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

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Abstract
This paper proposes that gender differences in responses to recruitment rejections contribute to women's underrepresentation in top management. We theorize and show that women are less likely than men to consider another job with a prospective employer that has rejected them in the past. Because of women's status as a negatively stereotyped minority in senior roles, recruitment rejection triggers uncertainty about their general belonging in the executive domain, which in turn 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 less inclined than men to apply again to a firm that has rejected them. 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 testing the effects of rejection on willingness to apply to a firm for another position. The results have implications for theory and practice regarding gender inequality at the labor market's upper echelons, highlighting that women's supply-side decisions to ''lean out'' of competition for senior roles must be understood in light of their previous experiences with employers' demand-side practices. Given the sequential nature of executive selection processes, rejection-driven differences in the 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.

Keywords: gender, recruiting, top management teams, belonging uncertainty, procedural justice

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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 underrepresented at the top echelons of organizations. Women hold about 16 percent of senior executive roles in Fortune 500 companies and only 5 percent of CEO positions (2020 Women on Boards, 2014). Some explanations for this underrepresentation focus on the different career choices men and women make, 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 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, Leibbrandt, and List, 2015). 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, Niederle, and Oosterbeek, 2012), and only a handful of studies examine women's actual job application choices (Barbulescu and Bidwell, 2013; Flory, Leibbrandt, and List, 2015; Fernandez-Mateo and Fernandez, 2016).

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 underrepresentation 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 in organizations (Cohen, Broschak, and Haveman, 1998; Barnett, Baron, and Stuart, 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 that previously rejected them. We theorize 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, because of women's ''outsider'' status in executive labor markets, rejection may trigger uncertainty

about the extent to which they belong in executive domains (cf. Walton and Cohen, 2007). As a consequence of this belonging uncertainty, women may place more emphasis on fair treatment in the selection process (the greater-weighting effect) and perceive treatment to be less fair when they are rejected (the confirmation effect). 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.

To reach an organization's highest echelons, individuals must win a series of competitions for jobs, both within and across firms (Rosenbaum, 1979). Each competition carries the risk of being rejected for the role, as 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.[1] By highlighting men's and women's differing responses to recruitment rejections, we identify a novel phenomenon that may contribute to women's underrepresentation in senior executive roles. We test our theoretical arguments using data from three separate studies: a field study of rejection in executive recruitment, a survey of executives, and an experiment with currently employed senior executives.

RESPONSES TO REJECTION IN EXECUTIVE RECRUITMENT

Rejection is undesirable 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, Day, and Thomas, 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 applicants' 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 predictive of future job performance, and whether individuals are given adequate feedback are highly predictive of how procedural

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[1] 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).

justice is perceived (Hausknecht, Day, and Thomas, 2004). In turn, perceptions of procedural justice have been linked empirically to organizational attractiveness, recommendation intentions, and acceptance intentions (Gilliland, 1994; Hausknecht, Day, and Thomas, 2004) and have been linked theoretically (but not yet empirically) to candidates' willingness to apply for a position at a previously rejecting organization (Hausknecht, Day, and Thomas, 2004).

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). 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), including whether people are valued and belong in the particular group in which the treatment occurs (De Cremer and Tyler, 2005). Fair treatment, in turn, affects individuals' behavior in 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 and 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.

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, Rattan, and Dweck, 2012) and even if they do not necessarily fear that they themselves will be stereotyped (Walton and Cohen, 2007).[2]

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[2] The construct of belonging uncertainty is closely related to (but different from) stereotype threat. Stereotype threat is the fear of confirming a negative stereotype about one's group and has been shown to undermine the performance of stereotyped individuals—e.g., women in math (Dar-Nimrod and Heine, 2006). Belonging uncertainty also arises from negative stereotypes about one's group and, as such, includes an element of stereotype threat. But 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, Rattan, and Dweck (2012), traditional stereotype threat primarily accounts for underperformance; belonging uncertainty accounts for underparticipation.

