less than .7, recalculated the scale, and then estimated the same ordered logit model described in the main analysis. The results remained unchanged in terms of both the direction and magnitude of effects, so we used the full scale in the analysis.

were also adapted from Colquitt and Rodell (2011): (i) the outcome reflected the effort I put into the recruitment process; (ii) the outcome was appropriate for the work I completed during the recruitment process; (iii) the outcome reflected what I contributed to the recruitment process; and (iv) the outcome was justified, given my performance ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ).

## Results

*Individuals' responses to rejection in executive recruitment.* We started by performing an exploratory analysis of the qualitative data provided by individual respondents; in this endeavor our aim was to assess whether, as implied by our theory, individuals mentioned fair treatment when explaining their willingness to consider another role with an employer who had rejected them in the past. Two independent coders analyzed participants' written responses about the recruitment experience and the reasons for their willingness (or not) to apply for another role with the rejecting organization about which they had written.<sup>8</sup>

Nearly 30% of the respondents mentioned issues of fit as a key consideration driving either a willingness or an unwillingness to apply again (e.g., "I think this company would be a good fit for me" versus "It would only be worth my consideration if the role was a good fit"). Opportunities for development ("It would offer a challenge as well as future growth") or lack thereof ("I think they do not offer much advancement in jobs") were also mentioned by about 18% of respondents (of which some were willing and others unwilling to apply again). Being worse-off ("Unless they offered me a significant pay increase, I doubt I would apply") or better-off ("I am trying to up my income") in terms of remuneration was mentioned by 14% of respondents. Individuals who expressed a high willingness to apply focused on their

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<sup>8</sup> For each respondent, the raters coded whether their written response mentioned one of ten categories of reasons for their willingness to apply again (1 = mentioned as a reason, 0 = not mentioned as a reason). The ten categories were developed by one of the authors based on a search of the literature on applicant reactions. The raters achieved moderate to perfect inter-rater reliability across the ten categories (average  $K = .83$ ). In cases of disagreement, a third, independent rater categorized the response for the category under disagreement – the response was scored as a 1 if two of the three raters thought the category was represented in the written response and a 0 if two of the three raters thought the category was not represented in the written response.

admiration for the organization that rejected them and for the profession in general (approximately 18% of all candidates): “I was very impressed by the company and would still be interested in working for them”. All those who indicated they would *not* be willing to apply to the previously rejecting employer (i.e., the 26 respondents who selected either 1 or 2 on the willingness scale) identified unfair treatment or unfair decision making as the issues that explained their unwillingness. Respondents frequently cited unfair treatment – that is, a lack of procedural justice – in their justification, as in this example: “After two interviews, one in person and one in a conference call, I was informed that I would receive a package in several weeks; however, the several weeks kept growing and growing in time and I never received an offer.” Many respondents also felt that the decision not to hire them was itself unfair and so exhibited a lack of distributive justice: “I was told that I was over-qualified and should showcase my talent elsewhere. I explained that I no longer wanted the executive suite and wanted to use my other talents in other areas of IT. I felt discriminated against because although I had the experience and was well qualified and the best candidate, I was older and ‘over-qualified’.” Often candidates mentioned issues both of procedural and distributive justice in their responses: “[I] had to call them to find out that I was not selected. I found out that the job was offered to the chairman’s son-in-law and [that] interviewing was done just ... [to] show that they were considering other candidates.”

The qualitative data indicates that our respondents readily articulated the role that perceived unfair treatment played in their unwillingness to engage with an employer who had rejected them previously, thereby underscoring the relevance of this mechanism.

**[[ INSERT Table 5 about Here ]]**

*Hypotheses tests.* Table 5 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations. There were no statistically significant gender differences on age, income, marital status or ethnicity, however female respondents had fewer years of work experience and were more likely to

report being in upper management. Women also reported higher feelings of rejection than men (3.5 versus 2.9). We test our hypotheses using ordered logit models because the outcome variable (*Willingness to apply again*) is categorical and ordinal (Long and Freese, 2006).<sup>9</sup> In Table 6, Model 1 includes the control variables. Models 2 and 3 also include the predictor variables (*Female candidate* and *Perceived procedural justice*), whose interaction is entered as a separate term in Model 4.

**[[ INSERT Table 6 about Here ]]**

Recall that, according to Hypothesis 1 (and as found in Study 1), women should be less willing than men to consider a job opportunity from a prospective employer that had previously rejected them. In Study 2 all respondents have previously been rejected, hence testing Hypothesis 1 translates into a negative effect of the *Female candidate* indicator on *Willingness to apply again*. Model 2 in Table 6 indicates that this coefficient is negative ( $\beta = -.899$ ),  $p = .0546$ . The *Female candidate* effect is also negative once we introduce the *Perceived procedural justice* indicator ( $\beta = -.956$ ,  $p = .045$ ). A likelihood ratio test indicates that including this variable significantly improves the fit of the model ( $p = .003$ ).

Although the small size of the sample limits the statistical power of these regressions, the size of the *Female candidate* effect is substantial. We calculated the predicted probabilities of each response level of the dependent variable for men versus women. Using the coefficients from Model 2 and holding all control variables at their means we find that men's predicted probability of responding "definitely will not apply" or "probably will not apply" is 14%, as compared to 28.6% for women. This amounts to nearly double the probability of women being more likely to refuse re-applying after a rejection. Conversely, the predicted probability of men's responding "probably will apply" or "definitely will apply"

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<sup>9</sup> Our results are substantially the same if we instead use linear regressions. However, the Akaike test reveals that the ordered logit model is preferable to the OLS model.

is 69.3%, as compared to 47.9% for women. The magnitude of these effects is similar if using the coefficients from Model 3. Furthermore, the *Female candidate* effect is independent of women's stronger feelings of rejection. That is, although women in this sample felt subjectively more rejected than men after the rejection event, their willingness to apply again to the employer is not affected by these feelings.<sup>10</sup> This is consistent with our theory, which focuses on perceptions of procedural justice rather than on affective reactions to being rejected.

Hypothesis 2 suggested that perceptions of fair treatment are more strongly linked to women's than to men's willingness to consider future job opportunities at a previously rejecting firm. This claim is supported by a positive and statistically significant interaction effect between *Perceived procedural justice* and the *Female candidate* indicator (Model 4 in Table 6). When all other variables in the model are held constant, the coefficient for that interaction effect reveals an increase of 1.229 in the log odds of women reporting greater willingness to apply (than do men) as their perceived level of procedural justice increases.

Figure 1 plots the interaction effect in terms of predicted probabilities. It depicts how the likelihood of men's and women's responses falling within each category of the outcome variable varies with perceived procedural justice, holding all control variables at their means. The most striking patterns appear in Panels A and E— that is, at both extremes of the outcome variable. Panel A of Figure 1 shows that, to the extent women reported being treated *unfairly* in the recruitment process, they were much more likely to state that they “definitely would

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<sup>10</sup> Although the bivariate correlation between *Feelings of rejection* and *Willingness to apply again* is not significant, the *Feelings of rejection* coefficient is positive and statistically significant once we introduce the *Female candidate* indicator in Model 2. Even though feelings are not the focus of our theory, intuitively we would expect that feelings of rejection would be associated with a lower willingness to reapply. We do not have a ready theoretical interpretation for why this is not so here. In separate analyses we explored the empirical significance of this result, by assessing the robustness of the *Feelings of rejection* coefficient to different specifications of the statistical model – i.e. using separate logits models and OLS regressions rather than ordered logit models. We found it to lose statistical significance in both cases, thus we hesitate to draw strong conclusions from this control variable.

not” apply again in the future. Women at the lowest end of the perceived procedural justice distribution have an 85% predicted probability of answering that they “definitely would not” apply, as compared to 0% for women who perceived the process as being very fair. In contrast, men’s perceived procedural justice was much less related to the likelihood of their re-applying (13% versus 2.5% of “definitely will not” for the lowest versus the highest levels of perceived procedural justice). This pattern of results can be compared with the results, plotted in Panel E of the figure, for individuals who said they “definitely would” apply again to the previously rejecting employer. Here, to the extent women reported being treated *fairly* in the recruitment process, they were much more likely to state that they “definitely would” apply again in the future. As before, men’s perceived procedural justice was much less related to the likelihood of their re-applying. Overall, these results support our hypothesis that perceptions of fair treatment more strongly affect women’s than men’s decisions to apply again for a position with an employer that has previously rejected them.

