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Talk is Cheap

The Adverse Effects of Gender Diversity Branding

Emmy Englund 41807

Klara Johnsson 41840

Abstract

To attract talent and become the employer of choice, organizations often portray themselves as committed to gender diversity. As many companies are still male-dominated in top positions however, such diversity branding often results in a misalignment between the intended diversity image and the reality within the organization. To shed light on the potential adverse effects of diversity branding, the current study aims to provide empirical evidence on how gender diversity branding can affect women's attraction to organizations with male-dominated management teams. Theoretically, this study relies on organizational impression management (OIM), behavioral integrity, and organizational attractiveness. Findings from a questionnaire-based experimental study with 200 female participants reveal that apologizing for one's poor gender diversity records will lead to higher organizational attractiveness. On the contrary, expressing pro gender diversity statements in an attempt to appear attractive and likable while experiencing low levels of gender diversity will lower the attractiveness of the firm. Behavioral integrity serves as the underlying mechanism for the link between the OIM tactic and organizational attractiveness. Together, these findings represent an important extension to previous gender diversity research, as they challenge the common perception that simply promoting diversity will increase applicant attraction and lead to a diverse workforce; rather, they suggest that diversity branding might in fact hurt organizations, if the communicated gender diversity image does not align with the diversity-related actions.

Keywords: gender diversity, organizational impression management, diversity branding, behavioral integrity, organizational attractiveness

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Hanna Berg

Examiner
Magnus Söderlund

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Definitions

Organizational Impression Management	“Any action purposefully designed and carried out to influence an audience’s perceptions of an organization’’ (Elsbach et al., 1998).
Organizational Impression Management Tactics	The behaviors and actions used to carry out organizational impression management (Bolino et al. 2008).
Assertive Impression Management Tactics	Assertive tactics are proactive in nature and are used to build, maintain or improve one’s image (Gardner & Matinko, 1988; Bolino et al. 2008; Bolino et al., 2016).
Ingratiation	Ingratiation is an organization’s attempt to appear attractive and likable towards its audience (Mohamed et al., 1999; Bolino et al., 2008).
Defensive Impression Management Tactics	Defensive tactics are reactive behaviors aimed to protect, manage or repair one’s image (Gardner & Matinko, 1988; Bolino et al. 2008; Bolino et al., 2016).
Apology	An organization’s attempt to obtain a pardon from an audience while acknowledging and accepting responsibility for the undesirable event. If a promise of improvement and recovery is included, the apology can elicit positive responses toward the company (Mohamed et al., 1999).
Diversity branding	An emerging concept that encompasses corporate communication in the form of diversity statements (Jonsen et al., 2021).
Diversity Mixed Messaging	The discrepancy between the intended diversity image communicated by the organization and the reality within the organization (Windscheid et al., 2016).
Behavioral Integrity	“The perceived pattern of alignment between an actor’s words and deeds” (Simons, 2002).
Organizational Attractiveness	Prospective applicants’ perceptions of an organization (Evertz & Süß, 2017). Organizations’ attractiveness is “reflected in individuals’ affective and attitudinal thoughts about particular companies as potential places for employment” (Highhouse et al., 2003).

1. Introduction

The following section problematizes the contradiction between an increased focus on gender diversity and the remaining unbalanced business community. To lay the foundation for this study, relevant previous research is presented, as well as the research gap, purpose, expected contribution, delimitations, and the research outline.

1.1. Problematization

According to the United Nations Development Programme (2020), Sweden is the third most gender-equal country in the world (Gender Inequality Index, ranking 3). This is surprising, as the statistics on equality in working life are alarming and much remains to be done before we reach a gender-equal business community. The latest Allbright report (2021) presents gender diversity statistics for all companies on the Stockholm Stock Exchange. The percentage of female CEOs in 2021 was 12 percent and the proportion of companies with a female chairman of the board was as low as 9 percent. Turning to the statistics for management teams, 61 percent of the companies do not achieve an even gender distribution (40/60), and one in five Swedish listed companies completely lacks a woman in the management team. Consequently, 81 percent of Swedish-listed companies either do not achieve an even gender distribution or completely lack women in the management team. According to Allbright (2021), these numbers may be the most obvious proof that the Swedish business community is anything but diversified. The need, the gravity, and the importance of research within this area are to the authors of this study equally obvious. Can one talk about gender-equal societies and countries when working life and business are clearly not?

Although diversity and inclusion have been an important focus for companies for decades (Özbilgin et al., 2015), especially in the field of employer branding and recruitment (Köllen, 2021), it is still a challenge for many organizations to attract applicants in today's ever-diversifying world (Avery et al., 2013). Women are one of the groups of applicants that have been challenging for companies to attract. The competition for female employees has become an increasingly important question for employers all over the world, and the recruitment of women has consequently become one of the top priorities for many companies (Chapple & Humphrey, 2014). Nevertheless, it seems that companies are not succeeding in achieving the gender diversity they express they seek, especially in board-and top positions.

In the context of diversity and with the aim of achieving a more diverse workplace, corporate websites have proven to be vital (Rubaii-Barett & Wise, 2007). A website is a medium where potential applicants can explore an employer's diversity-related practices, and be influenced by the employer's efforts to show that it values diversity (Jonsen et al., 2021; Williamson et al., 2008).

Accordingly, the information provided on websites affects viewers' attitudes towards the organization (Windscheid et al., 2016). Conveying diversity management efforts and other diversity impressions through a company's website, in order to manage and improve the employer image, is an approach that has become increasingly popular in recent years (Cober et al., 2004).

Indeed, when comparing the similar studies of Jonsen et al. (2021) and Point and Singh (2003), both of which examined the extent to which companies include diversity statements in their website communications, it is clear that there has been a significant increase in this type of communication. Jonsen et al. (2021) reported that all investigated companies mentioned diversity in their website communications compared to the study of Point and Singh (2003), conducted almost 20 years earlier, which reported that only half of the examined companies mentioned diversity on their websites. Accordingly, over the last two decades, diversity has become a topic that companies increasingly address through their websites, in particular regarding gender (Jonsen et al., 2021). Despite this increased focus, the unbalanced business community still remains, which seems like an alarming, remarkable, and contradictory development. Can one convey how strongly one values gender diversity and a gender-equal organization without actually taking the actions of achieving such an organization? Increased knowledge about the organizational effects of gender diversity messaging is needed in order for firms to attract women and achieve gender-equal organizations, which in turn will contribute to a more equal society.

Therefore, this study will examine how gender diversity messaging can affect the attractiveness of an organization with poor gender diversity records, from a female job applicant perspective. Theoretically, this study will rely upon organizational impression management, behavioral integrity, and organizational attractiveness, as will be outlined in the coming sections. Our central premise is that the link between organizational impression management and organizational attractiveness is mediated by the perception of the organization's behavioral integrity. In essence, what happens to the attractiveness of organizations that don't practice what they preach?

1.2. Employer Branding & Organizational Impression Management

According to Martin et al., (2011), *employer branding* is a concept that includes the practices of marketing, communications, and HR techniques, as well as the application of branding concepts. Employer branding is seen as a procedure of "differentiation of a firm's characteristics as an employer from those of its competitor" (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Martin et al., (2011) further define an *employer brand* as "a generalized recognition for being known among key stakeholders for providing high-quality employment experience, and a distinctive organizational identity which employees value, engage with and feel confident and happy to promote to others". An employer

brand can be translated into a company's *employer image*, which according to Lievens and Slaughter (2016) is "an outsider's mental representations of attributes related to an organization as an employer".

Creating a strong employer image is a way to improve and strengthen perceived *organizational attractiveness* (Baum & Kabst, 2014; Gatewood, et al., 1993; Sehgal & Malati, 2013). Followingly, organizational attractiveness can be seen as one of the main objectives and a crucial outcome of employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; Berthon, et al., 2005). Today, having a diverse workforce has become one of the key attributes of a company's employer image (Knox & Freeman, 2006). Even though companies might heavily invest in employer branding activities, a strong employer brand is not a given consequence. Specifically, if promises that are part of an organization's image creation are not kept. For example, a company that claims to value diversity, without providing actual organizational evidence for such claims might face a declining employer brand (Elegbe, 2018). Indeed, Windscheid et al. (2016) showed that companies not "walking the talk" when it comes to gender diversity management might risk losing applicants.

One way to create, protect or alter an image held by a target audience is through *impression management* (IM) (Bolino et al., 2008). Accordingly, IM can be used both to maintain a current image or to create a new desired image (Bozeman & Kacmar 1997; Bolino et al., 2008; Bolino et al., 2016). Although previous research mainly has catered to IM at the individual level (Mohamed et al., 1999; Windscheid et al., 2018), *organizations* frequently use impression management to control and regulate information, in an attempt to influence the way others perceive the organization (Mohamed et al., 1999; Bolino et al., 2008). In particular, *organizational impression management* (OIM) refers to "any action purposefully designed and carried out to influence an audience's perceptions of an organization" (Elsbach et al., 1998). This definition incorporates several organizational impression management activities (Avery & McKay, 2006), such as advertising, corporate website material, media releases, yearly reports, and personnel recruitment, which organizations utilize to promote beneficial corporate images (Elsbach et al., 1998; Avery & McKAy, 2006; Windscheid et al., 2018).

Within the organizational impression management framework, these activities are behaviors referred to as *OIM tactics* (Bolino et al. 2008). Previous research has attempted to categorize these tactics in different ways (Bolino et al., 2016). A common categorization is to distinguish between *assertive* and *defensive* tactics (Mohamed et al., 1999; Bolino et al., 2008; Bolino et al., 2016). Assertive tactics are proactive in nature and are used to build, maintain or improve an image. Conversely, defensive tactics are reactive behaviors aimed to protect, manage or repair one's image (Gardner & Matinko, 1988; Bolino et al. 2008; Bolino et al., 2016). Nevertheless, impression management can

backfire as different OIM tactics, in addition to a desired image, also can result in an undesired image (Jones & Pittman 1982; Turnley & Bolino 2001). It is therefore important to examine which tactics should be used in which situation, by whom, and in what way.

In an effort to conclude the optimal strategies for attracting minority applicants, Avery and McKay (2006) integrated the practical literature of OIM with the empirical findings on targeted recruitment to build a framework for approaching targeted recruitment. Specifically, the framework conceptualizes how different OIM tactics impact the corporate employment image during diversity recruitment efforts. The authors conceptualize that based on an organization's use of assertive and defensive tactics, job applicants will infer information about a firm's values, which will lead to a favorable or unfavorable employment image.

1.3. Diversity Branding & Diversity Mixed Messaging

Initially, it should be clarified that diversity branding includes the concept of gender diversity (the focus area of this study), with gender diversity being the most significant and prominent sub-area of diversity branding (Jonsen et al., 2021). Accordingly, research on diversity branding has been relevant to laying the foundation for this study.

Within the context of employer branding, we find *diversity branding*, an emerging concept that is used to attract talent and become the employer of choice (Jonsen et al., 2021). Different diversity statements can present a company as a great workplace driven by diversity, and consequently, increase applicant attraction (Edwards & Kelan, 2011). Promoting diversity can, accordingly, lead to an increased talent pool which gives opportunity for the financial benefits a diverse workforce can provide (Ng & Burke, 2005). Although diversity branding is not as explored in the literature as employer branding, diversity branding could be seen as mainstream today (Jonsen et al., 2021). For companies who want to attract a diverse workforce, and also be able to retain these employees, conducting employer branding with a focus on diversity is vital (Edwards & Kelan, 2011). For female candidates, the perception of to what extent a potential employer values diversity can be the difference between a job pursuit intention or a complete exclusion of the company (Avery & McKay, 2006).

Oftentimes, however, there is a discrepancy between the intended diversity image communicated by the organization, and the reality within the organization (Windscheid et al., 2016), as many firms are still heavily male-dominated – especially in boardrooms or top positions (Allbright, 2020). This discrepancy is commonly referred to as "diversity mixed messaging" (Windscheid et al., 2016). Indeed, firms experiencing lower levels of gender diversity might unconsciously send diversity mixed messages in an attempt to persuade stakeholders that they value and seek gender diversity

(Windscheid et al., 2018). To shed light on this issue, Windscheid et al. (2016) investigated how such mixed messaging affects the organization's attractiveness. The authors used a 2 x 2 factorial between-subjects design, where the board-gender composition (balanced vs. male-dominated) as well as the written gender diversity statement (pro statement vs. neutral statement. were manipulated. By relying on the concept of behavioral integrity, defined as "the perceived pattern of alignment between an actor's words and deeds" (Simons, 2002), the authors showed that diversity mixed messaging can negatively affect an organization's integrity as it represents a discrepancy between an actor's words and actions. In addition, the authors showed that sending such mixed messaging can negatively affect the organizational attractiveness. Thus, organizations should be careful how they communicate around gender diversity when they cannot "walk the talk", as it can affect the integrity and attractiveness of the organization.

Nevertheless, companies can attempt to strengthen their attractiveness by showing that the company values diversity through a diverse board (Schäpers et al., 2021). Management teams follow the same pattern. This study focuses on the executive management team in a company. They are a group of people with essential responsibilities within the business. Common roles are for example Chief Executive Officer, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Human Resources Officer, Chief Financial Officer and Chief Marketing Officer. The management team is responsible for final decisions within the company on budget, marketing and sales strategies, operations, communication among other things. Often, the team includes owners of the business (Indeed, 2021). Employees in top positions function as a source of information for potential applicants, possibly because the top layers of an organization are considered highly visible organizational attributes (McMillan-Capehart et al., 2010). In fact, an audience attends to such observable cues when making decisions regarding a company's reputation (McMillan-Capehart et al., 2010). In addition, different organizational outcomes are seen as reflections of values of the people in the management team (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). As such, management teams can be important to study, even though many employees and applicants will rarely - and possibly never - interact with them. In fact, previous research shows that firms with both men and women in the management team are seen as more attractive to female job seekers, especially with female executives holding non-stereotypical roles (such as CFO) (Iseke & Pull, 2019).

1.4. Diversity Branding Through Corporate Websites

Since a company's website is the first place applicants go to learn about an organization (Cappelli, 2001), it is not surprising that the research investigating corporate websites' effects on applicant attraction and image perception has increased in recent years (e.g., Allen et al. 2007, Dineen et al.

2002, Williamson et al. 2010). As recognized by Jonsen et al., (2021), diversity and inclusion are central parts of many companies' websites today, especially on the Careers and Human Resources pages. Williamson et al., (2008) argue that by making different efforts that clearly show applicants that a company values diversity, for example by being an equal opportunity employer, encouraging applicants from underrepresented groups to apply, and listing the benefits connected to diversity in the organization, a firm can have an impact on applicants' perceptions about how it values diversity. Website pictures showing a diverse workforce have also been proven to influence applicants' perception of to what extent a company values diversity (Braddy et al., 2006).

In an attempt to contribute to the understanding of how gender diversity is depicted on corporate websites, Windscheid et al. (2018) conducted a content analysis of 99 German corporate websites. The authors utilized the previously mentioned theoretical framework developed by Avery and McKay (2006) to investigate what OIM tactics corporations use in gender diversity-related communications. With regard to improving the employer image dimension of gender diversity, the authors found little variation in the use of impression management tactics on corporate websites. Specifically, only a third of the investigated firms utilized defensive tactics, while the majority of firms relied heavily on assertive impression management tactics. The authors argue that the use of assertive tactics creates a paradox, whereby companies want to maintain pragmatic legitimacy, but by doing so, they are also compromising the moral legitimacy. Moral legitimacy, on the other hand, can be both restored and maintained through the use of defensive impression management tactics, if they are used and expressed in an honest and genuine way (Windshield et al., 2018). Looking from a research perspective, there is a multidimensional need to further investigate the use of impression management tactics on corporate websites in the context of diversity.

1.5. Research Gap

In addition to conducting a content analysis, Windscheid et al. (2018) make propositions regarding what OIM tactics are better suited for attracting women, and in which cases OIM tactics risk the moral legitimacy of organizations. As no empirical investigation was conducted however, the authors suggest that future research should empirically examine how different types of tactics affect organizational outcomes. Similarly, Avery and McKay (2006), who integrated OIM with the empirical findings on targeted recruitment, conceptualize how different OIM tactics related to diversity affect the employer image, without empirically testing these assumptions. The authors claim that much of the OIM research only examines one tactic at a time, and propose that further research should empirically compare which OIM tactics are most effective when attempting to attract minority applicants, such as women. Furthermore, few studies have leveraged OIM to

examine how organizations can use such diversity-related practices, and this research has excluded empirical investigations (Avery & McKAy, 2006; Windscheid et al., 2018). This is surprising, as OIM can potentially serve as a useful tool for targeted recruitment (Avery & McKay, 2006). Previous research on impression management has largely overseen organizational IM by focusing on the individual level (Mohamed et al., 1999; Windscheid et al., 2018). Thus, the theoretical contribution of organizational impression management is somewhat limited.

Jonsen et al. (2021) examined the extent to which companies include diversity statements in their website communications, and showed how organizations use diversity branding to attract talent and appear as the employer of choice. As the authors did not examine potential "value gaps" between what companies say and what they do, they suggest that future research should examine "the territory between pure impression management and true intention". These potential "value gaps" are seemingly close to the concept of behavioral integrity, meaning the alignment between an actor's words and actions (Simons, 2002). Interestingly, Windscheid et al. (2016) relied on the concept of behavioral integrity when investigating how the discrepancy between an organization's gender diversity-related words and actions (known as gender diversity mixed messaging) affects the organization's attractiveness. While behavioral integrity has largely been applied on an individual level (Simons, 2002; Simons, 2011), the authors successfully applied it on an organizational level and showed that organizations that do not "walk the talk" on gender diversity experience lower behavioral integrity, which in turn affects the organizational attractiveness. Windscheid et al. (2016) propose that future research should investigate how such effects can be avoided. In addition, the authors did not rely on organizational impression management, as this study will. Morover, the study was conducted, as mentioned, by manipulating both the board-gender composition (balanced vs. male-dominated) and the written gender diversity statement (pro statement vs. neutral statement).

Taken together, previous research suggests empirically investigating how different types of OIM tactics affect organizational outcomes and the employer image, and comparing which OIM tactics are most effective when attempting to attract minority applicants, such as women. Furthermore, further research is needed on *organizational* IM in particular, as previous research mainly has catered to IM at the individual level. In addition, research calls to further investigate the territory between pure impression management and true intention, which is seemingly closely related to the concept of behavioral integrity. Finally, previous research propose to investigate how the negative effects of diversity mixed messaging can be avoided.

1.6. Purpose

With the aim to accelerate the development of gender equality in organizations and society at large, the purpose of this study is to provide empirical evidence on how gender diversity branding can affect women's attraction to organizations with male-dominated management teams.

1.6.1. Research Questions

This study aims to answer two research questions:

1. How do different organizational impression management tactics in the context of diversity branding affect organizational attractiveness?

2. How does behavioral integrity affect the relationship between different organizational impression management tactics and organizational attractiveness?

1.7. Expected Contribution

Although Sweden is considered to be the third most gender-equal country in the world (United Nations Development Programme, 2020), the majority of the Swedish listed firms are still heavily male-dominated in board- and top positions (Allbright, 2021). Practically, this study is expected to contribute to a greater understanding of how such companies' diversity branding can affect women's perception of these organizations, thereby showcasing how such companies should communicate their gender diversity efforts when attempting to attract women.

Theoretically, this study is expected to contribute to the relatively scarce research on *organizational* impression management (Mohamed et al., 1999; Windscheid et al., 2018). Further, the study's expected theoretical contribution lies within the empirical comparison between the OIM tactics, as few studies have empirically compared two impression management tactics and their effects (Avery & McKAy, 2006). By applying the theory of behavioral integrity on an organizational level, the study is expected to add to its theoretical development beyond the individual perspective (Simons, 2011). Finally, the introduction of behavioral integrity as a mediating variable is expected to extend the application and understanding of the concept.

Together, this study adds to the prior research on gender diversity by investigating the interplay between diversity-related words and actions, and is expected to provide valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners.

1.8. Delimitations

It should be clarified that this study focuses on the corporate communication of companies with poor gender diversity records. This choice and limitation were made since 81 percent of Swedish-listed companies either do not achieve an even gender distribution or completely lack women in the management team (Allbright, 2021). Thus, there seems to be a need to shed light on the organizational effects of contradicting diversity communication. Consequently, this study can only provide empirical evidence and draw conclusions about companies with male-dominated management teams.