Women's behavior in competitions for top management roles is likely similarly shaped by concerns about their belonging to the executive domain. Women are not only dramatically underrepresented in executive jobs (2020 Women on Boards, 2014), but they often encounter negative stereotypes about their leadership abilities in these positions. 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, with employers often defining the ideal candidate in explicitly masculine terms (Acker, 1990; Meriläinen, Tienari, and Valtonen, 2015). These negative stereotypes are consistent with the observed unequal distribution, representation, and treatment of women in executive positions. Women are less likely to be considered for executive roles than men (Dreher, Lee, and Clerkin, 2011). Those who do succeed at attaining executive-level roles are more likely than men to be appointed to positions in which the risk of failure is high (Ryan et al., 2011), and female executives are often paid less than their male peers (Carter, Franco, and Gine, 2014). Women pursuing executive roles are likely to have had direct or vicarious experiences with this unequal gender treatment over the course of their careers, and these experiences will affect their answers 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 uncertainty about whether they belong in the executive domain, and threats to belonging are likely to trigger this latent uncertainty. 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 in which their belonging is in question (Good, Rattan, and Dweck, 2012). Gender differences in belonging uncertainty in executive domains should differentially shape men's and women's perceptions of 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), women who are rejected for an executive position may be less inclined than men to apply for another position at the rejecting firm:

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

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. To the extent that women experience belonging uncertainty after a rejection, they (1) will assign more weight to unfair treatment (the greater-weighting effect) and (2) will 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 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.

The greater-weighting effect. Individuals are rejected for executive roles for many reasons, 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 in or exclusion from the domain in which 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 those who are uncertain about their belonging (De Cremer and Tyler, 2005). As such, 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 reapply to the firm. Thus, although all executive candidates are less likely to reapply if they believe they have been treated unfairly by a firm that has rejected them in the past (and vice versa, Hausknecht, Day, and Thomas, 2004), this tendency may 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 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, so that 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 rejection in recruitment 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 (as men are typically positively stereotyped and overrepresented in executive domains), they are not primed to make belonging-related negative evaluations of their treatment in recruitment settings. Thus:

> **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.

We tested 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 therefore examine gender differences in the responses to rejections occurring throughout the executive selection process. In Study 1, we used 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, obtained from the archives of an executive search firm, include all its interactions with 10,292 candidates considered for senior management jobs over a five-year period. In Study 2 we sought to replicate our core proposition via a survey of men and women executives and examined 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 tested the confirmation effect by randomly assigning executive 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.

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 given their prior interactions with employers. To test the 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. But 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 a rejection. Candidates' rejection experiences are thus shaped by their interactions with the search firm and should affect their willingness to engage with the same search firm or (by proxy) its clients in the future.

Setting and Data

We used 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 percent 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 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 possible interviews. The ensuing phone conversations 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.[3] 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

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[3] We do not have information on which candidates were contacted by Execo. If candidates were interviewed or refused to interview then we do know that they were contacted and hence were aware of being considered. But 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.

stage of the process—whether the candidate agrees to proceed to a formal interview with the search firm—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 interview are not affected by a client's identity or behavior but only by past interactions between the candidate and the 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 he or she had previously been rejected (at any stage of the recruitment process) for other roles presented to him or her by the search firm. Our goal was 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 him- or herself over time and under different ''rejection regimes''—that is, when he or 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 he or she is 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 but 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.[4]

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.[5] 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 in rejection even when we know nothing else about that job. We use a 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 his or 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*

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[4] To see why *candidate is interviewed* 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.

[5] 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 section).

of candidates considered for the focal job (also logged, as 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 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 in which this information was 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 included dummies for 16 industries: 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 1 gives descriptive statistics for the main variables used in the analysis, and table 2 reports their correlations.

Results

We estimated a linear probability model (LPM), with candidate fixed effects, in which *candidate declined to interview* was the dependent variable. The linear model yields coefficients that are easier to interpret than those of a logit specification (see Sorenson and Waguespack, 2006, for a similar procedure), but it has two 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), as we do here. Second, it generates predicted values that may be outside the 0–1 interval. Yet Wooldridge (2003) argued 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.

   The main baseline effects are presented in model 1 of table 3. As expected, previously rejected candidates (of either gender) were more likely to decline a formal interview than were non-rejected candidates. This effect is net of any individual stable unobserved heterogeneity and so is unrelated to candidates' qualities.

