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► **To cite this version:**

Jesse Olsen, Charles Parsons, Luis Martins, Véra Ivanaj. Gender Diversity Programs, Perceived Potential for Advancement, and Organizational Attractiveness: An empirical examination of women in the US and France. *Group and Organization Management*, 2015, 41 (3), pp.271-309. 10.1177/1059601115583579 . hal-03001020

**HAL Id: hal-03001020**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03001020v1>**

Submitted on 13 Mar 2024

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# Gender diversity programs, perceived potential for advancement, and organizational attractiveness: An empirical examination of women in the US and France\*

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**Abstract:** We conducted an experimental study to compare the effects of organization-sponsored gender diversity management programs on women's evaluations of organizational attractiveness in two countries: the US and France. Importantly, we examined perceived potential for advancement as a mediator of the relationship, thus elaborating on an underlying mechanism implied by signaling theory. Results from a sample of 230 women in the US and France provided overall support for the model. We found that country and individual characteristics affect how diversity management signals are translated into perceptions of the organization. We discuss the theoretical and practical contributions of the study, as well as limitations and opportunities for future research.

**Keywords:** diversity management; gender diversity; organizational attractiveness; recruitment; signaling theory; US; France

With the increase in the demographic diversity of the workforce in many countries over the last few decades, the effective management of diversity has emerged as a critical organizational task. For global organizations, diversity management involves “coping with the realities of an increasingly diverse, both ethnic- and gender-wise, workforce in a given nation” (Tung, 1993, p. 462). Although scholars have identified negative aspects of having a diverse workforce (e.g., S. E. Jackson & Joshi, 2004; Kochan et al., 2003; Riordan & Shore, 1997), they have also claimed that effective diversity management may minimize such aspects and lead to a more highly satisfied workforce, less conflict, more creativity, better communication among individuals, greater sensitivity to market niches and higher performance (Andrevski, Richard, Shaw, & Ferrier, 2014; Cox & Blake, 1991; Dezsö & Ross, 2012; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Milliken & Martins, 1996; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007; K. Y. Williams & O'Reilly, 1998).

In this study, we focus on gender diversity management (GDM), which includes programs aimed at the inclusion and advancement of women in the workplace. Such programs are usually created in response to legal requirements, fairness concerns, or business reasons (Cox & Blake, 1991; Ely & Thomas, 2001). In addition, these programs send signals to internal and external audiences that the organization fosters and values gender diversity. This signaling effect of gender diversity programs has intrigued researchers because while GDM signals could make an organization more attractive to women

\* This is the accepted version of the following article: Olsen, J.E., Parsons, C.K., Martins, L.L., & Ivanaj, V. (2016). Gender diversity programs, perceived potential for advancement, and organizational attractiveness: An empirical examination of women in the US and France. *Group and Organization Management*, 41(3), 271-309, which has been published in final form at <http://gom.sagepub.com/content/41/3/271> (Please cite the publisher's version.)

and therefore increase the organization's competitiveness in labor markets (Avery & McKay, 2006; Rynes & Barber, 1990; Smith, Wokutch, Harrington, & Dennis, 2004; Thorsteinson & Highhouse, 2003), empirical findings indicate that the effects of GDM signals on perceived organizational attractiveness are far from straightforward, indicating that while some potential beneficiaries of diversity management programs are attracted by such signals, others may actually be repelled (Martins & Parsons, 2007; Matheson, Echenberg, Taylor, Rivers, & Chow, 1994; Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). Researchers have suggested that in addition to between-group demographic characteristics, within-group attitudes, beliefs, experiences, and orientations may affect how individuals react to diversity-related signals (Chen & Hooijberg, 2000; Martins & Parsons, 2007; Williamson, Slay, Shapiro, & Shivers-Blackwell, 2008).

A further layer of complexity may be added to the signaling phenomenon in global organizations, many of which have sought to transfer diversity management practices from their home countries to other countries in which they operate (Wrench, 2005). While in practice organizations have moved toward transferring GDM practices from say the US to other countries, researchers have not conducted studies examining how GDM signals may affect the perceptions of potential employees across national contexts. Thus, this study is focused on a key unanswered question in the literature: are there differences in how potential employees react to the same GDM signals across countries? Within this line of inquiry, we examine (i) perceived potential for advancement as a key mediator of the effects of GDM signals on perceptions of organizational attractiveness, and (ii) individual characteristics as sources of within-country differences in responses to GDM signals.

We aim to contribute to research and practice in several ways. Our experimental study of the effects of the same GDM programs extends research on the contextual factors influencing the interpretation of GDM signals, which have thus far focused on demographic characteristics and individual differences. Our examination of perceived potential for advancement as a mediator extends our understanding of how and why GDM signals affect perceptions of potential applicants. Together these advances will inform managers about how they can frame GDM signals to best influence potential applicants' interpretations. The study will also sensitize them to the need to take country context into account in deploying such programs across multiple countries.

In this study, we limited our focus to women's reactions to GDM programs, which is consistent with prior studies of how individuals react to diversity management programs, which have often focused solely on the targeted beneficiaries of the programs (e.g., Heilman & Alcott, 2001; Richard & Kirby, 1998; Tougas & Beaton, 1992). Furthermore, prior research suggests that more complex relationships involving within-group characteristics may affect beneficiaries' reactions (Beaton & Tougas, 2001; Martins & Parsons, 2007; Matheson et al., 1994; Tougas & Beaton, 1993; Williamson et al., 2008). Thus, while we acknowledge that the reactions of non-beneficiaries are important areas of research focus, in this study we chose to focus on women's perceptions of organizational attractiveness in response to GDM

signals.

## **Background and Theory**

### **GDM Programs as Signals**

We draw on signaling theory (Spence, 1973). This perspective details how organizations or individuals communicate information to others with the hope of receiving investments of some kind. More recently, it has been used in the employee recruitment literature to explain the effects of an organization's communicated characteristics on its attractiveness to potential applicants (e.g., Allen, Mahto, & Otondo, 2007; Rynes, 1991; Rynes, Bretz, & Gerhart, 1991; Turban & Greening, 1996; Walker et al., In press). Specifically, scholars have drawn on this theory to discuss the effects of an organization's diversity management efforts on organizational attractiveness to potential employees (Martins & Parsons, 2007; Smith et al., 2004; Walker, Feild, Bernerth, & Becton, 2012; Walker, Feild, Giles, Bernerth, & Jones-Farmer, 2007).

Prior research has used signaling theory to argue that signals about more proactive organizational GDM programs should positively impact organizational attractiveness among women, because some women directly benefit from the programs (Konrad & Hartmann, 2001; Kravitz & Platania, 1993; Thomas & Wise, 1999; Tougas & Beaton, 1992). However, this argument has not been universally supported and other factors, such as individual differences, have been found to be important contingencies in responses to GDM signals (Martins & Parsons, 2007).

Also, while much of the literature cited above has focused on the dependent variable of organizational attractiveness, we argue that focusing on additional dependent variables may provide further insight into how signals are interpreted. One of the major phenomena of interest to research on GDM is the prevalence of the glass ceiling, or the invisible barrier that prevents many women and minorities from rising above certain corporate ranks (Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995; J. C. Jackson, 2001; Lyness & Thompson, 1997). Jackson (2001) found that many women perceive this to be the key barrier to the advancement of their careers from middle to upper management, but the effect has also been observed at lower levels of the organization (e.g., Scholarios & Taylor, 2011). Since GDM programs are designed to facilitate women's equal opportunity for advancement within an organization, we argue that women will perceive organizations with extensive GDM programs as offering better opportunities to advance up the organizational hierarchy. We term this perception "perceived potential for advancement" and define it based on Jackson's (2001) conceptualization as the degree to which individuals feel they will be able to advance upward in the hierarchy within an organization.

Finally, we go a step further and argue that whether and how individual differences influence women's reactions to GDM signals may be shaped by their national context. Thus, overall, we expect a general positive effect of GDM signals on women's perception of organizational attractiveness and perceived potential for advancement, but expect that the relationship will vary by country, and by

individual differences within the countries.

### **GDM Signals and the National Context**

Our basic argument is that how women process signals regarding GDM may be expected to vary by national context, which can include political, economic, socio-cultural, and other characteristics of the macro-environment. However, much of this variation may be largely due to the different legal and regulatory environments related to workforce gender diversity that are present in their respective countries. As much of the extant work on this topic has focused on the US, we chose to include a sample from the US as one point of comparison. In an effort to contribute a meaningful cross-national comparison, it was important to choose a country that is distinct from the US on dimensions theoretically relevant to diversity management while being fairly similar on others. France shares categorization with the US as a Western developed country and would not be seen as particularly culturally distant in terms of recent measurements of societal cultural practices and values (specifically, the US and France are within no more than one “band” of each other on both practices and values measurements in all nine of the GLOBE dimensions; House, Hanges, Armour, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). However, France provides ample contrast to the US on legal and regulatory dimensions, as we discuss below.

The legal and regulatory environment of France tends to focus on bearing and raising children, expressed through laws and regulations regarding parental leave and child care (Battagliola, 2004; INSEE, 2008). However, the US tends to emphasize equal opportunities at work considerably more than childbirth/rearing, family, or non-work issues (Ledvinka & Scarpello, 1991; Wolkinson, 2008). Gooderham, Nordhaug, and Ringdal’s (1999) research supports the general idea that HR practices are shaped by the national institutional environment. Though this study did not directly address diversity management programs, their findings on collaborative and calculative HR practices make the extension to other practices (such as diversity programs) a logical next step. In this line of thinking, the French institutional system is characterized as hierarchical with power concentrated at the top, unions that have a great deal of influence on the operations of personnel departments, and a lack of trust between lower level workers and upper management. This suggests that there might be a greater skepticism among French women when hearing of GDM programs. Furthermore, the qualitative research of Ollier-Malaterre (2009) demonstrates how the French tend to view employers with skepticism when it comes to HR programs meant to benefit employees. Many of the interviews revealed that employees view social welfare and support for other causes associated with employee and their family’s well-being as being the legitimate role of government, not employers.