When discussing *gender diversity*, it is important to shed light on the magnitude and complexity of the topic. In the field of social sciences, researchers distinguish between gender and sex, where the former is the socially constructed aspect of being a woman or a man, and the latter is the biological aspect (Köllen, 2021; Gatens, 1983; Oakley, 1972). This division has facilitated the weakening of role expectations bound to sex, as well as the biology-based explanatory models for male or female behavior, and instead increased the emphasis on the processes that create femininity and masculinity, or women and men (Lips, 2001; Lorber & Farrell, 1991). Despite this division, both diversity management practice and diversity research often contribute to a more binary view of gender and sex, by using only two genders and two sexes, instead of adopting the freer interpretation of these two (Köllen, 2021). This study is aimed at anyone who identifies herself as a woman. Followingly, we refer to the socially constructed aspect of being a woman, i.e. the gender, not the sex. As this study aims to provide empirical evidence on how gender diversity branding can affect women's attraction to organizations with male-dominated management teams, the inclusion of people who identify themselves as men or non-binary/other was not deemed as prioritized. The exclusion of these groups can again be referred to the statistics stating that 81 percent of all Swedish listed companies have male-dominated management teams. Consequently, the examination of female applicants is therefore considered to be more relevant than that of male applicants. On the other hand, an additional study including only male applicants or different genders would also add value to this research topic and is discussed in 5.4 Suggestions for Further Research.

What is important to highlight in the context of diversity, is the difference between diversity and inclusion. Today, these two words are often mentioned together, and also often used as a shorthand for any efforts or policies that relate to aspects in any of these two areas (Jonsen et al., 2021). It should be emphasized that the focus of diversity is about differences between individuals, while the focus of inclusion is about the participation and commitment of all employees (Roberson, 2006), and more specifically employees' experiences of feeling valued and included in a company (Jonsen et

al., 2021). Diversity is a prerequisite for inclusion, but it does not automatically lead to inclusion (Jonsen et al., 2021). We believe it is important to account for these differences, but we also want to point out that in this study we will focus exclusively on diversity. We highly value the importance of inclusion and we are well aware that the work does not end when diversity is reached. But as stated by Jonsen et al. (2021), we also argue that diversity comes before inclusion. Again referring to the Swedish gender diversity statistics, we believe the exclusive focus on diversity in this study serves an important purpose.

1.9. Research Outline

The coming sections are divided as follows. Starting with the Theoretical Framework (2), which describes and integrates organizational impression management, behavioral integrity, and organizational attractiveness, resulting in three hypotheses tested in this study. The following section presents the Methodology (3), which includes the scientific research approach, the preparatory work, the development of the main study, and discussions about the data quality. The methodology is followed by the Results and Analysis (4), which includes a brief discussion about the statistical tools and tests, followed by the results from the data- and manipulation checks, and a presentation of the hypothesis testing. The final section presents the Discussion (5), including a summary of the main findings, limitations, theoretical contributions and practical implications, suggestions for further research, and the study's conclusions.

2. Theoretical Framework

The following section presents the theoretical underpinnings of this study, which are based on a synthesis of organizational impression management and the related tactics (the independent variable), behavioral integrity (the mediating variable), and organizational attractiveness (the dependent variable). Three hypotheses are generated from the theoretical framework.

2.1. Organizational Impression Management

2.1.1. Assertive Tactics

As previously mentioned, organizational impression management (OIM) refers to "any action purposefully designed and carried out to influence an audience's perception of an organization" (Elsbach et al., 1998). OIM tactics are commonly categorized as either assertive or defensive (Mohamed et al., 1999). Assertive tactics are proactive in nature and are used to build, maintain or improve one's image (Gardner & Matinko, 1988; Bolino et al. 2008; Bolino et al., 2016). An established division of these assertive OIM tactics includes five sub-categories (Mohamed et al., 1999).

First, *ingratiation* is an organization's attempt to appear attractive and likable towards its audience (Mohamed et al., 1999; Bolino et al., 2008). In modern settings, ingratiation is oftentimes found in job ads, policy statements (Avery and McKay, 2006), and on corporate websites (Windscheid et al., 2018). A second form of assertive tactics is *organizational promotion*, which is used to make an organization appear competent and successful by claiming responsibility for a positive outcome or amplifying the organization's positive accomplishment (Mohamed et al., 1999). A third form of assertive tactics is *exemplification*, which refers to organizations' attempts to appear morally worthy by engaging in socially responsible activities such as general philanthropy or CSR (Mohamed et al., 1999; Avery & McKAy, 2006). *Intimidation* is used by organizations in attempts at appearing dangerous, powerful, and threatening, and is best utilized by powerful organizations playing on a weaker audience (Mohamed et al., 1999; Avery & McKAy, 2006; Windscheid et al., 2018). Lastly, *supplication* differs from the other assertive tactics as it does not attempt to portray the organization in a favorable light (Mohamed et al., 1999). Rather, supplication is used to depict an organization as dependent, vulnerable, and weak (Mohamed et al., 1999; Avery & McKAy, 2006; Windscheid et al., 2018).

Although all five assertive tactics can prove useful when organizations try to create a desirable image (Mohamed et al., 1999), some tactics are argued to be less appropriate for recruitment purposes (Avery & McKay, 2006). Specifically, intimidation is deemed inappropriate, as it is best suited when the target audience is dependent on the organization which is usually not the case for applicants (Avery & McKay, 2006; Windscheid et al., 2018).

2.1.2. Defensive Tactics

Conversely, defensive tactics are reactive behaviors aimed to protect, manage or repair one's image (Gardner & Matinko, 1988; Bolino et al. 2008; Bolino et al., 2016). An established division of the defensive OIM tactics includes the five sub-categories: *accounts*, *prosocial behavior, disclaimers*, *apologies*, *organizational handicapping*, and *restitution* (Mohamed et al., 1999). Avery and McKay (2006) define *accounts* as "explanations that attempt to minimize the perceived implications of some potentially negative event or occurrence". *Prosocial behavior* refers to attempts to "convince an audience that the organization merits a positive identity despite past transgressions" (Windscheid et al., 2018). Organizations use *disclaimers* to ward off negative reactions, by providing information and explanations prior to a potentially embarrassing action or event (Mohamed et al., 1999; Windscheid et al., 2018). An *apology* is an organization's attempt to obtain a pardon from an audience while acknowledging and accepting responsibility for the undesirable event. If a promise of improvement and recovery is included, the apology can elicit positive responses toward the company (Mohamed et al., 1999). Moreover, *organizational handicapping* is a tactic used by firms intending to make failure appear less undesirable, by making organizational success appear less likely (Mohamed et al., 1999; Avery and McKay, 2006). Finally, *restitution* involves offering compensation to a harmed or offended audience (Mohamed et al., 1999; Avery and McKay, 2006; Windscheid et al., 2018).

Defensive tactics can prove useful when trying to attract applicants, since they can convey the impression that an organization *seeks* diversity (Avery & McKay, 2006). However, Windscheid et al. (2018) found little use of such tactics on corporate websites, when firms attempted to attract minority and female applicants. Organizational handicapping was found on some websites, where organizations generally claimed that their lack of gender diversity was due to the shortage of qualified female candidates. Notably, however, no organization made use of disclaimers, apologies, accounts, or restitution.

2.2. Behavioral Integrity

The notion that leaders and organizations should "walk the talk", keep their promises, and "practice what they preach" is hardly novel (Simons et al., 2011). As employees, applicants, and stakeholders

track whose words can be relied upon (Simons et al., 2011), leaders and organizations should be careful to create any discrepancies between their words and actions. The idea that such discrepancies will affect the observer's perception of the actor is captured in the concept of *behavioral integrity* (Simons et al., 2011).

Simons (2002) defined behavioral integrity (BI) as the "perceived pattern of alignment between an actor's words and deeds", which entails "both the perceived fit between espoused and enacted values, and perceived promise-keeping". BI considers the extent to which psychological contracts, corporate value statements, and "simple follow-through on expressed commitments" are perceived as aligning with actions. Thus, BI considers the *perceived* and not the *actual* alignment between words and actions (Simons et al., 2011). While behavioral integrity (or lack thereof) has largely been applied on an individual level, and ascribed to a person or a group (Simons, 2002; Simons et al., 2011), the concept can be applied to organizations as well (Tomlinson & Carnes, 2015; Windscheid et al., 2016). In organizational contexts, the perceiver is typically an employee or an applicant (Simons, 2002; Windscheid et al., 2016).

Simons et al. (2011) argue that BI has consequences at the individual level, the managerial level, and the organizational level. Previous research has found that conforming BI is related to positive outcomes such as increased job satisfaction and satisfaction with the leader (Davis & Rothstein, 2006; Prottas, 2013), increased trust and affective commitment (Simons et al., 2015), strengthened organizational identification (Ete et al., 2022) and higher organizational attractiveness (Windscheid et al., 2016). On the contrary, breaking one's promises might lead to cynicism (Maclean et al., 2015) anger and frustration (Chiaburu et al., 2013), and decreased organizational attractiveness (Windscheid et al., 2016).

Furthermore, Simons (2002) argues that behavioral integrity is an ascribed trait or a stable attribute of the actor. This means that rather than attributing a misalignment to situational factors which might have motivated a specific behavior, observers tend to ascribe them as traits. For example, a misalignment could result in an actor being viewed as a liar. Hence, managing behavioral integrity is not an easy task (Simons, 2002). Nevertheless, actors can attempt to influence the perceived word-deed misalignment, typically by offering 'social accounts' such as apologies, excuses, or explanations. Hence, the use of social accounts can reduce the misalignment's negative impact on behavioral integrity. Such maneuvers represent straightforward and cost-efficient ways for organizations to influence the perceptions of BI (Simons, 2002).

2.2.1. Assertive Tactics and the Impact on Behavioral Integrity

Avery and McKay (2006) propose that organizations can use assertive tactics to convey the impression that an organization values diversity. Indeed, Windscheid et al., (2018) found that organizations use ingratiation, organizational promotion, supplication, and exemplification on their corporate websites when attempting to attract female applicants. Specifically, ingratiation was found to be the most common OIM tactic, which usually took shape in promotion policies, mentoring, female development, and equality policies.

Although communicating the organization's recognition and appreciation of diversity might be important for attracting a diverse workforce (Edwards & Kelan, 2011), previous research suggests that organizations should cautiously communicate around the topic (Windscheid et al., 2016). Specifically, if there is a discrepancy between the intended diversity image and the reality within the firm, the audience might perceive the communication as "diversity mixed messaging" (Windscheid et al., 2016). Hence, a firm that depicts an unbalanced workforce, management team, or board on their website, while simultaneously expressing pro gender diversity statements might send a diversity mixed message.

The misalignment between diversity-related words and actions (i.e., diversity mixed messaging) can negatively affect an organization's behavioral integrity (Windscheid et al., 2016). Simons (2002) proposes that "policies and procedures that do not accomplish their stated intent are often perceived as misalignments between words and deeds, and so are likely to reduce behavioral integrity". Observers of such misalignment might ascribe an organization to being untruthful or a liar (Simons, 2002; Simons et al., 2011; Windscheid et al., 2016). Similarly, Windscheid et al. (2018) propose that stakeholders might "see through the act" of mixed messaging, and thus perceive organizations as untruthful and manipulative. Thus, organizations transmitting a gender diversity mixed message should be perceived as lacking in behavioral integrity.

We propose that organizations claiming to value gender diversity by utilizing assertive tactics, while exhibiting low levels of gender diversity, will transmit a diversity mixed message. Specifically, we believe that an organization's use of *ingratiation* while exposing a male-dominated management team will transmit a diversity mixed message. While companies use organizational promotion, supplication, and exemplification when attempting to attract women (Avery & McKay, 2006; Windscheid et al., 2018), Windscheid et al., (2018) found that ingratiation is used more frequently for such purposes. Hence, we believe potential applicants to be familiar with such exposure and consequently, should not be surprised by a company's use of such communication. Further, we argue that diversity mixed messages represent a misalignment between an organization's words and

actions, and organizations sending such messages should be perceived as lacking in behavioral integrity. In sum, exposing a male-dominated management team while utilizing ingratiation should decrease the organization's perceived behavioral integrity.

2.2.2. Defensive Tactics and the Impact on Behavioral Integrity

As many firms will find it difficult to convince a female audience that the company sincerely values diversity, a more realistic goal might be to express that the firm *seeks* diversity (Avery & McKay, 2006). Specifically, Avery and McKay (2006) propose that "using defensive OIM tactics during recruitment will convey the impression to women and minorities that the organization *seeks* diversity". Similarly, Windscheid et al. (2018) propose that organizations can attain legitimacy by using certain *defensive* tactics in diversity-related communications. Specifically, they suggest that companies can utilize defensive tactics on their websites to "*apologize* for and provide *accounts* for low levels of gender diversity" (Windscheid et al., 2018).

Avery and McKay (2006) argue that defensive tactics should be especially beneficial for organizations with poor diversity records. Windscheid et al. (2018) develop this argument by suggesting that organizations with a questionable diversity reputation should use defensive tactics, rather than assertive tactics, to manage such reputations and impressions. Disclosing a firm's lack of gender diversity is likely to influence the organizational image more positively than sending diversity-mixed messages (Windscheid et al., 2016; Windscheid et al., 2018). By utilizing defensive tactics, organizations can own up to the lack of gender diversity and thus attempt to establish credibility with women (Avery & McKay, 2006). Hence, a firm with poor diversity records that use defensive tactics to accommodate for the low levels of gender diversity will convey the impression that the organization *seeks* diversity, and can attempt to establish credibility with its audience.

By providing defensive tactics such as accounts or apologies for a firm's lack of gender diversity, an organization can impact the perceived behavioral integrity, because such a notion could reduce the discrepancy between an actor's words and deeds. As suggested by Simons (2002), actors can attempt to influence behavioral integrity by apologizing or offering 'social' accounts, which are indeed comparable to defensive tactics. Such social accounts can reduce the misalignment's negative impact on behavioral integrity. Specifically, sincere apologies have proven essential when rebuilding and sustaining trusting relationships between organizations and their stakeholders (Basford et al. 2014; Windscheid et al., 2018). Combined, previous research and the concept of behavioral integrity suggest using defensive tactics to account for poor diversity records, and that such tactics should reduce the perceived misalignment between an organization's words and actions, thus impacting the perceptions of behavioral integrity.

We propose that an organization with poor gender diversity records that *apologize* for the low levels of gender diversity will convey the impression that the organization *seeks* diversity. The use of such tactics will reduce the perceived word-deed misalignment and thus impact the perceptions of behavioral integrity. Thus, exposing a male-dominated management team while *apologizing* for the organization's gender distribution should increase the organization's perceived behavioral integrity. Specifically, we suggest that when exposed to an organization with poor diversity records and an apologetic statement (a defensive tactic) potential applicants will report *higher* levels of behavioral integrity, whereas they will report *lower* levels of behavioral integrity when exposed to an organization with poor diversity records and ingratiation (an assertive tactic). Hence, a defensive OIM tactic will lead to higher levels of behavioral integrity, compared to an assertive OIM tactic. We thus hypothesize that:

> **H1**: When presented with a male-dominated management team and a defensive OIM tactic, potential applicants will report higher levels of behavioral integrity, compared to when presented with a male-dominated management team and an assertive OIM tactic.

2.3. Behavioral Integrity and the Impact on Organizational Attractiveness

Previous research often uses the term organizational attractiveness when describing prospective applicants' perceptions of an organization (Evertz & Süß, 2017). Highhouse et al., (2003) describe how an organization's attractiveness is "reflected in individuals' affective and attitudinal thoughts about particular companies as potential places for employment". Organizational attractiveness differs from actual intentions toward the company, as the concept does not necessarily mean that actions will be taken toward the company (Highhouse et al., 2003).

Previous research has shown that potential applicants' initial impressions of organizations are strong predictors of applicants' attraction (Lievens & Highouse, 2003). Moreover, potential applicants ascribe traits to organizations during the early stages of recruitment, which are related to the image of the organization as an employer (Lievens & Highouse, 2003). Lievens & Highouse (2003) showed that such inferred traits influence applicants' attraction to an organization. That is, a potential applicant can be attracted to an organization on the basis of the inferred traits. One such trait that is likely to impact an organization's attractiveness is behavioral integrity. Simons (2002) argues that behavioral integrity is a stable attribute of the actor and that observers tend to ascribe a misalignment as a trait, rather than attributing it to a situational factor which might have motivated a specific behavior. Thus, since behavioral integrity is an ascribed trait, and organizational traits influence applicants' attraction to organizations, behavioral integrity should influence an

organization's attractiveness. Indeed, Windscheid et al., (2016) showed that behavioral integrity had an effect on organizational attractiveness.

While conforming behavioral integrity is related to positive outcomes such as increased trust and affective commitment (Simons et al., 2015), and strengthened organizational identification (Ete et al., 2022), breaking organizational promises can provoke cynicism (MacLean et al., 2015), anger and frustration (Chiaburu et al., 2013). The positive effects related to conforming behavioral integrity, and negative effects related to violating it, leads us to believe that the same patterns should follow for organizational attractiveness. That is, organizations that are perceived to posit higher behavioral integrity should be perceived as more attractive, and organizations lacking in behavioral integrity should be perceived as less attractive. Indeed, Windscheid et al. (2016) showed that there is a positive relationship between an organization's perceived behavioral integrity and its organizational attractiveness. Specifically, their results indicate that "organizations lower on behavioral integrity are perceived as less attractive than organizations higher on behavioral integrity" (Windscheid et al., 2016).

We propose that the perceived behavioral integrity should affect the organizational attractiveness. Specifically, we believe that organizations higher on behavioral integrity will be perceived as more attractive, while organizations lower on behavioral integrity will be perceived as less attractive. That is, there will be a positive relationship between an organization's behavioral integrity and its attractiveness.

In addition, and as suggested earlier, a defensive OIM tactic should lead to higher levels of behavioral integrity, compared to an assertive OIM tactic. Since we suggest that organizations higher on behavioral integrity will be perceived as more attractive, a defensive tactic should lead to higher behavioral integrity, and thus higher organizational attractiveness. In comparison, an assertive tactic should lead to lower behavioral integrity, and thus lower organizational attractiveness. In essence, there should be no direct effect of the OIM tactic on organizational attractiveness; rather, it is believed that behavioral integrity will mediate the relationship between the OIM tactic and the organizational attractiveness. We thus hypothesize that:

> **H2:** There will be a positive relationship between an organization's behavioral integrity and its attractiveness.
>
> **H3:** Behavioral integrity will mediate the relationship between the OIM tactic and the organizational attractiveness.

2.4. Summary Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

In sum, we propose that when presented with a male-dominated management team and a defensive OIM tactic, potential applicants will report higher levels of behavioral integrity, compared to when presented with a male-dominated management team and an assertive OIM tactic (H1). Organizations higher on behavioral integrity will be perceived as more attractive, compared to organizations lower on behavioral integrity. That is, there will be a positive relationship between an organization's behavioral integrity and its attractiveness (H2). Thus, behavioral integrity will mediate the relationship between the OIM tactic and the organizational attractiveness (H3).

