THE ROLE OF CORPORATE IMAGE PERCEPTIONS IN SELECTION: TESTING
AN IMPRESSION FORMATION MODEL

A Dissertation

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Mom and Dad, for providing an incredible example of strength and love, and for always letting me know that they’re proud.

Jared, for being here to share the daily trials and triumphs, for calming me, for pushing me, for believing in me.
The current study explored how an online assessment experience influenced the formation of corporate images, applicant reactions, and organizational attraction. Corporate images were defined as individual level perceptions of company attributes, and entailed 4 dimensions pertaining to corporate social responsibility perceptions, perceived financial performance, perceptions regarding products and services, and perceptions of how well the company treats employees. Applicant reactions included perceptions of the assessment’s predictive and face validity, fairness, and opportunity to perform. The experiment required participants (N = 337) to act as if they were applying for a job and complete an online assessment branded for an actual company, and then report their perceptions about the company’s attributes, their reactions to the assessment, and their interest in pursuing employment at the company. The content of the assessment was manipulated to cue either corporate image perceptions pertaining to corporate social responsibility (CSR image) or corporate image perceptions pertaining to financial performance (financial image). Based on Highhouse et al. (2009) it was hypothesized that cues and signals from the environment, in this case from the assessment experience, would influence participants’ corporate images of the company and that those corporate images would influence outcomes such as attraction and reactions to the assessment experience. Results indicated that corporate image perceptions could be affected by assessment content, and that the assessment content did have a positive influence on
organizational attraction, mediated by corporate and financial image. Individual differences in familiarity with the company, previous work experience, and social identity consciousness were expected to moderate the mediated relationship such that the effect of assessment content on corporate image perceptions would be stronger for individuals who were unfamiliar with the organization and/or who had limited work experience. The effect of assessment content on corporate image and the effect of corporate image on organizational attraction were also expected to vary according to individual differences in social identity consciousness. These hypotheses were not supported. Implications of these results for research and practice were discussed.
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Illustrative model of how individual impressions of corporations develop.

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Concern for stakeholder perceptions about organizations has a long history in organizational psychology research as well as in other disciplines such as marketing and corporate strategy. Early recruitment research in organizational psychology considered job seeker perceptions of recruiting organizations important for eventual job choice (Tom, 1971). Most recently, stakeholder perceptions have been the focus of web-based recruitment research in organizational psychology. Among the numerous studies conducted to understand the antecedents and outcomes of job seeker perceptions of recruiting organizations, specific emphasis has been placed on the attributions that job seekers make as a result of encountering recruitment information from web-based media. A broad conclusion from the recruitment literature, in general, and web-based recruitment research, in particular, is that job seekers develop images of organizations that are partially reflective of the characteristics of recruitment materials they have encountered.

For selection and assessment, the next phase of staffing, researchers have devoted much less attention to stakeholder perceptions of organizations. The blossoming applicant reactions literature considers the possibility that characteristics of a selection process may have implications for an applicant’s attitudes and behavior toward an organization. However, there is a general disconnect between our understanding of the
impression forming processes presumed to take place during recruitment and how that process continues once applicants enter the selection and assessment phase.

The current study was designed to better understand the nature and consequences of individual’s perceptions about organizations in the context of assessment for selection. A primary goal of the current study was to test an impression formation model (Highhouse, Brooks, & Gregarus, 2009) wherein applicants’ images of a hiring organization are influenced by the cues and signals perceived during a selection assessment that contains content reflecting the brand of the hiring organization. Through exposing participants to different types of corporate image content (financial performance and corporate social responsibility content) within the assessment experience, the current study explored how the assessment experience influenced the formation of corporate images and the attitudinal consequences associated with those images.

Impression Formation

Our current understanding of how constituents form impressions of organizations is based on research in organizational psychology, marketing, and business administration. Early organizational psychology researchers were concerned with an individual’s image of a firm because of its presumed impact on vocation and organizational choice. Tom (1971) found that self-descriptions and descriptions of participants’ most preferred organizations were more congruent than self-descriptions and descriptions of least preferred organizations. This put forth the idea that subjective perceptions of a highly personal and emotional nature were part of the determinants of organizational choice. At the time, this notion was inconsistent with the assumption that
applicant choices were based on weighing of objective job factors or determined by the pleasantness of recruiter interactions alone.

Decades later, researchers revisited the inquiry into the ascription of trait-like qualities to organizations (Aaker, 1997; Slaughter, Zickar, Highhouse & Mohr, 2004). Lievens & Highhouse (2003) described a framework for understanding how people’s impressions of organizations develop. This framework incorporated instrumental, or objective, attributes of the organization, and symbolic, or subjective, inferences. Highhouse and colleagues contended that both instrumental and symbolic inferences are drawn from signals in the marketplace (Highhouse, Thornbury, & Little, 2007; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) and that these inferences lead to organizational attraction. Evidence from numerous studies, primarily in the recruitment and attraction literature, corroborate this notion and point to several sources of these market signals (Barber, 1998; Breaugh & Stark, 2000).

Decades of recruitment research aimed at understanding influences on job seeker behavior demonstrated that job seekers have multiple opportunities to gather information about a potential employer. Information may be gathered from formal, intended messaging originating from the hiring organization, such as newspaper or radio advertisements, internet job board postings, recruiter contact, organizational websites, and social networking sites (Allen, Mahto, & Otondo, 2007; Barber, 1998; Gatewood, Gowan & Lautenschlager, 1993). Information may also be gathered from sources which are outside of the organization’s direct control, such as employee referrals, or news and popular media (Fombrun, 1996; Williams, Labig, & Stone, 1993).
Cited as a growing future trend at the turn of the century, (Chapman & Webster, 2003) internet resources such as organizational websites are now the primary source of information for job seekers (Cober, Brown, Levy, Cober, & Keeping, 2003; Ployhart 2006). Thus, the last decade of recruitment research has focused heavily on understanding how information conveyed to job seekers, via web-based organizational recruitment websites in particular, impacts organizational images (Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey & Edwards, 2000; Cober, Brown & Levy, 2004; Lyons & Marler, 2011), reputation judgments (Braddy, Meade, Michael, & Fleenor, 2009) and traditional recruitment outcomes such as attraction and job pursuit (Allen et al., 2007; Cober, Brown, Keeping, & Levy, 2004). Research suggests that the form, content, and function of organizational recruitment sites affect job seeker attraction (Cober et al., 2003; 2004; 2004b). Presumably, an impression formation framework underlies these relationships such that information conveyed through the form, content, and function of the website allows viewers to make instrumental and symbolic inferences about that organization, which inform the viewer’s impressions and evaluations of the company and job.

Although the focus of organizational psychology has been investigating the formation and function of company perceptions in a recruitment context, other research, primarily from the brand management and marketing literatures, demonstrated that an individual’s image and evaluation of an organization may be influenced by information garnered outside of the employment context (Fombrun, 1996; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). For example, Meenaghan (1995) discussed the role of advertising at the corporate, retail, and product level in providing information for consumers about the functional and expressive capabilities of brands.
Taking the perspective that organizations are “social actors,” (Highhouse et al., 2009; Whetten & Mackey, 2009) the examples described above can be interpreted as demonstrations of efforts on the part of organizations to influence stakeholder perceptions. This practice has been referred to as organizational impression management (OIM) (Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, & Gilstrap, 2008; Elsbach, Sutton, & Principe, 1998). In an overview of impression management research and theory, Bolino et al., (2008) noted that research and theory on impression management at the organizational level is somewhat scattered. However, one major focus of OIM research is the examination of the impression management tactics employed in organizations’ efforts to create a specific image or accomplish a specific goal.

Organizational Impression Management in Recruitment & Selection

Organizations strive to engender favorable impressions in the minds of stakeholders because these qualities are associated with positive and profitable organizational outcomes (Benjamin & Podolny, 1999; Boyd, Bergh, & Ketchen Jr., 2010; Lange, Lee & Dai., 2011; PFarrer, Pollock, & Rindova, 2010). The potential for equity improvement and talent attraction associated with favorable stakeholder perceptions motivate researchers and practitioners to strive toward understanding how to manage and influence the impressions held by relevant stakeholders.

The study of brand management is one example of a tradition that spans disciplines and offers rich and diverse strategies for evaluating, influencing, and altering stakeholder perceptions of an organization and its products (Chernatony, 1999; Dowling, 2001; Fombrun, 1996; Keller, 2000). In organizational psychology, the majority of research on this topic is in the realm of recruitment, and most recently, web-based
recruitment. Bolino et al. (2008) took a multi-level perspective in reviewing the literature on impression management and summarized a line of research examining how organizations use impression management tactics to influence stakeholder perceptions during recruitment. The review by Bolino and colleagues showed that various forms of organizational impression management, defined as “any action that is intentionally designed and carried out to influence and audience’s perceptions of the organization” (Bolino et al., 2008 p. 1095; Elsbach et al., 1998), have been used to recruit minority and female job applicants (Avery & McKay, 2006) and influence web-site observer perceptions of a firm (Bansal & Kistruck, 2006).

Other investigations that do not specifically use the terminology of impression management are supportive of the notion that organizations can, and do, employ targeted messaging to alter and influence stakeholder perceptions. For example, Van Hoye and Lievens (2005) presented a study on the effectiveness of positive recruitment advertising for mitigating adverse effects of negative publicity on organizational attraction. Manipulation of corporate social performance messaging in recruitment advertisements is another form of intentional action that an organization may employ to increase its attractiveness to job seekers (Greening & Turban, 2000). Continued efforts toward understanding how specific content impacts applicant perceptions has armed organizations with some specific strategies for obtaining positive results from targeted recruitment messaging (Allen et al., 2007; Braddy, Meade, Michael & Fleenor, 2009; Cober et. al., 2003; 2004; 2004b; Dineen, Ling, Ash, & DelVecchio, 2007).

In the early 2000s, recruitment researchers admonished against conveying vague and overly positive organizational and job vacancy descriptions, which was a common
practice at the time (Cable et al., 2000). Researchers noted that organizations should instead employ targeted, realistic recruitment messages to attract job applicants that would be most likely to fit with the vacancy and existing organizational culture (Cober et al., 2004). The trend toward more deliberate and conscious recruiting messaging echoed the concept of realistic job previews (RJP) from classic recruitment literature (Barber, 1998; Rynes, 1991). The underlying notion that organizations should be concerned with the expectations and impressions developed in the minds of job seekers is obviously still prevalent in organizational research.