**[[ INSERT Figure 1 about Here ]]**

We performed several robustness checks on the results reported in Table 6. First, we ensured that the interaction effect is not driven by gender differences in the distribution of *Perceived procedural justice*. In particular, we confirmed that the variance in perceived procedural justice responses is not statistically different for men versus women. Second, we ensured that perceptions of outcome fairness – that is, of distributive rather than procedural justice – are not a driver of the results. Toward that end, we re-estimated the ordered logit regression analysis while using perceived distributive justice as the moderating variable. The *Female candidate* × *Perceived distributive justice* interaction term was not statistically significant ( $\beta = .23, p = .52$ ), which suggests that in this sample there is no evidence that women respond differently from men to perceptions that the decision to reject was itself unfair. If both interaction terms are entered in the model, only the *Female candidate* ×

*Perceived procedural justice* is statistically significant. Third, we confirmed that men and women in this sample do not differ in their reported history of job rejections – neither over their whole career ( $r = -.15, p = .13$ ) nor during their most recent job search ( $r = .17, p = .10$ ).

In addition to these robustness checks, we examined a number of alternative explanations for our findings. We investigated whether gender differences in responses to rejection in this sample are a “calculative” response by checking for whether women estimated that they would be less likely than men to succeed if they did re-apply. For this purpose we asked respondents to estimate how likely they would be to succeed in attaining the role if they applied again, with responses ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely). We found no correlation between gender and estimation of future success ( $r = -.07, p = .5$ ). Including these responses as a control variable likewise had no effect on the magnitude or direction of our results. We also explored whether gender differences in relational-interdependent self-construal (Cross, et al., 2000), regulatory focus (Neubert, et al., 2008), or gender-based rejection sensitivity (London, et al., 2012) might affect our findings. Table 7 summarizes the results of separate ordered logit regression analyses that included these variables as controls. In each analysis, including the additional control variable did not substantially change the direction or magnitude of the interaction effect between *Perceived procedural justice* and *Female candidate*.

**[[ INSERT Table 7 about Here ]]**

## **Discussion of Study 2**

Study 2 extends the results of Study 1 by examining Hypothesis 1 in a diverse sample of executive men and women and thereby showing that, across industries and occupations, women were less likely than men to consider a job opportunity from a prospective employer that previously rejected them. This study also provides support for the *greater-weighting*



effect (Hypothesis 2). We found that women's responses to rejection do depend, to a greater extent than men's, on their perceptions of being treated fairly (or unfairly) in the recruitment process. Indeed, the responses of those who expressed different levels of willingness to consider a role with a previously rejecting employer indicate that among individuals who were very unwilling, women (but not men) reported that they had been treated very unfairly whereas among individuals who were very willing, women (but not men) reported that they had been treated very fairly.

### **STUDY 3: EXPERIMENT**

The main purpose of this study was to test Hypothesis 3, which proposes that recruitment rejection triggers belonging uncertainty in executive domains for women (but not for men), negatively affecting women's perceptions of procedural justice and their subsequent willingness to pursue future opportunities with the rejecting firm. At the core of this *confirmation* effect is that men and women may react differently to the *same* rejection event. That is, men and women interpret the same reality differently because women have had different experiences as members of a negatively-stereotyped group in the executive domain. An accurate test of this mechanism therefore requires exposing individuals to an objectively identical rejection event and examining men's and women's subsequent reactions to that event.<sup>11</sup> This is only feasible in a controlled experimental setting, as in the field no individual has the same recruitment experience, thus gender differences in how perceptions of fair treatment are formed could be due to women actually being treated differently.

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<sup>11</sup> Notice that Hypothesis 2 does not require this condition, as the *greater-weighting* effect is about gender differences in behavioral reactions to perceptions of procedural justice, regardless of how those perceptions are formed. It is possible that women's perceptions of fair treatment differ from men's for various reasons, including women being treated differently. This is not consequential when testing the strength of reactions to those perceptions (Hypothesis 2), but it is crucial when testing how perceptions are formed (Hypothesis 3).

## Participants and Design

We paid a survey company to recruit 160 executives to participate in our experiment. We recruited individuals who were currently employed in senior roles and who thus had a “baseline” sense of belonging in executive domains – rather than relying on a typical sample of university students, or an online panel (e.g., Amazon’s Mechanical Turk).

We excluded individuals who submitted nonsense or gibberish for the writing task that constituted our manipulation, yielding a final sample of 128 individuals.<sup>12</sup> The participants were 65 men and 63 women employed in either executive or senior management roles (by “senior management” we refer to individuals who report directly to top management). The majority (75%) of participants self-identified as white, 9% as African American, 9% as Hispanic, and 3% as East Asian; the remaining 4% did not identify their ethnicity. The average age of participants was 39.88 years ( $SD = 11.39$ ). We used a between-participants design while manipulating rejection (i.e., rejected versus accepted).

## Procedure

Participants first responded to a number of demographic questions, which included indicating their gender.

**Rejection manipulation.** Next, we manipulated rejection for all participants by randomly assigning them to either the rejection condition (candidate was unsuccessful at securing a position) or the acceptance condition (candidate was successful at securing a position). Following similar manipulations in previous research (Mazzocco, et al., 2012; Wang, et al., 2013), we told participants that they would receive a randomly chosen applicant’s record for a candidate who had applied for an executive role and would then write a first-person account of “a day in the life” of that person. Participants received exactly the

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<sup>12</sup> As noted in footnote 7, our exclusion rate is higher than if workers from Amazon Mechanical Turk had been employed because survey companies rely on one-time participants and have no way of penalizing survey takers who produce unusable responses..

same candidate record – namely, the executive job applied for as well as candidate age and performance rating at each of four recruitment steps: résumé screening, interview with recruiter, interview with head of HR, and interview with CEO. We matched participants' gender with the applicant record they received, so men wrote about a male candidate (Michael Barrett) and women wrote about a female candidate (Michelle Barrett).

The application outcome noted on the candidate record varied depending on the rejection condition. In the *Rejected condition*, the outcome of the application was noted as “reject in favor of another candidate”; in the *Accepted condition*, the outcome of the application was noted as “make offer”.

**Mediators.** After completing the narrative essay writing task, each participant was asked to “put yourself in the shoes” of the candidate about whom they had written and to indicate their perceptions of procedural justice. We used the same *Perceived procedural justice* scale as employed in Study 2 ( $\alpha = .89$ ,  $M = 2.96$   $SD = .76$ ). Participants also completed a 30-item “executive sense of belonging” questionnaire that we adapted from Good, et al. (2012; see Appendix A for items and Confirmatory Factor Analysis); for this task,  $\alpha = .96$ . Participants rated their agreement with each item on a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). We reversed the scores to obtain a measure of belonging uncertainty in executive domains ( $M = 2.21$   $SD = .98$ ). The correlation between the perceived procedural justice scale and the executive sense of belonging scale was  $r = -.50$ , ( $p < .0001$ ).

**Dependent variable.** Finally, participants were asked to take the perspective of that same candidate and consider being approached by the company about another executive-level position; they were then asked to indicate their likelihood of applying for this position (1 = definitely would not to 5 = definitely would). We used the same question as in Study 2.

## Results

**Manipulation check.** To check our manipulation, we asked participants to indicate how rejected they felt, given the outcome of their application. A *t*-test confirmed that those who wrote a story from the unsuccessful candidate's perspective felt more rejected than those who wrote from the successful candidate's perspective ( $t(126) = -10.53, p < .0001$ ).

**Test of Hypothesis 3.** Hypothesis 3 suggests that recruitment rejection triggers belonging uncertainty in women, negatively affecting their perceptions of procedural justice and in turn, their willingness to consider future job opportunities from a firm that has rejected them in the past. In contrast, we expect that belonging uncertainty will not mediate the link between rejection, perceived procedural justice and willingness to consider future job opportunities for men. This hypothesis corresponds to a moderated-mediation model (presented in Figure 2), according to which gender differences in willingness to apply again are affected by the intervening variables of *Belonging uncertainty* and *Perceived procedural justice*. Following common practice to test moderated-mediation, we both examine the joint model for men and women (Figure 2a) and also perform a more conservative "separate groups" analysis to confirm that the proposed theoretical path is different for men and women (Figure 2b) (Rosnow and Rosenthal, 1989).