2.4.1. Visual Representation of the Theoretical Framework

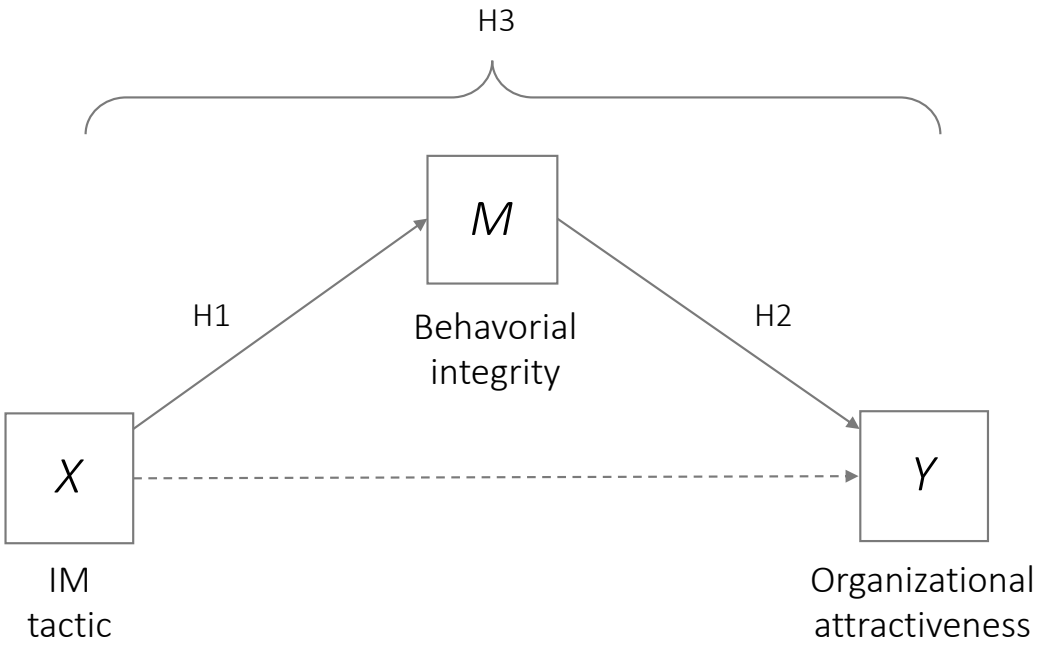


Figure 1. Visual representation of the theoretical framework

2.4.2. Summary of Hypotheses

Table 1

The table shows the relationship between the variables and a summary of the hypotheses

Relationship	Hypothesis
Defensive vs. assertive tactics and behavioral integrity.	**H1:** When presented with a male-dominated management team and a defensive OIM tactic, potential applicants will report higher levels of behavioral integrity, compared to when presented with a male-dominated management team and an assertive OIM tactic.
Behavioral integrity and organizational attractiveness.	**H2**: There will be a positive relationship between an organization's behavioral integrity and its attractiveness.
Behavioral integrity as a mediator of the effect of the OIM tactic on organizational attractiveness.	**H3**: Behavioral integrity will mediate the relationship between the OIM tactic and the organizational attractiveness.

3. Methodology

The following section will elaborate our methodological considerations. The chosen research approach will be presented, as well as the preparatory work, including a pilot study. Finally, the execution of the main study is described followed by a data quality discussion.

3.1. Scientific Research Approach

Based on our methodological assumptions, which follow from both ontological and epistemological considerations, this section aims to describe our research approach and chosen research method. Given the purpose of this study, in which we want to provide empirical evidence on how gender diversity branding can affect women's attraction to organizations with male-dominated management teams, we are looking to measure this phenomenon in order to find and *explain* correlation rather than understanding human behavior. Accordingly, positivism reflects the epistemological position for this purpose, which in turn stems from an objectivist ontology (Bell et al., 2019). What is observed in this study has an objective reality in the sense that the social phenomenon exists independently and without regard to our role as observers (Bell et al., 2019). Based on our epistemological considerations, a deductive approach was chosen in order to develop and test hypotheses on the basis of previous research and theory, to explain any relatedness between our variables.

With regard to methodological assumptions, a quantitative research strategy is argued to be the natural way to proceed with this study, as such a strategy entails a deductive approach (Bell et al., 2019). Edmondson and Mcmanus (2007) refer to research that collects and uses quantitative data as mature theory research. They further describe this as research that clarifies, refines, elaborates, or challenges specific dimensions or aspects of existing theories, for example, tests a theory in a new setting or investigates a mediating mechanism, which is exactly the case in this study. Another characteristic of this type of research is the agreement among researchers that the issues addressed are worth studying (Edmondson & Mcmanus, 2007). The authors' definition of mature theory research reflects our methodological considerations and supports our decision to proceed with a quantitative research strategy, as the topics of this study have seen academic interest and similar studies have been carried out. In addition, a quantitative research strategy was deemed more appropriate than a qualitative, as it ensures a strong methodological fit, i.e. internal consistency among the elements of our study such as research questions, previous work, research approach, and theoretical contribution (Edmondson & Mcmanus, 2007).

However, quantitative research has historically received a great deal of criticism (Bell et al., 2019). According to the authors, "These criticisms tend to revolve around the view that a natural science model is inappropriate for studying the social world". We realize that the results of our study are limited, as the results of a quantitative study only shed light on a small part of the factors explaining a specific phenomenon, and that other factors than those examined may affect the results. As this critique has been significant for us to consider, a discussion about other relevant factors will be presented in 5.2 Limitations.

Online experiment was the chosen method for this study. Söderlund (2018) defines an experiment as the following: "An experiment means that individuals are randomly allocated to groups, which receive different treatments, followed by a comparison of the group reactions after the treatments". Consequently, we are not interested in the perceptions and interpretations of single individuals, but instead the aggregated reactions of larger groups of people – again a reason why a quantitative approach was more appropriate than a qualitative one, which by its nature is more interpretive rather than explanatory (Bell et al., 2019). In this study, the individuals were randomly allocated to one of two groups and received one of two treatments (stimuli versions).

In order to collect data in our online experiment, an online self-completion questionnaire was designed. Edmondson and Mcmanus (2007) refer to the use of surveys as the appropriate and primary method of quantitative data collection. Bell et al. (2019) point out several advantages of self-completion questionnaires, for example, they can reach a large number of respondents at the same time and the collection of data is more efficient compared to structured interviews. Several studies have also concluded that web surveys, in particular, compared to other modes of data collection, result in more reliable and honest answers (Kreuter et al., 2008; Liu & Wang, 2015, 2016). This was something we considered particularly important when discussing alternative ways of collecting data. When comparing web surveys with structured interviews, we argue in particular that the use of self-completion questionnaires is beneficial. We believe that the presence of us as interviewers would have influenced female respondents to respond and think in a way that was satisfactory to us, something like "Two young women writing about gender diversity probably want answers that in the long run will promote diversity and emphasize the importance of gender equality". Accordingly, we wanted to avoid any type of interviewer effect. We believe using an online self-completion questionnaire significantly reduced the risk of affecting the respondents' replies.

On the other hand, self-completion questionnaires come with some disadvantages, for example, respondents might face problems understanding the questions without guidance, or get bored by

questions that don't seem important to them and therefore abandon the survey (Bell et al., 2019). To compensate for these disadvantages, the questions were made easy to understand, and a lot of effort was put into making the survey as compact and concise as possible to avoid bored respondents that potentially could abandon the survey. In addition, a pilot study was conducted to highlight any confusing questions or potential obstacles.

The level of engagement is generally lower in web-based surveys than in interviews (Kreuter et al., 2008; Liu & Wang, 2015, 2016). By including an attention check question in our survey, we have actively tried to identify any respondents who did not pay close attention to the survey questions and potentially could have contributed with sub-optimal responses. As suggested by Liu and Wronski (2018), one attention check question (which the authors refer to as trap question) rather than several is deemed sufficient to capture unattentive respondents. In addition, the authors point out that a trap question should not be too tricky to answer. Consequently, we followed both of these suggestions when designing our survey. Additionally, one of the survey questions was reversely coded, which helped to discover straight-lining (selecting the same answer option across several questions or throughout the whole survey), which can be a sign of inattention.

3.2. Preparatory Work

3.2.1. Investigating the Corporate Websites of Swedish Listed Firms

As the two OIM tactics used in this experiment are expressed through gender diversity statements (see section 3.2.3 Manipulation) on a corporate website (see section 3.2.2 Stimuli Development), it has been essential to investigate and understand how real companies communicate around the topic in order to create realistic statements. The corporate websites of Swedish-listed firms were deemed appropriate for such an investigation. Reports provided by Allbright, a non-profit and non-partisan organization working towards equality and diversity, assisted with the selection of company websites appropriate for the purpose of this study. To mirror reality, the investigated companies were selected from Allbright's 'yellow list' (Allbright, 2019). Companies with more than 0 percent and less than 40 percent of each gender in the management team are placed on the 'yellow list' (Allbright, 2019). With 133 companies in total, the 'yellow companies' represent the majority of the Swedish-listed firms. Out of the 133 companies, 25 were chosen for this investigation (see Appendix 1 for full list of investigated companies). All selected companies hold a (heavily) male-dominated management team. In addition, the selected companies are well known and were investigated due to their seemingly strong brand name. Therefore, it was believed that these companies would most certainly communicate around gender diversity.

Indeed, all 25 companies were found to communicate around gender diversity. Some companies had extensive sections related to gender diversity. For example, Swedish Match described how they "...believe that gender diversity at all levels of the organization benefits the Company in many ways" and "As such, we have a Group goal of having at least 40 percent of each gender in senior management" (Swedish Match, 2021). Similarly, Volvo Group described that "Equality is not a woman's concern, it's a business concern." and how they "...want a mix of women and men and non-binary people working together at all levels of the company" (Volvo Group, 2022). Other companies communicated a rather reserved approach towards gender diversity. For example, SAS only mentioned gender diversity in the following statement "All employees and applicants for vacant positions also have the right to be treated on an impartial and formal basis and not on the basis of what… gender… to which he or she belongs" (SAS, 2020). Regardless of how they communicate around gender diversity, all the investigated companies hold a male-dominated management team. The corporate websites of the chosen companies aimed to inspire the creation of realistic gender diversity statements. See Appendix 1 for a full list of the inspirational gender diversity statements from the investigated companies.

3.2.2. Stimuli Development

As this study sets out to compare two different impression management tactics, two versions of the stimuli were developed. The two stimuli versions consisting of two corporate websites were developed for the online questionnaire, and were designed by one of this study's authors who has worked as a professional web designer. Specifically, the stimuli versions depicted the "About Us" page on the corporate website of the fictitious company Galant. The "About Us" page contained two text blocks, the first one included a brief and general description of the company and was named "Who we are". To ensure the company description's credibility, the text was reviewed by one Talent Acquisition Specialist and one People Operations Specialist. No adjustments were made following their inputs. The second text block was named "A workplace for everyone", and included one of two manipulated gender diversity statements (see section 3.2.3 Manipulation). Thus, the two versions of the stimuli were identical apart from the text block "A workplace for everyone".

The website further included pictures of the 8 professionals in the management team, who were to represent the "reality" within the firm. Although the stimuli represented a fictitious firm, the content ought to be as authentic and realistic as possible. As the majority of the Swedish listed firms have at least one woman in the management team (Allbright, 2019), the stimuli depicted a male-dominated management team, including seven men and one woman, and not a male uniform management

team. In addition, the inclusion of a single woman should not give the impression that the organization is gender-balanced, as she will most likely be viewed as a token or a symbol (Kanter, 1977). Indeed, Windscheid et al. (2016) concluded that "the presence of a single woman on an organization's board is perceived as window dressing rather than as a sincere attempt to move toward establishing gender diversity in the organization's upper echelons". Thus, it was believed that depicting a male-dominated management team, instead of a male uniform management team, would better mirror reality while still giving the impression of the prevailing inequalities.

To further portray a realistic organization, the managers' titles were provided based on common gender distribution within a management team. As the vast majority of the human resource managers are women (Allbright, 2019; Allbright, 2020), the executive woman was given the title "Head of People and Human Resources". In addition, a single woman holding a stereotypical role (such as HR manager) should suggest that the organization is not only male-dominated in top positions, but that gender stereotypes prevail in the overall organization (Iseke & Pull, 2019). Further, the names of the executives were drawn from the top thirty most common names in Sweden, to avoid any potential cues from unusual names.

The 25 websites of the Swedish listed firms acted as inspiration for the layout, and the two text blocks. Coloring, fonts, and graphics were considered carefully and were determined based on the web designer's professional experience. In particular, colors and graphics were chosen with the intention of reducing any impact on the respondent as much as possible. One photograph, except for the images of the management team members, was included on the page. This photograph depicts a skyscraper view seen from the ground, and was chosen for its neutrality - an image that may appear on a company website, but which does not show, for example, employees or other aspects, which could have an impact on respondents or create bias. Intentionally, the management team block as well as the text block "A workplace for everyone" were designed to be large to catch attention and guide the respondent on where to put focus. In general, the page was designed to look as realistic as possible, and without any content that could stand out and potentially create bias. To reduce bias stemming from preconceptions against specific firms or industries, the depicted firm was fictitious and not appointed to a specific industry (see the two stimuli versions in appendix 2).

3.2.3. Manipulation

3.2.3.1. Assertive Tactic: Ingratiation

The organizational statement concerning gender diversity ("A workplace for everyone") was manipulated to either fit within assertive or defensive tactics. The assertive version of the stimuli was developed using the assertive OIM tactic *ingratiation*. As a reminder, *ingratiation* is an organization's attempt to appear attractive and likable towards its audience (Mohamed et al., 1999; Bolino et al., 2008). Avery & McKay (2006) propose that companies can use ingratiation in the form of *inclusiveness policy statements* (such as equal employment opportunity statements) to convey that the organization values gender diversity. Similarly, Windscheid et al. (2018) found that the majority of the investigated companies provided some sort of *equality policy* on their corporate website. The authors found that such equality policies often took shape in statements such as "Women at [company name] have the same opportunities as men" and "Men and women with equal qualifications have the same career opportunities at [company name]". As this version of the stimuli should depict an organization that transmits a diversity mixed message, equality policies similar to the ones identified by Windscheid et al. (2018) were deemed appropriate for transmitting such messaging.

While the assertive version of the stimuli was developed based on the definition of ingratiation, the gender diversity statements from the 25 company websites served as inspiration. To depict a realistic equality policy, statements similar to the equality policies identified by Windscheid et al. (2018) were of particular importance. To further strengthen the credibility of the equality policy, a diversity and inclusion management team at a global company was consulted. The generated feedback concluded that while diversity policies are often assertive in nature, they usually include a broader perspective than gender only. However, as this study only focuses on the gender aspect of diversity, the statement remained focused on gender diversity. In addition, several of the 25 investigated companies had diversity statements concerning gender only. The final version used in the main study reads as follows:

"Galant is a workplace that welcomes and respects all employees. At Galant, we believe that gender diversity at all levels of the organization contributes to innovation and profitable growth. We provide an equal opportunity workplace and are set to harness the skills of all employees. At Galant, we provide a workplace where employees with equal qualifications have the same career opportunities, regardless of gender."

3.2.3.2. Defensive Tactic: Apology

The second version of the stimuli was developed using the defensive OIM tactic *apology*. As previously mentioned, an apology is an organization's attempt to obtain a pardon from an audience, while acknowledging and accepting responsibility for the undesirable event. If a promise of improvement and recovery is included, the apology can elicit positive responses towards the company (Mohamed et al., 1999). Avery and McKay (2006) propose that companies can use defensive tactics (such as apologies) to convey that the organization *seeks* gender diversity. Thus, the gender diversity statement used in this stimuli was developed to depict a firm with poor diversity records that apologize for its low levels of gender diversity, and thus conveying the impression that the organization seeks diversity.

Although no thorough content analysis was conducted, we found no evident application of apologies on the 25 investigated company websites. Hence, the gender diversity statement developed for this second version of the stimuli is less anchored in real gender diversity communication. Nevertheless, the defensive statement was to convey an apology as defined in this thesis, by including a) an acknowledgment of the lack of gender diversity b) acceptance of responsibility c) an attempt to obtain a pardon and d) a promise of future improvement (Mohamed et al., 1999).

To strengthen the credibility and authenticity of the apologetic gender diversity statement, the same diversity and inclusion management team was again consulted. The generated feedback concluded that explicitly apologizing and accepting full responsibility for a negative event ("We sincerely apologize for…", "We accept full responsibility for…") is not realistic, as such communication might result in a lawsuit for the company. Thus, no such sentences were included in the final version. Instead, companies can accept responsibility yet avoid lawsuits by making broader claims such as "'we have not done enough", "we could have done better", "we missed opportunities", and "we were too slow to act". The final version used in the main study reads as follows:

"At Galant, we believe that gender balance on all levels in the organization will make us stronger as a company and we want to build on our differences to bring the best ideas to life. Today we are not where we want to be, as we have not done enough and have acted too slow regarding these questions. We know we have a long way to go, and accelerating our gender diversity efforts and ensuring an equal opportunity workplace is today our greatest priority. Our mission is to have a gender-balanced workforce by 2025 and to become the industry leader within gender diversity."

3.2.4. Measurements

3.2.4.1. Behavioral Integrity

Simons (2002) argues that behavioral integrity is subjective and might be subject to individual perceiver biases (Simons et al., 2011). However, aggregated responses of several perceivers are argued to eliminate such biases (Simons et al., 2011). Similar to most empirical studies on BI (Simons et al., 2011), behavioral integrity was in this study measured using an eight-item scale developed by Simons, Friedman, Liu, and McLean Parks (2007). This scale was originally developed to measure *employees'* perceived (mis)match between *leaders'* enacted and espoused values, and includes statements such as "My manager delivers on promises" and "My manager practices what she preaches". Although Simons originally applied the scale to measure BI at the managerial level from the employees' perspective, Windscheid et al (2016) successfully adapted the scale to instead measure applicants' perceived behavioral integrity at the organizational level (α =.97).

Similar to Windscheid et al. (2016), the scale used in this study was adapted to address the organizational and applicant perspective instead. For example, the original statement "There is a match between my *manager's* words and actions" was replaced by the statement "There is a match between the *organization's* words and actions". A 7-point Likert Scale was applied to answer the statements, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), where a lower score indicates lower BI (Simons et al., 2007).

Table 2

The table show the adaption of Simons, Friedman, Liu, and McLean Parks (2007) scale for measuring behavioral integrity

Item no	Original statement	Organizational modification
1	There is a match between my manager's words and actions.	There is a match between the organization's words and actions.
2	My manager delivers on promises.	The organization delivers on promises.
3	My manager practices what he/she preaches.	The organization practices what it preaches.
4	My manager does what he/she says he/she will do.	The organization does what it says it will do.
5	My manager conducts himself/herself by the same values he/she talks about.	The organization conducts itself by the same values it talks about.
6	My manager shows the same priorities that he/she describes.	The organization shows the same priorities that it describes.
7	When my manager promises something, I can be certain that it will happen.	When the organization promises something, I can be certain that it will happen.
8	If my manager says he/she is going to do something, he/she will.	If the organization says it is going to do something, it will.

3.2.4.2. Organizational Attractiveness

Organizational attractiveness was measured using a scale developed by Highhouse, Lievens, and Sinar (2003). Highhouse et al., (2003) examined three components of organizational attraction: attractiveness, intentions to pursue, and prestige. Thus, the original scale includes measures of company attractiveness, intentions to pursue, and prestige. However, as this study seeks to investigate the effect on attractiveness, rather than on applicant intentions and company prestige, the latter two were excluded from the scale. In addition, the definition of organizational attractiveness used in this study separates the attitudes about particular companies as potential employers from actual behavioral intentions. This study only addresses the former notion. Highhouse et al., (2003) assessed company attractiveness using five items that addressed "preliminary attitudes about the company as a potential place for employment.", thus focusing on attractiveness rather than actual intentions towards an organization. Moreover, previous research has successfully measured organizational attractiveness using only the company attractiveness item, thus excluding intentions to pursue and company prestige (Windscheid et al., 2016; Iseke & Pull, 2019). Thus, company attractiveness is deemed as an appropriate measure of organizational attractiveness as defined in this study.

The five items comprising company attractiveness (and thus organizational attractiveness) include the following statements: “For me, this company would be a good place to work”, “I would not be interested in this company except as a last resort” (reverse-coded), “This company is attractive to me as a place for employment”, “I am interested in learning more about this company”, “A job at this company is very appealing to me”. The items were coded on a 7-point Likert ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), where a lower score indicates lower organizational attractiveness (Windscheid et al., 2016).

3.2.4.3. Manipulation Checks

3.2.4.3.1. Perception of OIM Tactics

To measure whether the manipulated gender diversity statements were perceived as assertive or defensive a manipulation check was included, divided into two questions. Based on the text “A Workplace for Everyone”, i.e. the way the company communicates its gender diversity efforts on its corporate website, the participants were asked 1) If the company uses the text to appear attractive and likable, and to build, maintain or improve their company image (assertive) and 2) If the company uses the text to acknowledge and take responsibility for any current, unwanted situation, and to make a promise of future improvement (defensive). The items were coded on a 7-point Likert ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

3.2.4.3.2. Gender Composition of Management Team

To measure the perceived gender composition of the management team, a second manipulation check was included. Participants were asked, based on the pictures of the management team, to state whether they believed the management team to be female-dominated, male-dominated, balanced or I don't know.

3.2.4.4. Attention Check

To make sure all participants paid attention to the survey, an attention check was included. The participants were asked to choose the number eight among the answer options 10, 8, 5, 7 and 2.

