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Congruence Between Leadership Gender and Organizational Claims Affects the Gender Composition of the Applicant Pool: Field Experimental Evidence

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Abstract. The extent to which men and women sort into different jobs and organizations—namely, gender differences in supply-side labor market processes—is a key determinant of workplace gender composition. This study draws on theories of congruence to uncover a unique organization-level driver of gender differences in job seekers' behavior. We first argue and show that congruence between leadership gender and organizational claims is a key mechanism that drives job seekers' interest. Specifically, many organizational claims are gender-typed, such that social claims activate the female stereotype, whereas business claims activate the male stereotype. Thus, whereas female-led organizations making social claims are gender-congruent, male-led firms making the same claims are gender-incongruent. Beyond demonstrating a general preference among job seekers for congruence, we also find that female job seekers are most interested in working for organizations that are simultaneously congruent and provide credible signals that they are fair and equitable employers. The congruence of leadership gender and organizational claims thus affects the gender composition of applicant pools for otherwise identical jobs.

Supplemental Material: The online appendix is available at <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2021.1442>.

1. Introduction

Organizations have been facing increasing scrutiny for the gender composition of their workforce, with the representation of women often differing widely across otherwise similar companies.¹ An organization's gender composition has direct implications for inequality, given that biases and stereotypes are typically most pronounced in contexts with fewer women (Reskin 1993, Eagly and Karau 2002, Botelho and Abraham 2017) and that women tend to hold lower-paying organizational positions (Petersen and Morgan 1995, Cotter et al. 1997, Cohen and Huffman 2003). In order for organizations to increase the representation of women on their workforce, it is necessary that women be well represented in the pool of applicants for job openings (Petersen et al. 2000, Fernandez and Sosa 2005, Campero and Fernandez 2019). Yet, this is often not the case, as men and women tend to pursue different jobs (Correll 2001, Cech et al. 2011, Fernandez and Friedrich 2011, Barbulescu and Bidwell 2013). Broader research on gender in the workplace suggests that leader gender may affect the gender composition of the applicant pool, whereby women prefer female leaders and men prefer male leaders (Turban and Dougherty 1992, Gibson and Lawrence 2010, Goldberg et al. 2010, McGinn and Milkman 2012, McDonald et al. 2018).

At the individual level, this preference is consistent with findings that men and women prefer to interact with same-gender others (Ibarra 1992, 1995; Lincoln and Miller 1979; see McPherson et al. 2001 for a review) and see same-gender others as their career referents—the people whose careers they see as most like their own (Sumner and Brown 1996, Gibson and Lawrence 2010, McGinn and Milkman 2012). At the organization level, leader gender may signal additional information about the organization, given that organizations are shaped by members of their upper management (Hambrick 2007, Marquis and Tilcsik 2013) and that male and female leaders are perceived to impact organizational practices differently (Dobbin 2011, Dobbin et al. 2011, Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey 2012). For example, having women in leadership positions has been associated with more equitable outcomes and greater opportunities for female employees (Cohen et al. 1998, Cohen and Huffman 2007, Cohen and Broschak 2013, Abraham 2017). To the extent that job seekers are using leader gender to infer additional information about the organization, we argue that it is necessary to move beyond assessing the effect of leader gender for shaping the applicant pool in isolation, and instead consider leader gender within the broader organizational context.

Specifically, we advance supply-side labor market theories of gender differences in job seekers' behavior by examining the effect of leader gender in conjunction with organizational claims. Organizational claims are statements that organizations use to convey a wide range of information to key stakeholders about their core business, such as what they do or how they serve clients, as well as their broader commitments, including to social issues (Hsu and Hannan 2005, Tripsas 2009). As such, claims serve as signals about key organizational attributes that are difficult to observe directly, especially for external stakeholders. Importantly, many organizational claims are gender-typed, suggesting that the impact of leader gender on job seekers' interest will vary as a function of these claims. For example, organizational social claims, such as commitments to community and environmental issues, are considered female-typed (Lee and Huang 2018, Shea and Hawn 2019), whereas claims focused on business outcomes, such as profits, are arguably more male-typed. We examine whether and how (in)congruence between leadership gender and these gender-typed organizational claims drive job seekers' propensity to apply for a job. Job seekers may interpret female-led organizations making social claims as gender-congruent but perceive male-led firms making the same claims as gender-incongruent, and thus be more interested in job opportunities with congruent potential employers. Recent empirical evidence supports this assertion, showing that external stakeholders reward congruence, including congruence between the gender of an organization's leader and its claims (Baum et al. 2016, Lee and Huang 2018).

Beyond a general preference for gender congruence from job seekers, we argue that female job seekers' interest will also depend on the extent to which an organization credibly signals that it creates a fair and equitable workplace. Women have a distinct set of factors that they consider in making career decisions, which stems from their long-standing status disadvantage relative to men (Ridgeway and Bourg 2004). Women's concerns about facing bias, or inequity, and perceptions of being less competent or successful in certain jobs have been posited to deter them from pursuing careers in male-dominated fields, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) (Correll 2001, Cech et al. 2011, Barbulescu and Bidwell 2013). To the extent that women's broader career decisions are a function of these unique considerations, we argue that women will similarly be more interested in jobs with employers perceived to be fair and equitable. Specifically, we expect that female job seekers will be most apt to apply to jobs in female-led organizations making social claims, such as claims of commitment to the community or to diversity, as these organizations are simultaneously

gender-congruent *and* provide the most credible signal of commitment to fairness and equity. Among male job seekers, we expect equal interest in all gender-congruent organizations—namely, in male-led organizations making business-focused claims and female-led organizations making social claims. This proposed gender difference in job seekers' interest will lead to differences in the gender composition of the applicant pools for otherwise identical jobs across organizations, which may in turn contribute to an organization's overall ability to hire women.

We isolate the effect of congruence between leadership gender and organizational claims on male and female job seekers' propensity to apply for a job using a field experiment on a popular job-search platform.² This research design allowed us to overcome the significant empirical challenges of examining actual applicant behavior, which has only been accomplished in a small number of existing empirical studies (Barbulescu and Bidwell 2013, Fernandez-Mateo and Fernandez 2016, Brands and Fernandez-Mateo 2017). First, advancing our understanding of supply-side factors requires an examination of not only those who apply to a job, but also job seekers who *could* have applied but did not. This is comparable to hiring studies where it is necessary to observe those who applied to a job, not just those who were hired, for understanding demand-side processes affecting hiring outcomes (e.g., Fernandez and Mors 2008, Botelho and Chang 2020). Second, it is challenging to establish a causal relationship between organizational characteristics and individual employees' or job seekers' behavior more broadly, as it requires a comparison of individuals in equivalent organizational contexts with variance only in the focal characteristics of interest (Burbano 2016, 2020). Given that a number of job and organizational characteristics beyond those that we examine may affect job seekers' interest in a job (Thomas and Wise 1999), this field experimental design allows us to observe behavioral differences as a function of our focal organizational characteristics.

We identified job seekers who were actively seeking employment on one of the highest-traffic job-search platforms and had relevant skills and experience for a fictitious job vacancy that we created. These job seekers were then randomly assigned to see a description for an identical job vacancy at hiring companies that varied only in terms of the gender composition of their leadership team and their claims. This design allowed us to isolate the causal effect of congruence between leadership gender and organizational claims on the likelihood that male versus female job seekers applied for the job.³ Consistent with our predictions, we found that job seekers were more interested in jobs with congruent, over

incongruent, organizations. Examining job seekers' interest by gender, we also found that that female job seekers were most interested in female-led, gender-congruent organizations, whereas male job seekers were equally interested in jobs across all gender-congruent organizations. This study advances explanations of gender differences in job seekers' behavior by drawing on theories of congruence and identifying the implications of leadership gender and organizational claims on the gender composition of the applicant pool.

2. Theory and Hypotheses

2.1. Organizational Gender Congruence and Job Seekers' Interest

As outsiders to the organization, job seekers who are considering a job opportunity with a potential employer must rely on observable organizational characteristics, or signals, to draw conclusions about that organization (Rynes et al. 1991, Barber 1998, Burbano 2016). Beyond the information provided by any single organizational characteristic, consistency or congruence across characteristics is generally viewed more favorably by external stakeholders. For example, in a survey experiment, respondents indicated that job advertisements that were more consistent with the hiring organization's broader image were more attractive (Baum et al. 2016). One potential explanation for this general congruence benefit is that congruence is associated with credibility or legitimacy, such that organizations that provide consistent signals are seen as more credible (Durcikova and Gray 2009).

Recent empirical research suggests that beyond a general advantage to organizations for being consistent, congruence between the gender composition of the organization's leadership and organizational claims is also valued by external stakeholders. Organizational claims are statements that convey information to key stakeholders about the organization's core business, such as what they do or how they serve clients, as well as its broader commitments, including to social issues (Hsu and Hannan 2005, Tripsas 2009). Increasingly, organizations are making claims in support of social issues, including commitments to the community and environment (Soule 2009, Burbano 2016) and to creating diverse and inclusive workplaces (Kalev et al. 2006). Importantly, these social claims have been labeled as female-typed, such that they are associated with elements of the feminine stereotype (Shea and Hawn 2019). This process of gender typing typically occurs when a given role or attribute becomes associated with stereotypically male or female traits (Perry et al. 1994). Whereas feminine stereotypes focus on communal characteristics, including warmth, helpfulness, and cooperativeness, masculine stereotypes center on agentic

characteristics, such as assertiveness, competence, and decisiveness (Fiske and Stevens 1993, Abele 2003). Given that social claims are typically community- or other-focused, for example, aimed at helping to advance a historically underrepresented group, it is not surprising that these claims are perceived to be female-typed.