Although much of the research on impression formation and organizational impression management has occurred in the contexts of product advertisement and recruitment for selection, trends in selection assessment practice have shown that concerns over managing impressions, expectations, and reactions to organizational actions are relevant for organizational outcomes outside of the recruitment context alone. One such indicator of the relevance of impression formation concepts in the selection context is an increased focus, by researchers and practitioners, on applicant reactions to assessments and selection procedures. Special issues devoted the topic of applicant reactions published in the *International Journal of Selection and Assessment* in 2003 and 2009, and comprehensive reviews of the literature (Hausknecht, Day & Thomas, 2004), provided a wealth of resources and highlighted several streams of research that could offer insight into outcomes associated characteristics of employment assessments.

One line of applicant reaction research has focused on how applicant perceptions influence test performance and test validity. Of more direct application to the current study are research efforts aimed at understanding the role of applicant reactions for
individual and organizational outcomes such as job acceptance, attitudes toward the hiring organization, and self-perceptions.

Models of applicant reactions, such as the heuristic and theoretical models described by Ryan & Ployhart (2009), and Hausknecht et al. (2004), acknowledged the potential for justice perceptions to affect attitudes about the organization. Thus, experiencing an assessment may impact an applicant’s impressions and images about an organization. However, even with the advancements in our understanding of applicant reactions from the last two decades, the specific outcome of “attitudes toward the organization” merely appears as one of many potential consequences listed in large theoretical models. Few published studies have explicitly sought to understand applicants’ impressions of an organization resulting from an employment selection experience (cf. Tsai & Yang, 2010).

A second indication that understanding impression formation and organizational impression management is important in a selection context is a greater focus on the holistic “candidate experience” among assessment developers and practitioners. With increasing frequency in the past decade, companies are choosing to employ customized, brand specific assessments that serve to measure important applicant skills and attributes while also conveying information to the applicant about the job and organization (Winkler, 2006; Zappe, 2009; Zielinski, 2011). Rooted in the tradition of realistic job previews, and designed to convey brand specific messages in a similar manner as corporate recruitment websites, “branded assessments” are assessment experiences in which aesthetic properties and content are customized to reflect brand specific imagery
and language of the hiring organization, as well as information describing attributes of both the job and company.

As evidenced by the prevalence of articles and discussions around applicant reactions and the “candidate experience” among recruitment and selection practitioners (Anderson, 2003; Bauer, Maertz Jr., Dolen, & Campion, 1998; Bauer, Truxillo, Sanches, Craig, Ferrara, & Campion, 2001; Hausknecht et al., 2004; Sylva & Mol, 2009; Truxillo, Bodner, Bertolino, Bauer, & Yonce, 2009), these type of employment tests are gaining popularity among larger, brand-conscious organizations (Winkler, 2006). Employers are aiming to address applicant reactions with more than just justice-based selection procedures. They are incorporating realistic previews and the same kind of deliberate cultural messaging advocated by web-based recruitment research. These work samples and simulation-based assessments are likely to remain prevalent in both selection research and practice (Ployhart, 2006) because of their value as measurement tools and because of organizations’ sensitivity to applicant impressions, expectations, and reactions.

The current study sought to explore the impression formation process which may unfold once a potential applicant enters the selection phase. This process was considered an extension of the image formation processes which has been found to occur during recruitment (Cober et al., 2003; 2004; 2004b). In the current study, the branded-assessment is the source from which applicants perceived signals and made inferences about the employer, much like recruitment websites are seen as platforms from which job seekers gather information to infer instrumental and symbolic organizational attributes.
Corporate Image and Reputation

The particular perceptions of the hiring organization to be examined in the current study, termed “corporate images,” are individual level perceptions of the qualities of an organization. In order to understand the corporate image construct, it is necessary to review the broader concept of corporate reputation.

Corporate reputation is thought to have both operational and financial value for an organization (Dowling, 2002; Lange et al., 2011; Roberts & Dowling, 2002; Turban & Cable, 2003). Describing reputation, researchers most often refer to it as an “intangible” corporate asset; a label which reflects both the elusive and evocative nature of corporate reputation as well as its complex definitional landscape (Balmer, 2001; Barnett, Jermier, & Lafferty, 2006; Highhouse, Broadfoot, Yugo, & Devendorf, 2009; Lange et al., 2011). In the last decade, the management literature has been characterized by numerous attempts to clarify and categorize the construct of reputation and its antecedents and outcomes (Lange et al., 2011). The increased focus on the construct of corporate reputation characteristic of the last decade of human resources literature is not likely to wane; reputation and brand management remain highly visible corporate issues (Bennett & Kottasz, 2000).

Although organizational psychology has only recently begun to explore the formation and properties of corporate reputation judgments (Highhouse et al., 2009) and incorporate the construct in organizational research (e.g. Sinar, Reynolds, & Paquet, 2003; Tsai & Yang, 2010; Walker, Feild, Giles, Bernerth, & Short, 2011), as described above, psychology does offer a rich and developed theoretical framework regarding organizational perceptions and judgment formation (Brooks, Highhouse, Russell, & Mohr
In their 2009 review of corporate reputation research, Highhouse and colleagues proposed a framework that viewed reputation from the perspective of organizational impression management. Based on a review of reputation definitions from various disciplines (Highhouse, Broadfoot et al., 2009), Highhouse et al. (2009) adopted a working definition of corporate reputation that relied on a micro view where individual impressions form the collective reputation. Similar to other definitions (e.g. Fombrun, 1996; Ferris, Blass, Douglas, Kolodinsky, & Treadway, 2003), Highhouse et al. (2009) defined corporate reputation as a “global (i.e. general), temporally stable, evaluative judgment about a firm that is shared by multiple constituencies” (p.1482).

Whereas reputation was considered a collective judgment, image was reserved for reference to an individual’s impression of an organization (Barnett et al., 2009; Highhouse et al., 2009; Highhouse, Broadfoot et al., 2009). It should be noted that the term ‘image’ has been used elsewhere to refer to reputational judgments associated with the product lines or ‘brands’ of a parent company. This distinction will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. The conceptualization described by Highhouse and colleagues was an individual, perceptual based construct with a company as the target. Image was defined as “a dynamic perception of a specific area of organizational distinction” (Highhouse et al., 2009). Corporate images were therefore considered the foundation of collective corporate reputation assessments.
Highhouse et al. (2009) proposed an impression formation framework that explained the formation of general corporate evaluations and corporate reputation (see Figure 1). This model was based on the premises that underlie the instrumental-symbolic framework described above (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). The illustrative model of impression formation proposed by Highhouse et al. (2009) began with cues from the environment that signaled corporate attributes. These cues originated from organizational actions such as investments and advertising or from factors external to direct organizational control such as press or word-of-mouth information. The cues signaling corporate attributes then led to images in the minds of constituents. Images, in turn, influenced constituent impressions of the organization (i.e. whether the company was impressive or respectable). The authors postulated that these impressions of the corporation formed the basis for general corporate evaluations (e.g. “Is this a good or bad organization”), which, aggregated, represented corporate reputation.
As mentioned previously, support exists for the instrumental-symbolic framework from which the Highhouse et al., (2009) impression formation model was built, however, no published study has yet tested the individual-level impression development process proposed by these authors. Diab and Highhouse (2012) conducted a test of part of the model in a study of college students’ perceptions of two large corporations, Disney and Microsoft. Diab and Highhouse presented an impression formation model in which different corporate images influenced general corporate evaluations through impressions of either respectability or impressiveness. The current study adopted the impression formation framework described and tested in Highhouse et al., (2009) and Diab and Highhouse (2012) to measure the antecedents of applicant images (e.g. signals and cues from the environment); the portion of the model untested by Diab and Highhouse.
Types of Corporate Image

In the model presented by Highhouse et al. (2009), the term ‘image’ referred to specific areas of organizational distinction. In their discussion, the authors noted that an image for a particular organizational attribute may be more, or less, salient to an individual depending on that individual’s goals. Citing Elsbach (2006), Highhouse et al. (2009) noted that all stakeholders draw on the same reputations (e.g., good company), but may draw on distinct images (e.g., bad employer) related to their specific goals. According to the Highhouse et al. (2009) model, constituents may hold 4 types of images; employer image (image of the organization as an employer, including how well they treat employees), market image (image of the organization as a producer of goods and services), financial image (image of organization as an investment opportunity), and corporate social responsibility (CSR) image (image of organization as a corporate citizen). Highhouse et al.’s (2009) conceptualization of corporate image and its dimensionality is adopted for this study.

In a review of the current literature, instances of empirical research that explicitly aimed to understand the multidimensional nature of image perceptions were scarce (cf. Tsai & Yang, 2010). However, there were studies that supported the multidimensionality of the construct as described by Highhouse et al., (2009). For example, Gatewood et al. (1993) had students make a summary judgment of corporate image and recruitment image for several Fortune 500 companies and indicate the likelihood that they would respond to a job advertisement for that company. Corporate image ratings were made based on a list of company names, while recruitment image ratings were in response to review of recruiting advertisements for each company. The authors found that corporate
image and recruitment image each exerted influence on potential applicants’ decisions to pursue employment with a particular organization. This suggested that individuals make inferences about organizations based on multiple sources of information.

Highhouse, Zickar, Thorsteinson, Stierwalt, and Slaughter (1999) set out to identify and define the dimensions that differentiated the attractiveness of employers in the minds of job applicants. Their study introduced the concept of company employment image and offered a means for organizations to assess and understand the image that potential applicants hold of their company as a place to work.

A study of business students’ application behaviors conducted by Lemmink, Schuijf, & Streukens (2003) supported the dimensionality and “image-for-something” conceptualization purported by Highhouse et al., (2009) and suggested by Highhouse et al. (1999). Lemmink and colleagues assessed corporate image and employment image separately to demonstrate their independent effects on decisions to apply.