We examined the model outlined in Figure 2a using the *Process* macro in SPSS (model 6; Hayes, 2008) (results are presented in Table 8a). The first step examines each of the relationships between the variables in the mediation path via a series of regressions (*a*, *b* and *c* in Figure 2a). First, we regressed *Belonging uncertainty* on *Rejection*  $\times$  *Female candidate*, with *Rejection* and *Female candidate* being added as controls (Model 1, Table 8a). The *Rejection*  $\times$  *Female candidate* coefficient indicates that rejected women report an increase of .65 points in the belonging uncertainty scale ( $B = .65, p = .059$ ). This increase corresponds to approximately 29% of the average belonging uncertainty reported by

participants in this sample. In contrast, the increase in belonging uncertainty for rejected men is essentially 0 ( $B = .06, p = .77$ ) Next, we regressed *Perceived procedural justice* on *Belonging uncertainty*, controlling for *Rejection*, *Female candidate* and *Rejection × Female candidate* (Model 2, Table 8a). Consistent with our theory, individuals who felt more belonging uncertainty in the executive community perceived lower levels of procedural justice ( $B = -.35, p < .0001$ ). In the third step we regressed *Willingness to apply again* on *Perceived procedural justice*, controlling for *Rejection*, *Female candidate*, *Rejection × Female candidate* and *Belonging uncertainty* (Model 3, Table 8a).<sup>13</sup> As expected, individuals who thought they had been treated fairly were more likely to apply again in the future ( $B = .55, p < .0001$ ).

Having established each of the relationships between the variables in the mediation path, the next step in testing the moderated-mediation model involves examining whether the indirect effect of *Rejection × Female candidate* via *Belonging uncertainty* and *Perceived procedural justice* on *Willingness to apply again* was significantly different from zero (i.e. testing the significance of  $a*b*c$  in Figure 2a). A bootstrap sample of 5,000 replications (Preacher and Hayes, 2008) indicated that zero fell *outside* the 95% confidence interval (which ranged from  $-0.33$  to  $-0.008$ ) providing support for our hypothesized model in the joint analysis of men and women.

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<sup>13</sup> Unexpectedly, the *Rejection × Female candidate* on *Willingness to apply again* ( $d$  in Figure 2b) was not significant,  $B = -.14, p = .63$ . This does not affect the validity of our theoretical model for the *confirmation* effect, since theoretically and statistically meaningful mediation can occur in the absence of a significant total effect (MacKinnon, et al., 2000; Hayes, 2008; Zhao, et al., 2010; Rucker, et al., 2011). Nevertheless, an earlier experiment provided causal support for Hypothesis 1. Using the same method described previously, but excluding the measures of the mediating variables we recruited 206 managers from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (106 men and 100 women, 82% white, 37.77 years old ( $SD = 9.62$ ), 15.46 years of work experience ( $SD = 9.49$ ). The interaction between *Rejection × Female candidate* on *Willingness to apply again* was sizeable and statistically significant,  $B = -.45, p = .03$ . In line with Hypothesis 1, women who were rejected were less willing to apply for another job with the firm ( $M = 3.95 SE = .11$ ) than women who wrote from the perspective of a successful candidate ( $M = 4.52 SE = .10$ ),  $B = -.56, p = .0002$ . In contrast, men's willingness to apply to future job opportunities was unaffected by whether they wrote from the perspective of a rejected ( $M = 4.11 SE = .10$ ) or successful ( $M = 4.22 SE = .10$ ) candidate,  $B = -.11, p = .43$ .

The significant indirect effect found in the moderated-mediation analysis for the full sample implies that the variables that underlie responses to rejection in executive recruitment differ for men and women. However, in order to fully test that this is the case, we also conducted the most conservative test possible of Hypothesis 3, namely a “separate groups analysis” (see Figure 2b). We used the same procedure described above (again using model 6; Hayes, 2008). Table 8b presents the results. For women, rejection was positively related to belonging uncertainty in the executive community ( $B = .71, p = .009, 95\% \text{ BCa CI } -1.24 \text{ to } -0.19$ ).<sup>14</sup> To the extent women perceived that they did not belong in the executive community, they tended to perceive lower procedural justice in the recruitment process ( $B = -.32, p < .0001$ ). *Perceived procedural justice* was, in turn, positively related to *Willingness to apply again* for a subsequent role with the employer: to the extent women felt that they had been treated fairly, they were more willing to apply again in the future ( $B = .51, p < .001$ ). We tested the *indirect* effect (i.e., via belonging uncertainty and perceived procedural justice of rejection on willingness to apply again in another bootstrap sample of 5,000 ( $a_f * b_f * c_f$  in Figure 2b). In this analysis, zero fell *outside* the 95% confidence interval (which ranged from  $-0.36$  to  $-0.02$ ). This result indicates support for the hypothesized *confirmation* effect: for women, rejection triggers belonging uncertainty, priming them to perceive less fair treatment which in turn makes them unwilling to apply again to a previously rejecting firm.

We then checked for evidence of the *confirmation* effect in men’s responses to rejection. We found that, in contrast to the results for women, rejection was not significantly related to men’s sense of belonging in the executive community ( $B = .06, p = .78$ ; here the 95% BCa confidence interval ranged from  $-.51$  to  $0.37$ ). Also, using 5,000 bootstrap replications, we found that zero fell *inside* the 95% confidence interval (which ranged from

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<sup>14</sup> Responses to the *Belonging uncertainty* measures were not normally distributed. We therefore followed Field’s (2009) recommendation and included the bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) confidence intervals for the analysis of the *Rejection to Belonging uncertainty* link since these tests are robust to deviations from normality.

–0.13 to 0.08) for the indirect effect – via belonging uncertainty and perceived procedural justice – of rejection on willingness to apply again for men ( $a_m * b_m * c_m$  in Figure 2b). This result indicates that, for men, belonging uncertainty does not mediate the link between rejection and willingness to apply again in the future. Indeed, when belonging uncertainty is excluded from the analysis (Table 8b), perceived procedural justice fully accounts for men’s responses to executive recruitment rejection: for men, zero fell *outside* the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect between *Rejection*, *Perceived procedural Justice* and *Willingness to apply again* (-.80 to -.17). Thus, men who are rejected perceive less procedural justice than men who are successful ( $B = -.71, p < .0001$ ), and to the extent that men perceive less procedural justice, they are less likely to apply again in the future (and vice versa,  $B = .61, p < .0001$ ).<sup>15</sup>

**Alternative conceptual model.** In separate analyses we tested whether the alternative moderated-mediation model (i.e., *Rejection x Female candidate* → *Perceived Procedural Justice* → *Belonging Uncertainty* → *Willingness to apply again*) was a good fit for our data, by switching the order of the mediators and re-conducting the analysis described above. The results indicate that the *indirect* effect (i.e., via *Perceived procedural Justice* and *Belonging Uncertainty*) of *Rejection* × *Female candidate* on *Willingness to apply again* using 5,000 bootstrap replications, zero fell inside the 95% confidence interval (which ranged from –0.04 to .07) indicating that this alternative model did not explain gender differences in responses to rejection in recruitment.

**Alternative explanations.** We tested several other theoretical explanations for our results. We confirmed that perceptions of distributive justice do not account for our findings

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<sup>15</sup> We confirmed this via a statistical comparison of the indirect effect via *procedural justice* to the indirect effects (1) via *belonging uncertainty* and (2) via *belonging uncertainty* → *perceived procedural justice*. In both cases 5000 bootstrap replications indicated that the indirect effect via procedural justice was significantly different from (1) via *belonging uncertainty* (95%CI .13 to .81) and (2) via *belonging uncertainty* → *perceived procedural justice* (95%CI .12 to .80), confirming that men’s responses to rejection in terms of their willingness to apply to a subsequent role do not depend on belonging uncertainty.

by examining the indirect effect of *Rejection*, via *Belonging uncertainty* and *Perceived distributive justice*, on *Willingness to apply again* separately for men and women. The indirect effect was not significant for men (CI from  $-0.04$  to  $0.07$ ) or women (CI from  $-0.08$  to  $0.01$ ). We also ruled out two other “belonging” concerns as explanations for our results by re-running our analyses with two single-item measures of belonging as controls (Nichols and Webster, 2013): one for the need to belong generally and one for the sense of belonging in the fictional company. The subsequent analyses replicated the results already reported for our main analyses. We conclude that, even when we account for women’s general need to belong and for specific concerns about belonging in a particular organization, doubts about belonging in executive domains evidently underlie gender differences in responses to rejection in executive recruitment.