3.2.5. Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to ensure that 1) the management team was perceived as male-dominated (manipulation check), 2) to indicate whether the two statements generated a difference in responses, and 3) to highlight any potential obstacles.

An online questionnaire was sent out on the 15th of March. In total, 16 people who identified themselves as women responded to the questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire aimed to investigate the organization's perceived gender distribution and contained the stimuli *without* one of the two gender diversity statements. After reviewing the stimuli, the respondents were asked to answer whether the organization's a) workforce b) line managers c) management team, and d) overall organization were perceived as female-dominated, male-dominated, balanced, or I don't know. The question about the management team (question c) was accordingly the manipulation check.

The second part of the questionnaire contained one of the two versions of the stimuli which included one of the two gender diversity statements (see Appendix 3.5 for statements used in the pilot study). The respondents were randomly assigned to either view the assertive or the defensive version. To test whether the introduction of the gender diversity statement had an effect on the organization's perceived gender distribution, the respondents were again asked to answer questions related to the gender distribution of the company (including the manipulation check regarding the management team). The following sections contained statements measuring organizational attractiveness and behavioral integrity, to investigate whether the two versions of the stimuli generated a difference in responses. In addition, the respondents were asked to answer questions concerning men's and women's career opportunities, opportunities to develop, and opportunities to reach top-level positions at the company, which aimed to further indicate whether the two stimuli versions statements generated a difference in the results. Finally, the respondents were asked to provide any additional inputs. See the questionnaire used in the pilot study in Appendix 3.

3.2.5.1. Results from the Pilot Study

Results from the pilot study indicated that the management team, consisting of seven men and one woman, was indeed perceived as male-dominated. Thus, the manipulation worked as expected. In addition, the workforce, line managers, and overall organization were largely viewed as male-dominated (see Appendix 4 for full results). These results slightly decreased when introducing the second part of the questionnaire, with the stimuli containing the gender diversity statement (see Appendix 4 for full results). However, the majority of the respondents still viewed the management

team, the workforce, the line managers, and the overall organization as male-dominated. Therefore, the same pictures were used in the pilot study and the main study. In addition, the generated feedback indicated that the difference between the terms "the overall organization" and "the workforce" was unclear. The latter option was thus excluded from the main survey, as well as the "line manager" option, which was deemed unnecessary as such managers are already included in "the overall organization".

The results from the assertive and defensive stimuli indicated some difference in mean values between the two versions. The assertive version generated lower levels of organizational attractiveness, compared to the defensive version. However, when comparing the levels of behavioral integrity between the two versions, the results were somewhat mixed. In addition, men's and women's career opportunities, opportunities to develop, and opportunities to reach top-level positions were rated lower for the assertive version compared to the defensive version (See Appendix 4 for full results). This indicated that the manipulated statements generated a difference in terms of the organization's equal opportunities.

To further capture the essence of the chosen assertive and a defensive OIM tactic, and thus potentially generate a greater difference between the two versions, minor changes were made to the two gender diversity statements before the main survey was launched (see section 3.2.3 Manipulation for statements used in main survey). In addition, the website section containing the manipulated statement was enlarged to further emphasize the gender diversity statement. Conversely, the text block containing general information about the company was reduced. In addition, the font size was enlarged for both text blocks. Finally, the questions concerning men's and women's career opportunities, opportunities to develop, and opportunities to reach top-level positions at the company, were removed in the main study since they did not add to answering the research questions of this study.

3.3. Main Study

3.3.1. Survey Design

The main survey of this study was divided into three parts. The first part of the online self-completion questionnaire was an introduction, which in turn was divided into three sections. In the first section, the respondents were informed that the survey was part of a master thesis at the Stockholm School of Economics and intended to be answered only by people who identify themselves as women. Respondents were also informed that participation was completely anonymous and that no IP Addresses, location data, or contact info would be recorded. As such, the

study complies with the third ethical principle in business research which concerns "the need to protect the privacy of research participants" (Bell et al., 2019). In addition, the anonymization and data protection of the research subjects prevented violation of the first ethical principle, harm to participants, as no individuals could be identified (Bell et al., 2019). That is, the survey responses cannot be used in a way that could potentially harm individuals. To further encourage participation, the section included information that 2 SEK would be donated to support UNHCR's efforts in Ukraine for every answered questionnaire.

In the second section of the introduction, respondents were informed that they would be presented an "About Us" page on a fictitious corporate website. Consequently, participants were informed that the company as well as the corporate website were made up specifically for this study. They were further asked to read through the content carefully, assess it, and answer the questions provided. Finally, the third section contained information concerning GDPR which included information about *Participation*, *Confidentiality*, *Secured storage of data*, and *Your rights under GDPR*. As the respondents were informed that the participation was completely voluntary, and in addition had to actively consent to participate, the study complies with the ethical principle of informed consent (Bell et al., 2019). Moreover, the information concerning GDPR further strengthened the compliance with the ethical principles concerning privacy and avoidance of harm to participants. Before moving on with the actual survey questions in the second part of the survey, the respondent had to give information about gender identity (as the survey was intended to be answered only by people who identify themselves as women).

To reduce bias from preconceived notions of gender diversity, no information concerning the topic or purpose of the study was included in the introduction. Conveying such information to participants is a balancing act between reducing bias and preventing deception. Accordingly, it is not desirable to completely account for the purpose of the research (Bell et al., 2019). As the participants neither received information about the actual purpose nor any deceptive information, the study is argued to comply with the fourth and last ethical principle in business research, preventing deception.

The second part of the study included one of the two versions of the stimuli and questions measuring organizational attractiveness (5 questions) and behavioral integrity (8 questions). Two manipulation checks (in total 3 questions) were included, the first one was to indicate whether the manipulated gender diversity statements were perceived as assertive or defensive, and the second one was to indicate the perceived gender composition of the management team. In addition, one question was asked to indicate the perceived gender composition in the overall organization.

However, no investigations were made for this question, since it did not add to answering the research questions of this study. Accordingly, this question will not be discussed further. A seven-point Likert scale was used for questions regarding organizational attractiveness, behavioral integrity, and the first manipulation check. The scale ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

The choice of a seven-point scale was due to three reasons. First of all, previous research has successfully applied a seven-point Likert scale when measuring organizational attractiveness (Windscheid et al., 2016). To create consistency throughout the study, the seven-point Likert scale was applied to answer the questions concerning behavioral integrity and the manipulation check as well. Secondly, seven response options were deemed appropriate, as the number of options enables some nuances in the responses. Accordingly, less than seven options were believed to give too narrow responses, while more than seven options were believed to slightly increase nuances without any significant value. However, the use of an odd-numbered scale allows neutral answers, which can result in quite indifferent findings where the respondent neither agrees nor disagrees. On the other hand, it was deemed more important that such answers were allowed, to not risk any skewed answers where indifferent respondents are forced to agree or disagree.

The third and last part of the survey included questions about how much the respondents care, have knowledge of, and engage in questions regarding gender diversity (6 questions using a seven-point Likert scale). These questions were included as they were believed to be potential moderators, affecting the relationship between the OIM tactic and behavioral integrity. However, as the statistical analysis showed no significant effect of these potential moderators, they will not be discussed further. In order to get additional information about our respondents and to ensure that they paid attention, this part also included a few questions about demographic factors (age, occupation, number of years as a working professional, and educational level), and lastly an attention check question (in total 5 questions).

While the introduction and the set of questions were fixed and consistent across all surveys, the websites were presented in two versions. Except for the two questions in the introduction regarding gender identity and consent to participate, the survey included a total of 28 questions. As the survey was sent out to women from different nationalities, the survey was conducted in English. A more detailed description of the sampling and data collection will follow. To read the complete survey, see Appendix 5.

3.3.2. Sampling and Sample

A convenience sampling process was used to collect data. A convenience sample could result in limited differences in the responses, as respondents who choose to take part in a study may not completely represent the population from which the sample has been drawn (Cochran, 1977). Accordingly, Bell et al. (2019) argue that findings from a study with a convenience sample are challenging to generalize to the larger population. However, to somewhat increase generalizability, some efforts can be carried out. While using university students as subjects is common in business research, such sampling poses a threat to the external validity if the results are generalized to the commercial world (Adams et al., 2014). To avoid this issue, the sample of this study includes people who identify as women, above the age of 18, from different nationalities, and who are either students or working professionals. In addition, such a sample was believed to generate a greater amount of responses, compared to simply targeting university students. Finally, a convenience sample was deemed appropriate and reasonable due to the limited resources and scope of this study.

In this study, the sample consisted of the authors' friends, current and old colleagues, family, and alumni, as well as women in their surroundings, as participants were encouraged to share the survey. Encouraging such engagement could create a kind of "snowball effect", and is a way to increase the variety of women participating in the study, as well as the number of responses. This proved to be a good approach as the spread of our sample regarding age was large.

The total number of respondents was 210. Nine of the respondents stated that they were men and were excluded from the final sample. Although the respondents could state their gender identity as *Non-binary/Other* or *Prefer not to disclose*, none of these options were recorded by any respondents. In addition, one respondent was removed due to incomplete data points. The final sample consisted of 200 respondents, with a mean age of 35 years. 75 percent of the respondents were working professionals, 24 percent were students, and 1 percent were neither working professionals nor students. The respondents had on average worked 11 years. Finally, the respondents were asked to record their highest educational level, which resulted in the following percentages: 2 percent held a Ph.D. degree, 58 percent held a master's degree, 34 percent held a bachelor's degree, 6 percent held a high school degree and 1 percent held non of these degrees.

3.3.3. Data Collection

Qualtrics was the software used to create and design the self-completion questionnaire for the main study. An anonymous survey link was used to distribute the survey, which was done by sharing the

link in several Facebook groups, emails, chat channels in Microsoft Teams, Messenger, and Instagram stories. The data was collected between the 23rd and 30th of March 2022. As mentioned above, all answers were anonymous, and no IP Addresses, location data, or contact info were recorded. This was done to comply with GDPR and business research ethics, and to ensure more honest answers and maximize participation. Most of the efforts to distribute and share the survey link took place on March 23rd. A second "push" with reminders was sent out on March 28th in order to ensure a total number of responses above 200.

3.4. Data Quality

3.4.1. Reliability

The internal reliability, used to determine the internal consistency between these multi-item questions, was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (Bell et al., 2019). An acceptance level of >.7 was employed to determine satisfactory internal reliability (Söderlund, 2018). The table below discloses the satisfactory alphas for each measure. In addition, the chosen measures for organizational attractiveness and behavioral integrity have been applied in previous research (e.g. Windscheid et al., 2016), with a proven internal consistency of .97 and .92 respectively.

Table 3
The table shows Cronbach's alpha for organizational attractiveness and behavioral integrity

	Organisational attractiveness	**Behavioral integrity**
Cronbach's alpha	.915 *	.959 *

* α > .7

3.4.2. Validity

3.4.2.1. Measurement Validity

The construct of measurement validity concerns whether a measure captures the concept intended to be captured (Bell et al., 2019). Only established measures were used to capture the concepts of organizational attractiveness and behavioral integrity, thus strengthening the measurement validity of this study. Specifically, the scale measuring organizational attractiveness is well established in previous research (Windscheid et al., 2016; Iseke & Pull, 2019). Behavioral integrity was measured using a well-recognized scale developed by Simons, Friedman, Liu, and McLean Parks (2007). Although most empirical studies on behavioral integrity use this scale (Simons et al., 2011), it has

largely been applied on an individual level. However, Windscheid et al. (2016) successfully adapted the scale to capture an organization's behavioral integrity.

3.4.2.2. Internal Validity

Internal validity concerns whether the manipulation of the independent variable is responsible for the changes in the dependent variable (Adams et al., 2014; Bell et al., 2019). As this study applied an online experimental method, the participants were randomly allocated to one of the two treatments, which were held constant apart from the manipulated gender diversity statements. Consequently, the internal validity should be rather high, as any potential differences in the dependent variable should be explained by the randomization and manipulation (Söderlund, 2018; Bell et al., 2019). In addition, the order of the questions was carefully considered to reduce any potential bias stemming from respondents' inference about "appropriate" answers. For example, the questions concerning organizational attractiveness were placed before the questions concerning behavioral integrity, followed by the manipulation check and demographic questions.

3.4.2.3. External Validity

This construct of validity refers to whether the findings of the study can be generalized and applicable in other settings (Adams et al., 2014; Bell et al., 2019). One obvious threat to the study's external validity is its convenience sampling method. While the study targeted all above the age of 18 who identify as women, and thus a wide age span, the majority of the respondents were working professionals and held a master's degree. In particular, the large proportion of respondents holding a master's degree is perhaps not representative for the larger population of women. The sampling method used is therefore deemed to somewhat lower the external validity.

Furthermore, our study included a fictitious firm and an artificial stimuli. As an artificial situation in an experiment can impact the generalizability (Söderlund, 2010), several measures were taken to minimize this concern. First of all, the corporate websites of 25 Swedish listed firms acted as an inspiration for the text blocks as well as the visual components of the stimuli, to depict a realistic and credible website. Secondly, the fictitious website was designed by one of this study's authors, who is a professional web designer. Thirdly, the "About us" text was reviewed by one People Operations Specialist and one Talent Acquisition Specialist to ensure credibility. In addition, the manipulated gender diversity statements were repeatedly modified to further replicate reality. This was done based on several feedback sessions with a diversity and inclusion management team at a global company. Lastly, the names and titles of the management team were chosen due to their commonality and representativeness.

3.4.3. Replicability

Replicability concerns the process of reproducing a study in order to either strengthen the generalizability or question the validity of the original study (Bell et al., 2019). Accordingly, replicability is an important quality criterion of quantitative research. Several sections were included in this study to ensure replicability. Firstly, all the preparatory work has been carefully presented, including the preparatory investigation of existing corporate websites, the stimuli development, and the manipulation. In addition, the well-established measurements used in this study are described in detail as well as the execution of the pilot study. Furthermore, the survey design of the main study has been well-documented, together with the sample and sampling process as well as the data collection process. Moreover, the analysis of the data has been thoroughly described, that is, should one decide to reproduce this study, the information provided should be sufficient. Consequently, it can be argued that the replicability of this study is sufficiently ensured.

3.5. Data Analysis Tools and Tests

After closing the survey on March 30, 2022, the response data was downloaded and imported into the IBM SPSS (version 28), which is the statistical analysis software used to process and analyze the data.

Independent-samples t-test were used to test the two manipulation checks and H1 (significance level 5%). Such a test is commonly used when comparing the same variable between two different groups (Pallant, 2013). The independent-samples t-test reveals whether there is a statistically significant difference in the mean values between two groups (Pallant, 2013). The results are presented in line with Pallant (2013). Hayes PROCESS macro model 4 is used to test H2 and H3 (5 000 bootstrapping samples, 95% confidence interval). The results of Hayes PROCESS macro model 4 are presented as suggested by Hayes (2018).

3.6. Data Checks

3.6.1. Recoding of Variables

The organizational attractiveness scale included one reverse-coded item, "I would not be interested in this company except as a last resort". This item was recoded so that a higher value instead corresponded to higher levels of organizational attractiveness. Both organizational attractiveness and behavioral integrity are multiple-item measures (i.e., several questions are used to measure one concept), and were computed to two separate index variables by calculating the mean item scores of each respondent. Although simply calculating the total score for each subject is sufficient for index

creation, computing the mean can simplify interpretation as the total scale for the indexed variables are back to the original scale used for each of the items (i.e., from 1 to 7) (Pallant, 2013). The reliability of the indexed variables was tested through Cronbach's alpha (acceptance level > .7). The test disclosed satisfactory alphas of α = .915 (organizational attractiveness) and α = .959 (behavioral integrity).

3.6.2. Normality Checks

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to assess the normality of the distribution of scores for behavioral integrity and organizational attractiveness. A non-significant result ($p > .05$) indicates normal distribution, and a significant result ($p < .05$) suggests violation of the assumption of normality (Pallant, 2013). The results suggest that behavioral integrity is indeed normally distributed within the group who received the defensive stimuli version ($p = .084$). However, behavioral integrity yielded a significant result for the respondents who viewed the assertive stimuli version ($p < .001$), suggesting violation of the assumption of normality. Furthermore, the results for organizational attractiveness suggest normal distribution within the group who received the defensive stimuli ($p = .077$), but not for the respondents viewing the assertive stimuli ($p < .05$).

The tests indicate that the distribution of scores for behavioral integrity and organizational attractiveness are normal for respondents receiving the defensive stimuli. Conversely, the significant *p*-values indicate violations of the normality assumption within the group who received the assertive stimuli. Oftentimes, scores of the dependent variable are not normally distributed, yet most statistical techniques (such as the independent-samples t-test) are robust and tolerant of such violations (Pallant, 2013). As the sample size for the assertive group is well above 30, the violation of the assumption of normality should not cause any major complications (Pallant, 2013). In addition, Hayes (2018) argues that the assumption of normality is of little importance in regression analysis, as "only severe violations of the normality assumption substantially affect the validity of the statistical inference".

Table 4

The table shows the results of the Kolmogorov Smirnov test of Normality

Relationship	Website	statistic	df	*p*
Behavorial integrity	Assertive version	.168	105	<.001*
	Defensive version	.085	95	.084
Organisational attractiveness	Assertive version	.100	105	.011*
	Defensive version	.086	95	.077

*$p < 0.05$, violation of the assumption of normality

4. Results and Analysis

The following section will present the analyzed data as the results of the main study. The section is divided into two parts, starting with a presentation of the results from the manipulation checks, and a presentation of the hypothesis testing.

4.1. Manipulation Check

4.1.1. Gender Diversity Statements

The study contained two manipulation checks. The first manipulation check was to indicate whether the manipulated gender diversity statements were perceived as assertive or defensive. Based on the text "A Workplace for Everyone", i.e. the way the company communicates its gender diversity efforts on its corporate website, the participants were asked 1) If the company uses the text to appear attractive and likable, and to build, maintain or improve their company image (assertive) and 2) If the company uses the text to acknowledge and take responsibility for any current, unwanted situation, and to make a promise of future improvement (defensive). The items were coded on a 7-point Likert ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Ideally, participants receiving the assertive version of the stimuli should indicate that they perceived this statement as assertive rather than defensive, and the participants receiving the defensive version should indicate that they perceived this statement as defensive rather than assertive.

To check whether the two manipulations were perceived as predicted, two independent-samples t-tests were conducted. The results of the first independent-samples t-test (Q1: Assertive manipulation check) does not show a significant difference in mean values for the assertive version (M = 5.73 , SD = 1.05) and defensive version of the stimuli (M = 5.47, SD = 1.54; t (163.8) = 1.38, p = .169, two-sided). The results suggest that there is no difference in how assertive the two stimuli versions are perceived. The results of the second independent-samples t-test (Q2: Defensive manipulation check) show a significant difference in mean values for the assertive version (M = 3.99 , SD = 1.61) and defensive version of the stimuli (M = 4.88, SD = 1.1.47; t (198) = - 4.08, p = < .001, two-sided). The results suggest that the defensive stimuli version is indeed perceived to be more defensive than the assertive stimuli version.

In sum, the defensive stimuli version is perceived to be more defensive than the assertive stimuli version. But the results suggest that there is no difference in how assertive the two stimuli versions are perceived.

Table 5
The table shows the results of Independent-samples t-test (manipulation)

	Stumuli version	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Difference in mean	t	p
Q1: Assertive manipulation check	Assertive	105	5.73	1.05	.260	1.38	.169*
	Defensive	95	5.47	1.54			
Q2: Defensive manipulation check	Assertive	105	3.99	1.61	-.894	-4.08	<.001
	Defensive	95	4.88	1.47			

4.1.2. Management Team Composition

The second manipulation check was to indicate the perceived gender composition of the management team. While the pictures of the management team were held constant across both stimuli versions, it was deemed important to examine whether the management team was indeed perceived as male-dominated. To answer the manipulation check, the participants were asked whether they believed the management team to be a) female-dominated, b) male-dominated c) balanced, or d) that they did not know, based on the pictures of the management team. The results suggest that the management team is indeed perceived as male-dominated. The manipulation of the management team composition was hence recognized and worked as expected.