Empirical evidence supporting corporate social responsibility image as a distinct type or dimension of corporate image was found in a study by Greening and Turban (2000). Expanding upon previous research, which had suggested links between corporate social performance and employer attractiveness based on organizational level analyses (Turban & Greening, 1997), Greening and Turban took an individual level approach to the question. They manipulated corporate social performance and found that individuals reported stronger job pursuit intentions toward organizations described as having positive corporate social performance.

In one of the only published studies designed specifically to test the multidimensionality of corporate image, Tsai and Yang (2010) considered 4 dimensions
of corporate image and examined their effects on organizational attractiveness in two studies varying in research design, sample, and industry targets. Tsai and Yang incorporated a framework of corporate image introduced by marketing scholars (Keller, 2000; Keller & Aaker, 1992) which consisted of product images, service images, citizenship images, and credibility images. In Tsai and Yang’s study, each dimension of corporate image related to an applicant’s willingness to pursue a job. It is important to note that Tsai and Yang conceptualized and measured corporate image at the organizational level rather than investigating the effects of individual perceptions.

One goal of the present study was to expand upon the existing theory and research regarding specific types of organizational images to better understand the nature and consequences of individuals’ image perceptions the context of assessment for selection. The current study differed from much of the existing image perception research in the recruiting literature by employing an image measure which was not based on personality dimensions (cf. Slaughter et al., 2004). The current study is among the first to utilize the 4 types of images described by Highhouse et al. (2009) (cf. Diab & Highhouse, 2012) and to examine image perceptions in a selection context (cf. Tsai & Yang, 2010).

Individual Differences

Inherent in the premise of corporate image as an individual level construct, is the potential for flexibility and variation of images across people due to individual differences (Lange et al., 2011). One individual difference likely to impact the images people develop about companies, termed social identity consciousness, concerns the construction of social identities. The fundamental premises of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1985), as applied to organizational behavior
(Ashforth & Mael, 1989), posit that people tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories in order to make sense of the social environment and enable individuals to define themselves in the social environment. In other words, organizational membership is incorporated into individuals’ self-concepts and social identities (Dutton et al., 1994). Social identity theory has been used to explain individual variation in perceptions of fit with organizations and organizational attraction. Highhouse et al. (2007) explicitly invoked social identity theory as an explanatory mechanism in their framework of organizational attraction. These authors proposed that people were attracted to organizations because affiliation with that organization is a means of expressing aspects of one’s own self-concept. Highhouse and colleagues outlined a framework suggesting that individual differences in concern for appearing impressive or respectable to others moderated relationships between symbolic inferences from market signals and attraction to organizations.

Of relevance to the current study, this framework suggested that individuals may differentially attend to particular market signals, thus form different images and, more specifically, attend to information pertaining to some image dimensions more than others. The current study built on existing organizational research incorporating social identity theory (e.g. Cable & Turban, 2003; Herriot, 2004; Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) and on particular investigations asserting the influence of individual differences in the corporate image-attraction relationship (e.g. DeArmond & Crawford, 2011; Schreurs, Druart, Proost, & De Witte, 2009; Tsai & Yang, 2010; Walker et al., 2011) to assess the role of individual differences in social identity consciousness on image perception, image change, and reactions following a brand specific selection assessment.
The Current Study

To address the gap between our understanding of impression formation and the role of corporate image perceptions during recruitment versus latter stages of the staffing process, the current study proposed a test of an individual-level impression formation model in a selection context. The model, based on Highhouse et al. (2009) suggested that cues and signals from the environment, in this case from a selection assessment experience, would influence applicant impressions and images of a hiring organization. Subsequently, applicants’ images pertaining to different aspects of the organization (e.g. employer image, market image, financial image, and social image), would influence outcomes such as attraction and reactions to the assessment experience. Consistent with the multidisciplinary research suggesting that pre-assessment experiences influence applicant perceptions about an organization (e.g. recruitment materials and consumer advertisement), individual differences in previous experiences are proposed to play a moderating role in the image formation process. Personality variation was also expected to influence multiple aspects of the image formation and assessment reactions process.

In Chapter II, existing literature and theory on impression formation, corporate image, and applicant reactions are reviewed. Specific hypotheses pertaining to the proposed model will be outlined in Chapter II. Chapter III describes the methodology employed to test the hypotheses for the current study. Results obtained from the data collected for the current study are presented in Chapter IV and implications of the results are discussed in Chapter V.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature relevant to the constructs and variables of interest for the current study. The theoretical background and available research pertaining to impression formation will be reviewed, as impression formation processes are presumed to underlie the primary mediational chain in the current model. Following the review of impression formation theory and research, the definition, multidimensionality, and measurement of corporate image will be discussed, as this is the primary applicant perception of interest in the current study. Next, the theoretical background and relevant research regarding organizational attraction and applicant reactions will be summarized followed by a review of individual difference constructs relevant to the current study. The full model for the current study will be presented, followed by specific hypotheses around the relationship among the model variables.

Impression Formation

Job seeker and applicant perceptions of hiring organizations have consequences for several organizational outcomes including workforce composition (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Barber, 1998; Tom 1971), brand equity (Dowling, 2002; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990) and, because most organizations’ applicants are also customers, perceptions have consequence for future marketing success (Cable & Graham, 2000; Rynes & Barber, 1990). Much of our understanding of the development and outcome
associated with job seeker perceptions about organizations comes from recruitment research in organizational psychology. Early recruitment research pertaining to applicant perceptions primarily focused on the determinants of applicants decisions to accept a job offer or choose one job over another (Schwab, Rynes, Aldag, 1987). Early recruitment research was dominated by what Behling, Labovitz, & Gainer (1968) called the Objective Factor Theory of recruitment, which suggested that the process of organizational choice involved weighing and evaluating measurable characteristics of the job.

Noting the lack of research regarding the psychological processes involved in recruitment, Tom (1971) conducted a study to investigate the role of subjective factors in the organizational choice process. Tom’s main hypothesis was that a person’s preference for an organization would vary with the degree of similarity between his self-concept and his image of the organization. Organizational image was a concept not commonly investigated in psychological research at the time. Tom described organizational image as the way people perceived an organization; a loose structure of knowledge, belief, and feelings about an organization that could be vague, clear, weak, or strong. With confirmation of the main hypothesis, Tom’s investigation provided evidence that subjective factors played a role in the recruiting process and introduced the concept of organizational image to the recruiting literature.

Although early recruitment researchers often alluded to the existence of the organizational image construct, Tom’s study remained one of the few to explicitly investigate the components of organizational image for several years (Barber, 1998). Before reviewing the empirical evidence regarding the role of applicants’ perceptions
about organizations during the hiring process, a brief overview of relevant theories from psychology and other disciplines is provided below.

*Theories Related to Impression Formation*

Spence (1974), Rynes (1991) and Fombrun & Shanley (1990) offered the suggestion that, in light of incomplete information about organizations, applicants interpret information they encounter via recruitment materials as signals or cues of working conditions and other organizational attributes. This notion was based on signaling theory (Spence, 1974) as well as borrowed from the marketing and management literatures (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990). Before turning to the marketing and management scholarship, an overview of attraction theories, including signaling theory, will help establish a framework for understanding image and impression formation.

Ehrhart & Ziegert (2005) presented a theoretical framework based on three underlying metatheories that described how and why individuals were attracted to organizations. Although their explicit focus was attraction as an outcome, the framework was relevant to image formation, and, as will be discussed later, applicant attraction is an important variable in the current study. Ehrhart and Ziegert proposed three metatheories of applicant attraction; the environmental processing metatheory, interactionist processing metatheory, and self-processing metatheory. Of most relevance to the formation of applicants’ organizational images was the environmental processing metatheory which included theories that explained how characteristics of the actual environment (i.e. the objective characteristics of an organization) were interpreted and processed.
Signaling theory, proposed and explained in detail by Spence (1974) in his book *Market Signaling*, is one of the environmental processing theories highlighted by Ehrhart and Ziegert to explain the relationship between the actual environment and the perceived environment. The environmental processing metatheory also included a set of theories that explained the relationship between perceived environment and attraction. Although Spence’s book restricted its focus to the “uncertainty of the employer” regarding evaluation of an applicant’s potential productivity, the principle premises, that uncertainty exists in the two-way exchange of information in the job market and that parties in the exchange interpret information about the other as representations (signals) of existing realities, have often been invoked by recruitment and attraction researchers and are often cited alongside supporting evidence from the fields of management and marketing (e.g. Aiman-Smith et al., 2001; Gatewood et al., 1993; Highhouse et al., 1999; Rynes, 1991; Turban & Cable, 1996).

Fombrun and Shanley (1990) drew on signaling theory to describe the informational cues used by various audiences in the formation of reputation judgments. Fombrun and Shanley collected reputation ratings (from *Fortune’s* 1985 study), accounting data, market performance, media citation data, and charitable contributions data on over 119 firms to examine the degree to which corporate audiences attended to market, accounting, institutional, and strategy signals about firms within a particular market. Fombrun and Shanley found that reputational rankings were associated with a firm’s market performance, accounting profitability, concentration of institutional ownership, contributions to social welfare, size, and advertising intensity. Results of the study provided support for the notion that constituents interpret ambiguous information
signals from a variety of sources emanating from the firm itself, media, and other outlets, in order to gauge the relative merit of an organization.

Dowling (2001) took a prescriptive approach to the subject and advised on best practices for creating, maintaining, and manipulating corporate reputations. Dowling presented a model describing the creation of corporate images in the minds of employees and external constituencies. Consistent with the propositions of the environmental processing metatheory, its components (Ehrhart & Ziegert, 2005; Spence, 1976; Rynes, 1991), and the results of Fombrun and Shanley’s (1990) study, Dowling’s model described several factors related to employee and outsider images, including formal company policies, product offerings, marketing communications, organizational culture and previous experience with the organization. Dowling noted that changing people’s perceptions about an organization required changes to organizational activities related to these factors. This implied that changes to various organizational activities will provide new information (cues) to constituent groups, allowing for the interpretation (signaling) of different organizational realities.