As a result of this gender typing, female-led organizations making social claims are gender-congruent, whereas, for male-led firms, making these claims may be perceived as gender-incongruent and thus violate gender role expectations. On the other hand, claims focusing only on business initiatives that contribute to the bottom line are arguably more male-typed, or consistent with elements of the masculine stereotype, such as agency and competence. Making claims centered on success and profits, therefore, may be perceived as gender-incongruent for female-led, but not male-led, organizations. Consistent with this, a recent study revealed that women-led entrepreneurial ventures focusing on stereotypically masculine elements of their business, such as growth and profits, faced a disadvantage in accessing funding relative to otherwise similar male-led ventures (Lee and Huang 2018). Adding female-typed claims related to social impact, such as a commitment to the environment, which ostensibly made these women-led companies more gender-congruent, helped to close this gender difference in access to funding.

This notion that gender incongruence is discounted relative to gender congruence is consistent with broader, individual-level theories of gender role congruity and backlash. These theories have established that individuals are often penalized in evaluations for demonstrating gender-incongruent actions or behaviors. This penalty emerges because gender stereotypes are not only descriptive but also prescriptive, such that men and women are expected to behave in a manner that is consistent with the stereotype that aligns with their gender (Heilman 2001, 2012; Rudman et al. 2012; Moss-Racusin and Johnson 2016). Though evidence that gender incongruence penalties emerge for men remains mixed (Williams 1992, Kmec 2008), in the context of social claims, male employees have been found to face penalties for participating in corporate social initiatives (Bode et al. 2015, 2017).

Given that gender stereotypes are widespread, societal-level beliefs that are generally held by most people (Cornell and Ridgeway 2003), both men and women expect others to behave in a gender congruent manner (Haines et al. 2016). To the extent that female-led companies making social claims and male-led companies making only business-focused claims are gender-congruent, and both female-led companies making only business claims and male-led companies making social claims are gender-incongruent, we argue that job seekers will be more interested in the former.

Therefore, we expect that job seekers will generally favor job opportunities with congruent organizations.

Hypothesis 1. *Job seekers' interest will be higher for jobs with companies that are congruent, as compared with incongruent, in terms of leadership gender and organizational claims.*

2.2. Organizational Characteristics and Gender Sorting Among Job Seekers

Whereas men will generally prioritize gender congruence in their assessments of organizations, there is reason to expect that female job seekers will weigh both congruence and additional information conveyed by these organizational characteristics. In contrast to those of their male counterparts, women's career path decisions are more likely to be influenced by factors that mitigate concerns about fairness and facing inequality. Women are less likely to pursue jobs in stereotypically male fields such as STEM and finance (Fernandez and Sosa 2005, Fernandez and Friedrich 2011) because they anticipate discrimination, question their ability to succeed, and weigh competing family obligations (Correll 2001, Correll and Benard 2006, Cech et al. 2011, Barbulescu and Bidwell 2013). For example, in a study of MBA students' job-search behavior, women were less likely to apply to jobs in finance and consulting because of lower expectations of success and lower identification with those stereotypically male fields (Barbulescu and Bidwell 2013).

Importantly, women's unique concerns are not simply a function of their preferences (Barbulescu and Bidwell 2013, Sutter and Glätzle-Rützler 2014). Women are lower status relative to men and as a result have been historically disadvantaged (Ridgeway and Bourgeois 2004), making them particularly sensitized to the potential of bias or discrimination from future employers (Brands and Fernandez-Mateo 2017). Women have been found to face barriers in both external hiring processes (Petersen and Saporta 2004, Fernandez-Mateo and King 2011, Leung and Koppman 2018) and internal promotions (Cohen et al. 1998, Barnett et al. 2000), as well as in evaluations more broadly (Abraham 2020). Both direct and indirect experiences with inequity lead women to anticipate facing biases in future job searches and to hold downwardly biased assessments of their own skills and competencies. As a result, they have lower expectations about their likelihood to succeed in a given role, relative to similarly skilled men, which has direct implications for their job choices (Correll 2001, 2004).

Similar to the considerations deterring women from pursuing careers in certain occupations or industries, female job seekers will likely make inferences about fairness and their likelihood to succeed with a potential employer. Generally, the factors that influence job

seekers' interest in a potential employer are not uniform and are considered to be a function of an individual's particular concerns (Highhouse et al. 2007). For example, whereas there are no notable differences among men, women rate jobs as less appealing when the job posting includes masculine language because they believe that there are few women currently in that job and that they do not belong (Gaucher et al. 2011). Interestingly, the effect of masculine language in job postings persists, even for jobs in traditionally gender-neutral and female-dominated occupations, such as nursing. Furthermore, because prior rejection with a potential employer leads to perceptions of unfairness, women, but not men, have been found to be less likely to pursue a job with an employer who has rejected them in the past (Brands and Fernandez-Mateo 2017).

Organizational claims, or the statements about who the organization is and what it values, provide one important source of information to external stakeholders, including potential applicants. For example, community-focused social claims have been shown to be interpreted as a signal that employees will be treated fairly (Burbano 2016) and diversity-focused claims lead to perceptions that bias and discrimination are less likely (Edelman et al. 2011, Kaiser et al. 2013). Existing research also suggests heterogeneous responses to these various types of social claims by gender such that women are more sensitive to, and respond most favorably to, such claims (Kesner 1988, Williams 2003). For example, employers who adopt diversity and equity policies attract members of historically disadvantaged groups, including women (Barbulescu and Bidwell 2013, Kang et al. 2016). Relatedly, existing theoretical and laboratory-based studies suggest that women and racial minorities perceive companies making statements related to diversity more favorably (Rau and Hyland 2003, Avery and McKay 2006).

Given the well-established notion that organizational claims are often symbolic (Meyer and Rowan 1977), it is not entirely surprising that evidence of positive perceptions, or responses, to social claims has nonetheless been mixed (Margolis and Walsh 2001). There is commonly a disconnect between organizational claims and practices, such that organizations are often not following through on their publicly stated, socially desirable claims (Edelman et al. 2001, Kalev et al. 2006, Delmas and Burbano 2011, Marquis and Qian 2013). For example, employers that included diversity statements in their job advertisements were no less likely to exhibit discrimination in hiring than those that did not include such statements (Kang et al. 2016). Generally, it is very difficult for external stakeholders to observe when an organization is implementing practices that are

consistent with their claims. With respect to social claims, the sheer lack of observable data on firm practices, coupled with the complexity around how to measure progress toward social initiatives, makes it challenging for external stakeholders to gauge whether firms are acting on their commitments (Bromley and Powell 2012). Furthermore, organizations recognize the potential negative implications of perceived inconsistencies between claims and actions. As a result, organizations engage in strategic actions, such as hiding disconnects from relevant audiences (Marquis et al. 2016) and engaging in tactics to counteract perceived stakeholder doubt about the reliability of their social claims (McDonnell and King 2013).

The gender composition of leadership provides important insight into the likelihood that an organization is taking actions consistent with its social claims, suggesting that social claims from female leaders are more credible. Organizations are shaped by members of their upper management and, in the case of new ventures, by their founders (Hambrick 2007, Marquis and Tilcsik 2013). Having women in management has been associated with notable differences in the policies and initiatives that organizations offer. For example, organizations with female leaders tend to have a greater focus on diversity initiatives and programs aimed at resolving work-family needs, including dependent care assistance, flexible work arrangements, and parental leaves (Dobbin 2011, Dobbin et al. 2011, Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey 2012).

Furthermore, existing empirical evidence suggests a positive association between the presence of women in leadership and organizational actions and outcomes related to these initiatives. For example, firms with a larger proportion of female leaders have been found to have greater levels of philanthropy and charitable giving directed at the community and the environment (Williams 2003, Marquis and Lee 2013). Having women in leadership has also been linked to greater pay equity (Cohen and Huffman 2007, Abraham 2017), greater gender integration (Huffman et al. 2010), lower rates of sexual harassment (Dobbin and Kalev 2017), and higher rates of promotion for women (Cohen et al. 1998). Female managers have also been posited to create future opportunities for other women to enter management, such that a greater share of new management positions are filled by women when there are more women already in management (Cohen and Broschak 2013).

To the extent that female leaders are at least perceived to create equitable workplaces that enable women to succeed, social claims made by female-led organizations will be most credible and send the strongest signal that a potential employer is acting on its stated commitments. By contrast, whereas male-

led organizations making business claims are equally congruent, they do not provide any insight into the extent to which the organization creates an equitable workplace. Thus, female job seekers' interest in a job opportunity with a potential employer will be a function of both congruence between leadership gender and organizational claims and the extent to which that congruence provides a credible signal that the organization is fair and equitable.