Table 6
The table shows the perceived gender composition of the management team

Management gender composition	Count	Percentage
Male-dominated	189	94.5 %
Female-dominated	0	0 %
Balanced	8	4 %
I don't know	3	1.5 %
Total	**200**	**100 %**

4.2. Impression Management and Behavioral Integrity

H1 suggests that when presented with a male-dominated management team and a defensive IM tactic, potential applicants will report higher levels of behavioral integrity, compared to when presented with a male-dominated management team and an assertive OIM tactic. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to test the first hypothesis. The independent-samples t-test reveals whether perceived behavioral integrity differs significantly between the assertive and defensive stimuli versions. The results of the independent-samples t-test show a significant difference in mean values for the assertive version (M = 2.38 , SD = 1.72) and defensive version of the stimuli (M = 2.9, SD = 1.26; t (198) = 3.015, p = .003, two-sided). The difference between the mean values is 0.518 with a 95% confidence interval ranging between .179 and .857. The results suggest that the defensive version of the stimuli generates higher levels of perceived behavioral integrity, compared to the assertive version of the stimuli. Hence**, H1 is supported.**

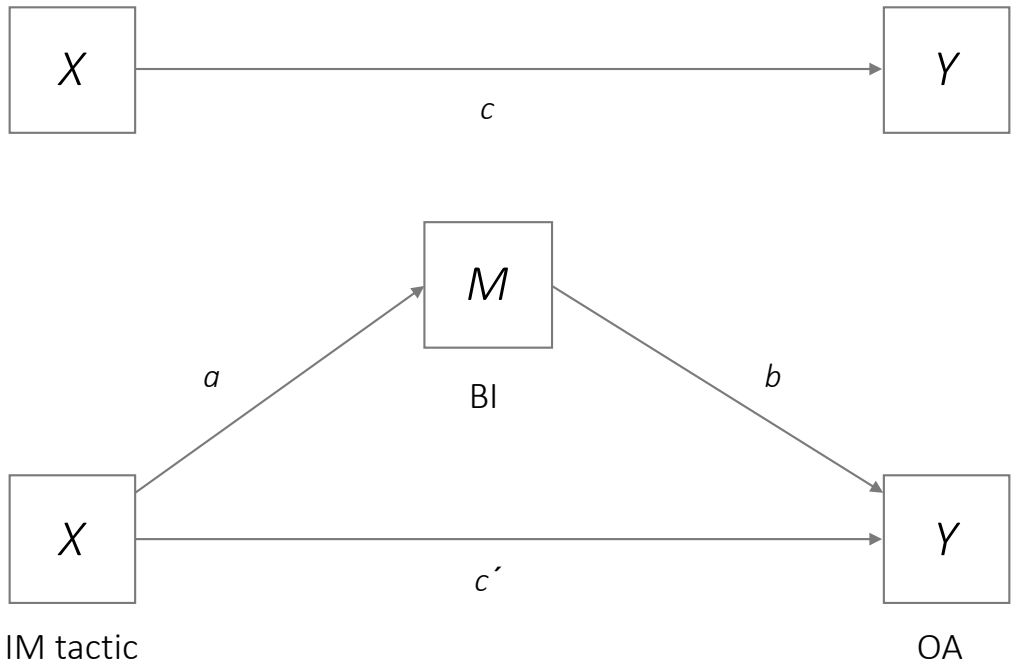
Table 7
The table shows the results from the independent samples t-test (behavorial integrity)

Stimuli version	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Difference in mean	t	*p*
Assertive	105	2.38	1.72	.518	3.015	.003
Defensive	95	2.9	1.26			

4.3. A Positive Relationship and an Indirect Effect

H2 suggests that there will be a positive relationship between an organization's behavioral integrity and its attractiveness, and H3 suggests that behavioral integrity will mediate the relationship between the OIM tactic and the organizational attractiveness. As mentioned, H2 and H3 are tested by conducting a mediation analysis using Hayes PROCESS macro (model 4). Hayes' (2018) criteria for establishing mediation differs from the historically recognized "causal steps approach" (Baron & Kenny, 1986), as it emphasizes the indirect effect (*ab*), rather than the individual paths in the model (Hayes, 2018). In addition, Hayes (2018) argues that evidence of a simple association between X and Y is no longer a precondition for conducting a mediation analysis.

Figure 2. A simple mediation model (Hayes, 2018)



Stemming from the above discussion, investigating X's direct effect on Y might perhaps not be necessary. Nevertheless, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the group means for organizational attractiveness. That is, to investigate whether organizational attractiveness differs significantly between the assertive and defensive stimuli versions. The results of the independent-samples t-test show a small - yet significant - difference in mean values for the assertive version (M = 3.67, SD = 1.37) and defensive version of the stimuli (M = 4.04, SD = 1.3; t (198) = 1.99, p = .047, two-sided). The difference between the mean values is .378 with a 95% confidence interval ranging between .005 and .75. The results suggest that the defensive version of the stimuli generates higher levels of organizational attractiveness, compared to the assertive version of the stimuli.

Table 8
The table shows the results from the independent samples t-test (organizational attractiveness)

Stimuli version	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Difference in mean	t	*p*
Assertive	105	3.67	1.37			
				.378	1.99	.047
Defensive	95	4.04	1.3			

While our results shows that the defensive version indeed generates higher levels of organizational attractiveness, compared to the assertive version of the stimuli, we will now dig deeper into the investigation by conducting the mediation analysis. In the current mediation analysis, the independent variable (X) is the impression management tactic manipulated through two different

gender diversity statements on a corporate website. The defensive tactic is represented by the dummy variable 1, and the assertive tactic is represented by the dummy variable 0. Behavioral integrity (BI) is the mediator (M) and organizational attractiveness (OA) is the dependent variable (Y) (see figure 2). PROCESS model 4 provides three separate regressions. The first regression calculates the effect of the X on M, path *a*. The second regression calculates the effect of M and X on Y, paths *b* and *c'* (*c´* being the direct effect). The third regression calculates the total effect (path *c*) of X on Y as the sum of the direct and indirect effect. Finally, the model provides the indirect effect of X on Y through M, which is calculated as the product of *a* and *b*. As described by Hayes (2018), "the indirect effect reveals as to whether the X's effect on Y can be said to be transmitted through the mechanism represented by the X → M → Y causal chain of events".

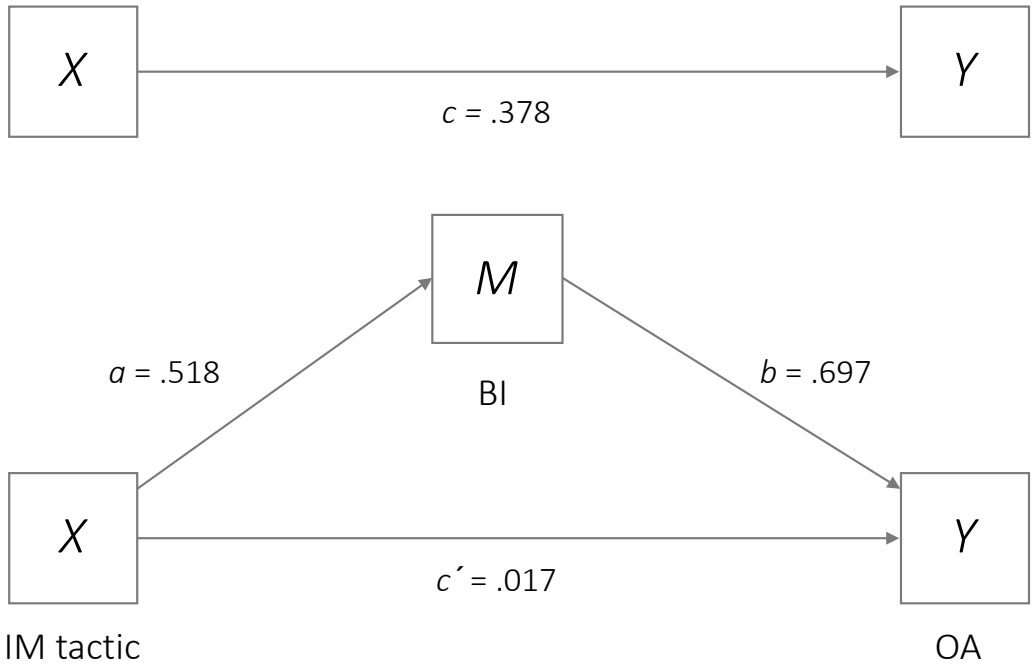


Figure 3. Output of the simple mediation model for behavioral integrity

Investigating path *a*, the results of the first regression reveal that the defensive stimuli version had a significant effect on behavioral integrity (p = .003). The regression coefficient *a* is positive, which indicates that respondents assigned to the defensive stimuli version (X = 1) are on average .518 units higher in their perceived behavioral integrity, than those assigned to the assertive stimuli version (X = 0).

The second regression investigates paths *b* and *c'*. The results show that behavioral integrity has a statistically significant effect on organizational attractiveness (b = .679, p = < .001). The sign of *b* is positive, which indicates that respondents relatively higher in perceived behavioral integrity are

estimated to be relatively higher in organizational attractiveness. There is a positive relationship between an organization's behavioral integrity and its attractiveness, thus **supporting H2**. Moreover, the results from the second regression convey the estimated direct effect of the OIM tactic on organizational attractiveness (c' = .017). However, this effect is not statistically significant (p = .912). This indicates that there is no evidence that the OIM tactic influenced organizational attractiveness independent of its effect on behavioral integrity. Nevertheless, such a simple association is not a precondition for mediation to occur (Hayes, 2018).

Calculating the product of a and b yields the indirect effect of the manipulation of the OIM tactic on organizational attractiveness through behavioral integrity (ab = .518(.697) = .361). A bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effect of OIM tactic (ab) using 5000 bootstrap samples was above zero (.121 to .589), meaning that there is evidence of a positive indirect effect of (X) OIM tactic on (Y) organizational attractiveness through (M) behavioral integrity. It is concluded that (M) behavioral integrity serves as a mediator of the effect of the (X) OIM tactic on (Y) organizational attractiveness. Behavioral integrity will mediate the relationship between the OIM tactic and the organizational attractiveness, hence **supporting H3**.

Finally, the total effect c of the manipulation on organizational attractiveness is calculated as the sum of the direct and indirect effect (c = .378, p = .0471). Respondents assigned to the defensive stimuli version were on average .378 units higher in their organizational attractiveness, than those assigned to the assertive stimuli version.

In sum, the OIM tactic indirectly influenced organizational attractiveness through its effect on perceived behavioral integrity. Respondents who viewed the defensive stimuli version (1) perceived the organization to have higher behavioral integrity, than those viewing the assertive stimuli version (0) (a = .518). Those who perceived higher behavioral integrity expressed higher organizational attractiveness (b = .679). There is no evidence that the OIM tactic influenced organizational attractiveness independent of its effect on behavioral integrity (c' = .017, p = .912). Behavioral integrity (M) serves as a mediator of the effect of the OIM tactic (X) on organizational attractiveness (Y) (.121 to .589). **Both H2 and H3 are supported.**

Table 9

The table shows the model coefficients for the mediation analysis

		Consequent						
		M (BI)			Y (OA)			
Antecendent		**Coeff.**	***SE***	***p***		**Coeff.**	***SE***	***p***
X (OIM tactic)	*a*	.518	.172	.003	*c´*	.017	.150	.912
M (BI)		-----	-----	-----	*b*	.679	.061	<.001
Constant	i_M	2.383	.118	<.001	i_Y	2.006	.176	<.001
		R^2 = .044 F(1, 198) = 9.093, *p* = .003				R^2 = .413 F(2, 197) = 69.338, *p* = < .001		

Table 10

The table shows a summary of the hypothesis testing

Relationship	**Hypothesis**	
Defensive vs. assertive tactics and behavioral integrity.	**H1:** When presented with a male-dominated management team and a defensive OIM tactic, potential applicants will report higher levels of behavioral integrity, compared to when presented with a male-dominated management team and an assertive OIM tactic.	Supported
Behavioral integrity and organizational attractiveness.	**H2**: There will be a positive relationship between an organization's behavioral integrity and its attractiveness.	Supported
Behavioral integrity as a mediator of the effect of the OIM tactic on organizational attractiveness.	**H3**: Behavioral integrity will mediate the relationship between the OIM tactic and the organizational attractiveness.	Supported

5. Discussion

The following section will present a summary of our main findings and describe the limitations of this study. Theoretical contributions as well as practical implications are discussed, followed by suggestions for further research. Finally, the study's conclusions are presented.

5.1. Summary and Discussion of Main Findings

5.1.1. Actions Speak Louder Than Words

Windscheid et al., (2016) showed that that organizations should indeed be careful how they communicate around gender diversity when they cannot "walk the talk", as such communication will impact the perceived integrity of the organization. Our results are in line with their findings, as the statistical analysis revealed that companies who apologize for their poor gender diversity records are indeed perceived to posit higher integrity, compared to firms who express pro gender diversity statements in an attempt to appear attractive and likable while experiencing low levels of gender diversity. Thus, our findings provide support for Simons' (2002) claim that social accounts, such as apologies, can impact the perceived behavioral integrity, because such a notion will reduce the discrepancy between the organization's words and deeds.

However, our findings indicate that behavioral integrity is difficult to manage, as proposed by Simons (2002). Although the defensive stimuli version did result in higher BI, compared to the assertive version, our findings indicate only a small difference in perceived behavioral integrity between the defensive and the assertive gender diversity statement. That is, both versions resulted in relatively poor behavioral integrity. Windscheid et al., (2016) showed that an organization with an unbalanced management team that simultaneously expresses a pro (assertive) gender diversity statements would send a diversity mixed message, and such misalignment between the diversity-related words and actions would negatively affect the organization's behavioral integrity. However, our results suggest that utilizing either the assertive or the defensive tactic might result in such a mixed message, as both statements resulted in relatively low scores.

Nevertheless, the results suggest that firms with poor gender diversity records should indeed utilize a defensive OIM tactics over an assertive tactic, as a defensive OIM tactic results in higher behavioral integrity. However, it does not necessarily mean that the company is perceived to posit *high* integrity. That is, to be perceived as an organization with integrity, it is not sufficient to simply claim to value diversity, nor to apologize for one's past wrongdoings and promise future justification. It seems that actions indeed speak louder than words.

5.1.2. The Relationship Between OIM Tactics, Behavioral Integrity and Organizational Attractiveness

This study set out to answer how different organizational impression management tactics in the context of diversity branding affect organizational attractiveness (RQ 1), and how behavioral integrity affects the relationship between different organizational impression management tactics and organizational attractiveness (RQ 2). Our findings suggest that apologizing for one's poor gender diversity records will lead to higher organizational attractiveness. On the contrary, utilizing an assertive OIM tactic while experiencing low levels of gender diversity will lower the attractiveness of the firm. However, there is no direct effect of the OIM tactic on organizational attractiveness, and our results reveal that behavioral integrity serves as a mediator of the effect of the OIM tactic on organizational attractiveness. That is, a defensive tactic will lead to higher behavioral integrity, and higher behavioral integrity will result in higher organizational attractiveness. On the contrary, an assertive tactic will lead to lower behavioral integrity, and lower behavioral integrity will result in lower organizational attractiveness.

Together, these findings represent an important extension to previous diversity research, as they challenge the common perception that simply promoting diversity will increase applicant attraction and lead to a diverse workforce (Ng & Burke, 2005; Edwards & Kelan, 2011). On the contrary, our findings suggest that the path towards increased attractiveness is neither simple nor straightforward. While apologizing for one's poor diversity records will foster the organization's integrity and hence its attractiveness, promoting diversity by simple assertive claims can instead alienate applicants - if the upper levels of the organization are not gender-balanced. In addition, our findings challenge previous research suggesting that diversity statements should be considered strategically important for talent management and the hiring process, despite the fact that such statements can be used as window dressing (Jonsen et al., 2021). Our findings provide evidence that there is a balancing act between promoting gender diversity and being untruthful, where companies who do not act according to their written diversity principles risk alienating female applicants.

Whereas assertive OIM tactics are intended to improve the company image (Gardner & Matinko, 1988), our results support the claim that the use of impression management can backfire, and instead result in an undesired image (Turnley & Bolino, 2001). If promises that are part of an organization's image creation are not kept, companies can invest in employer branding activities without the consequence of a strengthened employer brand (Elegbe, 2018). Specifically, breaking one's promises might lead to a declining employer brand (Elegbe, 2018). Thus, not only will the

inappropriate use of impression management violate the organization's integrity and thus reduce its attractiveness, but such inconsistent communication might ultimately impact the employer image and damage the employer brand. And while many applicants and employees will face limited contact with the management team, these top-layered managers function as a source of information for potential applicants, and are considered highly visible organizational attributes (McMillan-Capehart et al., 2010). As the audience attends to these observable cues when making decisions regarding a company's reputation (McMillan-Capehart et al., 2010), managing these informational cues should be of importance to the company itself. It is important to highlight that the management team has served as a cue for gender diversity efforts within the company, and this does not imply that this study has been about female candidates applying for management team positions specifically. This study examined female applicants' perceptions of the company for an undefined role, i.e. a female applicant applying for any type of role.

5.2. Limitations

It should be emphasized that an applicant's perception of a company or potential employer is not solely based on corporate website communication (Windscheid et al., 2016), the reality is more nuanced. Additional factors that may affect an applicant's perception are, for example, how strong the corporate brand is, salary level, international opportunities, reputation, work schedule, management style, corporate culture, and whether the company is known for having a strong team spirit and community (Kucherov & Zavyalova, 2012). In addition, this study's participants did not suffer any potential consequences of a job rejection, as actual applicants would. Thus, participants in this study could potentially have been more receptive and sensitive to the effects of discrepancies between an organization's diversity-related words and actions, compared to actual applicants. For an actual applicant, it is reasonable to assume that a more balanced consideration of several advantages and disadvantages determines a job acceptance or rejection. Furthermore, an applicant with few job alternatives might even consciously overlook the disadvantages.

The online survey included a manipulation check, to indicate whether the manipulated gender diversity statements were perceived as assertive or defensive. Unfortunately, the manipulation check did not succeed as expected. The defensive statement was perceived as more defensive than the assertive statement. However, there was no difference in how assertive the two statements were perceived. That is, they were perceived as equally assertive. One explanation for the partially failed manipulation check is perhaps the prevalence of assertive statements in corporate communication. As confirmed by the consulted diversity and inclusion management team, assertive statements are normally seen in corporate communications, while defensive statements are not. This applies

regardless of whether the communication is about diversity or any other area. Accordingly, the respondents would most likely expect the statement to be assertive, i.e. communication that strengthens a company's employer image and organizational attractiveness (Gardner & Matinko, 1988; Bolino et al. 2008; Bolino et al., 2016), rather than defensive, i.e. communication aimed to protect, manage or repair the company image (Gardner & Matinko, 1988; Bolino et al. 2008; Bolino et al., 2016).

There are several actions that could have reduced the risk of an unsuccessful manipulation check. First of all, the major shortcoming was to not include this manipulation check in the pilot study. If that had been done, the manipulation check could have been asked in another way, for example by making a scale where the answer would be placed either more to the assertive description of the text, or to the defensive description. A question asked in that way would more clearly state whether the diversity statement was perceived as *either* assertive or defensive. What should be emphasized, however, is that the manipulation worked as expected with regard to the results on behavioral integrity and organizational attractiveness. There was indeed a difference in perceived behavioral integrity and organizational attractiveness between the two groups.

Moreover, the manipulation was iterated several times with the consulted diversity and inclusion management team. In line with their suggestions, the diversity statements were revised, reformulated, and well elaborated before the final versions were selected for the online survey. However, the defensive statement would likely have been more true to the OIM theory if these iterations had not taken place. If the defensive statement had been more true to the theory, there is a possibility that the differences in the results regarding behavioral integrity and organizational attractiveness between the two statements had been larger. In addition, there is a possibility that the manipulation check would have been more successful. However, such a defensive statement might not have been realistic. As argued by the consulted diversity and inclusion professionals, explicitly apologizing and accepting full responsibility for negative events is not realistic and such communication might result in a lawsuit for the firm. We still support our choice to make the manipulation more realistic rather than true to theory to ensure study results that are truly applicable in business.