*Applicant Perceptions in Early Recruitment Research*

With the expansion of interest in recruitment as separate from selection, researchers began to speculate as to how recruitment practices impacted applicant, and eventual employee, attitudes and behavior (Rynes, 1991). Outcomes other than job acceptance were explored, and the range of factors suggested as predictors of outcomes such as attraction, employment pursuit, and job choice also expanded. Citing Spence (1974), Rynes (1991) noted that, in the absence of complete information regarding vacancy characteristics, application decisions are likely based heavily on general
impressions of organizational attractiveness. This notion prompted investigations into recruitment practice determinants of attraction, including applicants’ images and perceptions about the organization and its agents (Barber & Roehling, 1993; Gatewood et al., 1993; Liden & Parsons, 1986; Powell, 1984; Rynes & Miller, 1983; Turban & Greening, 1997).

One stream of research focused on identifying characteristics of recruiting materials and messages that increased job seeker attraction and job choice. Gatewood et al. (1993) conducted a study in which a group of college students indicated their willingness to apply for jobs at organizations whose images had been previously evaluated by a comparable group of students. Gatewood et al. found a positive correlation between the amount of information provided in a recruitment advertisement and the probability of responding to that advertisement. The finding that information availability predicted attraction and job pursuit was consistent with other research of the time. For example, Barber and Roehling (1993) found that subjects’ evaluations of job postings were more favorable when more information was provided. Additionally, the subjects in these studies paid more attention to organizational and job attributes when specific, rather than vague, information was provided. In addition to information adequacy (Barber & Roehling, 1993; Gatewood et al., 1993; Herriot & Rothwell, 1981) and information specificity (Barber & Roehling, 1993; Belt & Paolillo, 1982; Mason & Belt, 1986), other general information characteristics of recruitment material content, such as information uniqueness and variability, were suggested to improve recruitment outcomes (Barber & Roehling, 1993; Barber, 1998).
Another stream of recruitment research focused more explicitly on the relationship between organizational attributes, and job seekers perceptions about organizations. For example, Turban & Greening (1996) investigated the relationships between an organization’s corporate social performance, rated by an independent agency, and its attractiveness as an employer. University students’ attractiveness ratings of 160 organizations demonstrated that firms engaging in more socially responsible activities were more likely to be rated as highly attractive employers. The authors interpreted these results as evidence that potential applicants were somewhat aware of firms’ corporate social performance and used information about firms’ social activities in their determination of attractiveness.

Cable & Graham (2000) conducted a series of studies utilizing varied methodologies with the goal of learning about the antecedents of job seeker’s perceptions about organizational reputations. Based on results from a verbal protocol analysis, wherein participants described the factors affecting reputations, a policy capturing study, wherein particular variables were controlled to examine the effects of specific factors, and a field study, wherein job seekers evaluated actual recruiting organizations, the authors concluded the following: Job seekers’ perceptions were affected by the industry in which employers operated, their familiarity with the organization, company profitability, opportunities for personal development, and company culture. Cable and Graham concluded by suggesting that since job seekers’ perceptions appeared to be based on the information they hold about an organization, employers’ recruiting success may depend on their ability to successfully manage job seekers’ knowledge about the organization.
A study by Aiman-Smith et al. (2001) provided further evidence that information about organizational attributes can influence job seeker attraction. Aiman-Smith and colleagues conducted a policy capturing study to examine the relative importance of job factors and organizational image factors. A sample of university business students read scenarios describing fictitious organizations that varied in the level of ecological rating and layoff policy (among other job attributes). Participants then responded to questionnaires indicating the attractiveness of each organization and their intention to pursue a job at the organization. The authors found that organizational attributes influenced attraction to the organization. Specifically, respondents rated the ecological dimension highest in terms of attractiveness. This study contributed to research on organizational image by demonstrating that information conveyed about organizational attributes contributes to organizational attraction separately from job attributes.

Highhouse and colleagues (1999) had the expressed purpose of establishing a practically useful technique and tool for assessing the image that potential applicants hold of a company and identifying the image dimensions that were most critical for distinguishing among companies. The authors employed a forced choice inductive methodology in which participants’ descriptions of why they would prefer to work at one randomly assigned company over another provided the initial dimensions. Then, participants rated randomly assigned companies on the identified dimensions. The set of dimensions included “objective” factors (Tom, 1971) such as pay, location and size, as well as subjective or symbolic factors such as respectability, product image, and atmosphere. The authors were able to identify dimensions that both discriminated between companies and predicted perceptions of company employment image.
Respectability, product image, hearsay, and atmosphere emerged as both strong predictors of the image that potential applicants hold of a company as a place to work and key distinguishing factors among the companies in the study.

Taken as a whole, recruitment research regarding applicant reactions to recruitment materials and messaging content reviewed above, suggested that an applicant’s decision to join an organization was based on more than vacancy characteristics and general organizational attributes such as size and location. Applicants’ decisions to join an organization started with a decision to apply (Barber, 1998) and this decision to apply is motivated by previous experience, expectations, and evaluations information gathered about the hiring organization. Regarding the role of image in this process, Barber (1998) noted that image did matter to potential applicants, but she also indicated the need for further research regarding image formation, malleability, and its relationship with applicant pool characteristics.

When attraction and fit research in organizational psychology expanded, so did the number of studies focusing more directly on the propositions described by Spence (1974), Earhart & Ziegert (2005), and called for by Rynes (1991) and Barber (1998). Lievens and Highhouse (2003) adopted a marketing framework in order to understand organizational attraction as a result of early stage recruitment processes. The instrumental-symbolic framework applied to marketing, suggested that consumers associate both instrumental functions (objective, physical, tangible attributes about the product) as well as symbolic meanings (intangible attributes based on perceptions and inferences) with brands (Garder & Levy, 1955; Keller, 1993). Applied to recruiting, Lievens & Highhouse supposed that this framework implied that applicants’ initial
attraction to organizations could be partially explained by instrumental, objective, concrete, and factual attributes that the job or organization either has or does not have. This was consistent with early recruitment literature that focused on pay, promotion potential, location, and benefits as primary determinants of applicant job choice. The symbolic aspect of this framework suggested that applicants’ initial attraction to a company will also be based on the symbolic meanings that applicants associate with a particular organization.

The idea that applicants associate symbolic meaning with particular organizations was consistent with the results of a series of studies conducted by Slaughter et al. (2004) which demonstrated that individuals ascribe personality traits to organizations, much like they ascribe traits to other humans, brands, and themselves, and that the expressive meaning of those personality perceptions influenced organizational attraction. This also echoed Tom’s (1971) assertion that job choice is influenced by subjective factors, additional to objective attributes of the job.

Potential sources of organizational personality perceptions noted by Slaughter and colleagues include advertisements, media coverage, word-of-mouth, and familiarity with the physical presence of the company (Slaughter et al., 2004; Slaughter & Greguras, 2009). Ehrhart and Ziegert (2005) agreed with the notion of information source variety saying, “…virtually any characteristic observable to individuals can serve as a signal of actual organizational characteristics and can shape perceived organizational characteristics” (p. 904). Barber (1998) also noted that image is developed over a long period of time “based on secondary sources and a more or less random accumulation of information” (p. 33).
Organizational recruitment websites are one source that scholars and practitioners have focused on as a means of exerting organizational control over the cues and information processed by potential applicants. To this end, research in web-based recruitment has provided evidence regarding a number of content and style attributes that influence job seeker perceptions about hiring organizations.

Cober et al. (2004) presented a model in which applicant attraction begins with an affective response to an organizational website (from both prior attitudes toward the organization and the website façade), which then influences usability perceptions and search behavior to affect perceived organizational image, familiarity and attraction. In a qualitative study describing websites of Fortune’s “Best Companies to Work For”, Cober et al. (2004b) found that the form, content, and function of organizational websites varied considerably across companies. Their analysis provided insight about how employment websites may affect recruiting efforts. The authors noted, “The internet provides organizations with a powerful employment branding mechanism” (Cober et al, 2004, p. 214). Indeed, the function or usability of an organization’s website was identified by Pfieffelmann, Wagner and Libkuman (2010) as an important antecedent to organizational attraction. Along similar lines, De Geode, Van Vianen and Klehe (2011) found that clear provision of information via attractive and navigable websites can help prevent generic inferences based on industry culture stereotypes.

Cable and Yu (2006) provided evidence that website characteristics such as media richness, or the amount of information provided via organizational websites positively correlated with organizational image beliefs. Consistent with the idea that website features and form can signal particular organizational attributes, it has also been
suggested that the mere adoption of technology is an indication to applicants that an organization has a progressive and innovative culture (Chapman & Webster, 2003). Braddy et al. (2009) also found that particular website content features such as pictures, employee testimonials, organizational policy descriptions and awards won were differentially effective at engendering perceptions of particular cultural dimensions.

A recent investigation by Walker and colleagues (2011) contributed to the limited information available about how perceptions of organizations are formed and modified during recruitment. These authors used a contextual priming experiment to demonstrate that certain website characteristics such as technological advancement and depiction of racially diverse organizational members influenced both the formation and modification of participants’ image perceptions. This study was unique in its acknowledgement of job seekers existing perceptions of the organization; a reality often alluded to by recruitment researchers but rarely included in empirical investigations.

Among the potentially endless sources from which job seekers may acquire information to make inferences about an organization (Brown, Dacin, Pratt & Whetten, 2006; Lievens & Harris, 2003), the recruitment process is just one opportunity for organizations to influence job seeker and applicant perceptions. As, Dineen & Soltis (2010) admonished, “we would be mistaken to assume that recruitment could end once a job seeker has submitted an application” (p.61). An assumption guiding the current study is that many of the perceptual processes and effects which occur in a recruitment context also exist during the selection process.
Thus far, this review has focused on research mainly pertaining to recruitment rather than selection. However, the two are intertwined such that the ultimate outcomes of selection depend on outcomes of recruitment (Barber, 1998; Dineen & Soltis, 2010; Rynes, 1991). Dineen and Soltis (2010) presented a framework of recruitment processes in which the second phase focused on maintaining the status of viable applicants. That is, following the implementation of targeting messaging strategies to generate a viable applicant pool, organizations must focus on maintaining the interest of qualified job seekers who have officially entered the screening process.

This second phase begins with the application decision and concludes with a job offer. Applicant perceptions of the screening process, which may include selection procedures such as tests, interviews, or on-site visits, become important considerations during this phase of assessment. In their review, Dineen & Soltis (2010) noted that limited progress had been made in understanding the recruitment effects related to applicant screening processes. Although progress in the recruitment and attraction literature has clearly demonstrated, and advocated, the utility of targeted, customized recruitment content for its effect on applicant perceptions, signaling and messaging effects have received less attention during the phase following the application decision.