A French firm that puts forth a value-laden message regarding its management of diversity might therefore be perceived as disingenuous. D’Iribarne (1989, 2002) notes that French policy is driven largely by what he terms “the logic of honor” (or self-respect), while the United States would, in his model, follow an “ethics logic.” This means that while the firm in the US may be seen as an entity that can

legitimately embrace and put forth its own set of ethical values, the firm in France is not normally seen as an entity that can propound values. An outward display of corporate ethical values by French firms might be seen as insincere, provoking skeptical reactions among individual observers. In fact, such signals may even evoke suspicion that the firm is attempting to make up for some past hidden problems in dealing with the issues of equality of treatment among the sexes in the workplace. Thus, skepticism and doubt as to the genuineness of such a message and approach can quickly set in, leading employees to greet such repeated corporate messages with distrust.

Finally, while the formal laws and equal employment guidelines of France may appear similar to those of the US, the enforcement system has not created the same scale of monitoring and execution in France. Broad-based employer-wide hiring and employment patterns that are characterized by both proactive lawsuits and affirmative action (AA) plans are the norm in the US. However, they are lacking in France. In fact, many French employers fail to comply with equal employment laws and regulations, due largely to a lack of familiarity with them (Hegewisch & Mayne, 1994; Jenson & Sineau, 1995; McGauran, 2001). McGauran (2001) attributes this lack of awareness and responsiveness among managers to a high labor force participation rate among French women and, consistent with Gooderham and colleagues' (1999) research, the belief that it is the French government, not employers, who are responsible for ensuring equality in employment. Consequently, individuals are not as likely to perceive advantages to organization-sponsored diversity programs. Such programs are rather seen as suspect for the additional reason that they lack specificity and are rarely monitored or enforced (McGauran, 2001).

We propose that these legal/regulatory differences will shape women's interpretations of GDM signals. Women in the US are likely to associate proactive gender diversity programs with an organization's legal compliance, avoidance of lawsuits/penalties, and general provision of fair employment and promotion practices to women. However, in France, with a legal environment characterized by less proactive monitoring of workforce demographics, less proactive execution of equal employment-related regulations (Klarsfeld, 2009), and greater emphasis on childbirth/rearing issues, French women are less likely to associate organizational GDM programs with any substantial organizational benefits for women. Thus, we expect that:

*Hypothesis 1: The effect of GDM programs on women's evaluations of (a) organizational attractiveness and (b) perceived potential for advancement will be moderated by the national context such that the relationship for US women will be stronger (more positive) than for French women.*

### **Within-Country Variation in Women's Reactions to GDM Signals**

Despite the logical nature of the argument that women should respond positively to GDM signals because they are the intended beneficiaries of such programs, empirical studies, conducted using US samples, have failed to provide consistent support for this effect (Martins & Parsons, 2007; Matheson et

al., 1994; Truxillo & Bauer, 2000). Prior research suggests that women's interpretations of these signals can be complex. On the one hand, they may perceive organizational GDM efforts to be beneficial, because they may create a greater potential for advancement through the provision and enforcement of equal employment opportunities (e.g., greater potential for advancement from the provision and enforcement of equal employment opportunities; Beaton & Tougas, 2001; Tougas & Beaton, 1993). On the other hand, they may perceive GDM programs as detrimental, because GDM programs may create the potential for women to be stigmatized as beneficiaries of preferential treatment through GDM programs (e.g., the potential to be stigmatized as a beneficiary of the programs; Matheson et al., 1994). Thus, many of the potential beneficiaries of GDM programs may exhibit negative reactions to them (Heilman & Alcott, 2001; Heilman, Rivero, & Brett, 1991; Heilman, Simon, & Repper, 1987; Major, Feinstein, & Crocker, 1994; Matheson et al., 1994; Turner, Pratkanis, & Hardaway, 1991). These negative reactions have been explained largely based on the potential perception of a stigma of being unfairly advantaged as beneficiaries of GDM programs.

In fact, prior research suggests that so-called beneficiaries of diversity management programs often feel stigmatized by association with the programs (e.g., Heilman & Alcott, 2001; Heilman et al., 1991, 1987; Major et al., 1994; Turner et al., 1991). For example, Heilman et al. (1987) found that women reported significantly lower self-evaluations and task-related competence when they believed that they had been preferentially selected for a leadership role on the basis of their gender. Heilman et al. (1991) and Turner et al. (1991) replicated several effects from the earlier study and further found women in such situations to choose less challenging tasks. Additionally, Major et al. (1994) showed that women who were informed that they were preferentially selected for a leadership role rated the importance of the role significantly lower than women who were informed that they were selected based on merit alone. Extending this line of research, Heilman and Alcott (2001) found that women who simply knew others to believe them to be beneficiaries of a preferential selection program exhibited more negative affect and assumed others to have low expectations of them. When women were not confident in their ability to perform the task, they exhibited lower self-evaluations. When women had high confidence in their ability, they tended to choose more difficult tasks and express a desire to make a positive impression on others (Heilman & Alcott, 2001).

Martins and Parsons (2007) argued that such a fear of stigma may also operate in the recruitment context, and specifically that it may affect women's reactions to signals of proactive diversity management programs. They found that women's individual attitudes toward AA programs (specific types of GDM programs that are often mandated by the government and deliberately target minorities for employment) made a difference to how they reacted to GDM programs in general. Specifically, women who had more positive attitudes toward AA programs were attracted to organizations with proactive GDM programs, while women with more negative AA attitudes perceived organizations with extensive

GDM programs to be unattractive (Martins & Parsons, 2007; Matheson et al., 1994; Swim et al., 1995). These findings, and those of others, support the idea that women may interpret GDM signals quite differently depending on their individual beliefs and attitudes (Matheson et al., 1994; Swim et al., 1995).

Here, we propose that the extent to which women's positive or negative attitudes toward AA programs for women affect their reactions to organizations' GDM programs will vary within countries. Specifically, we expect that a context with a regulatory focus on equal employment opportunity is more conducive to AA attitudes affecting women's reactions in the manner described above. The influence of women's AA attitudes on their reactions to GDM programs will be facilitated by the equal-employment-focused regulatory environment of the US (Ledvinka & Scarpello, 1991; Wolkinson, 2008). Discussions of AA have been taking place for decades in the US (Ledvinka & Scarpello, 1991), while the concept is considerably newer to the French. AA (which is sometimes termed "positive discrimination" in France) has recently attracted considerable attention among both the public and politicians (e.g., "After the Riots," 2005; Ghiles, 2005; Rodriguez, 2006). However, unlike Americans, who generally see organizations as holding significant responsibility for providing equal employment, the French tend to view equal employment as a responsibility of the government and not of the employer (Gooderham et al., 1999; McGauran, 2001). We expect that this will lead French women to evaluate organization-sponsored diversity management programs independently of their attitudes toward legalistic AA policies. Furthermore, the general suspicion and lack of familiarity surrounding diversity programs in France (Hegewisch & Mayne, 1994; Jenson & Sineau, 1995; McGauran, 2001) are also likely to dampen positive evaluations of diversity management signals among those French women who support AA programs for women.

Another reason we might expect the responses of French women to differ from those of U.S. women is rooted in deeply held beliefs among the French about equality as historically demonstrated in the French Revolution. Sabbagh (2008) reinforces this idea in examining the issue of whether racial and ethnic identity should be included in the French census. If beliefs about equality lead to beliefs that all should be treated the same, then diversity programs targeting females may be less desirable. Furthermore, as Tatli & Özbilgin (2012) point out, the deeper understanding of important diversity groupings is not necessarily accomplished by looking at race and gender. These authors argue that understanding power, privilege, and disadvantage among different groups must be studied within each organization, thus raising uncertainty about the reception of broad-based programs targeting *a priori* groups. The important point from their argument is that we should not assume consistent effects from organization to organization, let alone country to country.

Thus, these arguments taken together, we expect that AA attitudes will not play a significant role in shaping women's perceptions of organizations' GDM programs in France, but that these attitudes will serve as a moderator of the relationship between GDM programs and organizational perceptions in the



US. Specifically, we predict that:

*Hypothesis 2: The effect of GDM programs on women's evaluations of (a) organizational attractiveness and (b) perceived potential for advancement within each country will be moderated by individual attitudes toward AA, but this effect will vary across countries, resulting in a three-way interaction among GDM programs, national context, and AA attitudes. Specifically, more positive AA attitudes will be associated with a stronger positive effect of GDM programs on organizational perceptions in the US, while AA attitudes will not impact the relationship between GDM and organizational perceptions in France.*

In developing our model thus far, we have focused on the three-way interaction effect of GDM signals, national context, and individual AA attitudes on both organizational attractiveness and perceived potential for advancement. We further propose that perceived potential for advancement also serves as an antecedent to organizational attractiveness and an important element of the mediating processes implied by signaling theory.

Essentially, having extensive GDM programs in place is likely to signal greater opportunities for women to advance within an organization. Furthermore, research has found that opportunities for advancement positively impact potential recruits' perceptions of organizations (Cable & Graham, 2000; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Rynes et al., 1991). Supporting this proposed relationship, Rynes and colleagues (1991) suggested that female recruits evaluate organizations in part on the basis of whether they see other women in managerial positions at the organization. In line with this thinking, we expect higher perceived potential for advancement to lead to more favorable evaluations of organizational attractiveness. Thus, overall, we expect that the effects of GDM programs on organizational attractiveness will operate in part through their effects on perceived potential for advancement. We therefore predict that women will interpret GDM signals partly in terms of their beliefs about how the stated GDM programs will affect their own opportunities for advancement within the organization.