Hypothesis 2. *Female job seekers' interest will be higher for jobs with female-led companies making social claims, such as community- or diversity-focused claims, than for jobs with male-led companies making only business-focused claims.*

3. Field Experiment Design

3.1. Overview of Process for Contacting Job Seekers and Observing Interest

To understand the extent to which organizational characteristics may contribute to gender segregation in the ways that we theorize, we implement a field experiment on one of the highest-traffic online employment-search engines (we use the pseudonym "JobSeeker.com").⁴ JobSeeker.com aggregates job listings from websites; allows employers to post jobs directly; enables employers to find active job seekers, using various search criteria; and facilitates contact with these job seekers directly through the site. Online employment search engines are increasingly being used by job seekers to identify prospective full-time, as well as part-time, jobs. According to a Pew Research Center study, most Americans looking for a new job utilize online resources, including employment search engines, in their job search, making these platforms a generalizable and relevant setting from which to source U.S. job seekers for our job vacancy.⁵

Our decision to create a market research analyst job vacancy was driven by two important considerations. First, the position of market research analyst is deemed to be one of the fastest growing jobs for individuals holding a bachelor's degree, ensuring that we would be able to identify a large sample of relevant job seekers for our study.⁶ Second, market research analyst is a gender-neutral job, which enabled us to advance theories of gender segregation by isolating the effects of organization-level factors.⁷ We created a corresponding market research analyst job description and identified job seekers, or potential applicants, suited for this position on JobSeeker.com. To identify an appropriate set of potential applicants for the job, we used the functionality available on Jobseeker.com to filter job seekers based on relevant search criteria. Specifically, we limit the set of job seekers included in our study to individuals who had updated their resume on the Jobseeker.com within the past week, are based in the United States, indicated

that they were looking for a full-time job, and have a bachelor's degree. We further restricted our selection of job seekers to those whose resumes included the following terms under job titles or skills: "market research," "business analyst," "business analysis," "data entry," "market analyst," "market analysis," "data analyst," "data analysis," or "research analyst." This ostensibly identified the population of the most relevant job seekers for our market research analyst position who were actively seeking employment on Jobseeker.com on the day that we conducted our search.

We then randomly assigned job seekers who met these criteria to one of our nine conditions (conditions and their corresponding manipulations are described in detail in the following section) and sent each individual a message about our job opening via the portal for contacting job seekers on JobSeeker.com. In this message, the details of the job were the same for all individuals, while the described characteristics of the hiring company, including information about the gender composition of the leadership team and details about the organization's claims, varied by condition. The message also included a link to the company's website and invited contacted job seekers to visit the website to learn more about the company and to apply.

When a hiring company identifies a potential applicant whom they would like to contact, they can only do so by submitting a message via the Jobseeker.com online portal, which costs the hiring company a fee (\$1.00–\$3.00) for each message sent. They are not able to contact job seekers directly, because Jobseeker.com redacts job seekers' personal contact information from their resumes. Messages sent to job seekers via JobSeeker.com generate an email message to the recipient that includes a voting button through which contacted job seekers can indicate whether they are interested in the job opportunity. If a job seeker indicates that they are interested using this voting button, then JobSeeker.com sends an automated message to the hiring company indicating that the seeker is interested.⁸ Importantly, indicating interest is not costless for job seekers, since at that point JobSeeker.com shares the job seeker's contact information, typically email, phone number, and address, with the hiring company. The message that job seekers receive via the platform always includes a reminder that their information will be shared with the potential employer once they indicate that they are interested. Based on our conversations with individuals working for JobSeeker.com, the voting buttons are the predominant way that job seekers reciprocate interest to prospective employers who contact them. It is less common to request that individuals submit separate applications when they are contacted, since an employer

who messages a job seeker through the website and paid the fee for doing so has presumably reviewed that individual's resume and determined that they are a viable candidate.⁹ In the opening line of the messages that we sent to job seekers via JobSeeker.com, we explicitly indicated that we had found their resume on the employment search engine (see Figure 2).¹⁰ Furthermore, a survey of individuals who self-reported that they had used JobSeeker.com in the past, conducted on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), supports this notion that indicating interest via the interested voting button is equivalent to applying for the job opportunity.¹¹ Importantly, this was true for both men and women. We thus use indication of job seekers' interest via the "interested" voting button on JobSeeker.com as our main dependent variable.

Independent of the research objectives of the study, we designed our study with ethical considerations in mind, aiming to ensure minimal impact on the job seekers included in our study. First, an advantage of the dependent variable we use is that it requires minimal time investment from the job seekers. Second, we hired and compensated one job seeker per condition from the pool of those who indicated interest (nine individuals in total) to conduct a short-term market research job.¹²

3.2. Conditions and Manipulations

We randomly assigned each job seeker included in our study to one of nine conditions (see Figure 1 for the three-by-three design). We varied the gender composition of the hiring organization's leadership team or founders (the founders and employees were all female, all male, or mixed gender and balanced in number) and organizational claims being made (business-focused, community-focused, or diversity-focused claims). We will refer to the companies in conditions in which the founders are male as *male-led companies*, those in which the founders are female as *female-led companies*, and those in which the founders

Figure 1. Three-by-Three Randomization Design

Claims	No Social Claims	Community Claims	Diversity Claims
Founder Gender			
Male-led	N=711	N=711	N=713
Female-led	N=708	N=688	N=711
Mixed Gender - led	N=688	N=705	N=686

are mixed gender as *mixed-gender-led companies*, in what follows. Our conditions allowed us to examine the effect of (in)congruence between leadership gender and organizational claims on job seekers' interest. Specifically, our congruent conditions are male-led business claims, female-led community claims, and female-led diversity claims, and our incongruent conditions are female-led business claims, male-led community claims, and male-led diversity claims. The three mixed-gender-led conditions—mixed-gender-led business claims, mixed-gender-led community claims, and mixed-gender-led diversity claims—enabled us to further scrutinize whether congruence between leadership gender and organizational claims is a key mechanism driving job seekers' interest, as these conditions are neutral with respect to congruence (i.e., neither inherently congruent nor incongruent).

These manipulations were implemented in two ways. First, we varied the messages sent to the job seekers via JobSeeker.com. In addition to the job description, which was constant across conditions, the messages sent to job seekers included information about the company's leadership gender and organizational claims. Specifically, each job seeker in our study received a message that included the names of the company's two founders, which conveyed leadership gender, the organization's claims, the name of the recruiter, and a link to the company's website,

which directed them to a company website corresponding to their condition. In terms of organizational claims, individuals assigned to the business-focused claims conditions received information about the organization's commitment to their business and success. Individuals assigned to one of the social claims conditions received information about the organization's commitment to either the community and environment or diversity and inclusion. Figure 2 shows the exact messages sent to job seekers via JobSeeker.com, revealing the precise manipulations used in these messages for each condition.

Second, we created nine company names with corresponding websites for each of our nine conditions, where we varied the images and text accordingly.¹³ The names of these companies were identical, with the exception of two letters at the start of the company name.¹⁴ Each website was also identical in design and layout (including a "Home" page, an "About Us" page, a "Join Us" page, and a "Contact Us" page), portrayed two founders, and listed the exact same description for our market research analyst job. As can be seen in the screenshots of each condition's website (see the online appendix), the text on the websites conveyed the gender of each of the company's two founders, described the organizational claims (business-focused, community-focused, or diversity-focused), and highlighted each founder's

Figure 2. Messages Sent to Job Seekers, with Manipulations Corresponding to Conditions

Hi {Name of Job Seeker},

We found your resume on {site} and wanted to introduce our company, {name of company}, and current job opportunities. We are looking for candidates interested in Business and Market Research to assist with client projects by conducting comparisons of our key clients to competitors, completing data entry and analysis, and preparing summary reports.

Our founders [**male-led condition: Michael and Christopher / female-led condition: Jessica and Amanda / mixed gender - led condition: {no text}**] launched {name of company} based on the belief that a small team could provide customized consultancy services to meet our clients' needs [**community claims condition: while being committed to giving back to our local and global communities / diversity claims condition: while being committed to diversity and inclusion/ business claims condition: {no text}**].

Please visit our website {hyperlink to company website provided} to find out more about us, about our job opportunities, and to apply (applications must be completed online on our website).

Best regards,

[**male-led condition: Kevin Smith / female-led condition: Ashley Smith / mixed gender-led condition: Taylor Smith**], {name of company}

JOB DETAILS

Job Title: Market/Business Research Position
Company: {name of company}

The job will consist of doing research, data entry, and analysis for one of our core clients. See our website for more details.

own experiences, which were consistent with the organizational claims in each respective condition.

The images reinforce our leadership gender manipulations by revealing the gender composition of the two-person founding team, who comprise the company's leadership, and other employees. Specifically, the images on the company websites corresponded to our leadership gender conditions as follows: all female for the female-led company condition, all male for the male-led company condition, and equal number of men and women for the mixed-gender-led company condition. The images of the founders were pretested on Amazon Mechanical Turk to ensure that the men and women across conditions did not differ on important characteristics that could confound our results. Specifically, we selected photographs that were statistically equivalent in perceived attractiveness, age, competence, and warmth.¹⁵ In addition to the founder pictures, we selected names for our founders and recruiters based on the most popular names for girls and boys in their approximate year of birth, based on the age measure from our pretest (male founders: Michael and Christopher; female founders: Jessica and Amanda).

To manipulate organizational claims, we varied the text on the websites, in addition to a logo. For example, the headline text of the home pages read, "At [Company Name], we provide outstanding service to our clients and invest our capital to [business claims condition: grow and expand our company / community claims condition: inspire and implement solutions that improve the broader community and the environment / diversity claims condition: promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace and beyond]." All pages were structured identically and included the same text on the lower left-hand side of the home page referencing a commitment to clients, developing integrative solutions, and preparing for future success. Claims were manipulated by condition in the text on the lower right-hand side of the home page. Further detail on these manipulations is available in the online appendix.