Just as recruitment processes are now primarily conducted via virtual media (Chapman & Webster, 2003; Dineen & Soltis, 2010; Lievens & Harris, 2003), the use of the internet for administration of employee selection procedures has also seen a dramatic surge in recent years (Lievens & Harris, 2003; Russell, 2007; Sinar et al., 2003). Sinar and colleagues (2003) posed questions regarding the relationship between candidate’s
reactions to internet based selection procedures and image perceptions. These authors collected data from over 20,000 candidates for sales-oriented positions at several international corporations. Candidates completed an online assessment before indicating their reactions to characteristics of the system such as, satisfaction with system speed, user-friendliness, and job-relatedness, as well as their perceptions regarding companies using internet based selection methods. Strong links between system speed and user-friendliness, and company image were found. These results echoed findings from web-based recruitment research regarding favorable image effects from the use of functional and navigable organizational websites (Cober et al., 2004; De Geode et al., 2011; Pfieffelmann et al., 2010).

Despite a lack of research explicitly focusing on the determinants of applicants’ organizational perceptions during selection, trends in online testing in the form of brand-specific simulation-based screening tools indicated that organizations were deliberately conveying cues and information to applicants. Previous theory and research from the realm of recruitment suggested that these practices may have consequences for image perceptions and thus attraction.

Staffing research was admittedly not completely void of research concerning applicant perceptions related to selection procedures. In fact, the emerging field of applicant reactions studies was devoted to this very topic, albeit with a different focus than was relevant to the current topic. Applicant reactions research has thus far focused on how applicant perceptions of justice-based characteristics of the selection process, or of assessment characteristics such as test type and format, influence outcomes such as test score and turnover (Bauer et al., 2001; Gilliland, 1994). Given the nature of the current
study, applicant reactions research was relevant, thus will be reviewed in more detail in sections devoted to outcomes of the impression formation process. Meanwhile, the present focus is on the similarity of dissemination, perception, and interpretation of cues and signals during selection with such processes during recruitment.

Employing tests and selection procedures that engender favorable applicant reactions is one way in which organizations could influence applicant perceptions of the company, and particular types of selection instruments are likely to be more useful than others for understanding applicant perceptions. The popularity of work sample and simulation based selection procedures have increased and their use is likely to endure in selection practice (Ployhart, 2006). Practitioner focused publications have indeed noted a popularity boom for online job simulations (Vilardo, 2010; Winkler, 2006; Zappe, 2009; Zielinski, 2011).

These online experiences took several forms but typically involved putting the job candidate in an online environment that mirrored certain aspects of the work they would be performing on the job (Winkler, 2006; Zappe, 2009). The tool simultaneously allowed employers to assess candidates’ skills and qualifications while candidates received a rich picture of the job (Winkler, 2006; Zielinski, 2011).

The realistic preview aspect that was characteristic of this type of assessment was not a new staffing practice. Scholars and practitioners have been exploring the utility of realistic job previews (RJP) for decades (Breaugh & Stark, 2000; Phillips 1998; Rynes, 1991). Reducing turnover was a primary goal of organizations who adopted online virtual job tryout screening procedures (Vilardo, 2010; Winkler, 2006; Zappe, 2009; Zielinski, 2011). Turnover reduction was also a primary outcome argued to result from
providing candidates with realistic job and organizational information during recruitment and selection (Phillips, 1998).

In the case of custom branded online job tryouts, the experience included messaging regarding the job as well as the organizational cultural context in which the job was conducted. This presented a similar opportunity for the signaling and perceptive process that occurs during web-based recruitment. That is, applicants are continuing to gather information and infer attributes about the job and organization based on cues and signals perceived upon entering and participating in the online selection process.

Before proposing specific hypotheses regarding the relationship between information provided to applicants during the selection process and outcomes such as image perceptions, attraction, and applicant reactions, it is necessary to define the particular type of organizational perception of interest in the present study. The following sections review the concept of corporate image as it relates to similar constructs such as corporate reputation and brand image, including the multidimensional nature of corporate image.

**Corporate Image**

*Corporate Image Defined: Distinguishing Among Related Constructs*

Corporate image was a concept often confused and confounded with several related terms, most prominent of which is corporate reputation. Along with the dramatic increase in research on the subject of corporate reputations over the last decade (Barnett et al., 2006), an abundance of reviews have aimed to consolidate and clarify the available definitions for corporate reputation and related constructs (e.g. Barnett et al., 2006; Balmer & Gray, 2003; Brown et al., 2006; Lang et al., 2011; Walker, 2010). Given the
nature of the overlap in these constructs, a brief review of the corporate reputation is necessary to describe the construct of corporate image.

Corporate reputation is thought to have both operational and financial value for an organization. A good reputation may increase customer trust in its products, build customer loyalty and employee satisfaction, signal superiority to market competitors (Dowling, 2001), attract a higher volume of high quality applicants (Turban & Cable, 2003), and contribute to overall financial performance (Lang et al., 2011; Roberts & Dowling, 2002). Corporate reputation, and its proposed associations with positive organizational outcomes, has an intuitive, lay meaning accessible to the general public. However, when employed in scholarly research, layers of complexity emerge.

Describing reputation, researchers most often refer to it as an “intangible” corporate asset; a label which reflected both the elusive and evocative nature of corporate reputation as well as its complex definitional landscape (Balmer, 2001; Barnett et al., 2006; Highhouse, Broadfoot et al., 2009; Lange et al., 2011). In the last decade, management literature has been characterized by numerous attempts to clarify and categorize the construct of reputation and its antecedents and outcomes, including sorting out the definitional complexities and contradictions present across different research domains. Lange et al. (2011) anticipated future scholars would recognize this period as a “critical formative phase of organizational reputation research” (p. 154). Such efforts to understand this construct reflected the practical significance and increasing visibility of corporate image and reputation management issues (Bennett & Kottasz, 2000).

With the bulk of the confusion surrounding the distinctions between corporate (organizational) identity, corporate image, and corporate reputation, several conceptual
frameworks have been proposed to distinguish these constructs. Key lines of distinction used to describe these constructs concern organizational membership (internal or external) of the perceiver, the level of specificity at which the perceptions are examined, and temporal aspects.

In the framework proposed by Brown and colleagues (2006), the identity concept is concerned with the question “What are we as an organization?” This is similar to how Bromley (2000) and Fombrun and Shanley (1990) conceptualized identity, as the way internal members think of the organization. This general definition of corporate identity is endorsed by scholars across disciplines (Dutton et al., 1994; Hatch & Schultz, 2000; Whetten & Mackey, 2009).

Both Brown et al. (2006) and Bromley (2000) conceptualized corporate reputation in terms of outsiders’ perspectives. That is, reputation is concerned with the question, “What do stakeholders actually think of the organization?” (Brown et al., 2006). In the case of each of these frameworks, corporate image concerns the presentation of the organization to external stakeholders. Fombrun and van Riel (1997) described corporate image and identity as the basic components of reputation where, as in the frameworks described by Brown et al. (2006) and Bromley (2000), identity represents the perspective of those inside the firm and image represents the perspective of external observers.

Often, corporate image and reputation were used interchangeably or treated as synonymous to refer to outsiders’ perceptions (e.g. Barber, 1998; Gatewood et al., 1996; Rynes 1991). Temporal stability and level of specificity were two key lines of distinction described by scholars intending to distinguish corporate image from corporate reputation. Based on a review of reputation definitions from various disciplines, Highhouse et al.
(2009b) defined corporate reputation as a “global (i.e. general), temporally stable, evaluative judgment about a firm that is shared by multiple constituencies” (p.1482). The temporal aspect of this definition is similar to the way in which Fombrun (1996) described reputation, as a resilient, enduring evaluation anchored in the core characteristics of the company. In contrast, Fombrun described corporate image as an immediate and transient impression. Bennett and Kottasz (2000) also found that non-academics conceptualized reputation as a collection of opinions developing over time. This temporal aspect is also reflected in others’ conceptualizations of corporate reputation as enduring (Elsbach, 2006), lasting (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000), and stable (Brooks & Highhouse, 2006).

Barnett and colleagues’ conclusion, following their review of 49 articles that defined reputation, supports the notion of reputation as a global assessment (Barnett et al., 2006) rather than an evaluation regarding specific organizational attributes. Brooks & Highhouse (2006) described reputation as a general assessment of a company while corporate images were described as people’s malleable impressions of specific aspects of a company (Highhouse et al., 2009). Lievens (2007) noted that people may develop images dealing with specific aspects of a company.

The relationship between corporate image and reputation endorsed herein is best characterized by scholars aiming to understand the development of reputation judgments. Corporate reputation is the aggregate of individual stakeholder perceptions. Thus, corporate images compose corporate reputation. Whereas reputation is considered a collective judgment, image references an individual’s impression of an organization (Barnett et al., 2009; Highhouse, Broadfoot et al., 2009; Highhouse et al., 2009). Image is
defined by Highhouse and colleagues as “a dynamic perception of a specific area of
organizational distinction” (2009b, p. 1487). Interestingly, the conceptualization of
reputation as an aggregate of individual image perceptions is consistent with Fombrun
and Shanley’s (1990) consideration of the relationship between the two. Corporate
images, or individual impressions of organizations, are therefore considered the
foundation of collective corporate reputation assessments.

This hierarchy is not embraced by all researchers, as demonstrated by statements
from many reviews regarding the need for further clarification, continued efforts toward
achieving a unified definition, and continued research aimed at understanding the
antecedents and consequences of corporate reputation (Balmer, 2001; Barnett et al., 2006;
Lange et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2010) as well as a general lack of consistency in how
researchers operationalize the corporate image construct in psychological research
(Highhouse et al., 2009; Lewis, 2001). Despite the lack of universal consensus, we
adopted this definition of corporate image for the current study as it is most consistent
with the way in which mental images are typically conceptualized in psychological
research and relates logically to reputation as a higher order factor.