   Model 2 of table 3 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 × female candidate*). Men's probability of declining to interview is 14.6 percent higher if they have been rejected in the past whereas that increase is 22.3 percent for women (i.e., 7.7 percent 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

Table 1. Summary of Descriptive Statistics for Study 1

Variable	Min.	Max.	Mean	S.D.
Individual and relationships variables (N = 23,555)*				
Candidate declined to interview	0	1	0.217	0.412
Female candidate	0	1	0.162	0.368
Candidate was previously rejected	0	1	0.454	0.498
Candidate declined past opportunity	0	1	0.290	0.454
Candidate was previously placed by Execo	0	1	0.034	0.182
Candidate jobs considered by Execo	0	18	1.555	1.798
Candidate contacts in other roles	0	107	3.692	7.556
Candidate answered advertisement	0	1	0.224	0.417
Job characteristics (N = 950)†				
Job salary (GBP)	50,000	1,250,000	159,212.2	94,645.33
Prior search firm–client relationship	0	19	1.413	2.561
Number of candidates considered	1	512	66.634	54.352
Job was advertised	0	1	0.355	0.479

Job industry (%)				Job function (%)			
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		

* Calculated at the ''candidate by job'' unit of analysis.
† Calculated at the ''job vacancy'' level of analysis. 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 2. Correlations between Main Variables in Study 1 (N = 23,555)*

Variable	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

* 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 3. Linear Probability Model of the Effect of Gender and Past Rejection on the Probability of Candidates Declining to Interview in Study 1 (N = 23,555)*

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Candidate declined past opportunity	−.458•••	−.459•••	−.432•••
	(.013)	(.013)	(.013)
Candidate previously placed by Execo	.079	.079	.095
	(.051)	(.050)	(.061)
Candidate jobs considered by Execo	.005	.004	.005
	(.004)	(.004)	(.004)
Candidate contacts in other roles	.003	.003	.003
	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)
Candidate answered advertisement	−.159•••	−.160•••	−.144•••
	(.010)	(.010)	(.012)
Job salary (GBP thousands, logged)	−.070•••	−.069•••	
	(.013)	(.013)	
Number of candidates considered (logged)	−.014••	−.014••	
	(.005)	(.005)	
Prior search firm–client relationship	−.002	−.002	
	(.001)	(.001)	
Job was advertised	.036•••	.037•••	
	(.010)	(.010)	
Candidate was previously rejected	.158•••	.146•••	.146•••
	(.008)	(.008)	(.009)
Candidate was previously rejected × Female candidate		.077•••	.062•••
		(.017)	(.018)
Constant	.635•••	.633•••	.010
	(.072)	(.072)	(.115)
R^2 (within)	.19	.19	.29

•• $p < .01$; ••• $p < .001$.

* 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. Candidate fixed effects are included in all models. Job fixed effects are included in model 3.

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). But 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 × 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 x 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 the 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 (*search firm rejected candidate* and *candidate is interviewed*) 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

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 in a range of recruitment environments.

STUDY 2: SURVEY OF EXECUTIVES

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 by using a diverse sample of executives reporting on their interactions in a range of recruitment environments that included search firms and prospective employers. In addition, we sought to test hypothesis 2, 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 U.S. residents: 54 women and 45 men. We paid a survey company to recruit 140 individuals who were 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, Huber, and Lenz, 2012; Goodman, Cryder, and Cheema, 2013; Paolacci and Chandler, 2014).[6] Most (71 percent) of the participants were white; their average age was 45.35 years with a standard deviation (S.D.) of 10.08, and they had worked on average for 21.87 years (S.D. = 10.50).

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.

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[6] Individuals undertaking 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, Cryder, and Cheema, 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, Huber, and Lenz, 2012). Our exclusion rate is higher than if workers from Amazon Mechanical Turk had been employed because 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, Huber, and Lenz, 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.

The respondents subsequently completed several questionnaire measures designed to capture, among other things, 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.

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: (1) I felt able to express my views during the recruitment process; (2) I was able to influence the decisions arrived at by the recruitment process; (3) The recruitment procedures were applied consistently; (4) The recruitment procedures were free of bias; (5) The recruitment procedures were based on accurate information; (6) I was able to appeal the decisions arrived at by the recruitment process; and (7) 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), $\alpha = 0.85$.[7]

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. Because men's and women's career aspirations may differ (Litzky and Greenhaus, 2007), we also controlled for career orientation (Warr, Cook, and Wall, 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), $\alpha = .81$. Finally, to control for perceived distributive justice we used the following four items, which were also adapted from Colquitt and Rodell (2011): (1) the outcome reflected the effort I put into the recruitment process; (2) the

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[7] 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.

outcome was appropriate for the work I completed during the recruitment process; (3) the outcome reflected what I contributed to the recruitment process; and (4) 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 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.[8]

Nearly 30 percent 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 percent of respondents, of which some were willing and others were 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 percent of respondents. Individuals who expressed a high willingness to apply focused on their admiration for the organization that rejected them and for the profession in general (approximately 18 percent of all respondents): "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 issue 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

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[8] 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 applicants' reactions. The raters achieved moderate to perfect interrater 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.