4. Measures and Analyses

4.1. Dependent Variable

Our dependent variable, *Interested*, is a binary variable representing whether the contacted job seeker indicated that they are interested in the market research analyst job using voting buttons embedded in the messages that we sent via JobSeeker.com. This variable is equal to 1 if the individual indicated interest in the job, and 0 otherwise.

4.2. Independent Variables

We constructed binary variables for each condition and use a two-part variable naming convention to

designate the condition that we are referencing. For example, *Female-Led (Business Claims)* is equal to 1 for observations in the female-led business claims condition and equal to 0 otherwise. We have a total of nine binary variables to represent each of our conditions in our three-by-three matrix and define each of these as described in the aforementioned example.

To examine how congruence between leadership gender and organizational claims affects job seekers' interest, we constructed a binary variable, *Congruent*, equal to 1 if the job seeker was randomly assigned to one of our three congruent conditions: male-led business claims, female-led community claims, or female-led diversity claims. *Congruent* was otherwise set equal to 0 for job seekers assigned to one of our three incongruent conditions: female-led business claims, male-led community claims, or male-led diversity claims. Our mixed-gender-led conditions allow for an additional test of our proposed congruence mechanisms, as these conditions are neutral with respect to congruence, given that mixed-gender leadership and organizational claims are not inherently congruent or incongruent. We constructed a binary variable, *Mixed-Gender-Led*, equal to 1 if the job seeker was randomly assigned to one of our three mixed-gender-led conditions: mixed-gender-led business claims, mixed-gender-led community claims, or mixed-gender-led diversity claims.

Given our prediction that male and female job seekers will weigh the importance of congruence differently, we examine how treatment effects differ by gender of the job seeker. We assigned gender to each job seeker based on their name using the IBM InfoSphere Global Name Management Tool (see also Botelho and Abraham 2017). We first scored each job seeker's name based on the likelihood of it being a woman's name. This tool takes as its input an individual's first name and compares that name with its database of 750 million names from around the world. Each name is then scored, on a scale from 0 to 99, for the likelihood that the individual with the given name is female, with higher scores being more likely to be female. We then created a dichotomous variable, *Female*, equal to 1 if this score was greater than 60 and equal to 0 if this score was less than 40. To avoid the possibility of erroneously coding names that were more gender-ambiguous, female was set to missing for job seekers with a name score between 60 and 40 and excluded from analyses involving job seekers' gender.

4.3. Other Variables and Controls

We ensure that our results are robust to the inclusion of control variables in regression models, particularly variables for observables that were not well randomized across conditions. We report results from ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions for ease of

interpretation, though our results are also robust to the use of a logit specification, which we report in the online appendix.

Our first set of controls captures the job seeker’s U.S. geographic region. Given that Jobseeker.com does not provide potential employers with job seekers’ addresses until the job seeker indicates interest, we use the region of the country where a job seeker resides as a proxy for location. *Midwest* is equal to 1 if the job seeker is based in the Midwest and equal to 0 otherwise. Indicators for *South*, *West*, and *Northeast* are constructed in the same fashion. Our next set of controls includes four distinct measures of job seekers’ quality and suitability for our market research analyst position. *Employed* is a binary variable equal to 1 if the job seeker’s resume indicated that they were employed (identified by the terms “present*” or “current*” within 25 words of the term “work experience”), and 0 otherwise.¹⁶ *Years of Experience* is a continuous variable inferred from the job seeker’s bachelor year. As another proxy for quality, we also constructed a binary variable, *Top Quartile Education*, to indicate whether each job seeker’s bachelor’s degree university ranking was in the top quartile of our sample. The quartile cutoff was 117, such that *Top Quartile Education* is equal to 1 if a given job seeker’s bachelor’s degree college or university has a rank that is equal to or less than 117 from *U.S. News and World Report*, and 0 otherwise. Fit with the job description was assessed by the number of terms relevant to the job description that appeared in the job seeker’s resume. A relevant term was counted when one of the following string combinations (within 10 words of each other) appeared in the resume: (market + research); (market + analysis); (market + analyz*); (competit* + research); (competit* + analysis); (competit* + analyz*); (industry + research); (industry +

analysis); and (industry + analyz*). We constructed a binary variable to capture job seekers’ suitability for our market research analyst position, *Top Quartile Fit*, which indicates whether each job seeker was in the top quartile of fit based on the number of relevant terms identified. The *Top Quartile Fit* cutoff was 2, such that *Top Quartile Fit* is equal to 1 if two or more terms were counted, and 0 otherwise.

5. Sample Characteristics and Randomization Balance

Our sample comprised of 6,321 job seekers who represent the population of active job seekers meeting our search criteria on JobSeeker.com on the day that we sourced participants for our study.¹⁷ Since our main analyses largely focus on male-led and female-led conditions in order to more directly compare organizations that are congruent versus incongruent, these analyses correspond to a three-by-two design (i.e., six of nine conditions) for a sample size of 4,242 job seekers. The three mix-gender-led conditions thus include the remaining 2,079 job seekers.

Table 1 presents summary statistics for the job seekers in the sample, by job seekers’ gender, given the focus of our study. Forty-four percent of our sample of job seekers were female. Pooling across gender, these job seekers represent a national sample, with 26% being from the Northeast, 35% being from the South, 23% being from the West, and 16% being from the Midwest. By design, only those with a bachelor’s degree were contacted, so everyone in the sample has at least a bachelor’s degree. Approximately 70% of job seekers were employed at the time of contact, and job seekers had approximately 10 years of work experience on average. The mean number of relevant terms per resume, captured by our measure for fit, was 1.46 (standard deviation, 2.03).

Table 1. Summary Statistics, by Job Seekers’ Gender

	Female job seekers		Male job seekers	
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
<i>Northeast</i>	0.26	0.44	0.26	0.44
<i>Midwest</i>	0.15	0.36	0.17	0.37
<i>South</i>	0.37	0.48	0.33	0.47
<i>West</i>	0.22	0.41	0.24	0.43
<i>Years of Experience</i>	9.28	9.41	10.43	10.71
<i>Employed</i>	0.71	0.45	0.69	0.46
<i>Top Quartile Fit</i>	0.32	0.47	0.37	0.48
<i>Top Quartile Education</i>	0.22	0.41	0.26	0.44

Notes. The *N* values vary due to information provided on each resume. For geographic location (*Northeast*, *Midwest*, *South*, and *West*), *N* = 2,473 female job seekers and *N* = 3,114 male job seekers. For *Years of Experience*, *N* = 2,192 female job seekers and *N* = 2,773 male job seekers. For *Employed*, *N* = 2,535 female job seekers and *N* = 3,180 male job seekers. For *Top Quartile Fit* and *Top Quartile Education*, *N* = 2,537 female job seekers and *N* = 3,180 male job seekers.

Table 2 reports the randomization balance of observable characteristics, by condition. We report the results of two-tailed t -tests for all comparisons of means. For robustness, we report versions of our regression analyses that control for the few observables not well randomized across conditions (*Female*, *Northeast*, *Midwest*, *South*, *Employed*, *Top Quartile Fit*, and *Top Quartile Education*).

Of those contacted, 27.1% responded that they were interested in the job on average across the nine conditions. Table 3 provides an overview of the characteristics of the job seekers who did versus those who did not indicate interest. On average, those interested were marginally less likely to be female, less likely to come from the Northeast, more likely to come from the South, less experienced, and less likely to be employed. As we would expect, those interested were more likely to be in the top quartile of job seekers who are a good fit for the job description.

6. Results

6.1. Effect of Congruence Between Leadership Gender and Organizational Claims on Job Seekers' Interest

To test our first hypothesis predicting that job seekers prefer gender-congruent organizations, Figure 3(a) shows the average likelihood that job seekers indicated interest in the job, pooling male and female job seekers, based on whether the hiring company is congruent with respect to its leadership gender and its claims. A comparison of job seekers' interest reveals that congruent companies receive more interest than do incongruent companies, on average. Whereas 32% of contacted job seekers indicated interest in the job in congruent companies, only 23% of job seekers indicated interest in incongruent companies ($p = 0.0000$). Model 2 of Table 4 illustrates that this nine-percentage-point difference is robust to the inclusion of controls, as indicated by the coefficient on *Congruent* ($B = 0.09$, $p < 0.001$). These results provide strong support for Hypothesis 1; job seekers prefer jobs with companies that are congruent in their leadership gender and claims over those that are incongruent.

Beyond predicting a general preference for congruent organizations, we argued that the extent of this preference would be heterogeneous with respect to job seekers' gender. We expected female job seekers, while demonstrating greater interest in jobs with congruent companies on average, would also consider the extent to which a potential employer signals fair treatment or equity. Male job seekers, on the other hand, who enjoy a status advantage and are less likely than female job seekers to have faced bias in the past, would be driven primarily by a preference for congruence between leadership gender and organizational claims. If female job seekers do indeed also take

into consideration organizational signals of fair treatment and equity, then we would expect their interest in congruent companies that do not provide such signals to be somewhat dampened compared with that of male job seekers. In our study, male-led companies making business claims are congruent but do not provide a signal of fairness and equity.