*Hypothesis 3: The interactive effects of diversity management programs, country, and AA attitudes on women's evaluations of organizational attractiveness will be partially mediated by perceived potential for advancement.*

We predict partial (rather than full) mediation, because given the breadth of the construct of organizational attractiveness, other perceptions outside the scope of our study are likely to act as mediators as well (Dineen, Ash, & Noe, 2002; Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997; Tom, 1971). We therefore propose that country and AA attitudes will continue to moderate the direct effect of GDM signals on organizational attractiveness, even after considering moderating effects on perceived potential for advancement.

Our hypotheses thus far propose what Edwards and Lambert (2007, p. 10) refer to as a "first stage and direct effect moderation model," in which interaction effects influence the dependent variable both

directly and indirectly through a mediator. However, we also posit that the national context will influence how individuals use perceived potential for advancement to evaluate an organization's attractiveness, adding a second-stage moderator to the model. Thus, while perceived potential for advancement is expected to positively impact evaluations of organizational attractiveness in both countries, we expect a difference in the strength of this effect between the two contexts.

Specifically, in the US, where equal employment opportunity for women has played a larger role in employment law (Ledvinka & Scarpello, 1991; Wolkinson, 2008), we expect opportunities for advancement to be more salient in women's evaluations of organizational attractiveness. Because a prevailing aim of US employment legislation is to provide equal opportunities for women to advance through the ranks of the organization, women in the US are likely to evaluate GDM programs in terms of how likely they are to achieve that aim. However, childbirth/rearing has received more attention in French employment legislation than has equal opportunity in promotion (Battagliola, 2004; INSEE, 2008), so French women are unlikely to evaluate GDM programs using the same criteria as their US counterparts. Rather, the reduced focus of French employment legislation on fostering equal opportunities for women to advance in organizations may result in French women being less likely to consider potential for advancement in their evaluations of GDM signals. Thus, we propose that:

*Hypothesis 4: The effect of perceived potential for advancement on women's evaluations of organizational attractiveness will vary between the US and France. Specifically, the relationship will be stronger (more positive) for US women than for French women.*

### **Summary**

Our research model is depicted in Figure 1. In sum, we argue that organizations' GDM efforts send signals to potential employees. These signals are perceived and interpreted by potential employees in terms of what they suggest about impacts on oneself, and in particular what they suggest about the potential to advance within the organization. However, interpretation and evaluation of the GDM signal is shaped by the national context and furthermore by individual-level AA attitudes, thus producing variation by country and individual beliefs. Finally, interpretation of the signal in terms of what it suggests about the potential for advancement influences the evaluation of the organization's attractiveness, though this evaluation will also be moderated by the national context.

[Insert Figure 1 about here.]

### **Method**

#### **Sample and Procedure**

We tested the model using data collected as part of a larger study of individuals' reactions to organizational diversity management efforts. The US sample consisted of 70 female MBA students in a coeducational institution in the Eastern US, and the French sample consisted of 52 female undergraduate management students and 108 female MBA students in a coeducational institution in Eastern France, for a

total sample size of 230. This final sample did not include international students; only women of US origin and French origin were included in the US and French samples, respectively. Toward the middle of the semester, 233 potential participants in core classes of organizational behavior were presented with a description of an organization (containing an experimental manipulation, presented and discussed below) and asked to complete a paper survey with a Human Subjects Review Board approved consent form. All but 3 individuals returned the survey, for a 98.7% response rate. Participation in the study was voluntary, and students did not receive payment or course credit. The French participants were given a survey in French which had been translated from English and subsequently back-translated to ensure accuracy (Brislin, 1970).

We conducted analyses for both the full sample and for graduate students only to rule out the possibility that the 52 undergraduate French students were in some way driving the between-country differences. Because we obtained equivalent findings in both sets of analyses, we report findings on the full sample. The mean age for all participants was 30.49 years (27.35 in the US; 31.86 in France) and the average work experience was 8.54 years (4.83 in the US; 10.19 in France). Given the gap in work experience between the samples, we included it as a control variable in all regression analyses. Age was highly correlated with work experience and thus was not included.

The survey assessed participants' personal characteristics, attitudes, attraction to the hypothetical organization presented as the experimental stimulus, and expectations of advancement within that organization. We used the hypothetical organizational descriptions used by Martins and Parsons (2007, p. 867), which provides participants with explicit signals about the organization's GDM efforts. The description read as follows:

The company is an international conglomerate with multiple global businesses operating in various manufacturing and service sectors. It is known as a quality employer that emphasizes professional development, individual career growth and expanding responsibility, as well as employee well-being and work/life balance. The company provides career opportunities in a variety of areas of expertise (e.g., finance and accounting, operations, marketing, information technology and e-business, international business, strategy and business development, etc.). The company recruits for management talent at many major MBA programs both in the US [France] and in other regions of the world where they have major facilities and/or markets."

We replaced "the US" with "France" for the French sample. Thus, rather than constructing simulated recruitment materials, we presented participants with explicit descriptions of organizational characteristics.<sup>1</sup> Following the brief organizational description, each participant was then presented with

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<sup>1</sup> In reality, this information would be signaled via such modes as recruitment materials, job fairs, websites, current employees' descriptions, and orientation sessions. Investigation of the optimal mode for sending diversity management signals is beyond the scope of this study, but is an important area of research.

one of two conditions (randomly assigned) describing the extent of organizational GDM programs—low or high level of GDM programs—making the study a between-subject experimental design. These conditions were also taken from the descriptions utilized by Martins and Parsons (2007). The low level variation of GDM programs for women contained the following statement:

The company's mission statement says that it is dedicated to recruiting and retaining a highly-qualified, diverse workforce and to maintaining a working environment that values diversity and benefits from it while encouraging all employees to become highly competent in their jobs.

The high level read as follows:

This company has extensive diversity programs for women such as mentoring programs, career counseling, company-sponsored support groups, financial support for women to travel to conferences, executive shadowing (attending to a 'day in the life' of an executive), female employee caucus groups, personal leadership coaches for women, special network functions for women to meet upper management, evaluation systems that hold upper level managers accountable for developing female candidates for promotion, and incentives for increasing the number of suppliers that are owned by women.

### Measures

Organizational attractiveness was measured with a 7-item 7-point Likert scale ( $\alpha = .97$  in US;  $.90$  in France), combining two scales used in prior research (Schwoerer & Rosen, 1989; Turban & Keon, 1993). Sample items are "I would be interested in pursuing a job application with this company" and "I would exert a great deal of effort to work for this company."

Perceived potential for advancement was measured using a 4-item 7-point Likert scale ( $\alpha = .93$  in US;  $.82$  in France) constructed based on Jackson's (2001) article. The items were "I have no reason to believe that I will not be able to advance into upper management (i.e. vice-president and above) at this company," "I do not anticipate any obstacles to my advancing into an upper management position at this company if I develop the right qualifications and experience," "If I develop the right qualifications and experience, my chances of advancing into upper management at this company would be high," and "I do not think that I would advance into upper management at this company even if I have the required qualifications and experience" (reverse-scored).

AA attitude was measured using Bell, Harrison, and McLaughlin's (2000) 5-item 7-point semantic differential scale, which asked respondents to indicate their attitude by selecting one of 7 points between 5 sets of anchors in response to the statement: "In general, affirmative action programs for women are." The anchors included "harmful" vs. "helpful," "negative" vs. "positive," "worthless" vs. "worthwhile," "ready to be phased out" vs. "necessary to keep," and "in need of changing" vs. "should stay the same." However, our tests of measurement invariance, described later, revealed that the last item was likely interpreted differently across the two national contexts. We therefore dropped it from the

regression analyses on which we report in this paper, though we achieved equivalent results when we included the item. This reduced 4-item measure exhibited good reliability ( $\alpha = .95$  in US;  $.91$  in France). To ensure that these items would not influence participants' interpretations of the organizational descriptions, this measure was taken after respondents were presented with the organizational descriptions and asked to report on the mediating and dependent variables.

In order to test our basic measurement model, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the non-manipulated self-report variables of organizational attractiveness, perceived potential for advancement, and AA attitudes. A three-factor model yielded good fit ( $\chi^2[101] = 209.97$ , CFI =  $.97$ , RMSEA =  $.02$ ), and fit the data significantly better than a two-factor model combining organizational attractiveness and perceived potential for advancement into one factor ( $\Delta\chi^2[2] = 340.23$ ,  $p < .01$ ) or a one-factor model comprising all items ( $\Delta\chi^2[3] = 1,156.98$ ,  $p < .01$ ). We therefore proceeded with analyses using the three separate constructs using average scores of their respective items.

The independent variable (GDM programs) was an experimental manipulation, and one of the moderators (country) was objectively determined. However, the mediator (perceived potential for advancement), one of the moderators (AA attitudes), and our dependent variable (organizational attractiveness) were all self-report measures. In order to assess the potential influence of common method variance on these three variables, we conducted a confirmatory analysis using the single common method factor approach outlined by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003). This approach involves the assessment of a measurement model in which items are allowed to load onto both a single common method factor and their respective latent constructs. All item loadings remained significant with respect to their corresponding constructs. The model achieved good fit ( $\chi^2[85] = 144.39$ , CFI =  $.98$ , RMSEA =  $.05$ ), which was significantly improved over the measurement model without a method factor ( $\Delta\chi^2[16] = 65.58$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This may indicate that common method variance significantly influences our self-report measures. However, as Podsakoff et al. (2003) point out, such results could occur for other reasons, such as the existence of other unmeasured correlates. Given that only one of 16 total items (an AA attitude item) loaded significantly onto the method factor and that our independent variable is an experimental manipulation, we proceeded with the analyses. However, we discuss this potential limitation later.