*Corporate Image Multidimensionality*

The definition of corporate image advocated by Highhouse and colleagues
contends that images are for specific aspects of companies; similar to contemporary
views of organizational climate as “climate-for-something” (e.g. climate for service)
(Highhouse et al., 1999; Reichers & Schneider, 1990; Rentsch, 1990; Schneider,
Salvaggio, & Subirats, 2002). Recruitment research supported this notion with
investigations into company employment image (Highhouse et al 1999), internet
selection image (Sylva & Mol, 2009), and CSR image (Turban & Greening, 1997).

Theoretical rationales for multiple images can also be found in papers that discuss the relationship between specific cues and inferences about organizations.

In the model presented by Highhouse et al. (2009b), images refer to specific areas of organizational distinction that may be more or less salient depending on an individual’s goals. Citing Elsbach (2006) these authors noted that all stakeholders “draw on the same reputations (e.g., good company), but may draw on distinct images (e.g., bad employer) related to their specific goals.” Indeed, several scholarly publications discussing both corporate image and reputation support the notion of multidimensionality (Alniacik, Alniacik, & Erdogmus, 2012; Fombrun, Gardberg, & Server, 2000; Gatewood et al., 1993; Lange et al., 2011; Lemmink, Schuijf, & Streukens, 2003; Lievens, 2007).

A degree of consensus may exist regarding the multidimensional nature of corporate image perceptions in general but few studies have laid out a concrete framework for identifying those specific dimensions. An exception is the framework of corporate image perceptions proposed by Keller (2000). The premise of this framework is that many types of associations, beyond physical product characteristics, may become linked with a corporate brand, thus influencing consumer behaviors. Keller suggested that consumers’ perceptions regarding a company fall into one of 4 dimensions: product images (relating to product attributes, benefits, or attitudes), service images (relating to people and relationships), citizenship images (relating to values and social welfare programs), and credibility images (relating to expertise). In this context, credibility image is considered a more abstract belief about the company, compared to the other three image dimensions. Corporate credibility depends on three factors: corporate
expertise, trustworthiness, and likability. The results of an experimental manipulation of
corporate image strategies, provided evidence supporting Keller’s (2000) framework
(Keller & Aaker, 1998). Results of this study suggested that the factors comprising
corporate credibility were differentially impacted by the information conveyed about the
company’s strategies relating to innovation, environmental concern, and community
involvement, thus, providing evidence supporting a multidimensional framework of
corporate image.

Along with limited availability of published theoretical frameworks explaining
the multidimensional nature of corporate image perceptions is a general lack of studies
that include measures of corporate image perceptions. A 2010 study by Tsai and Yang is
one of the few published empirical investigations that incorporated measures of corporate
image in selection or assessment contexts. Their investigation involved measuring the
influence of the 4 dimensions of corporate image described by Keller (2000) on applicant
attraction.

Another study which was explicitly aimed at understanding the role of image
perceptions and applicant attraction was conducted by Sinar et al. (2003). Sinar and
colleagues investigated the effects of system characteristics on a narrow aspect of
corporate image, which they termed “internet selection image”.

Each of these studies was valuable in advancing scholarship on corporate image
in selection and assessment contexts. However, neither conceptualized corporate image in
the manner described by Highhouse and colleagues. While there are parallels between the
dimensions of corporate image measured by Tsai and Yang (2010) and those defined by
Highhouse et al., (2009), Tsai and Yang (2010) conceptualized corporate image at the
organizational level, rather than at an individual level and Sinar’s investigation was focused on a narrow facet of corporate perceptions, although measured at an individual level.

Four types of images may be held in the minds of constituents; employer image (image of the organization as an employer, including how well employees are treated), market image (image of the organization as a producer of goods and services), financial image (image of organization as an investment opportunity), and corporate social responsibility image (image of organization as a corporate citizen). The dimensional framework described by Highhouse et al. (2009) overlaps with the multidimensional framework of corporate reputation measured by the Reputation QuotientSM developed by Fombrun, Gardberg, and Server (2000), except for the two additional dimensions of ‘Emotional Appeal’ and ‘Vision and Leadership’ in the Reputation QuotientSM (Alniacik et al., 2012). The following sections describe evidence supporting the 4-dimensional framework illustrated by Highhouse and colleagues, and adopted for the current study, including the relevance of each image dimension to the selection context.

**Employer Image: Evidence & Relevance in Selection**

As described previously, the pursuit of answers to questions about predicting job choice and applicant attraction led researchers to inquire about the function and value of applicants’ impressions and perceptions about hiring organizations. Gatewood and colleagues followed assertions by Fombrun and Shanley (1990) and Dowling (1988), that different stakeholder groups may hold different corporate images, with an empirical investigation aimed at determining whether potential applicants held a corporate image that was different from the general corporate image. Gatewood and colleagues provided
one group of participants with the names of several *Fortune 500* organizations and obtained the participants’ ratings of the organization’s overall corporate image. Another group of participants was exposed to recruitment advertisements for the same organizations and were asked to provide corporate image ratings. The corporate image ratings based on name only were not correlated with image ratings following review of recruitment materials. Additionally, the authors demonstrated that, what they termed, “recruitment image” accounted for a significant variance, beyond overall recruitment image, in the prediction of the probability of responding to an advertisement.

Although the conceptualization and measurement of corporate image in this case is dissimilar from the operationalization to be employed in the current study, Gatewood et al. (1993) demonstrated that perceptions of organizations may be specific to particular stakeholder groups and that the study of applicants’ images of organizations, in particular, was a worthy pursuit.

In 1999, Highhouse et al. undertook a similar purpose; to identify employment image dimensions that were most critical for distinguishing among companies in the same industry. More specifically, the authors aimed to provide practitioners with avenues for improving recruiting effectiveness through identification of employment image differentiators. Due to the lack of theoretical development and previous research on corporate employment image, Highhouse and colleagues used an inductive strategy to identify the dimensions of corporate employment image relevant to the unskilled, fast food industry, and then looked at how each dimension related to general company employment image. Attributes that emerged as significant predictors of participants’ desire to work for a company included, atmosphere, coworkers, customers, and product
image. This study demonstrated that it was possible to identify the attributes that applicants consider when assessing the attractiveness of a company as a place to work, and that those attributes are largely specific to the work environment.

Lemmink and colleagues (2003) expanded upon the work of Highhouse et al. (1999) by studying the relative effects of corporate employment image and, what they termed, general corporate image, on applicant attraction. In this study, corporate image was conceptually comprised of several factors including community and environmental responsibility, financial soundness, innovativeness, marketing, management quality, and product quality. Many of these factors were similar to the dimensions of corporate image described by Highhouse et al. (2009) and used in the current study.

Lemmink et al. (2003) made a clear distinction between the general factors of corporate image and the more specific, employment factors comprising company employment image. In order to test their hypotheses, the authors developed scales to measure both general corporate image and company employment image. The scale used to measure corporate image involved items relating to the investment value of company stock, company innovativeness, and product and service quality. The employment image scale contained items relating to job characteristics and extra organizational benefits such as the possibility of attending interesting trainings. Essentially, the corporate image scale employed in this study may appear to reflect market and financial image as described by Diab and Highhouse (2012), while the company employment image scale is a more detailed version of Diab and Highhouse’s conceptualization of employment image. The Lemmink et al. (2003) study is an important contribution to the study of corporate image as multidimensional because they found that while corporate image was positively related
to employment image, employment image positively, and independently, influenced intentions to apply to the organization.

Potential applicants’ employment images are typically the primary target of recruitment messaging. Additionally, hiring organizations should expect that employment images will be influenced by information exchanges during the assessment and selection phases of the staffing process. While employment image has an obvious connection with assessment and selection practices, little research exists directly assessing the relevance of other dimensions of corporate image for assessment and selection practices.

*Marketing Image: Evidence & Relevance in Selection*

Marketing image concerns the quality of the goods and services produced by the company. The stakeholder group that likely received the most attention in studies related to products and services is consumers. While the demographic characteristics of consumer groups obviously differ by industry and product type, it makes intuitive sense that market images will be the most accessible and well-developed among the general public for most companies. Researchers across disciplines have identified knowledge of and experience with a company’s products and services as one of the contributing factors to the overall impressions and evaluations that various stakeholders hold for an organization (Barber, 1998; Dowling, 2002; Fombrun, 1996; Slaughter et al., 2004). Recruitment research has generally concluded that in the absence of information pertaining to the job or organization, job seekers rely on other information they’ve gathered about the organization, including experience with its products and services in order to evaluate their potential fit with an organization.
Thornbury and Brooks (2010) conducted a study with the goal of identifying organizational correlates of job market entrants’ impressions of an organization as either respectable or impressive. They found that product and service quality and advertising intensity were the strongest predictors of impressiveness and respectability ratings across several types of organizations. The fact that a job seeking, graduating college seniors’ evaluations of organizations were driven primarily by advertising intensity and product characteristics is further evidence to the point that consumer marketing is a recruitment concern. If consumer marketing activities primarily drive the attraction of young applicants (Thornbury & Brooks, 2010), then market image warrants investigation as to its influence on applicant attitudes and behavior during the selection process as well.

Traditional selection assessments and selection procedures are not likely to be designed with consideration of influencing an applicant’s image of the organization’s product and service quality. As discussed previously, development and alteration of employment image is likely the primary purpose of information exchanges during selection. However, if knowledge of product and service attributes have informed a particular applicant’s impression of the organization, and these impressions have driven the applicant to pursue employment, it may be valuable to understand market image perceptions as antecedents to attitudes and behaviors during and following a selection assessment.

Applicants’ market images may be of even more concern to organizations as potential antecedents of the selection process (Ryan & Ployhart, 2000). Consumer driven advertisement and experience may be a major factor attracting individuals to apply for jobs at an organization, but we know very little about how becoming a member of a
different stakeholder group, potential employees, influences subsequent images of the organization regarding its products and services. Rynes (1992) suggested the potential for a “spillover” effect of applicants’ reactions to selection procedures to consumer behavior. Gilliland (1993) also suggested that endorsement of a company’s products would be an outcome in his justice-based model of applicant reactions. Although support for these propositions has been mixed in examinations of traditional assessment formats (Gilliland, 1994; Macan, Avedon, Paese, & Smith, 1994), market image may play a larger role in the context of a brand specific assessment experience wherein cues and references to the organization’s products and services are more common.