Table 4. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Study 2 (N = 99)*

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Willingness to apply again	3.42	1.31															
2. Age	45.35	10.08	–.03														
3. Married	.80	.40	–.01	.21													
4. Income (log)	5.39	.28	.10	–.07	–.01												
5. White	.71	.46	–.08	.24	.23	–.02											
6. Feelings of rejection	3.29	1.21	.01	.05	.10	–.22	.18										
7. Career orientation	4.02	.72	.24	–.12	–.06	.07	–.08	.02									
8. Upper management	.28	.45	–.07	–.12	.09	.14	.06	–.12	–.09								
9. Middle management	.22	.42	–.03	.08	.15	–.13	.08	–.05	–.03	–.34							
10. Lower management	.13	.34	.03	–.10	–.25	.04	–.28	.13	.05	–.24	–.21						
11. Years work experience	21.87	10.50	–.08	.84	.22	–.06	.28	–.02	–.14	–.14	.01	–.15					
12. Months since rejection	8.48	7.46	–.13	.12	.21	–.09	.23	.04	–.23	.07	.00	–.22	.13				
13. Number of rejections	.48	.40	.11	–.30	–.04	.23	.06	–.15	.08	.12	–.11	–.21	–.29	.15			
14. Perceived distributive justice	2.73	1.16	.35	–.09	.12	.19	–.23	–.38	.15	.03	.00	–.05	–.03	–.17	.23		
15. Female candidate	.53	.50	–.08	–.19	–.13	.12	–.12	.28	.21	.28	–.22	–.05	–.24	–.06	.18	.01	
16. Perceived procedural justice	3.38	.84	.38	–.17	.01	.22	–.18	–.28	.05	–.02	.00	.11	–.17	–.20	.22	.63	–.01

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

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 of both 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 indicate 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.

    Hypotheses tests. Table 4 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations for Study 2. 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 tested our hypotheses using ordered logit models because the outcome variable (*willingness to apply again*) is categorical and ordinal (Long and Freese, 2006).[9] In table 5, model 1 includes the control variables. Models 2 and 3 also include the predictor variables (*female candidate*

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[9] Our results are substantially the same if we instead use linear regressions, but the Akaike test reveals that the ordered logit model is preferable to the OLS model.

Table 5. Effects of Gender and Perceived Procedural Justice on Willingness to Apply Again after Being Rejected in Study 2 (Ordered Logit Models, N = 99)*

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

• $p < .05$; •• $p < .01$; ••• $p < .001$.
* All tests are two-tailed; standard errors are reported in parentheses.

and *perceived procedural justice*), whose interaction is entered as a separate term in model 4.

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 5 indicates that this coefficient is negative ($p = .0546$). The *female candidate* effect is also negative once we introduce the *perceived procedural justice* indicator in model 3 ($p = .045$). 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 percent, compared with 28.6 percent for women. This amounts to nearly double the probability that women will refuse to reapply after a rejection. Conversely, the predicted probability of men responding ''probably will apply'' or ''definitely will apply'' is 69.3 percent, compared with 47.9 percent 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.[10] 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 5). 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 will not'' apply again in the future. Women at the lowest end of the perceived procedural justice distribution have an 85-percent predicted probability of answering that they ''definitely will not'' apply, compared with 0 percent 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 reapplying: 13 percent versus 2.5 percent 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

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[10] 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 logit models and OLS regressions rather than ordered logit models. We found it lost statistical significance in both cases, so we hesitate to draw strong conclusions from this control variable.