Next, we conducted a series of analyses in order to assess measurement invariance across the national contexts. This test is necessary in order to understand whether findings might be attributable to different interpretations of questionnaire items across cultures, rather than to real differences in the underlying constructs and relationships. We conducted a multiple group analysis, based on our three-factor measurement model, in which we compared paths estimated for the US sample to those for the French sample. In the unconstrained model, no estimates were constrained to be equal across the samples, while in the measurement invariance model, we constrained factor loadings to be equal across samples. The unconstrained model achieved good fit ( $\chi^2[202] = 284.94$ , CFI =  $.98$ , RMSEA =  $.04$ ), and the

measurement invariance model was acceptable ( $\chi^2[215] = 379.67$ , CFI = .95, RMSEA = .06). However, the unconstrained model fit the data significantly better than did the invariance model ( $\Delta\chi^2[13] = 94.72$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that our measurement model was not invariant across samples.

Further construct-by-construct analyses suggested that while perceived potential for advancement was likely measured with invariance across the samples, AA attitude and perceptions of organizational attractiveness were not. In the AA scale, elimination of the fifth item, “in need of changing” vs. “should stay the same,” seemed to resolve the problem, but item deletions did not seem to resolve the invariance issue with the organizational attractiveness scale. Repeating the measurement invariance test without the fifth AA attitude item and without the organizational attractiveness scale further suggested that those items were at the root of the lack of invariance. Both the unconstrained and the measurement invariance models achieved good fit (respectively,  $\chi^2[38] = 66.45$ , CFI = .98, RMSEA = .06; and  $\chi^2[44] = 72.05$ , CFI = .98, RMSEA = .05), with a non-significant difference test ( $\Delta\chi^2[6] = 5.61$ ,  $p > .10$ ).

For our hypothesis testing, therefore, we excluded the fifth AA attitude item. We should note, however, that we also ran all tests including that item, obtaining equivalent results. Further, because of its central role as the dependent variable in our theorizing, we retained the organizational attractiveness scale, but we must exercise caution when drawing inferences from tests involving this dependent variable—a limitation we discuss further in the discussion section. On the other hand, we may make fairly confident inferences from tests of effects on perceived potential for advancement, as our findings on this variable are not likely due to different interpretations of measurement items.

### Results

We tested for the efficacy of the manipulation of extent of GDM programs using an item asking participants to indicate their level of agreement with a statement that the company offered extensive GDM programs for women. The mean response on a seven-point Likert scale was 5.88 for the high extent of diversity programs condition and 2.23 for the low condition ( $t = 12.95$ ,  $p < .01$ ), suggesting that the manipulations were effective. Further, this significant difference existed in both the US ( $t = 12.75$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and French ( $t = 8.64$ ,  $p < .01$ ) samples when tested separately. Means, standard deviations, and correlations are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 contains information for the combined sample, while Table 2 shows correlations for the US and French samples separately (US correlations are above the diagonal). Interaction terms used in the hierarchical regression analyses were computed using centered variables. Analysis of variance inflation factors (VIF) indicated that multicollinearity was not a significant concern in this study.

[Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here.]

We previously provided a theoretical explanation of the proposed model with corresponding hypotheses in a sequential manner, but it is important to note that in reality these effects occur simultaneously and are more accurately and meaningfully tested jointly. Thus, we likewise tested the joint

simultaneous effects of our entire model using regression analyses that incorporate Edwards and Lambert's (2007) suggestions for testing models involving both mediation and moderation.

This approach has a number of advantages over earlier methods, including simultaneous analysis of all effects in the model and an ability to produce significance tests for both indirect and direct effects (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). Our model most closely resembles Edwards and Lambert's (2007) total effect moderation model, because it includes moderated effects before (first stage) and after (second stage) the mediator, as well as on the direct effect. However, this model is unique in its inclusion of a three-way interaction at the first-stage and direct effects. Thus, we needed to derive the appropriate equations not only for conducting the initial regression tests, but also for later calculating the strength of all effects specific to our model. The derivation of these equations is presented and explained in the Appendix.

After determining the appropriate regression equations for both the mediator (perceived potential for advancement) and dependent variable (organizational attractiveness), we conducted two OLS regression analyses to estimate the regression coefficients for our sample. The results are presented in Table 3. Next, following Edwards and Lambert's (2007) procedure, we used constrained nonlinear regression (CNLR) to produce 1,000 bootstrapped samples and estimate OLS regression coefficients for each. For the original sample and each bootstrapped sample, we computed unstandardized estimates of the first-stage, second-stage, indirect, and direct paths by plugging the coefficient estimates into the formulas derived and presented in the Appendix. This procedure was performed at two levels for each moderator. Thus, to compute the direct effect, for instance, we computed paths for low and high AA attitude women (-1 and +1 standard deviation, respectively) in both the US (country = 0) and France (country = 1). Estimates of all effects are presented in the top half of Table 4 and in the models depicted in Figure 2. Significance testing was conducted by examining the bias-corrected (Stine, 1989) 95% and 99% confidence intervals observed in the 1,000 bootstrapped samples, per the procedure outlined by Edwards and Lambert (2007). This method also enabled us to conduct significance testing for effect differences between the countries and between AA attitude levels, presented in the bottom half of Table 4. Using the formulas derived and presented in the Appendix, we graphed all effects, as shown in Figure 3.

[Insert Tables 3 and 4 and Figures 2 and 3 about here.]

The regression coefficients for hypothesized two-way interaction between GDM and country on organizational attractiveness and perceived potential for advancement were not significant ( $B = .17$  and  $.02$ , respectively, both  $p > .05$ ), failing to provide support for Hypothesis 1.<sup>2</sup> However, these variables did seem to be important contributors via the three-way interactions in the full model. The three-way interaction terms on both perceived potential for advancement ( $B = -1.11$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and organizational attractiveness ( $B = -1.58$ ,  $p < .01$ ) indicated significant first-stage and direct effects. The path estimates

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<sup>2</sup> We also conducted hierarchical regression analyses, entering main effects in the first step and the hypothesized two-way interaction term in the second, but these analyses similarly yielded nonsignificant terms.

presented in Table 4 and Figure 2, as well as the graphs illustrated in Figure 3, provide further insight into direction and strength of all effects. Hypothesis 2 predicted a stronger effect of the interaction of extent of diversity programs for women and AA attitudes on organizational attractiveness and perceived potential for advancement in the US, but not in France. As presented in the bottom half of Table 4, among US women, the difference between unstandardized total effects of high versus low AA attitudes was a significant 5.48 ( $p < .01$ ), while the difference was a non-significant .31 among the French women ( $p > .05$ ), which is consistent with Hypothesis 2a. Similarly, the direct effect also indicates a significant difference among US women (3.53,  $p < .01$ ) but not French (.35,  $p > .05$ ). Hypothesis 2b, which predicted this effect on perceived potential for advancement (the first-stage effect), also received support, because US women exhibited a significant difference on this variable (4.65,  $p < .01$ ), while French women did not (-.09,  $p > .05$ ).

Hypothesis 3 predicted that perceived potential for advancement would act as a partial mediator toward the dependent variable of organizational attractiveness. As noted above, the regression coefficients indicate support for the hypothesis, but we examined the differences between effects within each country to better understand the direct and indirect effects. As presented in Table 4 (bottom half) and Figure 2, the first-stage effect was supported in that the difference between the unstandardized first-stage effects of high versus low AA attitudes in the US was a significant 4.65 ( $p < .01$ ), while it was a non-significant -.09 ( $p > .05$ ) in France. This was also the case for the direct effect, where the within-US difference was 3.53 ( $p < .01$ ) and the within-France difference was .35 ( $p > .05$ ). As the final piece of this test, the second-stage paths from perceived potential for advancement to organizational attractiveness were significant (.42 in the US and .46 in France,  $p < .01$  for both). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that the positive effect of perceived potential for advancement would be stronger in the US than in France. Since we did not specify a three-way interaction at the second stage, both levels of AA attitudes were constrained to have equal effect sizes within each country. As can be seen in Table 4 (bottom half) and Figure 2, there was no significant difference between countries in their second-stage effects (-.04,  $p > .05$ ), so Hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Finally, as an additional test of the proposed model, we compared the model to a fully saturated one in which all two- and three-way interactions occurred on the first-stage, second-stage, and direct effects. We conducted the procedure outlined by Tepper, Duffy, Henle, and Lambert (2006, pp. 112–115), computing the generalized  $R^2$  statistics ( $= 1 - [1 - R^2_M][1 - R^2_Y]$ ) for both models and comparing them through use of a  $W$  statistic (Pedhazur, 1982). The hypothesized and fully saturated models produced generalized  $R^2$  scores of .60 and .61, respectively and a significant  $W$  statistic ( $W = 8.37, 2 df$ ). This suggests that the less parsimonious model including the three-way interactive effect (perceived potential for advancement, AA attitudes, and country) at the second stage may be a viable alternative to the hypothesized model.