Financial Image: Evidence & Relevance in Selection

Evidence supporting the existence of the financial dimension of corporate image perceptions is less abundant than for the other image dimensions. This may be due partly to the fact that measuring perceptions of a firm’s financial performance was reserved for understanding the attitudes and behaviors of investor stakeholder groups. Financial image does appear in models of multidimensional images and perceptions of financial performance are prominently cited as a primary driver and outcome of corporate reputation (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990).

One exception to the scarcity of empirical studies of financial image is a study conducted by Carmeli, Gilat, and Waldman in 2007. These authors investigated how an organization’s achievements or performance evoked employee identification with the organization. Borrowing from the CSR literature, the authors distinguished between organizational performance relevant to the immediate business interests of the firm, and organizational interests and investments that advance social issues beyond the immediate
interests of firm shareholders. The study involved measuring employees’ perceptions of market and financial performance separately from perceptions of social responsibility performance. Results indicated that the two dimensions of organizational performance were differentially related to employee identification, thus providing evidence for the unique existence of financial image, separate from perceptions of other organizational attributes.

Financial image has not typically been considered a central variable in models explaining the staffing process. However, the relevance of job applicant’s images of the organization in terms of financial performance can be found in research relating to symbolic inferences and formation of impressions of organizations as either impressive or respectable entities (Highhouse, Broadfoot et al., 2009). Consistent with previous work on symbolic inferences in applicant attraction, Highhouse and colleagues have suggested that indicators of financial performance serve as signals to applicants that contribute to whether they perceive the organization as impressive. Communicating signals indicative of superior financial performance may have consequences for attracting applicants, because association with an impressive organization is appealing to certain individuals (Highhouse et al., 2007).

**Corporate Social Responsibility Image: Evidence & Relevance in Selection**

Scholarly attention to corporate social responsibility (CSR), defined by Aguinis and Glavas (2012) as “context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders’ expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental performance” (p. 933), has increased considerably in the past few decades (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Greening & Turban, 2000; Rupp, Ganapathi, Aguilera, &
The focus on stakeholder perceptions of organizational actions of this nature is multidisciplinary such that marketing research has devoted attention to consumers’ reactions to “green” products and corporate efforts (Aiman-Smith, Bauer, & Cable, 2001; Dowling, 2002; Fombrun, 1996) and organizational behavior researchers have paid significant attention to the relationship between organizational CSR practices and employee attitudes and behaviors (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Greening & Turban, 2000; Rupp et al., 2006). Most recently, scholars have called for increased attention to micro processes associated with CSR, that is, individual level predictors and outcomes relating to organization’s socially and environmentally oriented actions and policies (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

Rupp et al. (2006) proposed that individual employees “are concerned about, contribute to, and react to an organization’s evolving social consciousness” (p. 537). Drawing on macro level theories of CSR and micro level research in organizational justice, Rupp et al. argued that employees made distinct judgments about their employers’ CSR efforts and that these perceptions predicted individually relevant outcomes such as organizational attractiveness and job performance.

In addition to a wealth of theoretical scholarship on the subject of CSR activity and individual and organizational outcomes, several empirical examples provide evidence pointing to the significant impact of stakeholder CSR image on outcomes such as organizational attraction. Turban and Greening (1997) were among the first to test theories proposing that corporate social performance would provide a competitive advantage for organizations in an employment context. In their study involving ratings of over 150 organizations, Turban and Greening found that ratings of corporate social
performance were significantly correlated with independent ratings of corporate reputation and organizational attractiveness. In a later study, these authors built upon these results with an experimental manipulation of firm corporate social performance in recruitment advertisements. The results of this study suggested that prospective job applicants were more likely to pursue jobs from organizations portrayed as socially responsible. A similar conclusion may be drawn for the outcome variable, organizational identification. When Carmeli et al. (2007) looked at the impact of employee perceptions of two dimensions of organizational performance (perceived social responsibility and development and perceived market and financial performance), they found that perceived social responsibility and development had a larger effect on organizational identification.

The results of these studies and the literatures upon which they are based, suggested that perceptions about an organization’s CSR activities is a factor which attracts prospective employees and that information pertaining to CSR activities may be gathered from a number of sources. In terms of selection, this indicates that the image an applicant holds regarding a hiring organization’s CSR practices may impact behaviors toward the organization such as job pursuit.

CSR image has been studied and manipulated in recruitment research but we know very little about the relevance or magnitude of its influence relative to other organizational attributes and perceptions in a selection context. The current study was a step in exploring this gap.

Manipulation of Corporate Image in the Current Study

The current study involved an experimental manipulation of the presence of cues regarding financial performance and cues regarding CSR during the selection assessment.
These two dimensions of corporate image were chosen for the current study based on evidence from previous research suggesting that these two dimensions differentially impacted general impressions and general corporate evaluations (Diab & Highhouse, 2012). Additionally, the company portrayed in the current study puts a strong emphasis on both aspects of their organization in publicly available media. This meant that content regarding each of these aspects would not have to be fabricated or misrepresented for the purpose of the current study. Each dimension of corporate image was measured following the employment assessment.

The other two dimensions, employer image and market image, were not manipulated for the current study for several reasons. The assessment is essentially saturated with cues regarding employment at the company. Manipulation of such content would distort and potentially misrepresent the true nature of the company. The current study was meant to capture how potential applicants perceive a real organization, using their actual employment assessment, therefore the collaborating company did not grant permission to intentionally manipulate how they are portrayed as an employer. Thus, the presence of cues regarding employment image were not manipulated in the current study.

Since market image is presumed most likely to have formed prior to encountering a selection assessment, it was beyond the scope of this study to manipulate market image. At least a portion of the sample used for the current study was expected to have encountered the products and services of the company prior to participating in this study. Manipulation of the portrayal of the company’s products and services would be confounded with participants’ previous experiences. Additionally, familiarity was a major variable of interest in the current study. Measuring familiarity would have been
difficult if the most publicly visible references to the actual organization, its products and services, were misrepresented.

Although assessment content relating to employer and market image were not manipulated as part of the current study, these corporate image dimensions were still measured and used as part of the supplementary analyses. Employment image and market image were measured following the completion of the assessment and examined in relation to attitudinal outcomes.

Measurement of Corporate Image

The controversy and confusion surrounding the definition of corporate reputation and corporate image has contributed to inconsistencies in the operationalization and measurement of corporate image in psychological research. The operationalization of corporate image adopted for the current study is different from previous studies that have incorporated the concept of corporate image in recruitment or selection contexts. Studies conducted by Tsai and Yang (2010) and Turban and Greening (1997) conceptualized corporate image at the aggregate or organizational level, while the current study considers corporate image at the individual level. Lemmink, et al. (2003) and Sinar, et al. (2003) measured corporate image at the individual level but the constructs they measured were qualitatively different to the definition put forth by Highhouse and colleagues.

Outcomes

The intrigue of corporate image perceptions goes beyond simply understanding the types of stimuli that shape its development and influence various dimensions. Corporate image perceptions are interesting to organizational psychologists and marketing researchers because of the influence that a person’s corporate image of a
particular company may have on other attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. The recruitment literature has been characterized by an interest in understanding how recruitment practices and job seekers’ early experiences with an organization, including the development of perceptions about the hiring organization, eventually impact organizational attraction. While organizational attraction is by no means ignored in the selection literature, applicant reactions to testing and selection procedures are the primary dependent variable of interest lately (Hausknecht et al., 2004; Morgeson & Ryan, 2009; Truxillo et al., 2009). Each of these variables will be explored in the current study as outcomes of the corporate image formation process.

Organizational Attraction

As described in the recruiting literature, applicant attraction involves “the applicants’ overall evaluation of the attractiveness of the job and/or organization” (Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005, p. 929). Organizational attraction is considered a precursor to behavioral intentions and outcomes such as job choice (Chapman et al., 2005; Cable & Judge, 1996). The rise of interest in applicant attraction coincided with increased recognition of the contribution of employee knowledge and skills to organizational performance (Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Chapman et al., 2005). Several narrative reviews (Barber, 1998; Breaugh, 2008; Breaugh & Starke, 2000; Rynes, 1991) and a meta-analytic review of the correlates of attraction and job choice (Chapman et al., 2005) were published in the past 2 decades.

The last decade of organizational attraction research included an increase in studies exploring the construal and impact of inferences regarding organizational characteristics (e.g. Cable & Graham 2000; Cable & Turban 2003; Brooks et al., 2003;
Indeed, one of the strongest predictors of applicant attraction that emerged from the Chapman et al. meta-analysis is perceptions of organizational characteristics, including the work environment and organizational image. Additionally, applicant attraction was also predicted by subjective interpretations of fit with the job/organization (Braddy et al., 2009; Cable & Judge, 1996; Chapman et al., 2005; Dineen, Ash, & Noe, 2002). Lievens and Highhouse’s (2003) instrumental-symbolic framework, described above, accounts for both of these influences on organizational attraction. They postulated that organizational attraction is driven by perceptions of objective, tangible job and organizational attributes (instrumental factors) and by subjective inferences about the organization’s qualities (symbolic factors).

Evidence from job search and turnover literature suggests that an individual’s engagement in active consideration of jobs and job alternatives may depend on environmental factors such as the state of the economy or job market (Gerhart, 1990; Griffeth, Steel, Allen, & Bryan, 2005; Mobley, Horner, & Hollingsworth, 1978; Price & Mueller, 1998). Researchers have found that individuals are more likely to engage in job search when they perceive that the economic environment is favorable for employment (Griffeth et al., 2005; Steel & Griffeth, 1989). In a separate stream of research, the turnover literature suggests that the relationship between actual employment rate and turnover intentions is mediated by more proximal employee perceptions such as perceived job alternatives (Hom & Kinicki, 2001).

Organizational attraction is a part of the job search and application process, thus it is presumable that an applicant’s perceptions of alternative opportunities, a reflection of
their general perception of the employment environment, may influence their reported attraction to an organization or job. Although this relationship has not been directly explored, the current study will consider applicant attraction in the context of an individual’s perception of available job opportunities.