### **Discussion of Study 3**

Study 3 tested the *confirmation* effect in an experiment using real executives as participants. The results suggest that rejection triggers belonging uncertainty in women, negatively affecting their perceptions of procedural justice and the likelihood that they will put themselves forward for a subsequent role with the rejecting employer. Men’s sense of belonging in executive realms, in contrast, is unaffected by rejection. It is notable that we found support for this effect in a sample of participants who were already working in senior roles and hence ostensibly did belong in executive realms.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

Using a combination of field, survey, and experimental data this paper examines gender differences in responses to recruitment rejections, so to better understand women’s choices to compete for senior executive roles. We argue that labor market rejection shapes individuals’ experiences of fairness and belonging in non-gender-neutral ways. In particular, women are



less likely than men to put themselves forward for another role with a prospective employer that has rejected them in the past. This difference is associated both with women's stronger reactions to unfair treatment after experiencing a rejection (the *greater-weighting* effect) as well as with women perceiving more unfair treatment as rejection triggers their belonging uncertainty in the executive domain (the *confirmation* effect). The three studies build on and complement each other, allowing us not only to establish the real-world validity of our theory but also to illustrate its associated psychological mechanisms.

This work's first contribution is to propose gender differences in responses to recruitment rejections as a novel explanation for women's under-representation at the top of the corporate ladder. Although rejection is widespread in the labor market, we know little about how it shapes career trajectories over time. Our paper establishes that recruitment rejections affect candidates' decisions to compete for future jobs – and that they do so differently for men and women. This finding has both theoretical and empirical implications. From a theoretical standpoint, it contributes to studies of gender inequality in career trajectories, which have identified differences in the jobs occupied by men and women as a key driver of career outcomes (Bertrand and Hallock, 2001; Ridgeway, 2011). We argue that the jobs individuals do *not* take may matter as much for these outcomes as the jobs they do take. Hence theories of gender differences in career trajectories would benefit from better understanding the consequences of recruitment interactions that did not result in placement.

From an empirical standpoint, there may be far-reaching consequences of rejection for gender inequality at the top of the labor market. Women can only be hired for senior roles if they are part of the candidate pool; therefore, any mechanism that shapes the gender composition of that pool also shapes female representation among the hired executives (Rubineau and Fernandez, 2013). Women's lesser willingness to be considered after a rejection is one such mechanism, which operates by reducing the number of women available

to be considered during each selection process. The nature of executive careers is such that most senior managers have likely been considered and rejected during many internal and external recruitment processes. Given the sequential nature of these selection processes, even small initial differences in willingness to be considered for jobs could eventually cause large differences in the composition of candidate pools. That is: if a greater proportion of women than of men decline to be considered post-rejection, then the number of women available for subsequent selection rounds will gradually but continuously decline – as will the number of women hired for senior roles.<sup>16</sup> This dynamic is consistent with sociological models of cumulative disadvantage (DiPrete and Eirich, 2006), which establish that group differences at an early stage of a process are amplified when the outcomes of each stage shape the next stage's initial conditions.

The second contribution of this study is to provide a link between theories of gender inequality in executive labor markets that are based on the supply side (workers' behavior) and those based on the demand side (employers' behavior). There is evidence that the decisions of individuals and firms both affect women's under-representation in top management (Reskin and Roos, 1990; Haveman and Beresford, 2012), yet most scholars studying each of these aspects have treated them as being independent. In particular, existing accounts of women's career choices either take women's preferences as intrinsic or situate them exclusively in gendered socialization experiences outside the labor market (Bertrand,

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<sup>16</sup> To illustrate this process, in separate analyses we built a stylized formal model by simplifying the recruitment process so that it has only two stages: interview and hire. In order to “assume away” demand-side hiring decisions, all candidates willing to be considered are interviewed; one (random) candidate is hired and the others are rejected. Hired individuals do not return to the candidate pool in subsequent periods. Rejected individuals are unwilling to be considered again with probability  $p_f$  (for women) or with probability  $p_m$  (for men), and those who are not willing to be considered never return to the pool. The rejected candidates who *are* willing to be considered again (with probability  $1 - p_f$  for women or  $1 - p_m$  for men) are included in the next period's candidate pool. We then examine how the candidate pool's proportion of women changes over time due *only* to the difference in willingness to be reconsidered after being rejected; for this purpose we use probabilities inferred from the results of Model 2 in Table 4. We find that the percentage of female candidates drops quickly after only a few rounds of selection, which confirms that gender differences in this context are amplified over time.

2011). Socialization is undoubtedly important, with cultural messages about which types of jobs are appropriate for women being likely to shape women's general sense of belonging in the executive domain. Our theory extends these accounts to highlight the role of situational factors, such as direct and vicarious experiences with negative stereotypes and unequal treatment, in shaping women's sense of belonging in executive domains (with consequences for their willingness to compete for top corporate jobs). By thus linking women's sense of belonging to their behavior and perceptions in recruitment interactions, we provide a more complete theoretical understanding of gender differences in career preferences and behavior. Furthermore, by highlighting that such preferences do not arise out of inherent gender differences but rather from the experience of being an outsider, our theoretical model is broadly applicable to any negatively-stereotyped individual in executive domains (i.e., other 'outsiders').

A third theoretical contribution of our research is to the literature on procedural justice. The effect of perceived procedural justice on candidate reactions has been extensively studied in the selection and recruitment literature (for a review, see: Ryan and Ployhart, 2000). However, recent work has shifted away from examining the external, objective factors that affect individuals' judgements of procedural justice toward investigating the internal, psychological processes that underlie fairness judgements (Brockner, et al., 2015). We contribute to this nascent literature a person-in-situation account of the links among rejection, perceptions of procedural justice, and candidate reactions in recruitment settings. More specifically, our theory proposes belonging uncertainty as a previously unexamined psychological mechanism that can shape gender differences both in reactions to procedural justice as well as in perceptions of procedural justice. The latter effect, borne out by our experimental results, has implications for theories of justice, as it suggests that women's threatened sense of belonging may lead them to perceive the same objective situation as more

unfair – with consequences for their future engagement with potential employers. Men’s sense of belonging, in contrast, was not affected by being rejected and did not mediate the link between rejection and future willingness to apply. In other words, even in a setting where women and men underwent the same selection process, they experienced it differently. An important implication of these findings is that current theoretical models of procedural justice may better account for some groups’ experiences more than others’.

The theoretical contributions just described have significant organizational and policy implications. In particular, they underscore the sometimes unintended consequences – for diversity outcomes – of how firms manage their recruitment processes and candidate rejections. Given that women cannot be hired for executive roles unless they are willing to be considered for those roles, practices that increase women’s willingness to put themselves forward for executive positions should contribute to increased representation of women in these executive realms. This outcome is crucial in light of renewed efforts within policy circles to increase the proportion of women in top management jobs (United States Government Accountability Office, 2010; 2020 Women on Boards, 2014). Previous work has highlighted the importance of providing rejected candidates with appropriate feedback to help them make sense of the rejection (Fernandez-Mateo and Coh 2015). Our research further implies that this is particularly relevant for candidates whose sense of belonging may be threatened by recruitment rejections. In the case of women, this is important because there is evidence that they may actually receive different types of feedback from men’s – e.g. comments about their personality or style rather than skills and abilities (Correll, et al., 2016). Hence interventions that formalize feedback-giving in selection processes may be helpful. To address the more general issue of belonging uncertainty in executive domains, practices that normalize the experience of belonging uncertainty (Walton and Cohen, 2007; Stephens, et al., 2014) or affirm the self following rejection (Cohen, et al., 2006) may be effective. However,

it is noteworthy that the literature on belonging uncertainty does suggest that gender-blind interventions (e.g., messages about the importance of diversity and lack of discrimination in hiring practices) may have the unintended negative consequence of *increasing* women's belonging uncertainty (Cohen and Garcia, 2008). More work is thus needed to examine how different organizational interventions can reduce the tendency of women to “lean out” after experiencing recruitment rejections.

Our paper opens up several directions for future research. First, we studied gender differences in responses to rejection in the context of external recruitment. Although we expect that our theory applies also to internal selection processes, the extent to which it does – and how that extent might vary across organizations – remains an open question. For example, structuralist perspectives (e.g., Kanter, 1977) suggest that gender differences in organizational behavior are attenuated in “strong” contexts, such as organizations that feature clear career development trajectories. This possibility indicates that women's responses to rejection may be more similar to men's when the recruitment process minimizes ambiguous and/or insider-based practices. Hence a fruitful question for future research is assessing the extent to which the mechanism identified in this paper affects women's progress regarding executive roles in a variety of organizational contexts.