5.3. Theoretical Contributions & Practical Implications

5.3.1. Theoretical Contributions

By conducting this study, we have managed to fill several research gaps. First of all, this study has focused on *organizational* IM, thus shedding light on the organizational level of impression management, which has been largely overseen by previous research (Mohamed et al., 1999; Windscheid et al., 2018). In addition, previous research suggests empirically investigating how different types of OIM tactics affect organizational outcomes and the employer image, and comparing which OIM tactics are most effective when attempting to attract minority applicants (Avery & McKay, 2006; Windscheid et al., 2018). By conducting an empirical and comparative study, our research has shown that in companies with male-dominated management teams, defensive tactics are more effective compared to assertive tactics when attempting to attract female applicants.

The partially failed manipulation check reveals that the defensive statement was in addition perceived as assertive by the respondents. Considering that assertive tactics are used to appear attractive and improve the employer image (Gardner & Matinko, 1988; Mohamed et al., 1999; Bolino et al. 2008; Bolino et al., 2016), it is not strange to argue that some defensive tactics, such as apologies, could be used for the same purpose. That is, an apologetic statement is perhaps not only defensive in nature, but also assertive. We believe the lack of empirical as well as comparative studies has resulted in a division of OIM tactics that does not correspond to reality. Consequently, this study makes an important contribution to the previous literature on OIM, as it shows that the theoretical division of assertive and defensive tactics is not always applicable in real business contexts, as the definitions are overlapping in reality. In addition, the consulted diversity and inclusion professionals argued that an apologetic diversity statement written according to the definition given in research was unrealistic, and that such a statement never would have been communicated by any company today. Thus, the definition of the defensive tactic *apology* is not sufficiently realistic, as it is difficult to apply in real corporate communication. We suggest this definition to be revised to mirror the reality of business.

As suggested by previous research, this study has examined "the territory between pure impression management and true intention" (Jonsen et al., 2021) by relying on the theory of behavioral integrity. While behavioral integrity has largely been applied on an individual level, this study has added to its theoretical understanding by successfully applying it on an organizational level and

showing that violating behavioral integrity can have negative effects on companies as well. As suggested by Windscheid et al. (2016), this study has examined how such negative effects can be avoided. By integrating OIM with the concept of BI, this study has provided evidence that the negative effects of violating BI can be, at least partially, avoided by apologies that reduce the discrepancy between the organization's words and deeds. Finally, few studies have introduced BI as a mediating variable (see Windscheid et al., (2016) for an exception), yet we have shown that it serves as a useful mediator between organizational impression management and organizational attractiveness.

5.3.2. Practical Implications

By showing the negative effects that can occur when there is a discrepancy between an organization's diversity-related words and actions, this study contributes with practical implications for management teams, human resource practitioners, recruiters, and corporate communication professionals. Companies primarily use diversity branding to attract talent and become the employer of choice (Jonsen et al., 2021), and assertive OIM tactics are most common when attempting to attract female applicants through diversity communication (Windscheid et al., 2018). Previous research suggests that such communication is strategically important, even when used as window dressing (Jonsen et al., 2021). However, this study challenges this belief by arguing that companies with poor gender diversity records should not expect to reap any benefits from simple diversity branding, as this might result in questionable integrity and lowered attractiveness. This should be of particular importance to the Swedish business community, as most of the Swedish listed firms are still heavily male-dominated in top positions (Allbright, 2020) and will find it difficult to convince a female audience that the company sincerely values diversity. When attempting to attract women, we argue that these companies will benefit from simply apologizing for their lack of gender diversity, instead of promoting diversity to appear attractive or likable. In contrast to Jonsen et al. (2021), we suggest that organizations and businesses should move away from diversity mixed messaging and window dressing, and instead take the actions necessary towards increased gender equality. Accordingly, for all the Swedish-listed companies that do not achieve an even gender distribution or completely lack women in the management team, a defensive tactic is preferable and favorable compared to an assertive one. Until companies reach the gender diversity they express they value and possess, they will benefit from apologizing for their lack of gender diversity. If the Swedish-listed firms with unbalanced management teams (81 percent of all Swedish-listed companies) succeed in this, they can proudly move back to using assertive tactics in a true and genuine manner.

5.4. Suggestions for Further Research

While this study has contributed to the understanding and development of organizational impression management research, there is a need to further investigate the OIM framework, as the division between the related tactics as well as their definitions are not always applicable in real business contexts. Thus, to better assist practitioners and develop OIM tactics applicable in corporate communication, future research should continue to empirically test and compare impression management tactics and their effects. As suggested, the definition of an organizational *apology* should be revised to better mirror the reality of corporate communication. Moreover, future studies should extend our research by conducting similar studies focusing on other aspects of diversity, such as ethnicity, age or disabilities. For example, ethnic minorities appear to be especially conscious of diversity-related information on corporate websites (Walker et al., 2012).

This study has relied on behavioral integrity as the underlying mechanism between OIM and organizational attractiveness. Behavioral integrity was deemed to lay an appropriate theoretical foundation, as it was considered suitable for the purpose of this study. In addition, the concept captures a phenomenon that has been experienced by the authors of this study, who repeatedly have interacted with firms demonstrating a discrepancy between the organization's diversity-related words and actions. However, other concepts and theories were discussed as potential mediators, such as organizational authenticity (Cording et al., 2014), person-organization fit (Kristof, 1996), signaling theory (Connelly et al., 2011), and organizational justice (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009). Future studies could investigate whether these theories can serve as an underlying link between OIM tactics and organizational attractiveness.

This study has focused explicitly on people who identify themselves as women. This choice was made based on the statistics stating that 81 percent of all Swedish listed companies have male-dominated management teams. The authors of this study has consequently primarily been interested in how female job applicants perceive the attractiveness of an organization with poor gender diversity records with regards to their gender diversity messaging. A similar study conducted with male participants or participants with different genders would be of great value within the research of OIM tactics and organizational attractiveness. The differences or similarities between the results of such a study and this study would most likely give valuable insights that would improve companies' diversity-related communication further.

5.5. Conclusions

Over the last two decades, gender diversity has become a topic that companies increasingly address through their websites (Jonsen et al., 2021). Organizations often portray themselves as committed to gender diversity, ideally to attract talent and become the employer of choice (Edwards & Kelan, 2011; Jonsen et al., 2021). While the recruitment of women has become one of the top priorities for many companies (Chapple & Humphrey, 2014), an unbalanced business community still remains. As 81 percent of Swedish-listed companies either do not achieve an even gender distribution or completely lack women in the management team (Allbright, 2021), the Swedish business community is anything but diversified. To shed light on this issue, the current study aimed to provide empirical evidence on how gender diversity branding can affect women's attraction to organizations with male-dominated management teams.

Our findings suggest that for a company with a male-dominated management team, a defensive (apology) OIM tactic will lead to higher organizational attractiveness. On the contrary, utilizing an assertive OIM tactic (ingratiation) while experiencing low levels of gender diversity will lower the attractiveness of the firm. Our results reveal that behavioral integrity serves as a mediator of the effect of the OIM tactic on organizational attractiveness.

Taken together, our findings represent an important extension to previous gender diversity research as they provide empirical evidence that gender diversity branding might negatively impact women's attraction to an organization, if the communicated gender diversity image does not align with the diversity-related actions. In order to attract women, companies should continue to promote gender diversity, but with a strengthened focus on fulfilling the espoused gender diversity statements. Simply put, well done is better than well said.

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7. Appendices

Appendix 1. The Investigated Swedish Listed Firms

Table 11
The table shows the names of the investigated companies, examples of their gender diversity statements and their management team gender composition

No	Company	Example of diversity statement	Management gender composition	Link
1	Volvo	"On a daily basis Volvo Group is striving to move the needle towards increased inclusion and improved gender balance not only because it is 'fair' and 'the right thing to do', but because it is essential for our business performance. Equality is not a women's concern, it's a business concern."	• 15 in total • 4 women = 26 %	Diversity & Inclusion at Volvo Group
2	SKF	"This is why our Code of Conduct clearly states that all employees, regardless of their positions in the company, genders, nationalities, races, ages, and religions, shall be treated fairly and equally. "	• 12 in total • 2 women = 17 %	Equality and diversity
3	Getinge	"As we want to be an attractive employer, both for today's and tomorrow's employees, providing equal employment and development opportunities to all employees – regardless of gender, race, religion and other irrelevant contextual factors – is the foundation for all our efforts."	• 10 in total • 3 women = 30 %	People & Society
4	Atlas Copco	"Atlas Copco promotes inclusion and diversity and strives to improve the gender balance at all levels in the Group."	• 9 in total • 2 women = 22 %	Talented people and teams
5	Hexagon	"Hexagon is committed to…Listening and including input and perspectives that vary by race, ethnicity, social background, religion, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, military status, and national origin."	• 15 in total • 2 women = 13 %	Careers
6	Bravida holding	"Bravida should be a workplace that welcomes and respects all employees. By promoting gender equality and diversity, we make the most of employees' differences, skills and experience."	• 13 in total • 1 woman = 8 %	Employees

7	Swedish match	“…believe that gender diversity at all levels of the organization benefits the Company in many ways” “As such, we have a Group goal of having at least 40 percent of each gender in senior management”	• 7 in total • 1 woman = 14 %	Diversity and non-discrimination
8	SCA	“We work actively to broaden the recruitment base and increase knowledge about the industry. We work continuously for increased gender equality and equal value for all.”*	• 12 in total • 2 women = 17 %	Mångfald och inkludering
9	Holmen	"The forest industry is a continued male-dominated sector and Holmen works continuously for a better balance. However, the proportion of women in the Holmen Group is still unsatisfying, 20 percent, which falls within the range of other industries.”	• 12 in total • 2 women = 17 %	Equal treatment
10	Husqvarna	“The Husqvarna Group shall provide equal employment opportunities to all individuals without regard to gender… or any other characteristics protected by applicable law.”	• 8 in total • 2 women = 25 %	Diversity at Husqvarna
11	Cloetta	“Cloetta is a workplace where diversity and different qualities, knowledge and skills of all employees are included regardless of gender, religion, ethnic background, age, race and sexual orientation.“	• 10 in total • 2 women = 20 %	Respect for everyone
12	SEB	“…Actively appointing more women for key leadership roles.”	• 15 in total • 4 women = 27 %	Inclusion and diversity
13	Saab	“Security is a traditionally male dominated industry but we are out to change that. Between 2007 and 2017, we doubled the share of women in managing roles and the work continues.”	• 12 in total • 3 women = 25 %	This is Saab
14	Peab	“At Peab, we work actively to ensure that our company is inclusive, gender equal and reflects society.”*	• 8 in total • 2 women = 25 %	Arbetsmiljö och Jämställdhet
15	Essity	“We will continuously improve our gender equality, ensuring equality of opportunities – especially in leadership roles – across the organization.”	• 14 in total • 5 women = 36 %	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion within Essity
16	Nordea bank	“It’s our belief that gender balance on all levels in the organisation will make us stronger as a company.”	• 12 in total • 4 women = 33 %	A diverse community

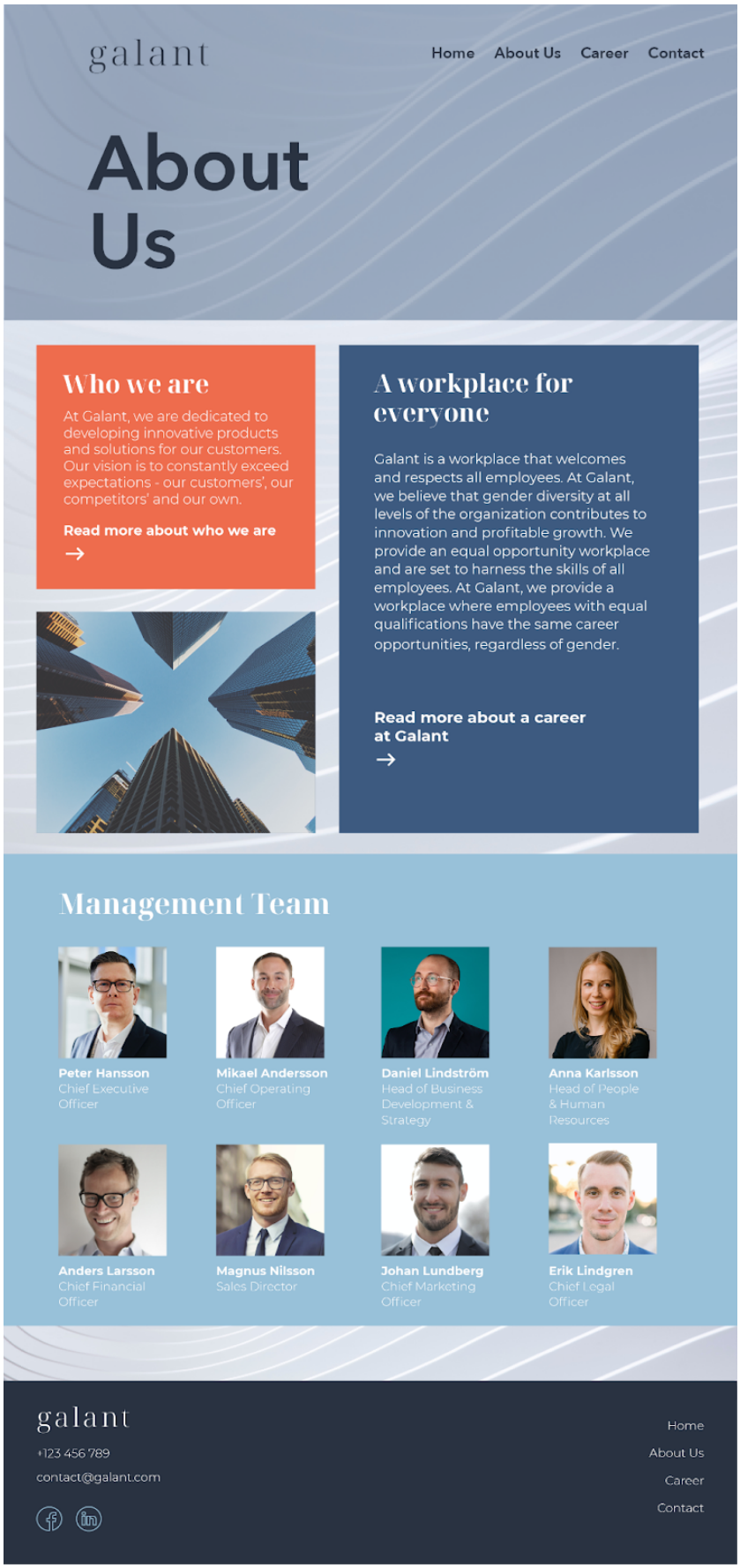
17	Electrolux	“At the end of 2019, 26% of all leaders with direct reports were women. At the end of 2019, 26% of Tier 2 managers and 27% of Tier 3 managers were women”	• 9 in total • 2 women = 22 %	Diversity and Inclusion drive our business
18	Skanska	“The women at Skanska are becoming increasing. In 2015, six percent of the regional managers were women. Today they are 30 percent.”*	• 9 in total • 2 women = 22 %	Fler kvinnor och nytt mindset
19	Hufvudstaden	“For us, it is obvious that men and women should be given the same opportunities. Hufvudstaden strives to be a gender equal organization and we work actively to make that happen.”*	• 8 in total • 3 women = 38 %	Mångfald och jämställdhet
20	Swedbank	“The Bank’s objective is to create groups of people with different experiences and backgrounds and an even distribution of men and women at all levels – from top management to employee level.”	• 15 in total • 5 women = 33 %	Policy on diversity and inclusion
21	Bilia	" We are convinced that an even gender distribution has positive effects on both the work environment and profitability, and against that background we want to employ more women.”*	• 8 in total • 2 women = 25 %	Värderingar och kultur
22	Alfa laval	“Alfa Laval has decreased the gap between the proportion of female managers and employees. In 2009, the proportion of female leaders within the group was 15 percent with the goal to reach 20 percent. Today, Alfa Laval has reached the goal of 20 percent female managers which also mirrors the proportion of females in the whole group.”	• 9 in total • 2 women = 22 %	Diversity promotes growth
23	SAS	“All employees and applicants for vacant positions also have the right to be treated on an impartial and formal basis and not on the basis of what, on proper or improper grounds, might be thought of as characteristic for what… gender… to which he or she belongs.”	• 7 in total • 2 women = 29 %	Diversity policy
24	Scandic hotels group	“We achieve this by working for diversity and gender equality in the recruitment, development and training of employees, and by collaborating with local actors to have a positive impact on the local community.”*	• 9 in total • 2 women = 22 %	Strategi

25	SSAB	“The steel industry is traditionally male-dominated, and with 19% of our employees being women, SSAB is no exception. We believe that improving gender balance will positively contribute to our performance culture and be more responsive to customer needs.”	• 11 in total • 4 women = 36 %	Diversity and equal opportunities