Figure 1. Effect of candidate gender and perceived procedural justice on willingness to apply again to a prospective employer after a rejection.
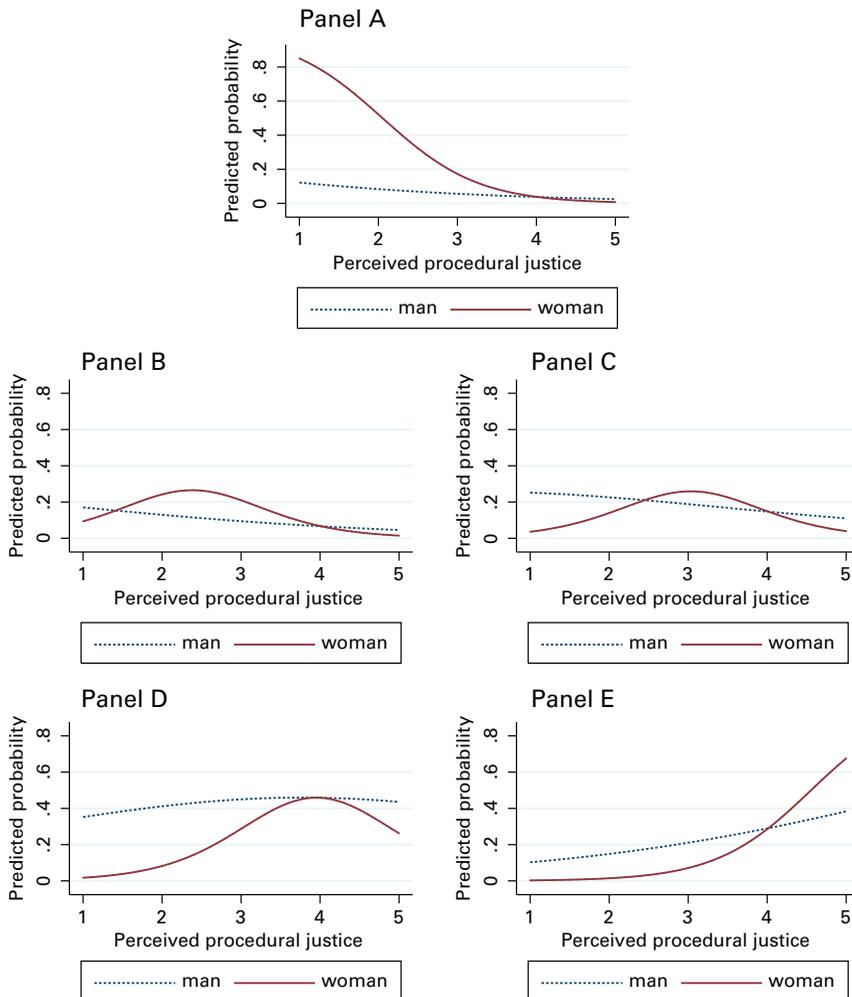
Panel A. Probability of responding "Definitely will not apply."
Panel B. Probability of responding "Probably will not apply."
Panel C. Probability of responding "Don't know."
Panel D. Probability of responding "Probably will apply."
Panel E. Probability of responding "Definitely will apply."

individuals who said they "definitely will" 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 will" apply again in the future. As before, men's perceived procedural justice was much less related to the likelihood of their reapplying. 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.

We performed several robustness checks on the results reported in table 5. First, we ensured that the interaction effect was not driven by gender differences in the distribution of *perceived procedural justice*; 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 reestimated the ordered logit regression analysis while using perceived distributive justice as the moderating variable. The *perceived distributive justice × female candidate* 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 *perceived procedural justice × female candidate* 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 reapply. 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, Bacon, and Morris, 2000), regulatory focus (Neubert et al., 2008), or gender-based rejection sensitivity (London et al., 2012) might affect our findings. Table 6 summarizes the results of separate ordered logit regression analyses that included these variables as controls. In each analysis, including the additional control variable did

Table 6. Study 2 Robustness Checks*

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

• $p < .05$.
* Standard errors are reported in parentheses.

not substantially change the direction or magnitude of the interaction effect between *perceived procedural justice* and *female candidate*.

Discussion

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, more than men's, on their perceptions of being treated fairly (or unfairly) in the recruitment process. 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 requires exposing individuals to an objectively identical rejection event and examining men's and women's subsequent reactions to that event.[11] This is feasible only in a controlled experimental setting, as in the field no two individuals have the same recruitment experience, and thus gender differences in how perceptions of fair treatment are formed could be due to women actually being treated differently.