Second, it is worth reiterating that our field data pertains to interactions between candidates and an executive search firm and not to direct interactions between individuals and employers. This setup is useful because it allows us to measure past interactions in ways that would otherwise be extremely difficult to employ. Moreover, the characteristics of executive search processes are such that relationships between recruiters and candidates are crucial at the earliest stages of the hiring process. Our obtaining of similar results in Studies 2 and 3 (when we present respondents with direct employer interactions) suggests that our field results are not driven by the mediated nature of the specialized hiring process we examine.

That being said, future research would do well to examine just how the observed mechanisms differ as a function of the particular recruitment context.

Third, we have examined gender differences in how being rejected by a company shapes individuals' future willingness to interact with *the same* company. This is the most parsimonious expression of our theory, and it allows for the cleanest empirical tests. Nevertheless, one might reasonably suppose that women's reactions to past rejections shape their willingness to be considered for jobs not only with previously rejecting firms but also with other similar firms, or even for jobs in a similar function or industry to that of the rejecting firm. Such behavior should be expected if, for instance, a female candidate interprets rejection from a given firm as a broader signal of lack of belonging in similar positions. Furthermore, responses to rejections in the job search process could more generally work as a mechanism contributing to job segregation in the labor market as a whole.<sup>17</sup> Given that job segregation is a crucial contributor to wage inequality and differences in career advancement by gender (Reskin, 1993; Petersen and Saporta, 2004), our study hence opens up new avenues for broader research on labor market inequality.

In conclusion, our research demonstrates that gender differences in responses to rejection may well contribute to the under-representation of women at the upper echelons of organizations. The theoretical model that we propose to explain these gender differences conceptualizes women's preferences to compete for senior roles as being shaped by their previous recruitment experiences. We remark that such preferences may be independent of a woman's actual probability of success in a given selection process. Beyond these theoretical implications, our findings also suggest that popular recommendations advising that women "lean in" to executive leadership may miss the mark by treating women's choices as being largely or even solely determined by forward-looking calculations based on the expected

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<sup>17</sup> We thank an anonymous reviewer for this point.

value of actions, or “the shadow of the future” (Poppo, et al., 2008). In contrast, our work calls attention to the “shadow of the past” – here, women’s past experiences with gender inequality – as a determinant of their decision to ‘lean out’.

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**Table 1. Summary of Data and Measures used in each Study**

<b>Study</b>	<b>Rejection measure</b>	<b>Willingness to apply again measure</b>
Study 1: Longitudinal archival data from Executive search firm <i>N</i> = 10,292 individuals (23,555 observations)	Past rejection at any stage Rejected in the past by search firm or potential employer	Candidate declines to interview with search firm
Study 2: Survey of executives <i>N</i> = 99 individuals	Past rejection at any stage after initial application Rejected in the past by potential employer	Candidate's willingness to apply for a subsequent role with the employer
Study 3: Experiment using executive participants <i>N</i> = 128 individuals	Past rejection at end of selection process Rejected in the past by potential employer	Candidate's willingness to apply for a subsequent role with the employer

**Table 2. Study 1: Summary of Descriptive Statistics**

<b>Individual and relationships variables<sup>a</sup></b>							
<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>		
Candidate declined to interview	23,555	0	1	0.217	0.412		
Female candidate	23,555	0	1	0.162	0.368		
Candidate was previously rejected <sup>b</sup>	23,555	0	1	0.454	0.498		
Candidate declined past opportunity	23,555	0	1	0.290	0.454		
Candidate was previously placed by Execo	23,555	0	1	0.034	0.182		
Candidate jobs considered by Execo	23,555	0	18	1.555	1.798		
Candidate contacts in other roles	23,555	0	107	3.692	7.556		
Candidate answered advertisement	23,555	0	1	0.224	0.417		
<b>Job characteristics<sup>b</sup></b>							
<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>		
Job salary (GBP)	950	50,000	1,250,000	159,212.2	94,645.33		
Prior search firm–client relationship	950	0	19	1.413	2.561		
Number of candidates considered	950	1	512	66.634	54.352		
Job was advertised	950	0	1	0.355	0.479		
<b>Job industry (%)</b>				<b>Job function (%)</b>			
Media	3.78	Infrastructure	6.52	Financial services	9.78	Marketing director	7.05
IT	7.68	Government	9.26	Consultant	1.47	Sales director	3.36
Pharmaceutical	7.68	Health	0.63	Board member	4.52	Divisional sales director	2.23
Agriculture	0.10	Education	0.21	CFO	6.94	Legal and governance	4.84
Finance	33.36	NGO	1.26	Divisional finance director	3.26	Nonexecutive director	1.36
Professions	8.31	Other	3.89	CEO	7.78	Pharmaceutical scientist	1.15
Leisure	6.00			Divisional managing director	13.68	Other management position	21.47
Engineering & manufacturing	12.52			Operations director	2.73	Other	15.13
Retail	15.47			Government	3.89	Missing	0.03
Energy	2.21			HR director	4.63		

<sup>a</sup> Calculated at the “candidate by job” unit of analysis ( $N = 23,555$ ).

<sup>b</sup> Calculated at the “job vacancy” level of analysis ( $N = 950$ ). A given vacancy may correspond to more than one industry and to more than one job function; hence the sum of percentages exceeds 100.

**Table 3. Study 1: Correlations between Main Variables (N = 23,355)**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Candidate declined to interview											
2 Female candidate	.07										
3 Candidate was previously rejected	-.03	-.03									
4 Candidate declined past opportunity	.13	.06	.08								
5 Candidate was previously placed by Execo	-.004	-.01	.06	.06							
6 Candidate jobs considered by Execo	.03	.01	.53	.49	.21						
7 Candidate contacts in other roles	.08	.05	.15	.28	.23	.35					
8 Candidate answered advertisement	-.27	-.10	.03	-.22	-.01	-.06	-.17				
9 Job salary	.02	-.04	.014	.11	.03	.07	.22	-.23			
10 Prior search firm–client relationship	.01	.05	.08	.04	-.01	.06	-.02	-.04	.01		
11 Number of candidates considered	-.09	.001	-.03	-.08	-.02	-.07	-.06	.22	-.16	.05	
12 Job was advertised	-.08	-.003	-.01	-.13	-.01	-.05	-.10	.52	-.33	-.04	.32

*Notes:* Space considerations prevent us from including in this table the 18 job function dummies, 16 industry dummies, and year controls. A complete correlations table that incorporates the entire set of control variables is available from the authors upon request. All correlations greater than .015 are significant at  $p < .05$ .

**Table 4. Study 1: Linear Probability Model of the Effect of Gender and Past Rejection on the Probability of Candidate Declining to Interview**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Candidate declined past opportunity	-.458*** (.013)	-.459*** (.013)	-.432*** (.013)
Candidate previously placed by Execo	.079 (.051)	.079 (.050)	.095 (.061)
Candidate jobs considered by Execo	.005 (.004)	.004 (.004)	.005 (.004)
Candidate contacts in other roles	.003 <sup>+</sup> (.002)	.003 <sup>+</sup> (.002)	.003 (.002)
Candidate answered advertisement	-.159*** (.010)	-.160*** (.010)	-.144*** (.012)
Job salary (GBP thousands, logged)	-.070*** (.013)	-.069*** (.013)	
Number of candidates considered (logged)	-.014** (.005)	-.014** (.005)	
Prior search firm–client relationship	-.002 (.001)	-.002 <sup>+</sup> (.001)	
Job was advertised	.036*** (.010)	.037*** (.010)	
Candidate was previously rejected	.158*** (.008)	.146*** (.008)	.146*** (.009)
Candidate was previously rejected × Female candidate		.077*** (.017)	.062*** (.018)
Constant	.635*** (.072)	.633*** (.072)	.010 (.115)
Candidate fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job fixed effects	No	No	Yes
<i>N</i>	23,555	23,555	23,555
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> (within)	0.19	0.19	0.29

*Notes:* All tests are two-tailed; robust standard errors (clustered by candidate) are reported in parentheses. All models include the following controls: year, job function, and industry.