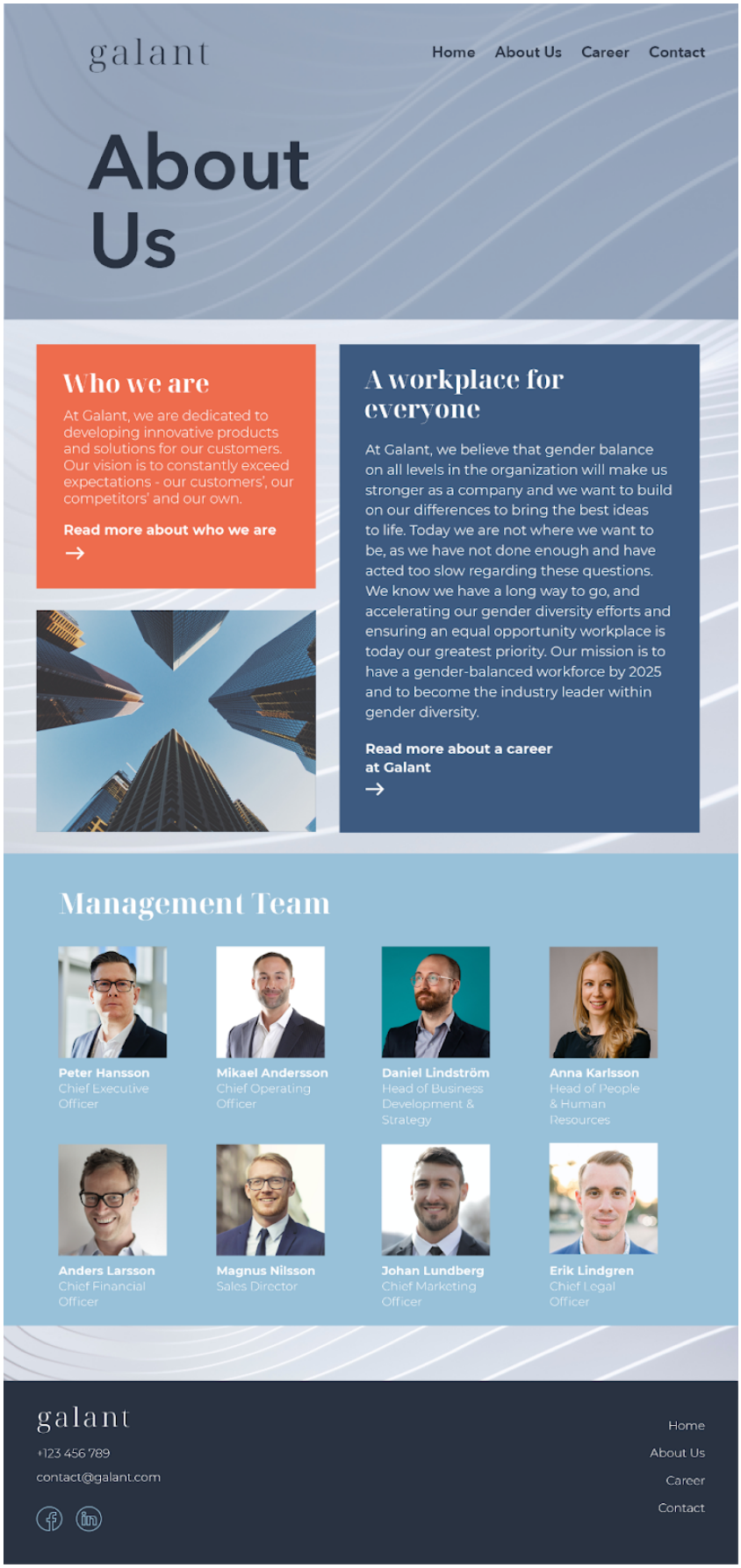
* Translated from Swedish

Appendix 2. Stimuli

Appendix 2.1 Assertive Stimuli Version



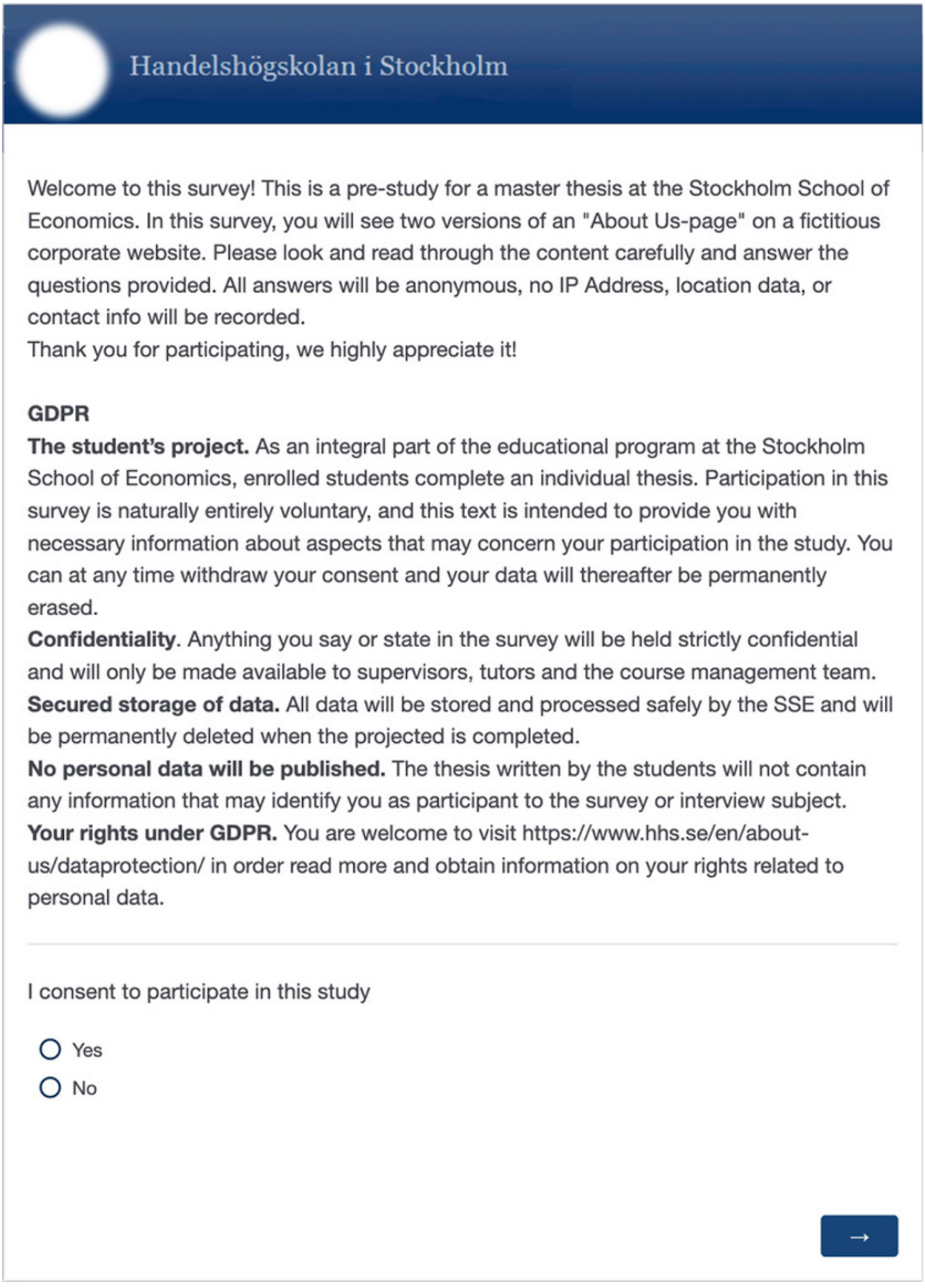
Appendix 2.2 Defensive Stimuli Version



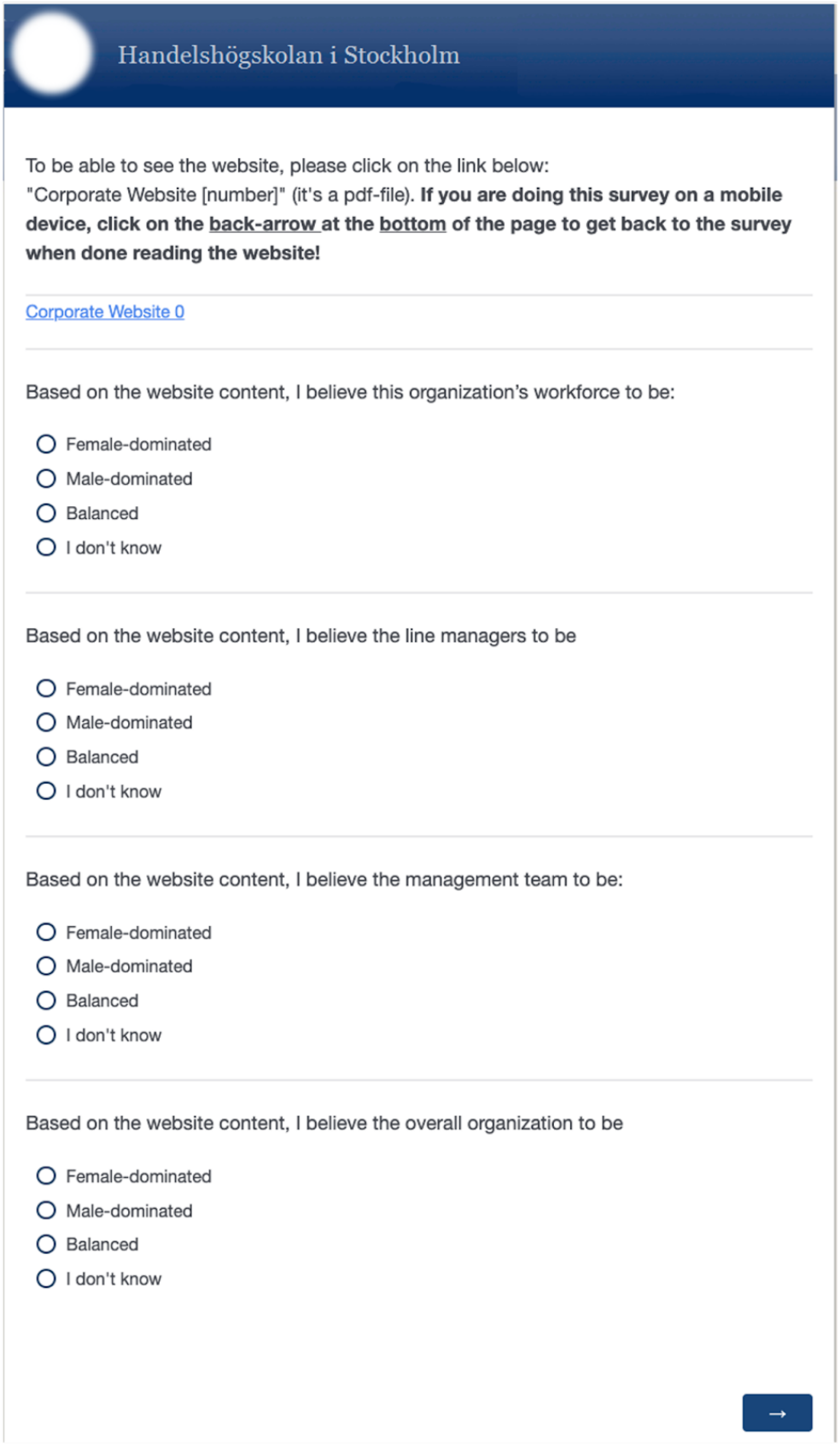
Appendix 3. Pilot Study

Appendix 3.1 Pilot Study Questionnaire

Appendix 3.1.2 Pilot Study Questionnaire: Introduction Page



Appendix 3.1.2 Pilot Study Questionnaire: First Part



Handelshögskolan i Stockholm

To be able to see the website, please click on the link below:
"Corporate Website [number]" (it's a pdf-file). **If you are doing this survey on a mobile device, click on the back-arrow at the bottom of the page to get back to the survey when done reading the website!**

Corporate Website 0

Based on the website content, I believe this organization's workforce to be:

- Female-dominated
- Male-dominated
- Balanced
- I don't know

Based on the website content, I believe the line managers to be

- Female-dominated
- Male-dominated
- Balanced
- I don't know

Based on the website content, I believe the management team to be:

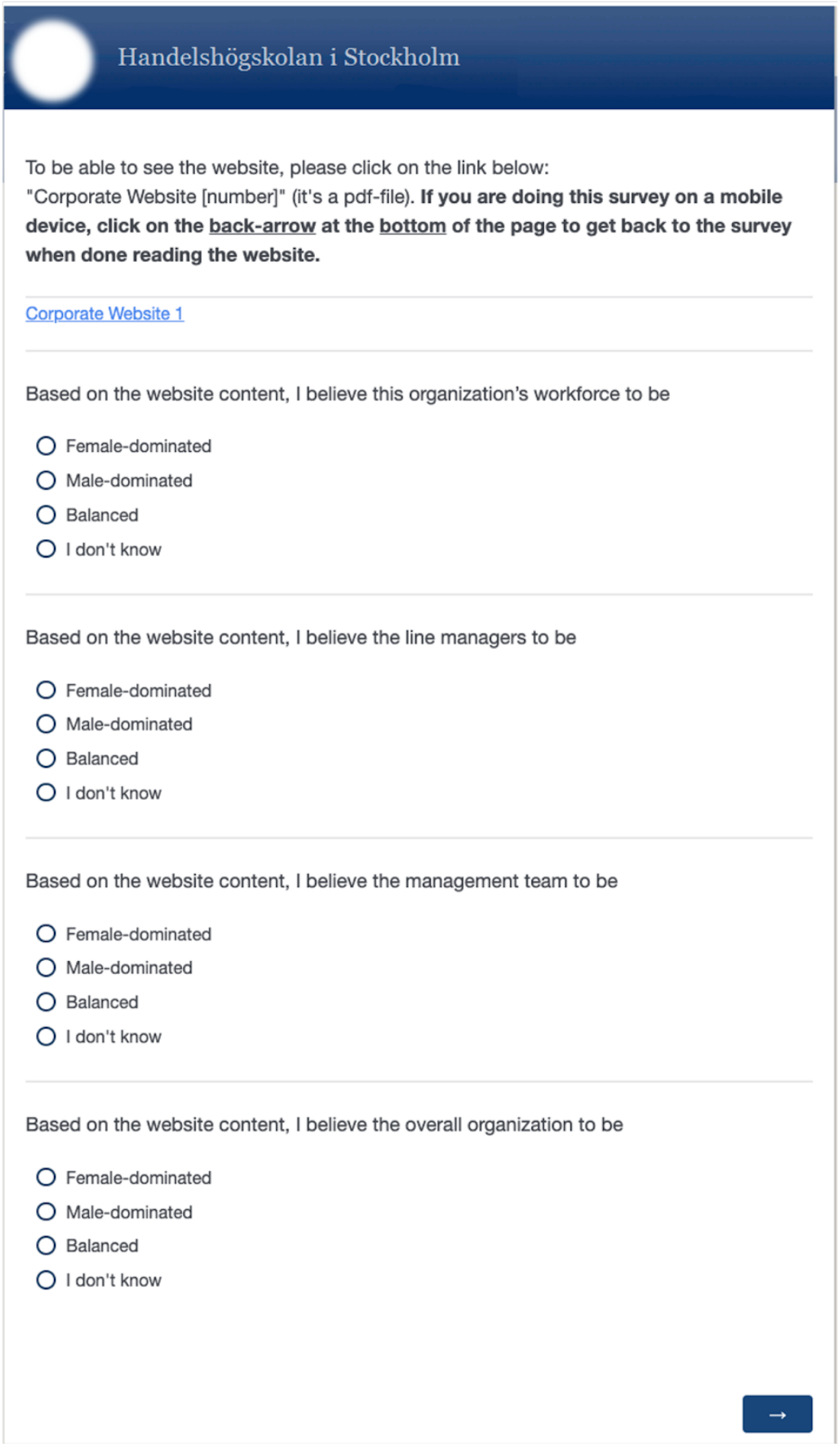
- Female-dominated
- Male-dominated
- Balanced
- I don't know

Based on the website content, I believe the overall organization to be

- Female-dominated
- Male-dominated
- Balanced
- I don't know

→

Appendix 3.1.3 Pilot Study Questionnaire: Second Part



Handelshögskolan i Stockholm

Based on all the information provided on the website, I believe that

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
For me, this company would be a good place to work	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would not be interested in this company except as a last resort	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This company is attractive to me as a place for employment	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am interested in learning more about this company	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A job at this company is very appealing to me	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Based on all the information provided on the website, I believe that:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
There is a match between the organization's words and actions	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The organization delivers on promises	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The organization practices what it preaches	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The organization does what it says it will do	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The organization conducts itself by the same values it talks about	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The organization shows the same priorities that it describes	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
When the organization promises something, I can be certain that it will happen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
If the organization says it is going to do something, it will	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

→

Handelshögskolan i Stockholm

Based on all the information provided on the website, I believe that:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
At this organization, men and women have equal career opportunities	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
At this organization, men and women have equal opportunities to develop themselves	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
At this organization, men and women have equal opportunities to reach top-level positions	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

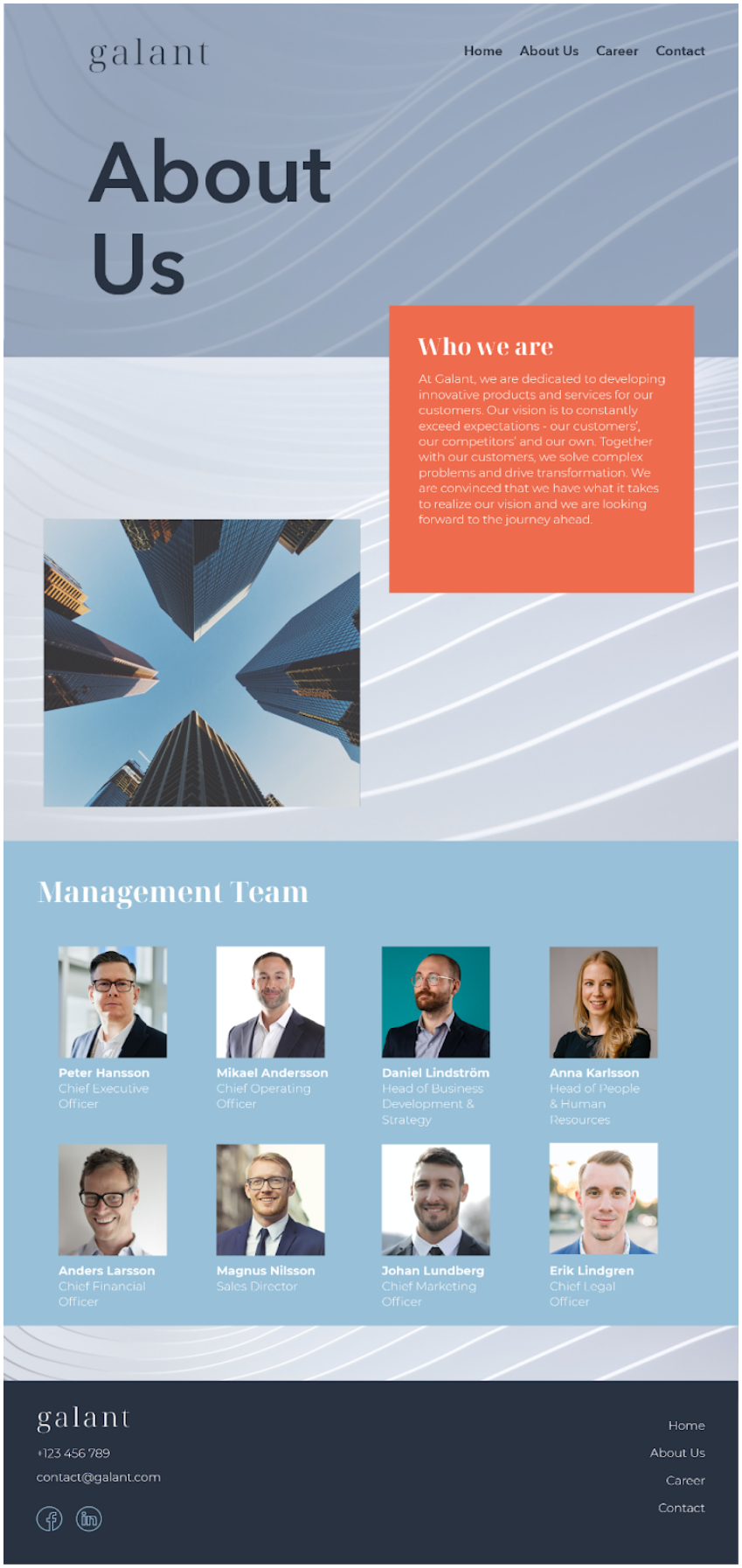
Please select B as your answer choice

- ○ A
- ○ B
- ○ C
- ○ D
- ○ E

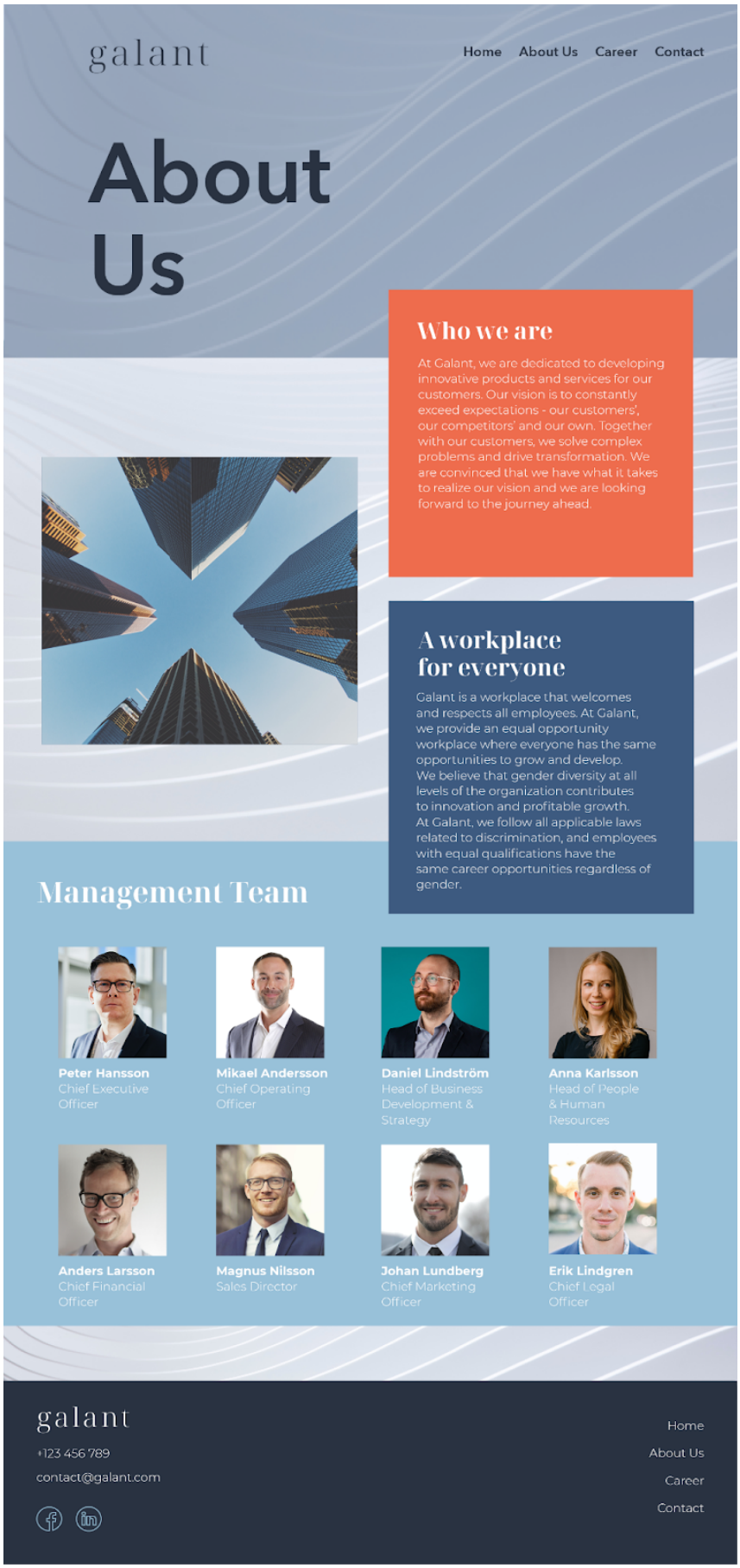
Any other thoughts or input regarding the website or the whole survey that you want to share and that would be good for us to know?