We thus introduce the job seekers' gender and directly examine whether preference for congruence is heterogeneous with respect to the job seekers' gender in Figure 3(b). First, consistent with the results presented in Figure 3(a) and with Hypothesis 1, Figure 3(b) shows that both male and female job seekers prefer congruent to incongruent companies on average (29% vs. 23%, $p = 0.004$ for female job seekers; 34% vs. 23%, $p = 0.0000$ for male job seekers). Figure 3(b) also reveals notable differences by the job seekers' gender however; whereas both male and female job seekers are equally interested in all incongruent companies (23% vs. 23%, $p = 0.88$), male job seekers exhibit a higher level of interest in congruent companies than do female job seekers (34% vs. 29%, $p = 0.03$). Models 3 and 4 (Table 4) provide directionally consistent results, suggesting that the positive effect of congruent (as compared with incongruent) companies varies by the job seekers' gender. The negative main effect of our treatment, *Congruent*, in both of these models shows that male job seekers are more likely to be interested in jobs in congruent than incongruent companies ($B = 0.11$ without controls, and $B = 0.10$ with controls, $p < 0.001$). Though the effect of the interaction of *Congruent* and *Female* is not statistically significant ($B = -0.04$, $p = 0.13$ without controls; $B = -0.04$, $p = 0.17$ with controls), it is directionally consistent with the notion that male job seekers are even more interested in congruent companies than are female job seekers.

To directly test our second hypothesis, we now examine gender differences in job seekers' interest across each of our three congruent conditions in Figure 4(a). Comparing the dark-colored bars, we see that female job seekers' interest varies across the three congruent conditions such that they are more likely to indicate interest in congruent companies that also signal fairness and equity. That is, female job seekers' interest is higher for female-led companies making diversity-focused claims and (marginally higher) for female-led companies making community-focused claims than male-led companies making business-focused claims (33% vs. 24%, $p = 0.02$, and 31% vs. 24%, $p = 0.09$, respectively). Another way of interpreting these results is that, among the congruent conditions, female job seekers are least interested in male-led companies making business-focused claims. A comparison of the light-colored bars reveals that, in contrast to women, male job seekers exhibit a statistically

Table 2. Randomization Balance, by Condition

	Neutral conditions			Congruent conditions			Incongruent conditions		
	Mixed-gender-led business claims (control)	Mixed-gender-led community claims	Mixed-gender-led diversity claims	Male-led business claims	Female-led community claims	Female-led diversity claims	Female-led business claims	Male-led community claims	Male-led diversity claims
	N = 688	N = 705	N = 686	N = 711	N = 688	N = 711	N = 708	N = 711	N = 713
<i>Female</i>	0.46	0.45	0.43	0.42	0.43	0.46	0.47	0.43	0.45
N = 5,717		[0.73]	[0.21]	[0.10]	[0.19]	[0.88]	[0.84]	[0.24]	[0.70]
<i>Northeast</i>	0.26	0.28	0.24	0.28	0.26	0.26	0.27	0.24	0.22
N = 6,169		[0.61]	[0.39]	[0.62]	[0.82]	[0.84]	[0.88]	[0.33]	[0.04]
<i>Midwest</i>	0.16	0.11	0.17	0.16	0.16	0.18	0.16	0.17	0.15
N = 6,169		[0.00]	[0.82]	[0.68]	[0.99]	[0.35]	[0.62]	[0.87]	[0.50]
<i>South</i>	0.34	0.36	0.35	0.32	0.35	0.34	0.34	0.35	0.39
N = 6,169		[0.44]	[0.55]	[0.45]	[0.62]	[0.98]	[0.99]	[0.51]	[0.03]
<i>West</i>	0.23	0.25	0.23	0.25	0.22	0.22	0.24	0.23	0.24
N = 6,169		[0.38]	[0.96]	[0.45]	[0.85]	[0.59]	[0.70]	[0.81]	[0.78]
<i>Years of Experience</i>	9.46	9.49	9.45	9.35	10.21	9.73	9.66	10.21	9.71
N = 5,499		[0.95]	[0.99]	[0.84]	[0.20]	[0.62]	[0.71]	[0.18]	[0.65]
<i>Employed</i>	0.69	0.72	0.74	0.71	0.71	0.70	0.72	0.60	0.70
N = 6,318		[0.32]	[0.05]	[0.49]	[0.53]	[0.64]	[0.28]	[0.00]	[0.79]
<i>Top Quartile Fit</i>	0.36	0.37	0.35	0.36	0.37	0.37	0.35	0.25	0.34
N = 6,321		[0.67]	[0.60]	[0.46]	[0.91]	[0.89]	[0.73]	[0.00]	[0.32]
<i>Top Quartile Education</i>	0.25	0.24	0.25	0.25	0.23	0.23	0.24	0.20	0.26
N = 6,321		[0.53]	[0.93]	[0.75]	[0.31]	[0.30]	[0.67]	[0.03]	[0.60]

Notes. Table reports means. The *p*-value of null that difference of means between the treatment group and the control group (mixed-gender-led business claims) equals 0 is reported in brackets. Statistically different ($p < 0.10$) means are shown in bold.

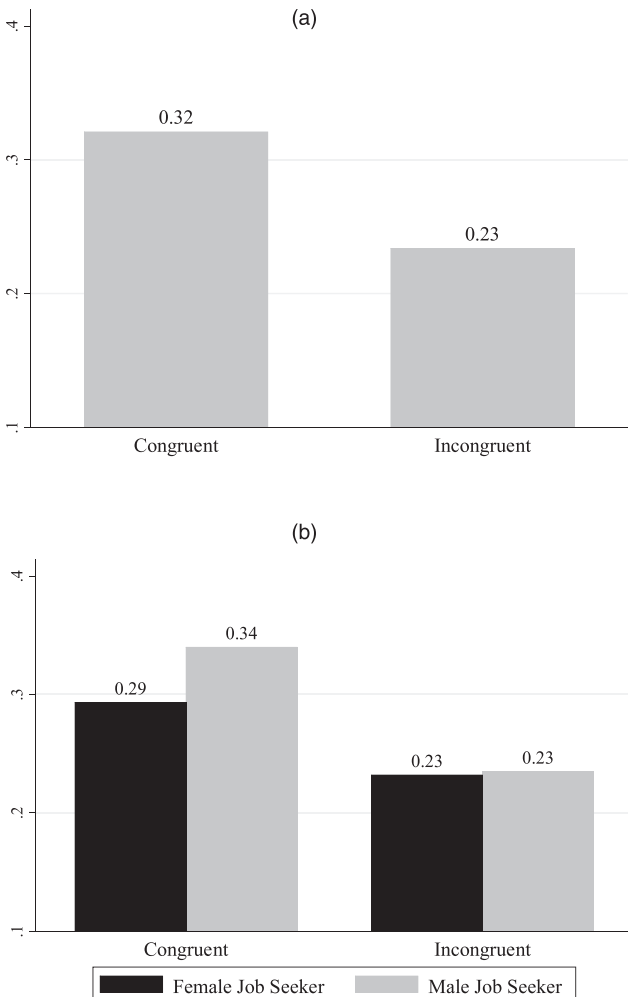
Table 3. Summary Statistics of Job Seekers Who Indicated Interest vs. Did Not Indicate Interest

	Interested	Not interested	<i>p</i> -Value of null that difference of means between interested and not interested equals 0
<i>Female</i>	0.42	0.45	<i>p</i> = 0.06
<i>Northeast</i>	0.22	0.27	<i>p</i> = 0.00
<i>Midwest</i>	0.16	0.16	<i>p</i> = 0.60
<i>South</i>	0.37	0.34	<i>p</i> = 0.02
<i>West</i>	0.24	0.23	<i>p</i> = 0.56
<i>Years of Experience</i>	9.22	9.87	<i>p</i> = 0.03
<i>Employed</i>	0.68	0.71	<i>p</i> = 0.03
<i>Top Quartile Fit</i>	0.37	0.34	<i>p</i> = 0.02
<i>Top Quartile Education</i>	0.23	0.24	<i>p</i> = 0.66

Notes. Means are reported. *N* = 1,713 interested; *N* = 4,608 not interested.

equivalent level of interest in all three congruent companies (36% vs. 32% vs. 34%, *p* > 0.10 for all comparisons). This provides support that, whereas male job

Figure 3. (a) Job Seekers’ Interest for Congruence Between Leadership Gender and Claims (Hypothesis 1); (b) Job Seekers’ Interest for Congruence Between Leadership Gender and Claims, by Job Seekers’ Gender



seekers are equally interested in jobs with all congruent companies, female job seekers are most interested in congruent companies that signal fairness and equity. OLS regression results reported in Table 5 show that these comparisons of means are generally robust to the inclusion of control variables. Though the coefficient on *Female-Led (Community Claims)* as compared with *Male-Led (Business Claims)* is no longer statistically significant in Model 2, the magnitude of the effect remains the same (*B* = 0.06, *p* = 0.15). Together, these results provide clear support for Hypothesis 2. Whereas congruence was the main predictor of male job seekers’ interest, female job seekers’ interest was highest for companies that are both congruent and signal fairness and equity, namely, female-led companies making diversity-focused claims.