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

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[11] 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).

individuals.[12] 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 percent) of participants self-identified as white, 9 percent as African American, 9 percent as Hispanic, and 3 percent as East Asian; the remaining 4 percent did not identify their ethnicity. The average age of participants was 39.88 years (S.D. = 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 used in previous research (Mazzocco et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2014), 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 same candidate record—namely, the executive job applied for, as well as the candidate's age and performance rating at each of four recruitment steps: résumé screening, interview with the recruiter, interview with the head of human resources, and interview with the 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's 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 (α = .89, mean = 2.96, S.D. = .76). Participants also completed a 30-item ''executive sense of belonging'' questionnaire that we adapted from Good, Rattan, and Dweck (2012; see the Online Appendix, http://asq.sagepub.com/supplemental, for items and the confirmatory factor analysis); for this task, α = .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 (mean = 2.21, S.D. = .98). The

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[12] As noted in footnote 6, 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.

correlation between the perceived procedural justice scale and the executive sense of belonging scale was $r = -.50$, ($p < .001$).

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 will not to 5 = definitely will). 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 ($t(126) = -10.53, p < .001$).

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 at a firm that has rejected them in the past. In contrast, we expect that belonging uncertainty will not mediate the link among 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 examined the joint model for men and women (panel 2A) and performed a more conservative ''separate groups'' analysis to confirm that the proposed theoretical path is different for men and women (panel 2B) (Rosnow and Rosenthal, 1989).

We examined the model outlined in panel 2A using the *Process* macro in SPSS (model 6; Hayes, 2008), and results are presented in table 7, panel A. 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 2, panel A). First, we regressed *belonging uncertainty* on *rejection × female candidate*, with *rejection* and *female candidate* being added as controls (model 1, table 7, panel A). The *rejection × female candidate* coefficient indicates that rejected women report an increase of .65 points in the belonging uncertainty scale ($p = .059$), corresponding to approximately 29 percent of the average belonging uncertainty reported by participants in this sample. In contrast, the increase in belonging uncertainty for rejected men is essentially 0 ($p = .77$) Next, we regressed *perceived procedural justice* on *belonging uncertainty*, controlling for *rejection, female candidate* and *rejection × female candidate* (model 2, table 7, panel A). Consistent with our theory, individuals who felt more belonging uncertainty in the executive community perceived lower levels of procedural justice. In the third step we regressed *willingness to apply again* on *perceived*

Figure 2. Theorized and estimated model for Study 3.

2A. Moderated-mediation analysis

2B. Separate groups analysis
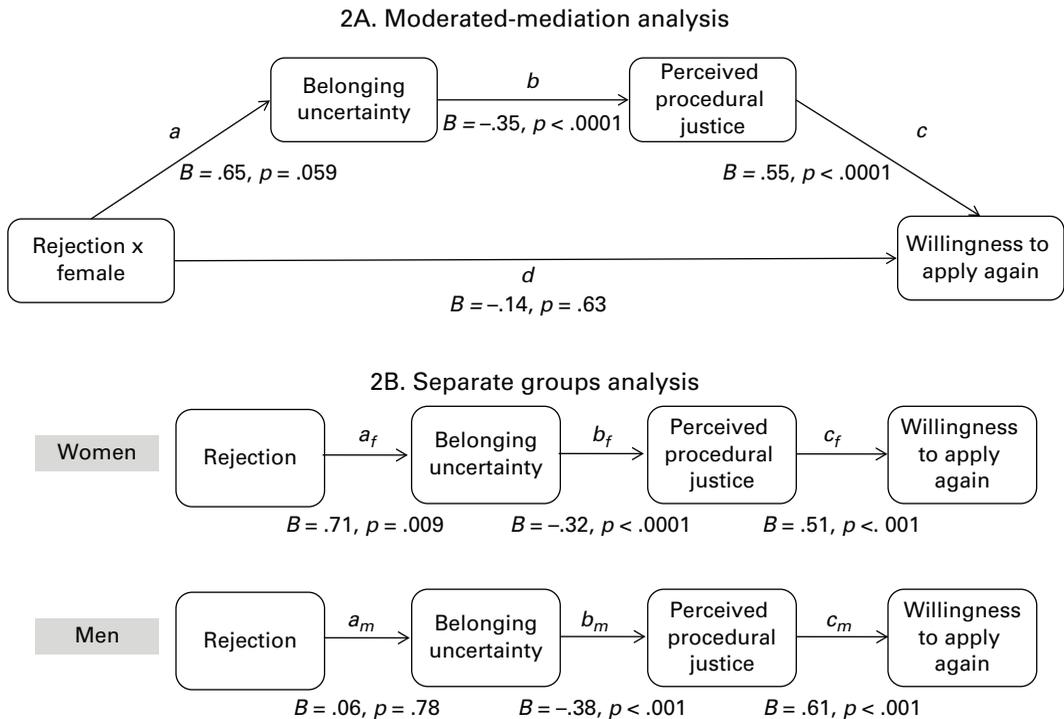
procedural justice, controlling for *rejection, female candidate, rejection ×
female candidate*, and *belonging uncertainty* (model 3, table 7, panel A).[13] As
expected, individuals who thought they had been treated fairly were more likely
to apply again in the future.