### Discussion

In this experimental study, we examined the relationship between organizational gender diversity management programs and women's evaluations of organizational attractiveness in two national contexts. We did not find the hypothesized two-way interaction effect between GDM signals and national context on women's perceptions of organizational attractiveness. However, we did find the expected three-way interaction effect between GDM signals, national context, and attitudes toward AA programs for women. Specifically, we found that US women's AA attitudes affected their evaluations of GDM signals such that women with more positive attitudes were more attracted to organizations signaling proactive GDM programs than women with negative AA attitudes. This relationship was reversed for less proactive GDM signals in the US. However, AA attitudes and GDM signals did not have a significant interaction effect in France. The difference in findings across the two countries was consistent with our hypotheses. Also as hypothesized, these effects on organizational attractiveness were partially mediated by perceived potential for advancement. However, the strength of the mediated effect did not vary significantly across contexts as we had expected.

Furthermore, effects on organizational attractiveness must be interpreted with caution, in light of the fact that this construct did not meet the requirements of measurement invariance. In other words, between-country differences may be attributable to different interpretations of the organizational attractiveness scale across these two contexts. On the other hand, because perceived potential for advancement was found to be measured invariantly across countries, the significant findings on that variable likely represent real differences in the interactive effects of GDM programs, AA attitudes, and national context.

We suggest that one reason for the difference in effects between countries may be that US women who are supportive of AA associate GDM programs with self-relevant or gender group benefits (e.g., in terms of the potential for advancement). Prior research suggests that this may lead them to evaluate organizations more favorably when they present signals indicating a greater extent of GDM efforts (e.g., M. L. Williams & Bauer, 1994). However, women who are less supportive of AA may associate GDM programs with a stigma effect (e.g., Martins & Parsons, 2007) and may consequently perceive organizations with more extensive GDM programs to be less attractive. On the other hand, French women may not associate GDM programs with self-relevant outcomes such as perceived potential for advancement. Moreover, their attitudes toward AA programs did not play a significant role in this effect. We have argued that this may be due to a less proactive enforcement system for equal employment opportunities in France (Hegewisch & Mayne, 1994; Jenson & Sineau, 1995; Klarsfeld, 2009; McGauran, 2001). This lack of a significant effect on perceived potential for advancement in France seemed to be mirrored on organizational attractiveness perceptions, but future work is needed to confirm this, using a measure of organizational attractiveness that is interpreted in the same way across national contexts.

In order to better understand our findings, we conducted *post hoc* interviews with several professional women in both countries in order to understand, in their own words, what GDM means to them. As we wanted to obtain responses that were not influenced by participation in our main study, we targeted women who did not participate in the study described previously. We informally approached a convenience sample of 10-15 women, to which 5 replied with permission to reproduce their answers anonymously. Women in the US generally indicated their interpretation of GDM signals in terms of the achievement and maintenance of appropriate gender ratios. For example, one interviewee explained, “The phrase ‘gender diversity management’ implies to me managing the ratio of male to females in a given area. My impression is that it would include methods and goals of having a certain ratio of gender.” Another woman similarly commented, “When I think of gender diversity management, I think of conscious efforts to ensure that an organization is comprised an appropriate ratio of men and women (perhaps based on a national average or something like that).” When GDM signals are interpreted in such terms (emphasizing proportions and representation), attitudes toward AA programs are likely to have more influence in shaping women’s evaluations of organizations. As we hypothesized and as our findings suggest, AA attitudes are likely to play a significant role in whether or not US women would feel stigmatized under organizational GDM programs. Thus, the legal and regulatory environment of the US, with its focus on legal enforcement of equal opportunity, seems to influence women’s interpretations of GDM signals.

In contrast, French interviewees were much less likely to discuss gender ratios or numbers. Instead, French women stated that gender diversity management was a means by which the organization could manage, respect, and/or understand the differences between men and women. The gender “differences” mentioned by the interviewees generally referred to different perspectives and preferences of the two sexes that require different management styles and practices. For example, one interviewee stated,

[GDM] is about how to efficiently manage a heterogeneous team composed of men and women.

You need to learn to adapt your management style for different profiles of male, female, or mixed team types. It is also about understanding specific needs and what motivates employees, both men and women.

Another French woman explained, “Gender diversity management helps people to understand that diversity is a source of wealth for the enterprise. It involves a process of opening minds and detecting talent. It must be part of the daily management of a company.” The French interviewees generally emphasized that inherent differences do exist between men and women, and that these differences can have business benefits that justify GDM programs. However, organizations such as the Laboratoire de l’égalité (Laboratory for Equality; 2014) are striving to combat inaccurate and often harmful gender stereotypes that still exist. Consistent with our hypotheses, AA attitudes were less relevant to French

women's interpretations of GDM signals. This effect may be attributable to French women's tendency to interpret GDM signals more in terms of business benefits and less in terms of the satisfaction of legal requirements.

Contrary to our prediction, our study did not support the hypothesis that national context differentially affects the degree to which perceived potential for advancement relates to organizational attractiveness. The relationship was positive and significant in both the US and France, but did not seem to differ significantly in strength across the two countries. We had hypothesized that women in the US would exhibit a stronger association between advancement and organizational attractiveness than would women in France. However, it is possible that differences between the two contexts were not large enough to elicit a significant difference in this relationship. Alternatively, this effect may be more complex than we had initially hypothesized, as was suggested in our comparison with a fully saturated model. The fully saturated model suggests that individual attitudes and beliefs may play a moderating role at the second stage of the model as well. However, given the post hoc nature of this finding, combined with the measurement invariance issues associated with the organizational attractiveness scale, such interpretations are purely speculative and would need to be examined more closely in future research.

#### Theoretical Contributions

In this study, we sought to build on and extend the extant theory on the signaling effects of organizational GDM programs in two specific ways. To this end, we have demonstrated the importance of considering national context in the study of diversity management. This adds to the literature exploring moderators of the relationship between diversity management programs and applicants' organizational perceptions (e.g., Chen & Hooijberg, 2000; Martins & Parsons, 2007; Williamson et al., 2008). Our findings suggest that in addition to individual differences, researchers must take contextual differences into consideration when examining individuals' reactions to organizational diversity management programs. We have explored national context from a largely legal/regulatory perspective, but this study contributes to a potentially fruitful exploration of various factors in the national context that may affect implementation of and reactions to organizational diversity management efforts. These legal and regulatory factors are ultimately deeply rooted in a nation's history, but there are numerous other factors that may also be explored. Examples of such factors are provided in Table 5, which shows a comparison of the US and France on factors such as proportion of women in management or board positions, representation in the government, and potentially relevant cultural dimensions. Furthermore, in addition to acknowledging the heterogeneity of national contexts, it is important to note that many aspects of national context are dynamic. Changes in the political environment, the economy, social trends, and other such factors impact individual work preferences and organizational practices (Ollier-Malaterre, Valcour, Dulk, & Kossek, 2013). Future research could compare several countries, operationalizing various aspects of the national context and possibly even incorporating more dynamic aspects over time.

[Insert Table 5 about here.]

Second, we have provided evidence of a significant mediating mechanism—perceived potential for advancement—in the relationship between GDM signals and women’s assessments of organizational attractiveness. In both of these contributions we build on and extend existing research that has utilized a signaling logic to examine individual reactions to diversity management (e.g., Allen et al., 2007; Erhart & Ziegert, 2005; Martins & Parsons, 2007; Rynes, 1991; Rynes et al., 1991; Smith et al., 2004; Turban & Greening, 1996; Walker et al., 2012, 2007).

Our experimental study suggests that national context plays an important role in how the signals are interpreted. The mediation analysis points out an important mechanism through which these signals are interpreted in affecting evaluations of organizational attractiveness. Our findings provide empirical support for claims that signaling theory provides an explanation of individuals’ perceptions of organizations (e.g., Allen et al., 2007; Martins & Parsons, 2007; Rynes et al., 1991; Smith et al., 2004; Turban & Greening, 1996; Walker et al., 2012, 2007).

#### Managerial Contributions

For managers, our results suggest that organizations can benefit from the consideration of contextual and individual characteristics that may be associated with potential applicants’ interpretations of diversity management signals. Our study indicates the importance of understanding the national context before exporting diversity management programs that have been developed in the US. Wrench (2005) noted a recent trend in which US-style diversity programs are being adopted by organizations in other parts of the world. Our results suggest that organizations expecting these programs to have the same effects on outcomes, such as recruiting success, across their global operations are unlikely to obtain the benefits they seek. Rather, they may need to be customized to the local country context, as suggested recently by Gerhart (2009) for human resource management practices in general.

GDM programs such as the ones used in our manipulation may be perceived positively by female job applicants in the US who hold positive AA attitudes. However, these same programs will not be perceived as positively by US women who hold negative AA attitudes. In addressing unfavorable perceptions of these programs, it has been recommended that organizations in the US emphasize the importance of both merit and diversity (Harrison, Kravitz, Mayer, Leslie, & Lev-Arey, 2006; Martins & Parsons, 2007; Tougas & Beaton, 1992). Such action could potentially signal a value of merit, improving evaluations among women who have less favorable AA attitudes (Heilman, Battle, Keller, & Lee, 1998; Konrad & Linnehan, 1995; Major et al., 1994).

However, if these US-style diversity programs are adopted in France, managers may be disappointed with little or no improvement for a potentially high cost of implementation. Thus, we recommend that organizations first evaluate the efficacy of these programs. Given the more childbirth/rearing-focused and less equal employment opportunity-focused legal/regulatory environment

of France, an emphasis on the importance of family may be an effective way to appeal to top female talent in France. As Ollier-Malaterre (2009) has noted, family and maternity leave programs are already in place, but organizations may need to place more emphasis on flexible work arrangements in order to be more appealing to female talent. In addition, organizations might explicitly note that they go beyond their responsibilities under the law to create equal employment opportunities for all individuals. This may address any suspicion or cynicism associated with diversity management programs that could exist due to the relatively passive enforcement of French equal employment law.

#### Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

We have a number of suggestions for future research that could address the potential limitations of this study and lead to further contributions to the field. First, our examination was focused on two countries—the US and France. Although the US and France share a number of similarities as Western democracies, this study suggests that their differences can significantly affect how diversity management signals are interpreted. It would be interesting to explore how diversity management programs affect organizational perceptions in countries that are far more different from one another than those observed in this study (e.g., Western versus Eastern countries). Additionally, where our study has focused on certain legal/regulatory differences, larger scale international studies could better test the association of specific legal factors, as well as a variety of cultural dimensions, with reactions to organizational diversity management programs. Such studies could begin to tease apart the effects of specific national practices and values. On a similar note, future research may explore not only samples from other countries, but may also explore these effects among other sub-populations. For example, while our study examined relationships among individuals generally early in their careers, other studies may seek to build upon our results using samples of middle or upper managers. Having achieved some degree of success and career advancement, such groups may have developed different beliefs as to how diversity management programs relate to such outcomes as perceived potential for advancement. Future studies may also draw on actual job-seekers via employment agencies or job search websites.

We assessed perceived potential for advancement as an indicator of mediating processes implied by signaling theory. As mentioned in the development of our model, we suspect that there are other unmeasured mediators of the relationship between GDM signals and organizational attractiveness. For example, prior research has suggested that perceptions of person-organization fit (Cable & Judge, 1996) mediate the relationship between organizational characteristics and evaluations of organizational attractiveness (Dineen et al., 2002; Judge et al., 1997; Tom, 1971). It is likely that signals are interpreted not only in terms of how one expects organizational characteristics to affect his/her advancement, but also in terms of how these characteristics will affect one's expectations of good fit. While our diagnostic test for common method variance indicated the potential presence of a method factor among the self-reported variables, the existence of such other unmeasured mediating mechanisms or other correlates may provide

an alternative explanation (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Scholars should therefore incorporate other potential mediators, such as fit perceptions, as well as perceptions of psychological climate (James, Hater, Gent, & Bruni, 1978; James & Jones, 1974), and organizational justice (Greenberg, 1987). It is important to note that this line of research could benefit greatly from further qualitative research to identify and more deeply understand such underlying mechanisms. The interviews we conducted after our quantitative study aimed only to supplement the study, but we recommend further and more in-depth qualitative studies on this topic.

Future studies should test individuals' reactions to more than two hypothetical organizations and to other types of diversity management programs. This study used descriptions of fairly generic "high GDM" and "low GDM" programs, but such a design does not allow us to draw conclusions about how individuals may react to specific aspects of GDM programs. For example, it could be the case that certain individuals react favorably to increasing supplier diversity but unfavorably to mentoring or coaching targeted at women. It may also be worthwhile to manipulate such variables as the proportion of women in managerial positions. Future research may investigate the effects of different specific programs or multiple levels of proactivity in GDM. Additionally, having participants view multiple hypothetical organizations and describe their perceptions of each would enable the use of a within-subject design and be more realistic since job-seekers usually simultaneously consider more than one organization for employment.

In addition, we examined the effects of GDM signals across national contexts, focusing on the perceptions of the intended targets of the programs (i.e., women). However, prior research suggests that men's assessments of organizational attractiveness may also be affected by GDM programs, since they may perceive such programs to hurt their employment and advancement opportunities (Truxillo & Bauer, 2000). Future research could examine how these effects vary across countries, and study some of the mediating processes among non-beneficiaries' evaluations of diversity management signals.

Finally, our finding that organizational attractiveness may not have been measured invariantly across these two national contexts raises both concerns and opportunities for future research in this area. As mentioned previously, this lack of invariance implies that our findings on this variable must be interpreted with caution, though we may regain some confidence in our findings through corroborative results on perceived potential for advancement, which was found to have been measured with invariance. While the construct of organizational attractiveness is fairly well-established in the management literature (Turban & Keon, 1993), the present study raises concerns about its measurement across different national contexts. This study illustrates the fact that as management research increasingly crosses national borders, scholars will need to revisit measures of even such established constructs as organizational attractiveness to ensure that they measure the intended constructs equivalently in different contexts.

### **Conclusion**

In this experimental study, we investigated potential job applicants' reactions to organizational GDM programs in two countries. We found support for a model which predicts that national context and individual attitudes will jointly moderate the effects of organizations' GDM signals on women's organizational perceptions. We also found that perceptions of advancement opportunities mediated the relationship between GDM signals and perceptions of organizational attractiveness, though we must exercise caution considering the potential problem with measurement invariance for organizational attractiveness. Our study provides an important test of an underlying mechanism suggested by signaling theory. Our findings contribute to our understanding of how individuals differ in their reactions to diversity management programs that are ostensibly meant to benefit them, and we propose that these differences are rooted, at least in part, in the legal/regulatory aspects of the national context. Finally, we suggest useful guidelines for organizations, particularly as they attempt to globalize their diversity management practices.

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**Table 1**  
**Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations**

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Work Experience (Months)	102.46	105.70	–					
2. Extent of Diversity Programs	.51	.50	.00	–				
3. Country	.70	.46	.28**	.08	–			
4. Affirmative Action Attitude	4.26	1.48	-.07	.08	.00	(.92)		
5. Perceived Potential for Advancement	4.33	1.43	-.05	.03	.09	.04	(.86)	
6. Organizational Attractiveness	4.72	1.44	.02	.05	.20**	.11	.62**	(.93)

Notes.  $N = 230$  (US = 70, French = 160). For Country, 0 = US, 1 = France. For Extent of Diversity Programs, 0 = low level condition, 1 = high level condition. Coefficient alphas appear in parentheses on the diagonal for variables composed of multi-item scales.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 2**  
**Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations within Each Country**

Variables	US		France		Correlations (Top = US, Bottom = France)				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Work Experience (Months)	57.99	41.21	122.33	118.98	–	-.04	.08	-.16	-.18
2. Extent of Gender Diversity Management	.45	.50	.53	.50	-.02	–	-.05	.03	.00
3. Affirmative Action Attitude	4.26	1.47	4.26	1.48	-.09	.13 <sup>†</sup>	(.91/.95)	-.16	-.09
4. Perceived Potential for Advancement	4.14	1.59	4.41	1.35	-.07	.02	.13	(.82/.93)	.78**
5. Organizational Attractiveness	4.28	1.64	4.91	1.31	-.02	.06	.23**	.50**	(.90/.97)

Notes.  $N = 230$  (US = 70, French = 160). For Extent of Gender Diversity Management, 0 = low level condition, 1 = high level condition. US correlations are above the diagonal, and French correlations are below the diagonal. Coefficient alphas appear in parentheses on the diagonal for variables composed of multi-item scales (first number is the reliability in France; second is the reliability in the US).

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . <sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ .

**Table 3**  
**Regression Results**

Variables	A: 1st-Stage Effects on Advance		B: 2nd-Stage and Direct Effects on Org. Attr.	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Work Experience	.00	.00	.00	.00
GDM	.02	.31	-.08	.25
Advancement	–	–	.43**	.11
Country	.31	.26	.41 <sup>†</sup>	.22
AAA	-.78**	.13	-.48**	.14
GDM × Country	.02	.37	.17	.30
GDM × AAA	1.57**	.22	1.21**	.25
Country × AAA	.86**	.16	.59**	.16
GDM × Country × AAA	-1.58**	.26	-1.11**	.27
Country × Advancement	–	–	.03	.13
Constant	-.31	.23	4.41**	.18
<i>R</i>	.45		.70	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.21		.49	
<i>F</i>	7.72**		22.23**	

Notes. *N* = 230. *B* = raw score (unstandardized) weights of centered variables, AAA = Affirmative Action Attitude, GDM = Extent of Gender Diversity Management, Advancement = Perceived Potential for Advancement (centered), Org. Attr. = Organizational Attractiveness. \* *p* < .05. \*\* *p* < .01. <sup>†</sup> *p* < .10

**Table 4**  
**Analysis of Simple Effects and Path Differences.**

Group	Stage		Effect		
	1st	2nd	Indirect	Direct	Total
US Women					
Low AAA	-2.73**	.42**	-1.15**	-2.16**	-3.31**
High AAA	1.91**	.42**	.80**	1.36**	2.17**
French Women					
Low AAA	.05	.46**	.03	-.09	-.06
High AAA	-.03	.46**	-.02	.27	.25
Differences					
Among US Women (High – Low AAA)	4.65**	NA	1.95**	3.53**	5.48**
Among French Women (High – Low AAA)	-.09	NA	-.04	.35	.31
Among Low AAA Women (US – French)	-2.79**	-.04	-1.17**	-2.08**	-3.25**
Among High AAA Women (US – French)	1.95**	-.04	.82*	1.10**	1.92**

Notes. AAA = Affirmative Action Attitude. Estimates for Low and High AAA groups were computed by calculating scores for individuals one standard deviation below and above the mean AAA score. Consistent with the analysis methods outlined by Edwards and Lambert (2007), effect differences were tested for significance by examining the bias-corrected confidence intervals from 1000 bootstrapped samples. The model did not specify a three-way interaction at the second stage, so all levels of AAA were constrained to have equal effect sizes within each country. \* *p* < .05. \*\* *p* < .01.