Though we do not hypothesize about gender differences in job seekers’ interest across incongruent companies, we present these results in Figure 4(b) and Table 6 for completeness. The dark bars in Figure 4(b) and Models 1–4 (Table 6) reflect that female job seekers’ interest does not vary across the incongruent companies (*p* > 0.10). The light bars in Figure 4(b) and Models 5–8 (Table 6), however, suggest some differences in interest from male job seekers. Male job seekers indicated lower interest in male-led companies making community-focused claims (*B* = −0.08, *p* < 0.05 without controls; *B* = −0.06, *p* < 0.10 with controls), and directionally less interested in male-led companies making diversity claims than in female-led companies making business claims. We speculate that male-led companies making social (community or diversity) claims are likely to be perceived as relatively more incongruent than female-led companies making business claims. Given the importance of congruence in male job seekers’ considerations of job opportunities, it seems plausible that the

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Table 4. Effect of Congruence Between Leadership Gender and Claims on Job Seekers’ Interest on Likelihood of Indicating Interest (Hypothesis 1 [H1])

	Model 1 (H1)	Model 2 (H1)	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Congruent</i>	0.09*** (0.01)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.11*** (0.02)	0.10*** (0.02)
<i>Female</i>		-0.03+ (0.01)	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)
<i>Congruent* Female</i>			-0.04 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)
<i>Midwest</i>		-0.00 (0.02)		-0.00 (0.02)
<i>South</i>		0.03+ (0.02)		0.03+ (0.02)
<i>Northeast</i>		-0.04+ (0.02)		-0.04+ (0.02)
<i>Employed</i>		0.00 (0.02)		0.00 (0.02)
<i>Top Quartile Fit</i>		0.04* (0.02)		0.04* (0.02)
<i>Top Quartile Education</i>		0.02 (0.02)		0.02 (0.02)
Constant	0.23*** (0.01)	0.22*** (0.02)	0.23*** (0.01)	0.21*** (0.02)
N	4,242	3,750	3,848	3,750

Notes. OLS regression results, where all models include robust standard errors reported in parentheses. Baseline is *Incongruent*. The N values in Models 2 and 4 are lower than in Model 1 due to the number of observations for which control variables could be constructed from resumes. The N value in Model 3 is lower due to the number of observations for which we coded gender (gender-ambiguous names were coded as missing).

+ $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

relative degree of perceived incongruence in each of these in conditions helps to explain these results.

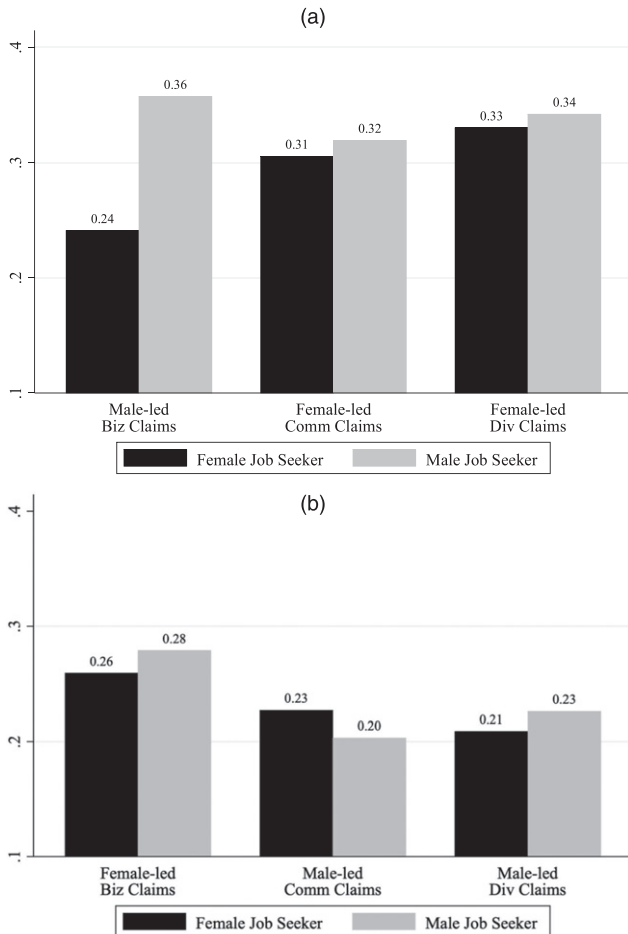
6.2. Additional Support for Proposed Congruence Mechanisms

Our main analyses centered on the female-led and male-led company conditions, given our focus on isolating the effect of congruence between leader gender and organizational claims on job seekers’ interest. As an additional test of our proposed mechanisms, we now examine job seekers’ interest for companies in the mixed-gender-led conditions, as these are neither inherently congruent nor incongruent and thus serve as an important counterfactual. To the extent that congruence is the driver of job seekers’ interest, we would expect interest in these companies that are neutral with respect to congruence to fall between interest for congruent and incongruent companies. We indeed find that to be the case, as 26% of job seekers indicated interest in mixed-gender-led companies, on average. This is six percentage points lower than job seekers’ interest in congruent companies (0.26 vs. 0.32, $p = 0.00$), and three percentage points higher, though marginally significant, than job seeker interest in incongruent companies (0.26 vs.

0.23, $p = 0.06$). This supports our assertion that congruence between leadership gender and claims is a key mechanism driving job seekers’ interest.

With respect to job seekers’ gender, there is no statistically significant difference between male and female job seekers’ interest in mixed-gender-led companies on average (0.26 for male job seekers vs. 0.25 for female job seekers, $p = 0.52$). Our results are also consistent with our prediction that female job seekers are most interested in a subset of congruent companies, namely, those that also provide credible signals of fairness and equity in the workplace. An examination of interest from female seekers across conditions reveals that their interest in mixed-gender conditions is indistinguishable from their interest in incongruent conditions, even for mixed-gender-led companies making social claims (0.25 for mixed-gender vs. 0.23 for incongruent, $p = 0.42$). However, female job seekers’ interest was significantly higher in female-led congruent conditions, which are female-led companies making social claims, than in mixed-gender-led conditions (0.32 for female-led congruent vs 0.25 for mixed-gender, $p = 0.00$). Given that female-led organizations making socially focused claims arguably provide the most credible signal of fairness

Figure 4. (a) Job Seekers' Interest for Congruence Between Leadership Gender and Claims, by Condition and Job Seekers' Gender (Hypothesis 2); (b) Job Seekers' Interest for Incongruence Between Leadership Gender and Claims, by Condition and Job Seekers' Gender



and equity, the fact that these conditions elicit the highest level of interest from female job seekers follows from our theoretical arguments leading to Hypothesis 2. We report complete data for job seekers' interest (average and by job seekers' gender) for each of the mixed-gender-led conditions in Online Appendix Table 5 for completeness.

6.3. Implications for the Gender Composition of the Applicant Pool

Given that we observed gender differences in job seekers' interest across different congruent organizations, we consider implications for the gender composition of the application pool across our conditions. Panels (a) and (b) of Figure 4 reveal that female job seekers exhibit the highest level of interest for female-led companies making diversity claims, whereas male job seekers exhibit equally high levels of interest for all three congruent conditions (male-led companies making business-focused claims and female-led

companies making social claims). As a result of these gender differences, we would thus expect the gender composition of the applicant pool to differ across these congruent conditions.

To attribute these observed differences in the gender composition of the applicant pool to leadership gender and organizational claims, it is necessary to isolate where the gender composition of the applicants (i.e., those indicating interest) differs significantly from the gender composition of the pool of job seekers contacted within each condition. Table 7 reports this comparison showing the proportion female among those contacted and the proportion female among those interested by condition. Pearson chi-squared comparisons indicate that the proportion female is statistically equivalent between the pool of those contacted and the pool of those interested in all conditions, except that of male-led companies making business-focused claims. In this condition, whereas 42% of those contacted are female, only 33% of those interested are female ($p < 0.01$).

Despite the potential negative implications of male-led companies making business claims for attracting a gender-balanced pool of applicants, to the extent that the pool of male applicants to these firms are higher quality, or better suited for the position, this overrepresentation of men could be viewed positively by a hiring firm. To examine this, we compare the applicants on various measures of quality and fit: whether the job seekers are currently employed at the time of contact, in the top quartile of fit, in the top quartile of education, and in terms of years of experience in Table 8. Specifically, we examine whether male applicants in our male-led company making business claims differ from male applicants in our other conditions along each of these dimensions. Our results reveal that there are no statistically significant quality differences across the conditions, with two exceptions. One is in terms of likelihood of being employed, where male applicants applying to the male-led business claims condition are more likely to be employed than those applying to the mixed-gender-led business claims condition. The second is in terms of fit, where male applicants applying to the female-led diversity claims condition are more likely to be in the top quartile of fit than those applying to the male-led business claims condition. This suggests that female-led companies making diversity claims are arguably attracting better-suited male applicants. A comparison of all other quality and fit dimensions reveals that male job seekers applying to the male-led business claims condition are statistically equivalent to those applying to each of our other conditions. These comparisons suggest that the observed higher interest from male job seekers for male-led companies making business claims does not lead to a higher-quality or a better-suited pool of applicants.