<sup>+</sup>*p* < .10, \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001

**Table 5. Study 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations (N = 99)**

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1Willingness to apply again	3.42	1.31															
2Age	45.35	10.08	-.03														
3Married	0.80	0.40	-.01	.21													
4Income (log)	5.39	0.28	.10	-.07	-.01												
5White	0.71	0.46	-.08	.24	.23	-.02											
6Feelings of rejection	3.29	1.21	.01	.05	.10	-.22	.18										
7Career orientation	4.02	0.72	.24	-.12	-.06	.07	-.08	.02									
8Upper management	0.28	0.45	-.07	-.12	.09	.14	.06	-.12	-.09								
9Middle management	0.22	0.42	-.03	.08	.15	-.13	.08	-.05	-.03	-.34							
10Lower management	0.13	0.34	.03	-.10	-.25	.04	-.28	.13	.05	-.24	-.21						
11Years work experience	21.87	10.50	-.08	.84	.22	-.06	.28	-.02	-.14	-.14	.01	-.15					
12Months since rejection	8.48	7.46	-.13	.12	.21	-.09	.23	.04	-.23	.07	.00	-.22	.13				
13Number of rejections	0.48	0.40	.11	-.30	-.04	.23	.06	-.15	.08	.12	-.11	-.21	-.29	.15			
14Perceived distributive justice	2.73	1.16	.35	-.09	.12	.19	-.23	-.38	.15	.03	.00	-.05	-.03	-.17	.23		
15Female candidate	0.53	0.50	-.08	-.19	-.13	.12	-.12	.28	.21	.28	-.22	-.05	-.24	-.06	.18	.01	
16Perceived procedural justice	3.38	0.84	.38	-.17	.01	.22	-.18	-.28	.05	-.02	.00	.11	-.17	-.20	.22	.63	-.01

Note: All correlations greater than .20 are significant at  $p < .05$ .

**Table 6. Study 2: Effects of Gender and Perceived procedural Justice on Willingness to Apply Again after Being Rejected (ordered logit models)**

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>	<b>Model 4</b>
Age	.047 (.035)	.050 (.035)	.052 (.036)	.057 (.036)
Married	-.341 (.527)	-.496 (.537)	-.673 (.544)	-.610 (.543)
Income (logged)	.481 (.731)	.677 (.744)	.522 (.753)	.206 (.773)
White	-.022 (.466)	-.170 (.472)	-.291 (.491)	-.120 (.492)
Feelings of rejection	.275 (.179)	.445* (.202)	.567** (.214)	.476* (.220)
Career orientation	.399 (.270)	.460 <sup>+</sup> (.274)	.631* (.277)	.559* (.281)
Upper management	-.705 (.498)	-.488 (.515)	-.442 (.517)	-.508 (.526)
Middle management	-.595 (.553)	-.660 (.554)	-.661 (.552)	-.740 (.561)
Lower management	-.676 (.689)	-.887 (.693)	-1.118 (.716)	-1.067 (.693)
Years of experience	-.051 (.034)	-.059 <sup>+</sup> (.035)	-.056 (.036)	-.052 (.036)
Months since rejection	-.013 (.029)	-.015 (.028)	-.001 (.029)	-.002 (.029)
Number of rejections	-.124 (.543)	.061 (.547)	-.053 (.552)	-.116 (.554)
Perceived distributive justice	.645** (.204)	.680*** (.206)	.358 (.231)	.320 (.234)
Female candidate		-.899 <sup>+</sup> (.468)	-.956* (.477)	-4.938** (1.781)
Perceived procedural justice			.927** (.318)	.423 (.377)
Perceived procedural justice × Female candidate				1.229* (.530)
<i>N</i>	99	99	99	99
Log likelihood	-140.73	-138.85	-134.45	-131.64
Chi-square	22.98*	26.75*	35.55**	41.18***

*Notes:* All tests are two-tailed; standard errors are reported in parentheses.

<sup>+</sup>*p* < .10, \**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001

**Table 7. Study 2: Robustness Checks**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Measures</b>	<b>Regression coefficients</b>	
		<b>Control construct</b>	<b>Perceived procedural justice × Female candidate</b>
Estimation of future success	Single item	.49 (.26)	1.28* (.52)
Relational-interdependent self-construal	RISC scale (Cross, et al., 2000)	.10 (.29)	1.27* (.54)
Regulatory focus	Promotion–prevention focus (Neubert, et al., 2008)	Prevention .14 (.22) Promotion .14 (.24)	1.15* (.53)
Gender-based rejection sensitivity	GBRS scale modified for work context (London, et al., 2012)	–.09 (.08)	1.21* (.53)

\* $p < .05$



**Table 8. Study 3 Regression Results**

**Table 8a: Moderated Mediation Results (*N* = 128).**

	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>
	Belonging uncertainty	Perceived procedural justice	Willingness to apply again
Rejected Condition	.06 (.24)	-.69*** (.15)	.04 (.17)
Female Candidate	-.25 (.24)	-.15 (.15)	.12 (.17)
Rejected Condition x Female Candidate	.65 <sup>+</sup> (.34)	.30 (.22)	-.09 (.24)
Belonging Uncertainty		-.35*** (.06)	-.14* (.07)
Perceived Procedural justice			.55*** (.09)
<i>R</i>	.26*	.61***	.61***
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.07	.37	.37

**Table 8b. Separate Groups Analysis**

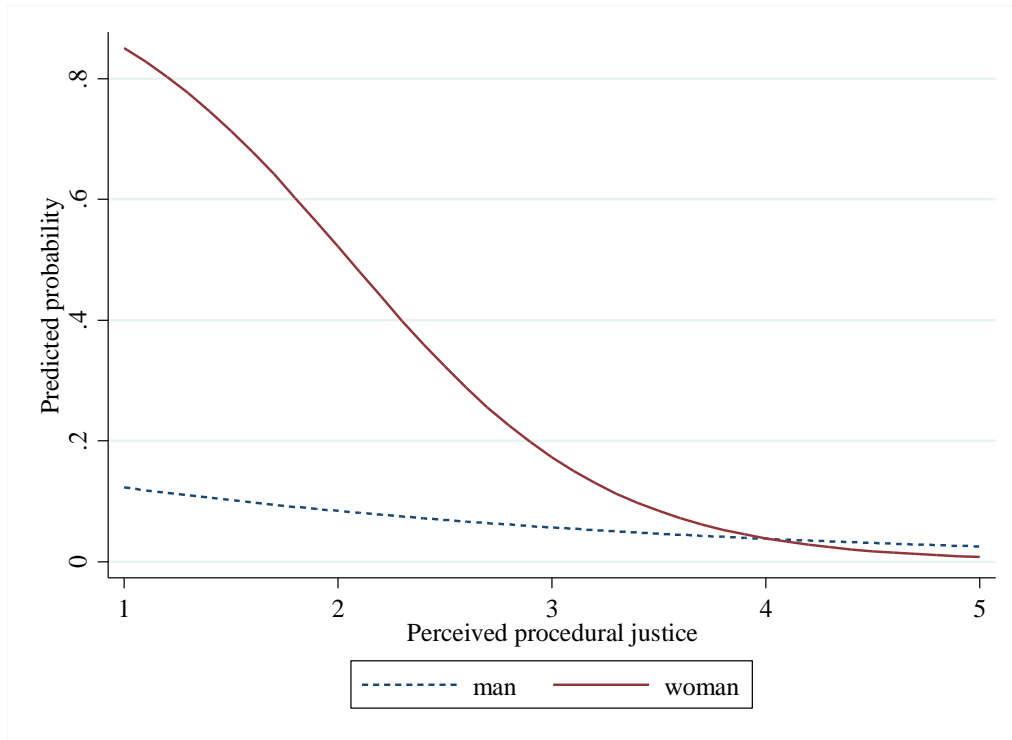
	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>	<b>Model 3</b>
	Belonging uncertainty	Perceived procedural justice	Willingness to apply again
<i>Female (N = 63)</i>			
Rejected condition	.71** (.26)	-.41* (.17)	.003** (.18)
Belonging uncertainty		-.32*** (.08)	-.25 (.08)
Perceived procedural justice			.51*** (.13)
<i>Male (N = 65)</i>			
Rejected condition	.06 (.22)	-.69*** (.14)	.08 (.20)
Belonging uncertainty		-.38*** (.09)	.001 (.11)
Perceived procedural justice			.61*** (.15)
<i>Male (N = 65) (excluding Belonging uncertainty)</i>			
Rejected condition		-.71*** (.17)	.08 (.19)
Perceived procedural justice			.61*** (.13)

Notes: All tests are two-tailed; standard errors are reported in parentheses.