**Table 5**  
**Contextual Factors Potentially Relating to Gender and Gender Roles**

Factor	US	France
Labor force participation of women (and men) <sup>1</sup>	53.55% (43.32)	36.10% (56.75%)
Gender Wage Gap (how much higher men are paid) <sup>1</sup>	18.8%	14.3%
Senior management positions occupied by women <sup>2</sup>	20%	26%
Board of director positions occupied by women <sup>3</sup>	16.9%	18.3%
Year of recognition of women's right to vote	1920	1944
Government (legislative) representation (lower house, upper house) <sup>4</sup>	18.3%, 20%	26.2%, 22.5%
Hofstede's Masculinity score	62	43
GLOBE Gender Egalitarianism Practices ("as-is") score <sup>5</sup>	3.34	3.64
GLOBE Gender Egalitarianism Values ("should-be") score <sup>5</sup>	5.06	4.40

Notes.

1 Based on 2010 OECD statistics.

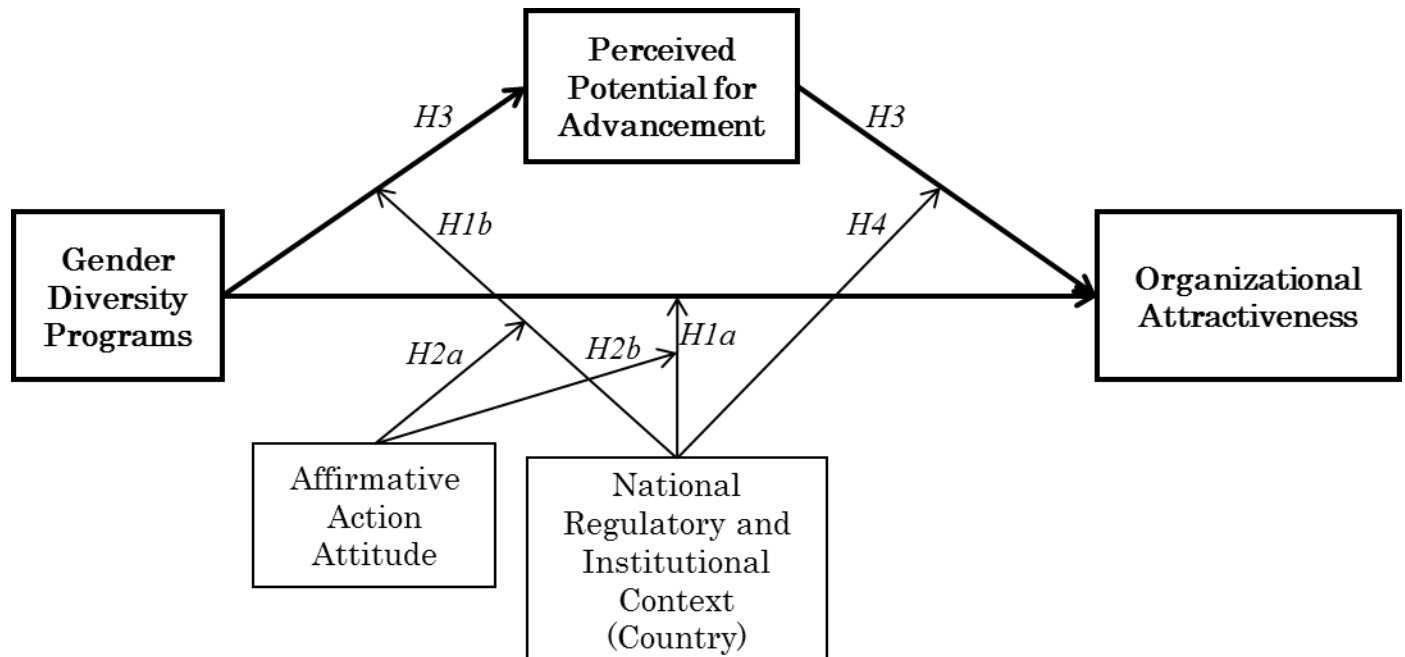
2 Based on 2013 Grant Thornton statistics.

3 Based on 2014 Catalyst statistics.

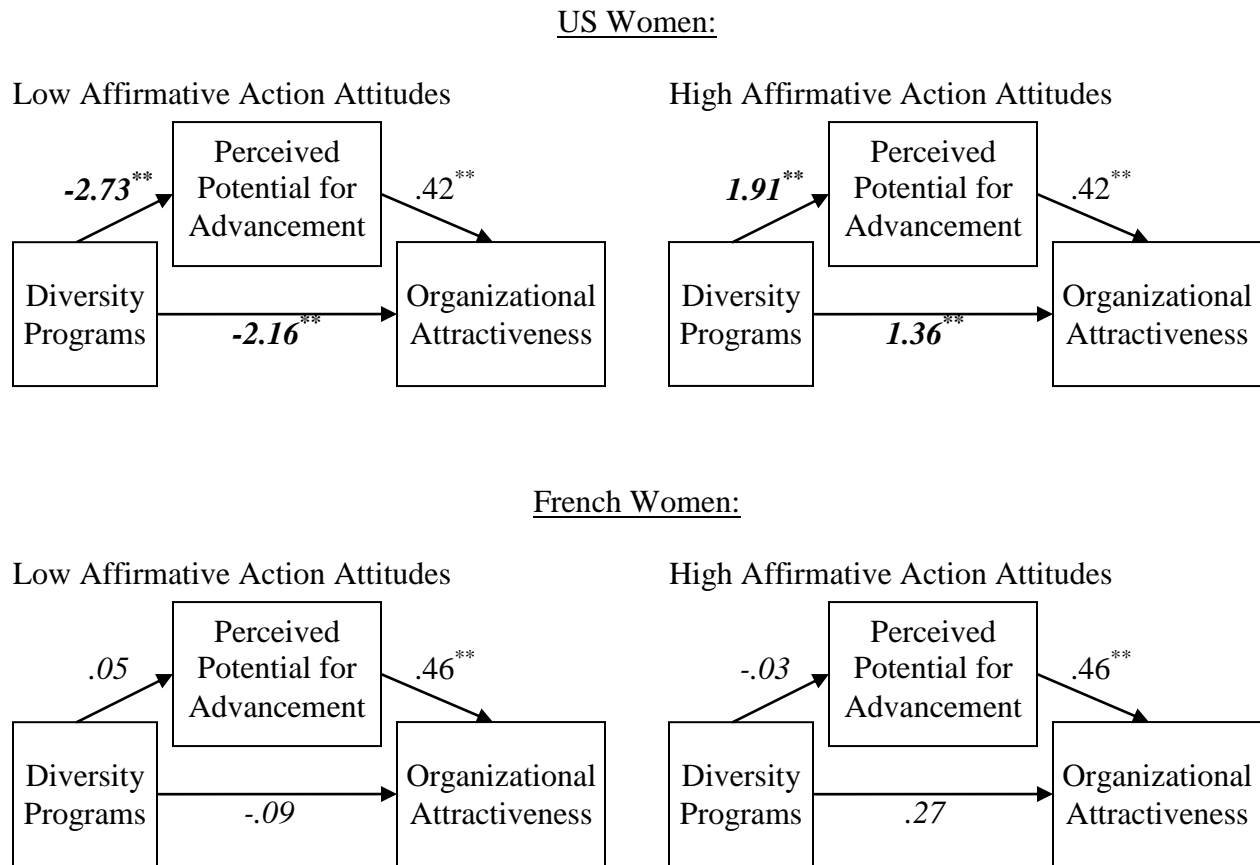
4 Based on 2014 Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) statistics.

5 Scored from 1 to 7, with egalitarianism at the midpoint (4). Lower scores indicate a favoring of men, while higher scores indicate a favoring of women.