   Having established each of the relationships between the variables in the
mediation path, the next step in testing the moderated-mediation model

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[13] The *rejection × female candidate* on *willingness to apply again* (*d* in figure 2, panel A) was not
statistically significant. This does not affect the validity of our theoretical model for the confirmation
effect, because theoretically and statistically meaningful mediation can occur in the absence of a
significant total effect (MacKinnon, Krull, and Lockwood, 2000; Hayes, 2008; Zhao, Lynch, and
Chen, 2010; Rucker et al., 2011). Indeed, significant indirect effects in the absence of a significant
total effect are common, particularly when mediator measures are more sensitive than dependent
variable measures, as is likely the case here (Rucker et al., 2011). Nevertheless, an earlier experi-
ment provided causal support for hypothesis 1. Using the same method described previously, but
excluding the mediating variables, we recruited 206 managers from Amazon's Mechanical Turk:
106 men and 100 women, 82 percent white, 37.77 years old (S.D. = 9.62), 15.46 years of work
experience (S.D. = 9.49). The interaction effect *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 (mean = 3.95,
S.E. = .11) than women who wrote from the perspective of a successful candidate (mean = 4.52,
S.E. = .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 (mean = 4.11, S.E. = .10)
or successful (mean = 4.22, S.E. = .10) candidate, *B* = −.11, *p* = .43. By randomly assigning men
and women to be rejected, this experiment confirms that rejection is causally related to the gender
differences in willingness to apply again that we observed in the field and survey data.

Table 7. Study 3 Regression Results*

	Model 1 Belonging uncertainty	Model 2 Perceived procedural justice	Model 3 Willingness to apply again
A. Moderated mediation results (N = 128)			
Rejected condition	.06	−.69•••	.04
	(.24)	(.15)	(.17)
Female candidate	−.25	−.15	.12
	(.24)	(.15)	(.17)
Rejected condition × Female candidate	.65	.30	−.09
	(.34)	(.22)	(.24)
Belonging uncertainty		−.35•••	−.14•
		(.06)	(.07)
Perceived procedural justice			.55•••
			(.09)
R	.26•	.61•••	.61•••
R^2	.07	.37	.37
B. Separate groups analysis			
Female (N = 63)			
Rejected condition	.71••	−.41•	.003••
	(.26)	(.17)	(.18)
Belonging uncertainty		−.32•••	−.25
		(.08)	(.08)
Perceived procedural justice			.51•••
			(.13)
Male (N = 65)			
Rejected condition	.06	−.69•••	.08
	(.22)	(.14)	(.20)
Belonging uncertainty		−.38•••	.001
		(.09)	(.11)
Perceived procedural justice			.61•••
			(.15)
Male (N = 65) excluding belonging uncertainty			
Rejected condition		−.71•••	.08
		(.17)	(.19)
Perceived procedural justice			.61•••
			(.13)

• $p < .05$; •• $p < .01$; ••• $p < .001$.
* All tests are two-tailed; standard errors are reported in parentheses.

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 2, panel A. A bootstrap sample of 5,000 replications (Preacher and Hayes, 2008) indicated that zero fell outside the 95-percent confidence interval (CI, which ranged from − .33 to − .008), providing support for our hypothesized model in the joint analysis of men and women.

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. To fully test that this is the case, however, we also conducted the most conservative test possible of hypothesis 3, namely a ''separate groups analysis'' (see figure 2, panel B). We used the same procedure described above (again using model 6; Hayes, 2008). Table 7, panel B presents the results. For women, rejection was positively related to belonging uncertainty in the executive community ($p = .009$, 95-percent BCa CI -1.24 to -0.19).[14] 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. Perceived procedural justice was, in turn, positively related to women's willingness to apply again for a subsequent role with the employer. 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 ($a_f \times b_f \times c_f$ in figure 2, panel B). In this analysis, zero fell outside the 95-percent CI, which ranged from $-.36$ to $-.02$. 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. 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.