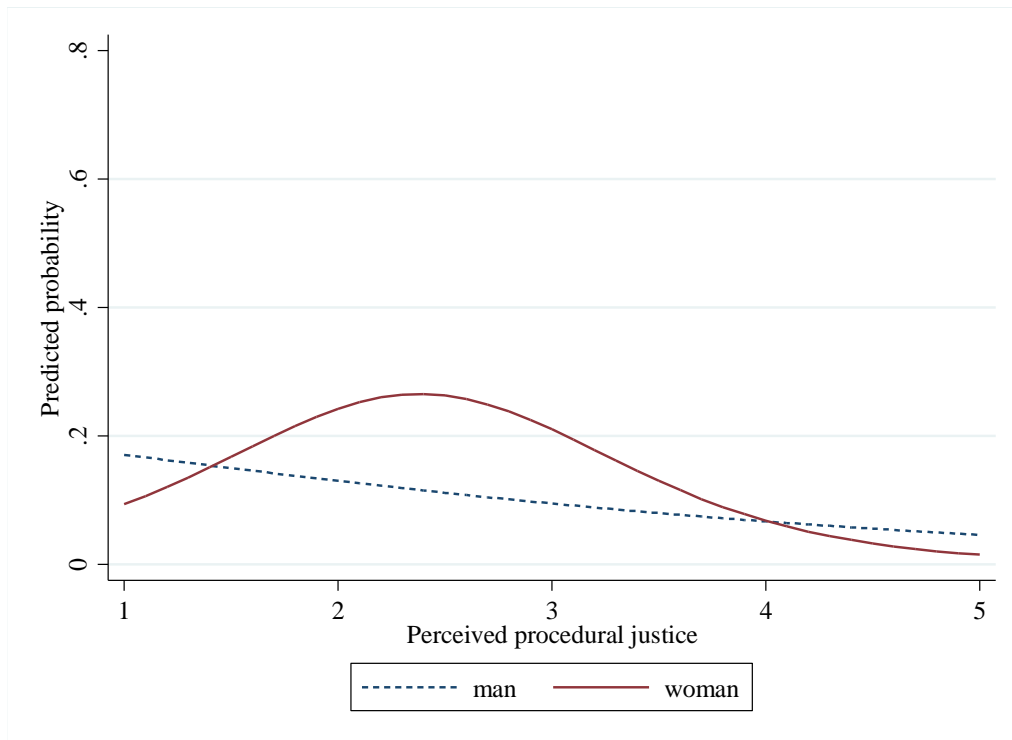
<sup>+</sup>*p* < .10, \**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001

**Figure 1. Study 2: Effect of Candidate Gender and Perceived Procedural Justice on Willingness to Apply Again to a Prospective Employer after a Rejection**

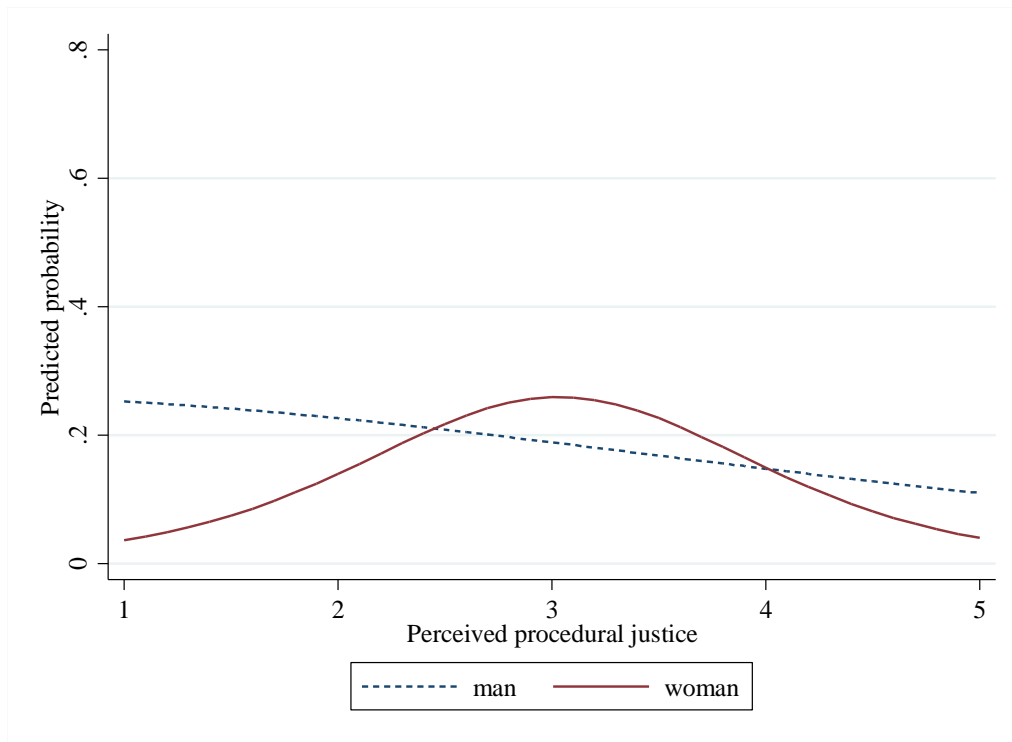
**Panel A: Probability of responding “Definitely will not apply”**



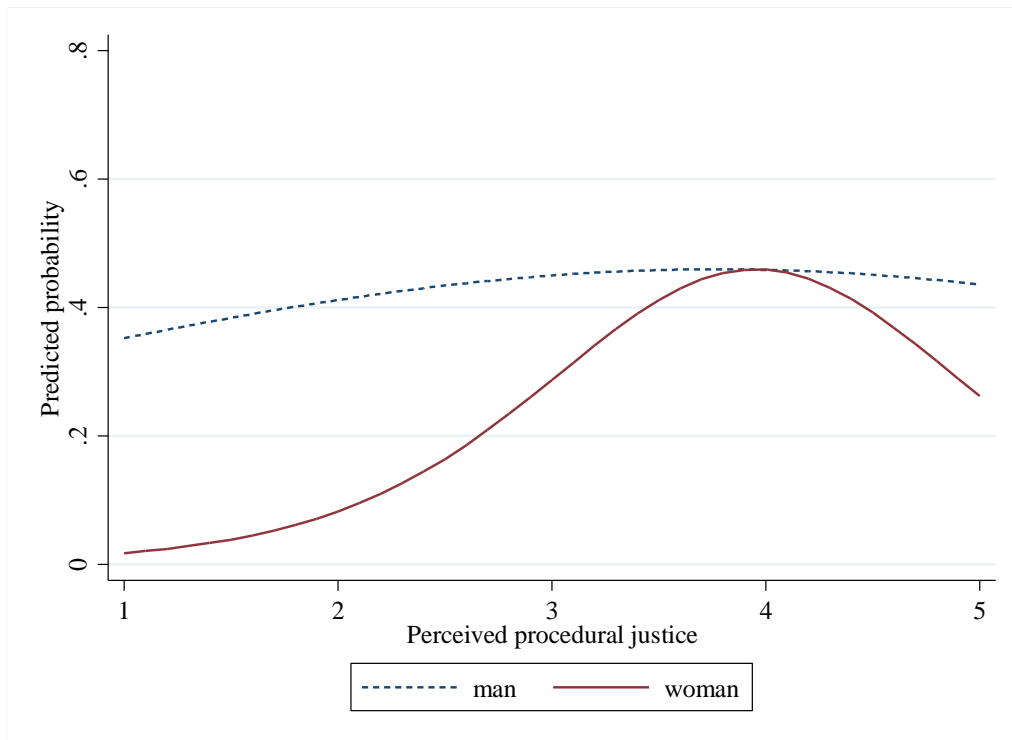
**Panel B: Probability of responding “Probably will not apply”**