**Figure 1. The research model.**

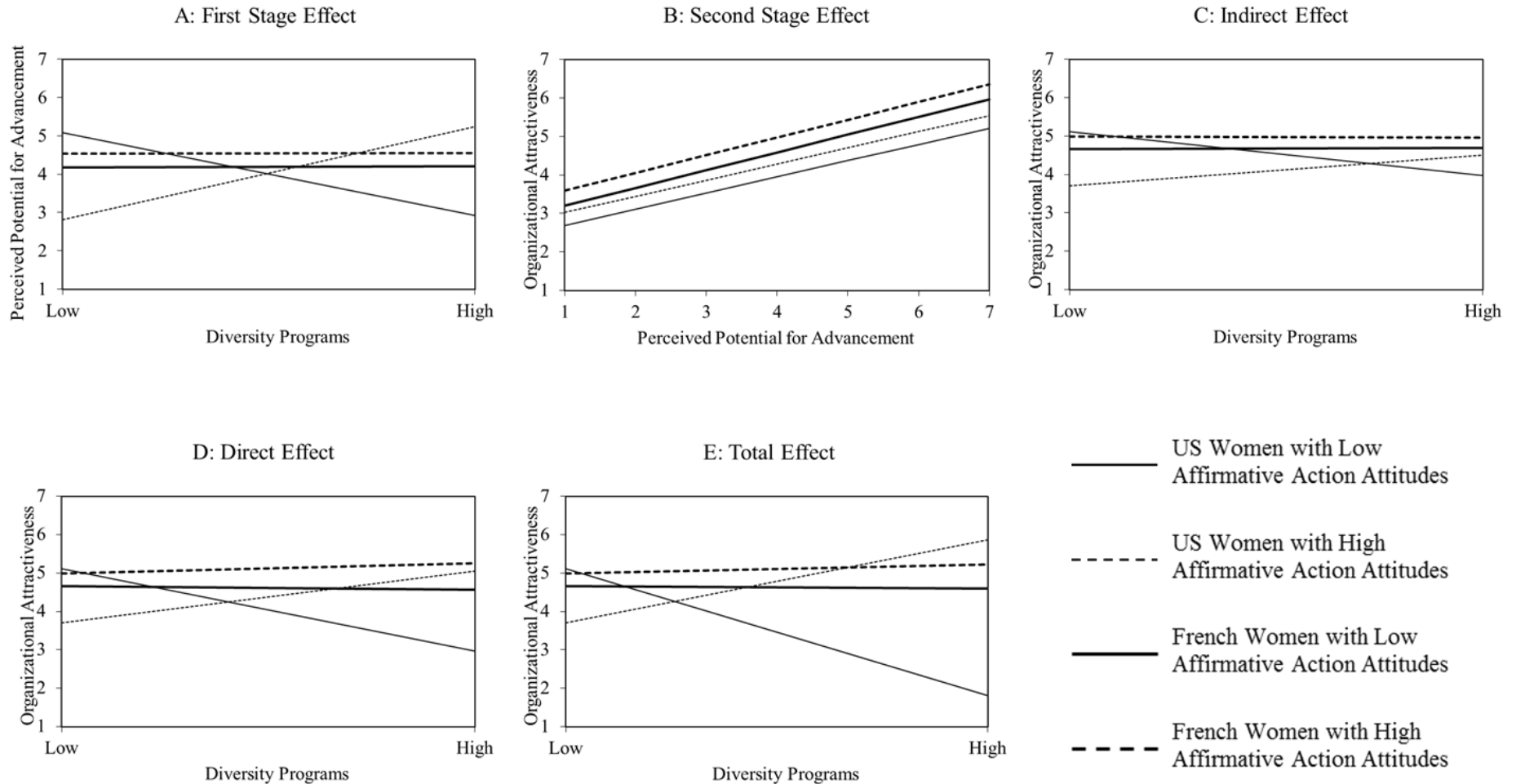


**Figure 2. Partial mediation models by country and affirmative action attitude.**



Notes. Paths are labeled with unstandardized path coefficients. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . Bold path coefficients indicate significant ( $p < .05$ ) within-country differences across low and high affirmative action attitude levels; italic coefficients indicate significant ( $p < .05$ ) between-country differences within affirmative action attitude levels.

Figure 3. Plots of effects with country and affirmative action attitude as moderators



### Appendix Development of Regression Equations and Paths

Using the procedure recommended by Edwards and Lambert (2007), we began the mediation analysis by specifying the regression equations for both the dependent variable and the mediator:

$$M = a_0 + a_X X + a_W W + a_Z Z + a_{XW} XW + a_{XZ} XZ + a_{WZ} WZ + a_{XWZ} XWZ + e_M \quad (1)$$

$$Y = b_0 + b_X X + b_W W + b_Z Z + b_{XW} XW + b_{XZ} XZ + b_{WZ} WZ + b_{XWZ} XWZ + b_M M + b_{MW} MW + e_Y \quad (2)$$

where  $X$  is the GDM manipulation (0=low, 1=high; independent variable),  $M$  is perceived potential for advancement (the mediator, centered),  $W$  denotes country (a moderator at both the first and second stages; 0=US, 1=France),  $Z$  is affirmative action attitude (a moderator at the first stage only; centered), and  $Y$  is organizational attractiveness (the dependent variable).  $a$  and  $b$  denote the unstandardized regression coefficients for determining the mediator and the dependent variable, respectively, with  $a_0$  and  $b_0$  representing the intercepts. Finally,  $e$  denotes error, or the regression residual. Using Equation 1 to substitute for  $M$  in Equation 2, we multiplied the terms (Equation 3) to obtain a single regression equation (Equation 4):

$$\begin{aligned} Y &= b_0 + b_X X + b_W W + b_Z Z + b_{XW} XW + b_{XZ} XZ + b_{WZ} WZ + b_{XWZ} XWZ + b_M (a_0 + a_X X \\ &\quad + a_W W + a_Z Z + a_{XW} XW + a_{XZ} XZ + a_{WZ} WZ + a_{XWZ} XWZ + e_M) + b_{MW} (a_0 + a_X X \\ &\quad + a_W W + a_Z Z + a_{XW} XW + a_{XZ} XZ + a_{WZ} WZ + a_{XWZ} XWZ + e_M) W + e_Y \\ &= b_0 + b_X X + b_W W + b_Z Z + b_{XW} XW + b_{XZ} XZ + b_{WZ} WZ + b_{XWZ} XWZ + a_0 b_M + a_X b_M X \\ &\quad + a_W b_M W + a_Z b_M Z + a_{XW} b_M XW + a_{XZ} b_M XZ + a_{WZ} b_M WZ + a_{XWZ} b_M XWZ + b_M e_M \\ &\quad + a_0 b_{MW} W + a_X b_{MW} XW + a_W b_{MW} W^2 + a_Z b_{MW} WZ + a_{XW} b_{MW} XW^2 + a_{XZ} b_{MW} XWZ \\ &\quad + a_{WZ} b_{MW} W^2 Z + a_{XWZ} b_{MW} XW^2 Z + b_{MW} W e_M + e_Y \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

$$\begin{aligned} Y &= b_0 + a_0 b_M + (b_X + a_X b_M) X + (b_W + a_W b_M + a_0 b_{MW} + a_W b_{MW} W) W + (b_Z + a_Z b_M) Z \\ &\quad + (b_{XW} + a_{XW} b_M + a_X b_{MW} + a_{XW} b_{MW} W) XW + (b_{XZ} + a_{XZ} b_M) XZ + (b_{WZ} + a_{WZ} b_M \\ &\quad + a_Z b_{MW} + a_{WZ} b_{MW} W) WZ + (b_{XWZ} + a_{XWZ} b_M + a_{XZ} b_{MW} + a_{XWZ} b_{MW} W) XWZ + e_Y \\ &\quad + b_M e_M + b_{MW} W e_M \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$

Alternatively, working again from Equation 3, we can produce an equation that makes the simple paths more clear:

$$\begin{aligned} Y &= [b_0 + a_0 b_M + a_0 b_{MW} W + a_Z b_M Z + a_Z b_{MW} WZ + a_W b_M W + a_W b_{MW} W^2 + a_{WZ} b_M WZ \\ &\quad + a_{WZ} b_{MW} W^2 Z + b_Z Z + b_W W + b_{WZ} WZ] + [b_X + a_X b_M + a_X b_{MW} W + a_{XW} b_M W \\ &\quad + a_{XW} b_{MW} W^2 + a_{XZ} b_M Z + a_{XZ} b_{MW} WZ + b_{XW} W + b_{XZ} Z + b_{XWZ} WZ + a_{XWZ} b_M WZ \\ &\quad + a_{XWZ} b_{MW} W^2 Z] X + e_Y + b_M e_M + b_{MW} W e_M \\ &= [b_0 + a_0 (b_M + b_{MW} W) + a_Z Z (b_M + b_{MW} W) + a_W W (b_M + b_{MW} W) + a_{WZ} WZ (b_M \\ &\quad + b_{MW} W) + b_Z Z + b_W W + b_{WZ} WZ] + [b_X + a_X (b_M + b_{MW} W) + a_{XW} W (b_M \\ &\quad + b_{MW} W) + a_{XZ} Z (b_M + b_{MW} W) + a_{XWZ} WZ (b_M + b_{MW} W) + b_{XW} W + b_{XZ} Z \\ &\quad + b_{XWZ} WZ] X + e_Y + b_M e_M + b_{MW} W e_M \\ &= [(b_0 + b_W W + b_Z Z + b_{WZ} WZ) + (a_0 + a_W W + a_Z Z + a_{WZ} WZ) (b_M + b_{MW} W)] + [(b_X \\ &\quad + b_{XW} W + b_{XZ} Z + b_{XWZ} WZ) + (a_X + a_{XW} W + a_{XZ} Z + a_{XWZ} WZ) (b_M + b_{MW} W)] X \\ &\quad + (e_Y + b_M e_M + b_{MW} W e_M) \end{aligned} \quad (5)$$

As shown in Equation 5, the path for the first-stage moderated effect is estimated by  $(a_X + a_{XW} W + a_{XZ} Z + a_{XWZ} WZ)$ , the path for the second-stage moderated effect is estimated by  $(b_M + b_{MW} W)$ , and the path for the moderated direct effect is estimated by  $(b_X + b_{XW} W + b_{XZ} Z + b_{XWZ} WZ)$ . To plot the first- and second-stage effects, we started with Equations 1 and 2, respectively, and redistributed the terms such that intercepts and slopes are more clear:

$$\begin{aligned} M &= a_0 + a_W W + a_Z Z + a_{WZ} WZ + a_X X + a_{XW} XW + a_{XZ} XZ + a_{XWZ} XWZ + e_M \\ &= [a_0 + a_W W + a_Z Z + a_{WZ} WZ] + [a_X + a_{XW} W + a_{XZ} Z + a_{XWZ} WZ] X + e_M \end{aligned} \quad (6)$$

$$\begin{aligned} Y &= b_0 + b_W W + b_Z Z + b_{WZ} WZ + b_X X + b_{XW} XW + b_{XZ} XZ + b_{XWZ} XWZ + b_M M \\ &\quad + b_{MW} MW + e_Y \\ &= [b_0 + b_W W + b_Z Z + b_{WZ} WZ + (b_X + b_{XW} W + b_{XZ} Z + b_{XWZ} WZ) X] + [b_M + b_{MW} W] M + e_Y \end{aligned} \quad (7)$$





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**Title:**

Gender Diversity Programs, Perceived Potential for Advancement, and Organizational Attractiveness: An Empirical Examination of Women in the United States and France

**Date:**

2016

**Citation:**

OLSEN, J. E., Parsons, C. K., Martins, L. L. & Ivanaj, V. (2016). Gender Diversity Programs, Perceived Potential for Advancement, and Organizational Attractiveness: An Empirical Examination of Women in the United States and France. *Group and Organization Management*, 41 (3), pp.271-309. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601115583579>.

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