→

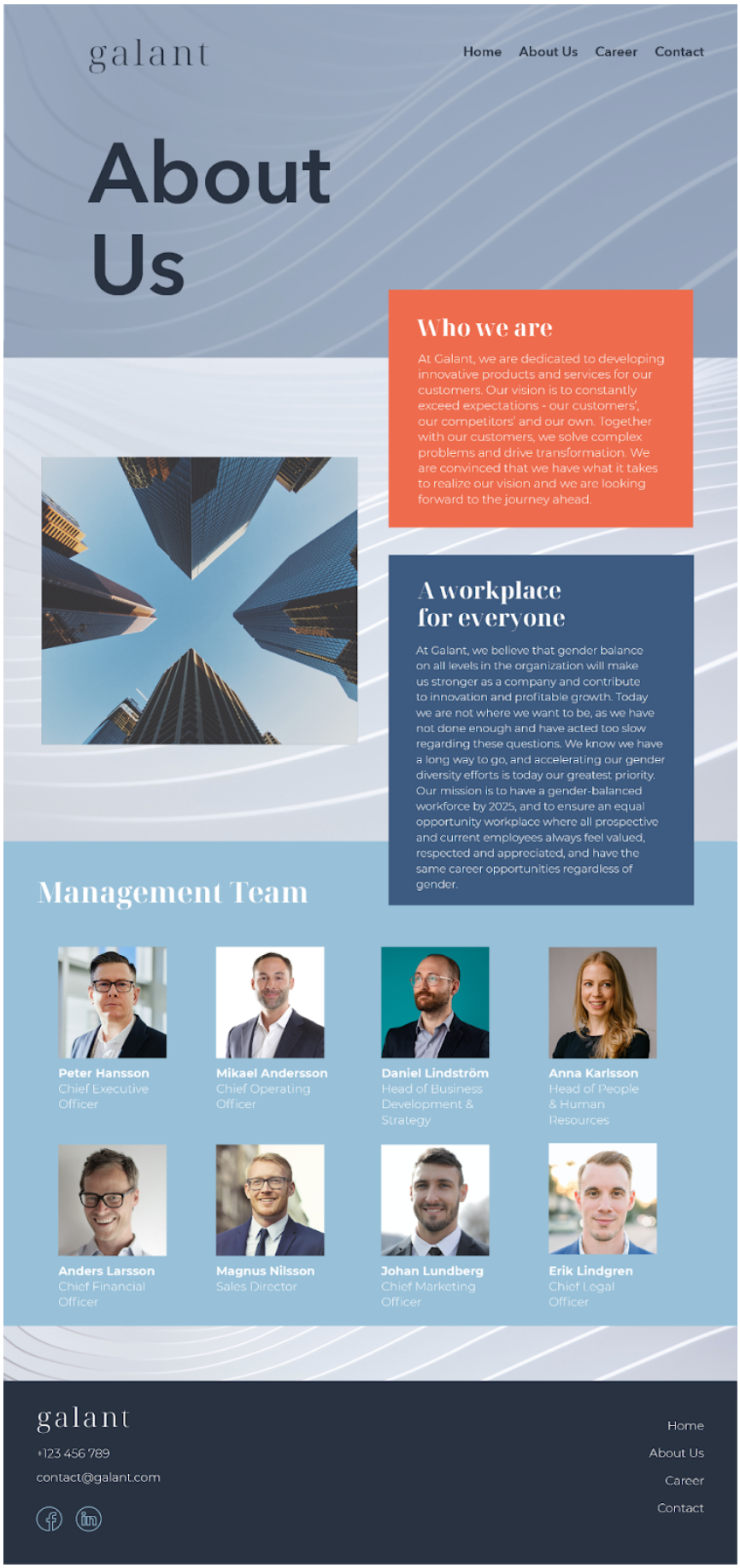
Appendix 3.2 Stimuli Without Gender Diversity Statements



Appendix 3.3 Assertive Stimuli Version (Pilot Sudy)



Appendix 3.4 Defensive Stimuli Version (Pilot Study)



Appendix 3.5 Manipulated Statements Pilot Study

Appendix 3.5.1 Defensive Statement Pilot Study

"At Galant, we believe that gender balance on all levels in the organization will make us stronger as a company and contribute to innovation and profitable growth. Today we are not where we want to be, as we have not done enough and have acted too slow regarding these questions. We know we have a long way to go, and accelerating our gender diversity efforts is today our greatest priority. Our mission is to have a gender-balanced workforce by 2025, and to ensure an equal opportunity workplace where all prospective and current employees always feel valued, respected and appreciated, and have the same career opportunities regardless of gender."

Appendix 3.5.2 Assertive Statement Pilot Study

"Galant is a workplace that welcomes and respects all employees. At Galant, we provide an equal opportunity workplace where everyone has the same opportunities to grow and develop. We believe that gender diversity at all levels of the organization contributes to innovation and profitable growth. At Galant, we follow all applicable laws related to discrimination, and employees with equal qualifications have the same career opportunities regardless of gender."

Appendix 4. Results From the Pilot Study

Appendix 4.1 Results From the First Part

Appendix 4.1.1 Perceived Gender Composition of the Workforce, Line Managers, Management Team (Manipulation Check) and Overall Organization

Table 12
The table shows the perceived gender composition of the workforce, line managers, management team (manipulation check) and overall organization, before introducing the manipulated gender diversity statements

	Workforce	Line managers	Management team	Overall organization
Female-dominated	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Male-dominated	87.5 %	93.75 %	100 %	87.5 %
Balanced	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
I don’t know	12.5 %	6.25 %	0 %	12.5 %

Appendix 4.2 Results From the Second Part

Appendix 4.2.1 Perceived Gender Composition of the Workforce, Line Managers, Management Team (Manipulation Check) and Overall Organization

Table 13
The table shows the perceived gender composition of the workforce, line managers, management team (manipulation check) and overall organization, after introducing the manipulated gender diversity statements

	Workforce	Line managers	Management team	Overall organization
Female-dominated	6.25 %	6.25 %	12.5 %	6.25 %
Male-dominated	68.75 %	93.75 %	87.5 %	68.75 %
Balanced	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
I don’t know	25 %	0 %	0 %	25 %

Appendix 4.2.2 Orgainzational Attractiveness

Table 14
The table shows the results of the five items measuring organizational attractiveness

	Stumuli version	**Mean**	**Difference in mean**
Q1: For me, this company would be a good place to work	Defensive	4.29	.86
	Assertive	3.43	
Q2: I would not be interested in this company except as a last resort (reverse coded)	Defensive	3.86	-1.57
	Assertive	5.43	
Q3: This company is attractive to me as a place for employment	Defensive	4.00	1.29
	Assertive	2.71	
Q4: I am interested in learning more about this company	Defensive	4.14	1.00
	Assertive	3.14	
Q5: A job at this company is very appealing to me	Defensive	3.14	0.71
	Assertive	2.43	

Appendix 4.2.3 Behavioral Integrity

Table 15
The table shows the results of the eight items measuring behavioral integrity

	Stumuli version	Mean	Difference in mean
Q1: There is a match between the organization's words and actions	Defensive	3.29	.57
	Assertive	2.71	
Q2: The organization delivers on promises	Defensive	3.71	.57
	Assertive	3.14	
Q3: The organization practices what it preaches	Defensive	3.14	.43
	Assertive	2.71	
Q4: The organization does what it says it will do	Defensive	3.00	-.29
	Assertive	3.29	
Q5: The organization conducts itself by the same values it talks about	Defensive	3.71	1.14
	Assertive	2.57	
Q6: The organization shows the same priorities that it describes	Defensive	2.86	-.14
	Assertive	3.00	
Q7: When the organization promises something, I can be certain that it will happen	Defensive	2.71	-.29
	Assertive	3.00	
Q8: If the organization says it is going to do something, it will	Defensive	3.43	0
	Assertive	3.43	

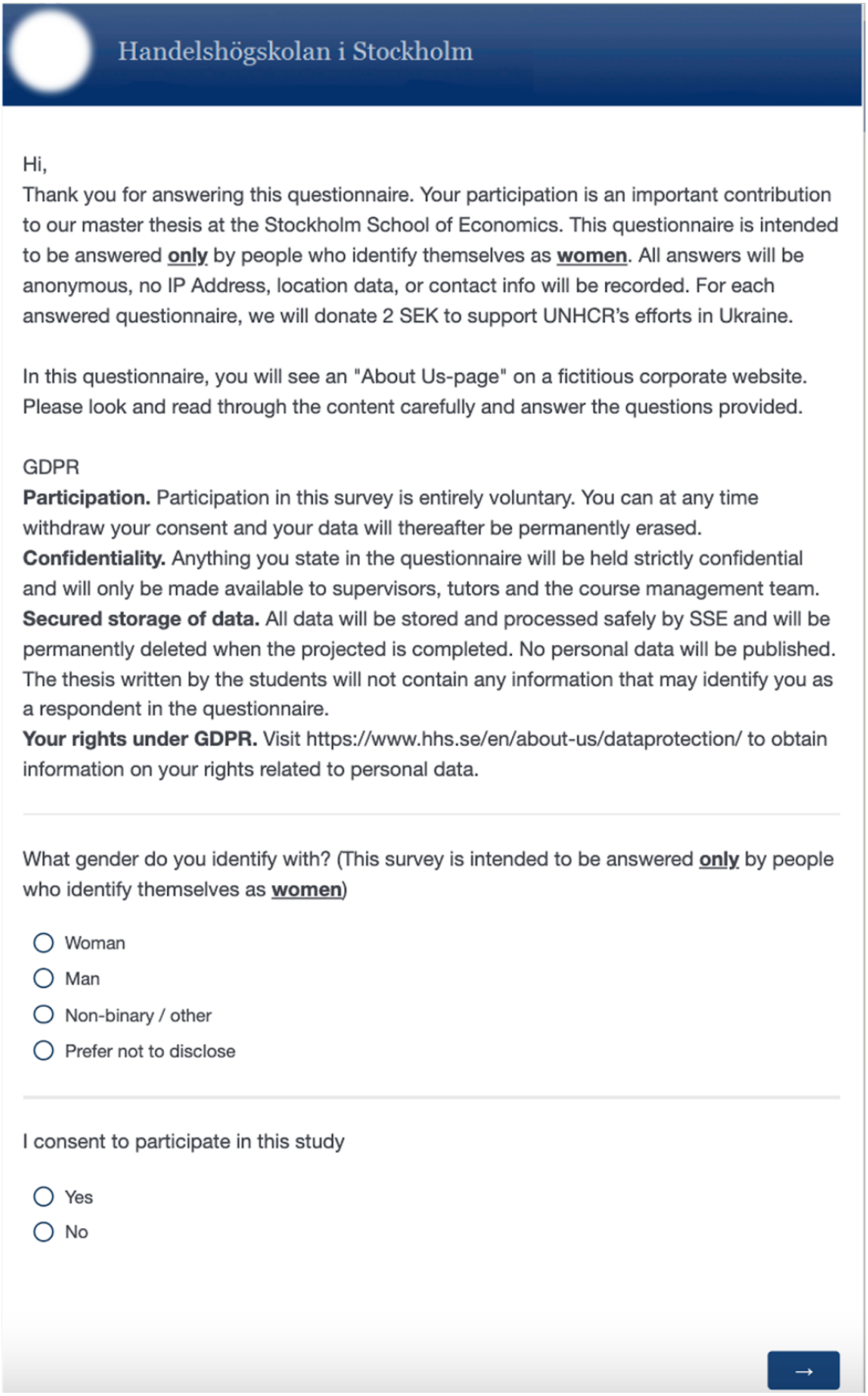
Appendix 4.2.4 Career Opportunities, Opportunities to Develop, and Opportunities to Reach Top-Level Positions

Table 16
The table shows the results of the five items measuring men's and women's career opportunities, opportunities to develop, and opportunities to reach top-level positions

	Stumuli version	**Mean**	**Difference in mean**
Q1: At this organization, men and women have equal career opportunities	Defensive	3.57	1.29
	Assertive	2.29	
Q2: At this organization, men and women have equal opportunities to develop themselves	Defensive	3.86	1.14
	Assertive	2.71	
Q3: At this organization, men and women have equal opportunities to reach top-level positions	Defensive	3.14	1.43
	Assertive	1.71	

Appendix 5. Main Study Questionnaire

Appendix 5.1 Main Study Questionnaire: First Part



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Hi,
Thank you for answering this questionnaire. Your participation is an important contribution to our master thesis at the Stockholm School of Economics. This questionnaire is intended to be answered **only** by people who identify themselves as **women**. All answers will be anonymous, no IP Address, location data, or contact info will be recorded. For each answered questionnaire, we will donate 2 SEK to support UNHCR's efforts in Ukraine.

In this questionnaire, you will see an "About Us-page" on a fictitious corporate website. Please look and read through the content carefully and answer the questions provided.

GDPR
Participation. Participation in this survey is entirely voluntary. You can at any time withdraw your consent and your data will thereafter be permanently erased.
Confidentiality. Anything you state in the questionnaire will be held strictly confidential and will only be made available to supervisors, tutors and the course management team.
Secured storage of data. All data will be stored and processed safely by SSE and will be permanently deleted when the projected is completed. No personal data will be published. The thesis written by the students will not contain any information that may identify you as a respondent in the questionnaire.
Your rights under GDPR. Visit https://www.hhs.se/en/about-us/dataprotection/ to obtain information on your rights related to personal data.

What gender do you identify with? (This survey is intended to be answered **only** by people who identify themselves as **women**)

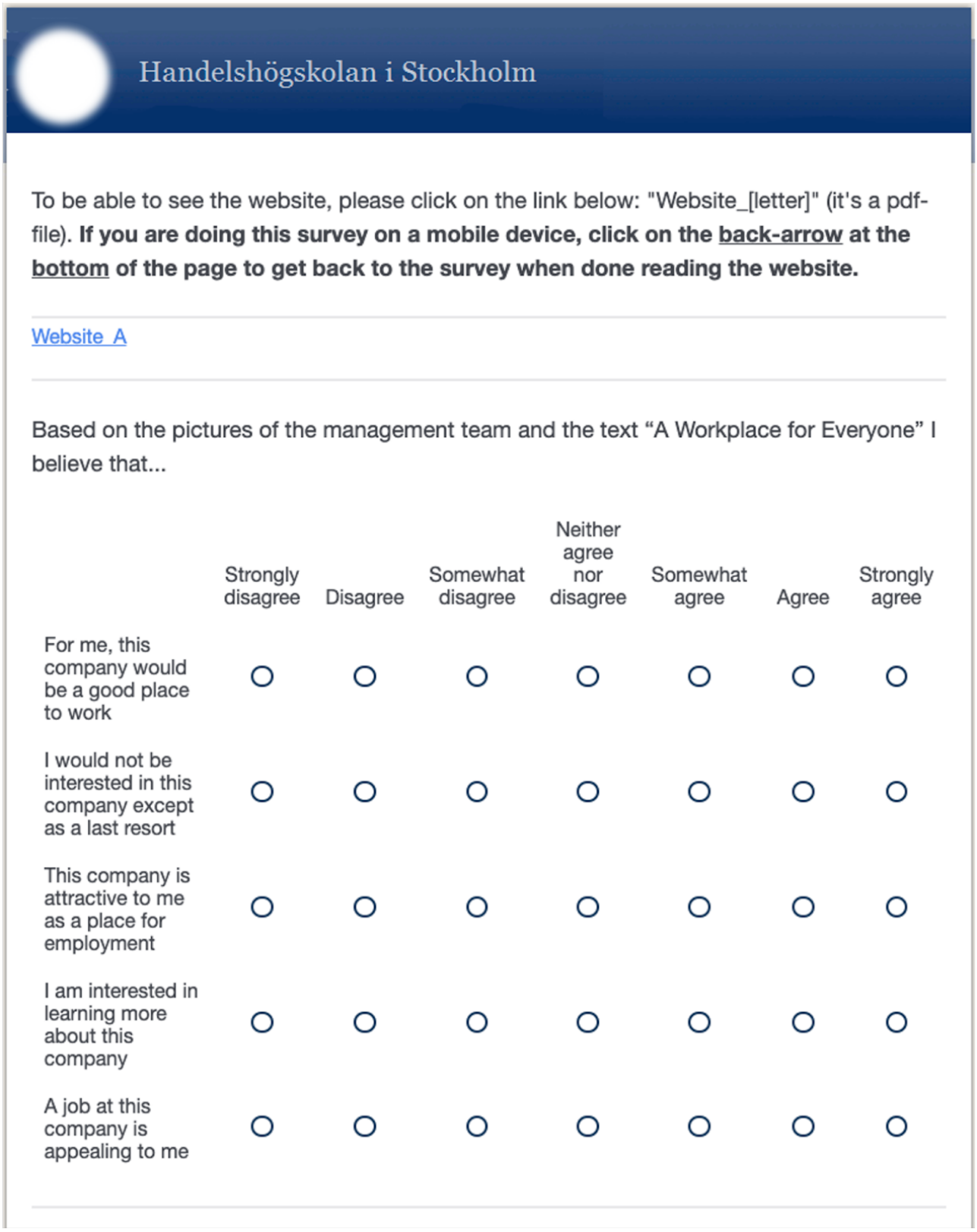
- ○ Woman
- ○ Man
- ○ Non-binary / other
- ○ Prefer not to disclose

I consent to participate in this study

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

→

Appendix 5.2 Main Study Questionnaire: Second Part



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To be able to see the website, please click on the link below: "Website_[letter]" (it's a pdf-file). **If you are doing this survey on a mobile device, click on the back-arrow at the bottom of the page to get back to the survey when done reading the website.**

Website_A

Based on the pictures of the management team and the text "A Workplace for Everyone" I believe that...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
For me, this company would be a good place to work	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would not be interested in this company except as a last resort	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This company is attractive to me as a place for employment	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am interested in learning more about this company	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A job at this company is appealing to me	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Based on the pictures of the management team and the text “A Workplace for Everyone” I believe that...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
There is a match between the organization’s words and actions	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The organization delivers on promises	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The organization practices what it preaches	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The organization does what it says it will do	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The organization conducts itself by the same values it talks about	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The organization shows the same priorities that it describes	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
When the organization promises something, I can be certain that it will happen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
If the organization says it is going to do something, it will	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Based on the text “A Workplace for Everyone”, i.e. the way this company communicates its gender diversity efforts, I believe that…

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The company uses the text to appear attractive and likable, and to build, maintain or improve their company image	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The company uses the text to acknowledge and take responsibility for any current, unwanted situation, and to make a promise of future improvement	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Based on the pictures of the management team, I believe the management team to be

- ○ Female-dominated
- ○ Male-dominated
- ○ Balanced
- ○ I don't know

Based on the pictures of the management team, I believe the overall organization to be

- ○ Female-dominated
- ○ Male-dominated
- ○ Balanced
- ○ I don't know

→

Appendix 5.3 Main Study Questionnaire: Third Part

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As a person, I...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Care about questions regarding gender diversity	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Believe questions regarding gender diversity are important	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Am aware of gender diversity-related questions, issues and challenges	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Have knowledge about questions regarding gender diversity (e.g. through newspaper articles, diversity reports, etc)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Actively investigate how a company that I consider as a potential employer work with questions regarding gender diversity	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Try to engage in questions regarding gender diversity (in school, at work, or outside of school/work)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

What is your exact age? Please write in numeric form

What is your occupation?

- ○ Student
- ○ Working professional
- ○ None of the above

Approximately how many years have you been working as a professional? (If you have only studied, type 0)

What is your highest educational level?

- ○ High school degree
- ○ Bachelor degree
- ○ Masters degree
- ○ PHD degree
- ○ None of the above

Choose the number eight

- ○ 10
- ○ 8
- ○ 5
- ○ 7
- ○ 2

→