**Panel C: Probability of responding “Don’t know”**



**Panel D: Probability of responding “Probably will apply”**



**Panel E: Probability of responding “Definitely will apply”**

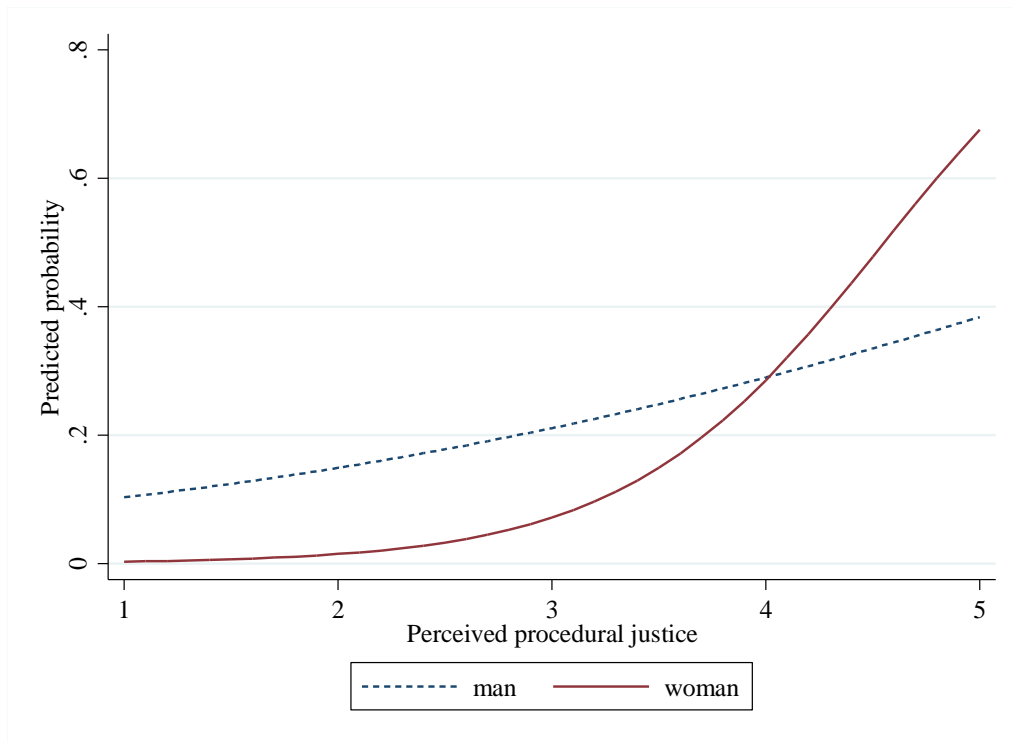
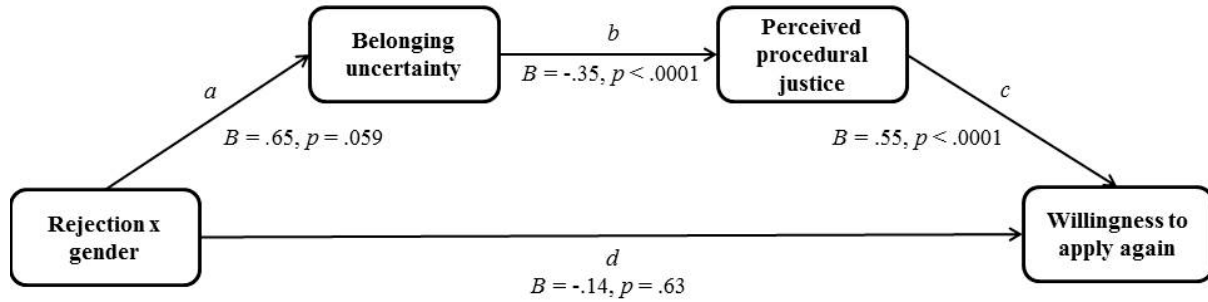
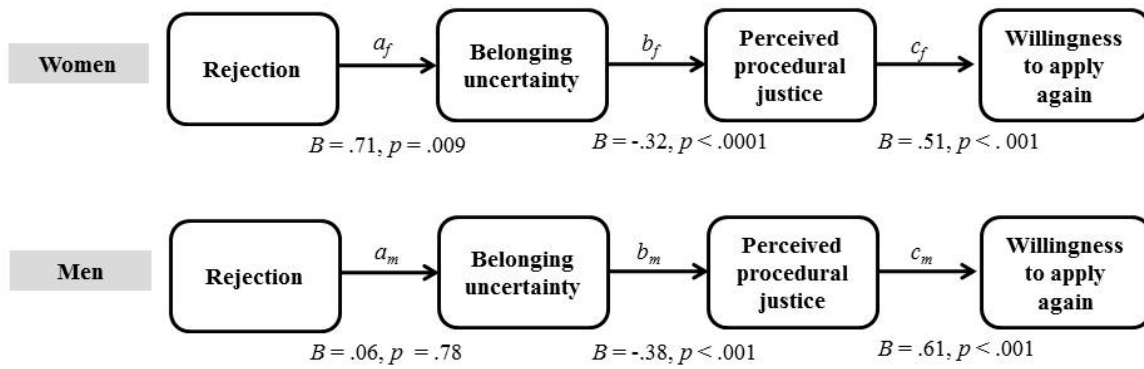


Figure 2. Study 3: Theorized & Estimated Model

2a. Moderated-Mediation Analysis



2b. Separate Groups Analysis



## Appendix A: Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Executive Sense of Belonging Scale

We adapted our Executive Sense of Belonging measure from the Sense of Belonging in to Math Scale developed for use in a student population by Good, et al. (2012). In order to ensure that the factor structure of the original measure was valid in a managerial population we conducted a factor analysis. Because the factor structure of the measure has already been established in prior research, we conducted a Confirmatory Factor Analysis rather than an Exploratory Factor Analysis (which would be appropriate if we had developed a new measure).

We recruited 453 managers (247 men 206 women) from Amazon's Mechanical Turk. The average age of the respondents was 33.59 years ( $SD = 9.59$ ) and they had an average of 5.52 years ( $SD = 5.76$ ) of experience in management. The managers responded to the Executive Sense of Belonging scale and provided some demographic information.

We conducted the CFA in MPlus. We tested the second order factor structure of the original measure, in which Sense of Belonging was indicated by five first order factors (Membership, Acceptance, Affect, Desire to Fade, and Trust), which were in turn indicated by their individual items. The results, presented in Table 1A, indicated that each individual item achieved high factor loadings on to the relevant first-order factor (all factor loadings  $> .64$ ), and each first order factor achieved moderate to high-factor loadings on to the second order factor, sense of belonging (all factor loadings  $> .56$ ).

We examined several measures of model fit against conventional cut off levels (Hu and Bentler, 1999; Kenny, 2015). The chi-square test indicates the similarity between the observed and expected matrices, with probabilities of greater than .05 indicating that these matrices are similar. However, in large samples ( $N > 200$ ) the chi-square statistic is almost always statistically significant. Given this, it is not surprising that the chi-square value of 2088.62 was significant at  $p < .001$  in our sample of 453 managers. As an alternative, we examined the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), which measures the difference between the observed and the null model. The CFI was .86 (values over  $> .8$  indicate acceptable model fit). Finally, we examined the standard root mean square residual (SRMR), which is an absolute measure of fit that represents the difference between the observed correlation and the predicted correlation. Values below .08 indicate acceptable model fit – in this case, the SRMR was .07. Overall then, based on the factor loadings and model fit indices, we concluded that that adapted executive sense of belonging scale was valid for use in managerial populations.

Table 1A. Confirmatory Factor Analysis of Executive Sense of Belonging

Second-order factor loading	First-order factor loading	Item
0.56	Membership	
	0.911	I feel that I belong to the executive community
	0.922	I consider myself a member of the executive world
	0.957	I feel like I am part of the executive community
0.946	0.895	I feel a connection with the executive community
	Acceptance	
	0.776	I feel like I fit in
	-0.752	I feel like an outsider (-)
	0.767	I feel respected
	0.814	I feel valued
	0.796	I feel accepted
	0.792	I feel appreciated
	-0.849	I feel disregarded (-)
	-0.854	I feel neglected (-)
	-0.855	I feel excluded (-)
0.89	-0.785	I feel insignificant (-)
	Affect	
	0.773	I feel at ease
	0.822	I feel comfortable
	0.711	I feel content
	0.768	I feel calm
	-0.778	I feel anxious (-)
	-0.819	I feel tense (-)
	-0.795	I feel nervous (-)
-0.794	I feel inadequate (-)	
0.744	Fade	
	0.641	I enjoy being an active participant
	-0.767	I wish I were invisible (-)
	-0.913	I wish I could fade into the background and not be noticed (-)
0.685	-0.801	I try to say as little as possible (-)
	Trust	
	0.724	I trust the recruitment and selection procedures to be unbiased.
	0.648	I have trust that I do not have to constantly prove myself
	0.897	I trust my mentors to be committed to helping me develop
0.779	Even when I do poorly, I trust my mentors to have faith in my potential	

*Note.* Model fit indices are as follows:  $\chi^2(400, N 453) 2088.86, p < .0001$ ; CFI .86; standard root mean square residual .07. All  $ps < .001$ . Parenthetical minus signs indicate that the items were reverse-coded.