Table 5. Effect of Conditions Representing Congruence Between Leadership Gender and Claims on Likelihood of Indicating Interest, by Job Seekers' Gender (Hypothesis 2 [H2])

	Female job seekers (H2)				Male job seekers			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
<i>Female-Led (Community Claims)</i>	0.06 ⁺ (0.04)	0.06 (0.04)			-0.04 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.04)		
<i>Female-Led (Diversity Claims)</i>			0.09* (0.04)	0.09* (0.04)			-0.02 (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)
<i>Midwest</i>		0.05 (0.05)		0.04 (0.06)		0.04 (0.06)		-0.04 (0.05)
<i>South</i>		0.09 (0.05)		0.08 (0.05)		0.07 (0.05)		0.02 (0.05)
<i>Northeast</i>		-0.06 (0.05)		-0.04 (0.05)		-0.05 (0.05)		-0.08 (0.05)
<i>Employed</i>		-0.04 (0.04)		-0.02 (0.04)		0.02 (0.04)		0.04 (0.04)
<i>Top Quartile Fit</i>		-0.04 (0.04)		-0.06 (0.04)		0.06 (0.04)		0.12** (0.04)
<i>Top Quartile Education</i>		0.07 (0.05)		0.02 (0.06)		0.05 (0.04)		-0.01 (0.04)
Constant	0.24*** (0.03)	0.24*** (0.06)	0.24*** (0.04)	0.25*** (0.06)	0.36*** (0.02)	0.29*** (0.05)	0.36*** (0.02)	0.31*** (0.05)
N	532	517	567	553	732	712	729	718

Notes. OLS regression results, where all models include robust standard errors reported in parentheses. Baseline is *Male-Led (Business Claims)*. Addition of control variables to any given specification reduces the sample size, since not all resumes enabled coding of the control variables.
⁺ $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

7. Robustness Tests

Though it is theoretically unclear whether men and women should differ in clicking behavior or in likelihood of being “treated” by the websites, we compared male and female job seekers’ behavior on the company websites to ensure that such potential gender differences are not driving our observed differences in job seekers’ interest.¹⁸ We find that the likelihood of visiting the company websites was substantively and statistically equivalent for contacted male and female job seekers (0.39 for men vs. 0.39 for women, $t(3,846) = -0.19, p = 0.84$). Conditional on visiting the site, we also find that men and women do not differ in terms of bounce rate, or the likelihood of leaving the site after one click (0.02 for men vs. 0.02 for women, $t(1,490) = 0.28, p = 0.78$). The average number of clicks per person during visits to the websites was also statistically equivalent for both genders (14.7 for men vs. 15.2 for women, $t(1,490) = -0.60, p = 0.55$).¹⁹ Thus, it is highly unlikely that the observed differences in job seekers’ interest by gender were driven by gender differences in clicking behavior or in exposure to content on the websites.

Our results are robust to the use of logit, rather than OLS, specifications of our regression analyses, which are reported in Online Appendix Tables 1 and 2. Our results are also robust to a less conservative specification of the job seeker’s gender variable, wherein *Female_alt* is equal to 1 if the IBM InfoSphere Global

Name Management Tool score assigning the probability that the given name is female is greater than 50, equal to 0 if the score is less than 50, and coded as missing if the score was equal to 50 (see Online Appendix Tables 3 and 4).

8. Discussion

Given that an organization’s gender composition has important implications for workplace gender inequality, our study focuses on unpacking how organization-level factors contribute to the gender composition of the applicant pool. Specifically, we argue that gender sorting among job seekers is a function of organizational congruence between leadership gender and claims. Because organizational claims are gender-typed (Lee and Huang 2018, Shea and Hawn 2019), we posit that job seekers will be more apt to apply to jobs with potential employers that are congruent with respect to the gender of their leadership and their claims. We also argue that this congruence effect will be heterogeneous with respect to job seekers’ gender. Whereas congruence between leadership gender and claims will be the primary driver of interest among male job seekers, female job seekers will simultaneously weigh congruence and the extent to which the employer appears to create a fair and equitable workplace. Consistent with our predictions, we found that job seekers were more interested in congruent organizations on average. Whereas male job seekers were equally interested in all congruent organizations, female job seekers were

Table 6. Effect of Conditions Representing Incongruence Between Leadership Gender and Claims on Likelihood of Indicating Interest, by Job Seekers' Gender

	Female job seekers (H2)				Male job seekers			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
<i>Male-Led (Community Claims)</i>	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)			-0.08* (0.03)	-0.06+ (0.03)		
<i>Male-Led (Diversity Claims)</i>			-0.05 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.04)			-0.06 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.03)
<i>Midwest</i>		-0.06 (0.05)		-0.05 (0.05)		-0.02 (0.05)		0.02 (0.06)
<i>South</i>		0.06 (0.05)		0.01 (0.05)		-0.04 (0.05)		-0.02 (0.05)
<i>Northeast</i>		-0.01 (0.05)		-0.02 (0.05)		-0.05 (0.05)		-0.05 (0.05)
<i>Employed</i>		0.04 (0.04)		-0.02 (0.04)		0.02 (0.03)		-0.01 (0.03)
<i>Top Quartile Fit</i>		0.06 (0.04)		0.03 (0.04)		0.06 (0.04)		-0.03 (0.03)
<i>Top Quartile Education</i>		0.07 (0.04)		0.04 (0.04)		0.09* (0.04)		-0.01 (0.03)
Constant	0.26*** (0.03)	0.19*** (0.05)	0.26*** (0.03)	0.26*** (0.05)	0.28*** (0.02)	0.25*** (0.05)	0.17*** (0.02)	0.31*** (0.05)
N	579	564	589	574	711	691	691	673

Notes. OLS regression results, where all models include robust standard errors reported in parentheses. Baseline is *Female-Led (Business Claims)*. Addition of control variables to any given specification reduces the sample size, since not all resumes enabled coding of the control variables.

+ $p < 0.1$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

most interested in gender-congruent organizations that were female-led and made social claims, the combination of which ostensibly provided the most credible signal of an equitable workplace.

This paper makes several contributions to research on organizational congruence and supply-side labor market processes. We draw on theories of organizational congruence to uncover a unique driver of job seekers' behavior and identify implications for the gender composition of the applicant pool. We argue and show that congruence between leadership gender and organizational claims is valued by job seekers and is a key predictor of whether a job seeker applies for a job opportunity, *ceteris paribus*. These results

are consistent with Lee and Huang (2018), who find that external stakeholders reward congruence among entrepreneurs. They show that evaluators reward female, but not male, founders for adding a social impact framing, which is considered female-typed and thus congruent for female-led ventures. Our study extends this line of inquiry by isolating the effect of (in)congruence between leadership gender and organizational claims for supply-side labor market processes and, importantly, by identifying how this congruence is evaluated differently based on the gender of the job seeker. Our research suggests that, whereas evaluators generally favor congruence, in the labor market where job seekers are gauging what it

Table 7. Implications for the Gender Composition of the Applicant Pool, by Condition

		Proportion female in contacted pool	Proportion female in interested pool	Pearson chi-squared comparison
Congruent	Male-led business claims	0.42	0.33	$X^2(1, N = 648) = 10.00, p = 0.002$
	Female-led community claims	0.41	0.43	$X^2(1, N = 616) = 0.13, p = 0.714$
	Female-led diversity claims	0.45	0.46	$X^2(1, N = 648) = 0.10, p = 0.749$
Incongruent	Female-led business claims	0.45	0.47	$X^2(1, N = 634) = 0.31, p = 0.578$
	Male-led community claims	0.46	0.43	$X^2(1, N = 656) = 0.54, p = 0.462$
	Male-led diversity claims	0.43	0.45	$X^2(1, N = 646) = 0.27, p = 0.601$
Neutral	Mixed-gender-led business claims	0.46	0.45	$X^2(1, N = 616) = 0.07, p = 0.792$
	Mixed-gender-led community claims	0.45	0.46	$X^2(1, N = 640) = 0.04, p = 0.848$
	Mixed-gender-led diversity claims	0.43	0.40	$X^2(1, N = 613) = 0.97, p = 0.324$

Table 8. Comparison of Quality and Suitability Among Male Job Seekers Indicating Interest, by Condition

	Neutral conditions			Congruent conditions			Incongruent conditions		
	Mixed-gender-led business claims	Mixed-gender-led community claims	Mixed-gender-led diversity claims	Male-led business claims	Female-led community claims	Female-led diversity claims	Female-led business claims	Male-led community claims	Male-led diversity claims
<i>Employed</i>	0.51 [0.00]	0.72 [0.74]	0.64 [0.33]	0.70	0.70 [0.93]	0.72 [0.82]	0.71 [0.88]	0.66 [0.49]	0.69 [0.80]
<i>Top Quartile Fit</i>	0.35 [0.56]	0.43 [0.63]	0.41 [0.84]	0.39	0.42 [0.61]	0.52 [0.05]	0.37 [0.75]	0.39 [0.98]	0.31 [0.24]
<i>Top Quartile Education</i>	0.26 [0.83]	0.26 [0.78]	0.26 [0.81]	0.28	0.29 [0.86]	0.22 [0.24]	0.27 [0.94]	0.33 [0.47]	0.21 [0.26]
<i>Years of Experience</i>	9.33 [0.96]	11.48 [0.20]	8.55 [0.56]	9.41	9.97 [0.70]	9.85 [0.74]	9.40 [0.99]	11.71 [0.17]	9.06 [0.82]

Notes. Table reports means. The *p*-value of null that difference of means between each condition and that of male-led business claims equals 0 is reported in brackets. Statistically different ($p < 0.10$) means are shown in bold.

would be like to work for a potential employer (e.g., Rynes et al. 1991, Barber 1998), women also weigh signals about the extent to which the organization will be fair and equitable. Consistent with this, female job seekers' interest was only higher for female-led companies making social claims, which are simultaneously congruent and provide the most credible signals that the organization creates a fair and equitable workplace. One fruitful direction for future work is to examine heterogeneous effects of congruence between leadership gender and organizational claims or actions on other key outcomes. For example, it is plausible that (in)congruence affects additional stages of the recruitment process, such as job applicant salary requirements or likelihood to accept an offer, as well as posthire employee actions, such as productivity or retention. Future work can also explore whether and how congruence between non-gendered organizational characteristics might interact in influencing job seekers' behavior.