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 ($p = .78$; here the 95-percent BCa CI ranged from $-.51$ to .37). Also, using 5,000 bootstrap replications, we found that zero fell inside the 95-percent CI (which ranged from $-.13$ to .08) for the indirect effect—via belonging uncertainty and perceived procedural justice—of rejection on willingness to apply again for men ($a_m \times b_m \times c_m$ in figure 2, panel B). This result indicates that, for men, belonging uncertainty does not mediate the link between rejection and willingness to apply again in the future. When belonging uncertainty is excluded from the analysis (table 7, panel B), perceived procedural justice fully accounts for men's responses to executive recruitment rejection: for men, zero fell outside the 95-percent CI for the indirect effect among *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, and to the extent that men perceive less procedural justice, they are less likely to apply again in the future (and vice versa).[15]

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[14] 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 because these tests are robust to deviations from normality.

[15] 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, 5,000 bootstrap replications indicated that the indirect effect via procedural justice was significantly different from (1) via *belonging uncertainty* (95-percent CI from .13 to .81) and (2) via *belonging uncertainty* → *perceived procedural justice* (95-percent CI from .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.

   Alternative conceptual model. In separate analyses we tested whether the alternative moderated-mediation model—*rejection × 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 conducting again the analysis described above. The results indicate that for 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-percent CI (which ranged from − .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 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 − .04 to .07) or women (CI from − .08 to .01). We also ruled out two other ''belonging'' concerns as explanations for our results by rerunning 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.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

To better understand women's choices to compete for senior executive roles, this paper used a combination of field, survey, and experimental data to examine gender differences in responses to recruitment rejections. We argued that labor market rejection shapes individuals' experiences of fairness and belonging in ways that are not gender neutral. 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) and 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 underrepresentation 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 be hired for senior roles only if they are part of the candidate pool; any mechanism that shapes the gender composition of that pool also shapes female representation among the executives hired (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.[16] 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 underrepresentation 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, 2011). Socialization is undoubtedly important, with cultural messages about which types of jobs are appropriate for women

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[16] 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. 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 3. 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 (see also Fernandez and Campero, 2016, for a related ''what if'' approach to disentangling the role of supply-side mechanisms in gender segregation).

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.

A third theoretical contribution of our research is to the literature on procedural justice. The effect of perceived procedural justice on candidates' reactions has been extensively studied in the selection and recruitment literature (for a review, see Ryan and Ployhart, 2000). But recent work has shifted away from examining the external, objective factors that affect individuals' judgments of procedural justice toward investigating the internal, psychological processes that underlie fairness judgments (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 candidates' reactions in recruitment settings. Our theory proposes belonging uncertainty as a previously unexamined psychological mechanism that can shape gender differences both in reactions to procedural justice and 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 in which 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 than for others.'

Our theoretical contributions have significant organizational and policy implications, underscoring 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 in policy circles to increase the proportion of women in top management jobs (U.S. 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 implies that this is particularly relevant for candidates whose sense of belonging may be threatened by recruitment rejections. For women, this is important because there is evidence that they may receive different types of feedback than men—e.g., comments about their personality or style rather

than skills and abilities (Correll et al., 2016). Hence interventions that formalize giving feedback 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, Hamedani, and Destin, 2014) or affirm the self following rejection (Cohen et al., 2006) may be effective. It is noteworthy, however, that the literature on belonging uncertainty suggests 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 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, our field data pertain 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 allows for the cleanest empirical tests. But 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.[17] Given that job segregation is a crucial contributor to

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[17] We thank an anonymous reviewer for this point.

wage inequality and differences in career advancement by gender (Reskin, 1993; Petersen and Saporta, 2004), our study opens up new avenues for broader research on labor market inequality.

Gender differences in responses to rejection may contribute to the underrepresentation of women at the upper echelons of organizations, as women's decisions to compete for senior roles may be shaped by their previous recruitment experiences, regardless of a woman's actual probability of success in a given selection process. Thus 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 value of actions, or ''the shadow of the future'' (Poppo, Zhou, and Ryu, 2008). In contrast, our work calls attention to the shadow of the past—women's past experiences with gender inequality—as a determinant of their decision to lean out.

Acknowledgments

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