Our results also provide one plausible explanation for the mixed findings in research examining the benefits of organizational social claims (Margolis and Walsh 2001, Dover et al. 2016). Our study suggests that a failure to account for leader gender in extant studies may be a contributing factor. To the extent that employees and other stakeholders perceive social claims to be coming from male-led versus female-led organizations, observed reactions to such claims may actually be a function of perceived incongruence between leader gender and claims and not simply the claims. To address this possibility, research examining the effects of social claims on stakeholder reactions or behavior must account for leadership gender. Additionally, further exploration into how other key stakeholders such as consumers, regulators, the public, or watchdog groups respond to congruence between leadership gender and social claims could be a fruitful direction for future research.

Furthermore, given that the likelihood a female candidate is hired is largely a function of the proportion of women in the applicant pool (e.g., Fernandez and Sosa 2005), our results suggest that an organization's leadership gender composition and claims have implications for the gender composition of the workforce. We find that having at least one female represented in leadership or making social claims results in an applicant pool that is (gender) representative of the pool of those contacted. However, the pool of applicants for job vacancies in male-led congruent companies, namely, those making only business-focused claims, receive a disproportionate number of male applicants. Therefore, considering extant research showing that women are often just as likely to be hired once they are in the applicant pool (Petersen et al. 2000, Fernandez and Sosa 2005, Campero and Fernandez 2019), our results suggest that their overrepresentation

in the applicant pool will result in men being disproportionately likely to be hired in these male-led organizations making only business-focused claims, *ceteris paribus*. Our findings also highlight the interplay between supply- and demand-side drivers of gender segregation. Most research aimed at understanding gender segregation has focused on one of these two categories of explanations, treating these as distinct processes (for an exception, see Brands and Fernandez-Mateo 2017). Demand-side explanations focus on how the actions taken, and decisions made, by employers contribute to segregation (Fernandez-Mateo 2009, Leung and Koppman 2018), whereas supply-side explanations identify the ways job seekers' behaviors drive segregation (Fernandez and Friedrich 2011, Barbulescu and Bidwell 2013). Our results reveal that these labor market processes are highly interdependent. Furthermore, existing research on gender segregation has largely focused on how characteristics of the occupation or industry contribute to gendered applicant pools, typically examining the most male- or female-dominated jobs (e.g., Cech et al. 2011, Barbulescu and Bidwell 2013). Our results indicate that, even for a gender-neutral job like the one we study, men and women apply to different potential employers with implications for gender segregation.

In addition to overcoming the empirical challenges associated with addressing our research question, our design uniquely allows for the generalizability of our results. By identifying our population of job seekers on one of the highest-traffic online job-search engines, we are confident that we captured a nationally representative population of job seekers for our market research analyst position. As with any field experimental setting, there are additional elements of interest that are outside the scope of this study and point to opportunities for future research. For example, whereas the job-search engine from which we sourced our population of job seekers population provides a representative sample of job seekers for our job vacancy, it is likely that more senior or highly educated job seekers rely less on these platforms. To the extent that these savvy job seekers place a higher emphasis on inferences drawn from organizational characteristics such as those we explore in this paper, we may expect that our observed effects to be even stronger among that sample, though this is an open question for future research to address.

It is plausible that our hiring companies are most representative of smaller, entrepreneurial organizations for which publicly available information is limited to what the organization shares on its websites. For larger companies, applicants generally have more information about a firm than we provided in our study. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to identify whether our

results would differ for larger established corporations, there is some evidence that congruence may be even more important. Baum et al. (2016) found that job advertisements that were more consistent with the hiring organization's broader image were more attractive and that this was especially true for more well-known firms. Our study sets the stage for future work to further unpack how our findings vary based on employer characteristics, including status and size. Nonetheless, given that small firms make up a substantial proportion of the economy, comprising 48% of U.S. employment, understanding the effect of firm characteristics among this population of firms is inherently important.²⁰

Our field experimental design establishes important causal pathways, pointing to additional opportunities for future complementary work to further develop this line of inquiry. For example, future work could more directly test, and specifically rule out, mechanisms potentially underlying our observed results. One possible alternative mechanism to the congruence argument we propose relates to perceptions of authenticity (e.g., Hahl and Ha 2019), wherein male leaders making claims of diversity are seen as inauthentic. The fact that we observe very similar effects in male-led companies adding either community- or diversity-focused claims suggests that this alternative mechanism is unlikely to be the main driver of the lower demonstrated interest from job seekers in these conditions. Nonetheless, directly ruling out this potential mechanism warrants further attention, for example, in a laboratory setting. Additionally, our study highlights the importance of considering congruence across organizational characteristics for shaping the composition of the applicant pool. Given our focus on congruence between leadership gender and organizational claims, we held other leadership characteristics constant by design. Thus, a boundary condition of this study is that it does not inform whether or how congruence between other leadership characteristics, such as race, and organizational claims affects job seekers' behavior, offering an additional opportunity for future research.

Practically speaking, this paper has important implications for what firms can do to influence the gender composition of their applicant pools. Our study suggests that either the presence of women in leadership or making socially focused claims may lead to a more gender-balanced applicant pool and thus lead to a more gender-balanced workforce. Importantly, however, our study also suggests that female leadership is not enough to attract female applicants; consistency and congruence between gender of leadership and organizational claims being made are also critical. To attract female applicants, then, our study suggests that

female-led firms should also exhibit a commitment to social issues such as the community and environment and/or diversity.

Endnotes

¹See <https://www.statista.com/chart/2582/female-employment-in-tech-companies/>.

²The study was preregistered on Open Science Framework. Institutional review board (IRB) approval was obtained for this field experiment. The experiment took place in February 2018.

³With respect to the gender composition of the hiring company founders and employees, we varied whether the founders and team were all female, all male, or mixed gender. We varied claims by including a statement of one of the following, where the first two represent social claims: the company's commitment to the community and the environment, the company's commitment to diversity and inclusion, or a statement focused on the company's commitment to business initiatives. We thus employed a three-by-three randomization design.

⁴We include data on job seekers' interest for the one-month period immediately following study launch. The name of the employment search engine is available from the authors upon request. Revealing the identity of the site poses potential risks to the platform itself, as job seekers may discover that academic research is being conducted. Therefore, we opted to use the pseudonym "Jobseeker.com" throughout this paper.

⁵Certainly, online employment search engines are not the only manner through which prospective applicants source jobs, with referrals and other sources being important (e.g., Fernandez et al. 2000). They are, however, an important source for job seekers in today's job market, making our setting a relevant one.

⁶See <https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2017/article/occupational-projections-charts.htm>.

⁷See <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.htm>.

⁸We created an email address, info@[name of company], for each company.

⁹All employers on JobSeeker.com have access to the job seeker's resume, which is publicly available and viewable to those signed up on JobSeeker.com. The resumes and information from the resumes were kept confidential.

¹⁰Since submitting a formal application via company websites is not typical for job seekers contacted through JobSeeker.com, this outcome would introduce some potential noise and selection bias in the set of job seekers who choose to submit an application on the company website despite it being against the norm to do so when using JobSeeker.com. Unsurprisingly, while the average rate of indicating interest on JobSeeker.com was 27% for our sample, on average across conditions only 5% of contacted job seekers submitted resumes on the website.

¹¹We recruited individuals who had used JobSeeker.com in the past (self-reported) to answer a survey about their experience on Amazon Mechanical Turk. The post read, "If you have used [JobSeeker.com] in the past, complete a 3-minute survey about your experience." Participants were asked a number of questions about their experience; the question of interest was to respond on a seven-point Likert scale, with 1= Strongly disagree and 7= Strongly agree, whether "On [JobSeeker.com], where the employer already had reviewed your resume and indicated interest in you as a candidate for the job, to what extent do you agree that clicking 'Confirm my interest' is equivalent to applying for the job opportunity?" After dropping observations due to failing the attention check question or taking longer to take the survey than the mean plus one standard deviation, $N = 74$, the mean response to the question of interest was

5.91 (standard deviation, 0.78). This perception of agreement is statistically equivalent for men and women (on a seven-point Likert scale, the mean response is 5.88 for men and 5.96 for women; $p = 0.71$).

¹²Of the subset who indicated interest in a temporary, short-term project-based job with the company, we randomly selected one per condition and offered them the short-term job until one job seeker per condition accepted the short-term job offer.

¹³Back-end website data suggest that at least 39% and up to 73% of contacted job seekers visited the company website for their respective condition.

¹⁴Names of the nine companies and exact website URLs are available from the authors upon request.

¹⁵Stock photos of 14 females and 14 males were identified by the authors, and 30 MTurkers saw each photo and ranked them on a Likert scale of 1 to 5 along each of the dimensions with the exception of age, which was measured in the following buckets: <25, 25–29, 30–34, 35–39, 40–44, 45–49, 50–54, 55+. To measure competence and warmth, the questions were adapted from Fiske et al. (2002).

¹⁶An asterisk reflects that all words with the indicated stem of the word are identified. For example, "current*" would capture "current" and "currently."

¹⁷We truncated our sample at the earliest date and time at which the first company account on JobSeeker.com stopped contacting job seekers. Due to the high volume of messages that we were sending over a short period of time (the messages were automated), the employment website suspended our ability to contact job seekers. As this suspension happened at different times for each of the company accounts, we exclude all observations of individuals that were contacted after the time at which the first cancellation of messaging ability took place.

¹⁸From the unique links sent to each job seeker, we are able to identify the web behavior of 1,636 individuals who visited the websites. We cannot identify individuals who visited the websites by googling the name of the company.

¹⁹For the amount of time between first and last clicks, we limited the sample to those whose min and max click occurred within 24 hours to avoid outlier effects.

²⁰U.S. Census Bureau, Business Dynamics Statistics, 2014.

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