**Applicant Reactions**

In selection literature, applicant reactions have become the outcome of interest over the past decade. The term applicant reactions encompasses a range of specific variables, but has been generally defined as “attitudes, affect, or cognitions an individual might have about the hiring process” (Ryan & Ployhart, 2000, p. 566). Hausknecht et al. (2004) list five reasons why the study of applicant reactions to selection procedures is an important endeavor; because adverse reactions to a selection system may make the company a less attractive option for the applicant, make the applicant less likely to accept a job offer, relate to the likelihood of an applicant filing a legal complaint or court challenge, less likely to purchase company products, and more likely to dissuade other potential applicants (Smither, Reilly, Millsap, Pearlman & Stoffey, 1993). Although research has yet to investigate some of these effects in the context of social media, it is likely that some of these concerns are increasingly visible as communication among constituent groups expands to more platforms.

Early models of applicant reactions, based on organizational justice theory (Gilliland, 1994), explained the development and consequences of individuals’ justice perceptions in selection settings. The basic premise of these models is that applicants view selection processes in terms of four types of justice; distributive justice (the fairness of outcome allocations), procedural justice (fairness of rules and procedures that lead to a
selection decision), interpersonal justice (respect and sensitivity shown to individuals), and informational justice (regarding the explanations given to individuals about the selection decisions and procedures) (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001; Hausknecht et al. 2004).

Recent models of applicant reactions built upon the organizational justice framework, but are more general such that they include additional relevant antecedent and moderator variables including general perceptions about testing and selection (Ryan & Ployhart, 2000; Hausknecht et al., 2004). The main premise of the model outlined by Hausknecht et al. (2004) is that important individual and organizational outcomes are best predicted by applicant perceptions of the selection process. Broadly categorized outcomes of applicant perceptions include selection procedure performance, self-perceptions, work attitudes and behaviors, and attitudes and behaviors toward the organization. Antecedents of applicant perceptions include person characteristics, perceived procedure characteristics, job characteristics, and the organizational context (e.g. selection ratio). For the current study, four common applicant reactions variables will be measured; perceived predictive validity (Smither et al., 1993), perceived face validity (Smither et al., 1993), perceived opportunity to perform (Bauer et al., 2001), and procedural fairness perceptions (Gilliland, 1994).

Much of the research on applicant reactions has focused on characteristics of selection procedures such as the effects of item types, testing platform, and decision communication. Applicants’ perceptions of the organization are seldom mentioned as antecedents or correlates of applicant reactions to selection procedures, except as outcomes in some theoretical models. As noted by Herriot (2004), many applicants may
have already developed detailed perceptions of the organization and determined that their own identity matches prior to applying to the organization. This corresponds with a general conclusion from recruitment and fit literature which presumes that applicants are attracted to, and apply to organizations with which they perceive a good match. The current study was a step in bridging the gap between recruitment research, which clearly insinuates the formation and existence of corporate images prior to selection and the applicant reactions literature which has yet to fully incorporate the idea of corporate image into models of applicant reactions.

Previous Experience

Herriot’s (2004) identity-based approach to understanding applicant reactions to selection processes put a strong emphasis on experiences prior to application as a determinant of reactions. Herriot presumed that an applicant’s decision to apply is already likely to be based upon a perceived match between their own identity and their perception of the organization. Each type of previous experience moderator is described below.

Familiarity

Because of the many sources from which job seekers may gather information and make inferences about organizational attributes, it is likely that some applicants will have very clear images and expectations prior to application while, for others, the selection assessment may be one of the first encounters with the organization.

The general concept of familiarity is often discussed alongside corporate reputation judgments. However, familiarity has been afforded less attention in discussions of applicant experiences (Hausknecht et al., 2004). Macan et al., (1994)
mentioned familiarity in their discussion of future research directions, in which they speculated that being unfamiliar with the organization or having incomplete information may lead applicants to rely heavily on the selection procedure for information about the organization. The available empirical inquiries on the subject of familiarity during recruitment or selection suggest that familiarity exerts a considerable influence over message effectiveness and audience perceptions of organizations.

One goal of Gatewood et al. (1993) was to examine differences in determinants of executive images and the images of college students. The authors concluded that executives base images on hard economic performance indicators, while college students relied on familiarity. That is, mere exposure to the company including previously working there and exposure to product advertisement correlated with positive image evaluations. Turban and Greening (1997) found a similar pattern with familiarity such that familiar firms were viewed more favorably than unfamiliar firms. Interestingly, the attributes that characterized familiar firms in this study included large size, high media exposure, large advertising budgets, positively rated corporate social performance, and high ratings of reputation and attractiveness as an employer. Congruent with Turban and Greening’s finding that familiar firms were those with the means to publicize their products, the results of a study by Collins (2007), in which he investigated job seeker perceptions of 123 recruiting companies, demonstrated that product knowledge impacted the effectiveness of recruitment messaging. Individual differences in exposure to or experience with certain aspects of an organization may impact what types of signals a job seeker uses to form images regarding that organization. Indeed, Walker et al. (2011) investigated the formation and modification of organizational image perceptions and
found that participants’ familiarity with recruiting organizations moderated the effects of web site characteristics on organizational image perceptions.

Work Experiences

Another experience factor which could affect that type of images influenced by a branded selection assessment is an applicant’s general work experience or job search experience. In a series of studies, Thornbury and Brooks (2010) investigated the organizational correlates of impressiveness and respectability inferences, finding that advertising intensity and product/service quality were the primary drivers of participants’ impressions. Diab and Highhouse’s (2012) conclusion that market image (defined as perception of product and service quality) was the most important driver of respectability and impressiveness impressions provided corroborating evidence to this point. It should be noted that student samples were utilized in these studies. When Gatewood and colleagues (1993) examined the difference in determinants of executive’s images of organizations and the images held by college students, they found that students relied heavily on familiarity via previous work experience and product advertisements. Thornbury and Brooks also concluded that inexperienced job seekers may rely on consumer driven signals to a higher degree than more experienced job seekers and call for future research on the topic.

Individual Differences

In addition to the set of previous experience moderators, individual differences in personality and perceptions of assessment performance were expected to moderate the relationships in the proposed mediational model.
Social Identity Consciousness

Organizational theorists have long contended that organizational membership is incorporated into individuals’ self-concepts and/or social identities (Dutton et al., 1994). According to social identity theory, as outlined by Ashford and Mael (1989), individuals define themselves in terms of relevant characteristics relating to groups of which they are members. The importance of organizational membership to one’s identity suggests that individuals will pay particularly close attention to information and signals during pre-employment experiences that engender feelings or impressions about the hiring organization (Cable & Turban 2003; Lievens & Highhouse 2003).

Recently, Highhouse and colleagues (2007) identified social identity consciousness as a moderator of the relationship between symbolic inferences about an organization and attraction to that organization. The authors described the role of social identification in relation to impression management for real or imagined audiences. That is, people identify with organizations as a way of expressing something about their self-concepts. In the framework proposed by Highhouse and colleagues, social identity consciousness “deals with individual differences in the degree to which the self-presentation concerns are currently dominant” (p. 137). The authors proposed two primary social-identity needs which are supposed to be satisfied through attraction and association with relevant organizations; need for social adjustment and need for value-expression.

Need for social adjustment reflects classic impression management by association and “basking” research in which one’s desired to be regarded favorably by relevant others takes the form of associating one’s self with things or people that are popular or
prestigious (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980; Highhouse et al., 2007). Highhouse and colleagues (2007) explain that in an employment context, a social adjustment concern has to do with “a job seeker’s awareness or interest in the degree to which association with a particular employer invokes prestige or impresses others” (p.137). An individual with a concern for social adjustment may desire affiliation with a high status organization over a low status or lesser known organization.

When an individual has a need for value-expression, they are likely to derive a sense of self regard, not from social stature as with concern for social adjustment, but from a sense of collective self-regard. That is, an individual’s view of him or herself is dependent on their view of the collective regard. Highhouse and colleagues explain that in a job context, value-expression concern has to do with “a job seeker’s awareness or interest in the degree to which association with a particular employer invokes a sense of dignity or respect: (p. 138).

As these social identity consciousness concerns fit into the instrumental-symbolic framework of attraction, Highhouse et al. (2007) suggest particular market signals which may trigger symbolic inferences relevant to each function of attraction. For social adjustment, the authors suggest that applicants will be attracted to organizations which they infer to be impressive. The symbolic inference of impressiveness may be triggered by market signals such as being a leader in compensation, having a prominent Fortune rating, and being perceived as aggressive, dominant, or innovative. For value-expression, the authors suggest that applicants will be attracted to organization which they infer are respectable companies. Respectability inferences may be triggered by market signals
including socially responsible actions, family-friendly policies, and being perceived as sincere, empathetic, or ethical.

Perceived Performance

Research on applicant reactions has demonstrated that an applicant’s perception of how they performed on a selection assessment is a factor that contributes to satisfaction with the selection process, including justice perceptions (Macan et al., 1994; Smither et al., 1993; Hausknecht et al., 2004). Those who perceived their performance on the selection assessment to be higher reported higher satisfaction with the selection process, were more likely to report liking the job and being attracted to the organization, and were more likely to report job acceptance and product purchase intentions (Macan et al., 200). Similarly, Smither et al. (1993) found that perceived knowledge of the test outcome correlated with organizational attractiveness ratings, procedural justice ratings, and intention to recommend the job or organization to a friend. Chan, Schmitt, Jennings, Clause, and Delbridge (1998) drew on the self-serving bias perspective to explain why job-relevance ratings and fairness perceptions were directly influenced by perceived performance. The authors suggested that this relationship was consistent with a self-serving bias in that applicants perceived the assessment as irrelevant and unfair in response to their own perceptions that they had performed poorly.

Perceived performance was only moderately correlated with actual test score for cognitive ability tests, and less so for assessment centers (Macan et al., 1994). Thus, applicants’ perceptions of their performance on an assessment may influence outcomes to a different degree than their actual scores on an assessment.
Impression Formation Model of Attraction

Having discussed the various constructs of interest, I will now elaborate on the expected relationships among the constructs. I proposed that the various constructs described above comprised an impression formation model in which cues or signals from the environment influenced applicants’ images of an organization, which in turn affected applicant attraction toward the organization and reactions to the selection procedure. This primary mediational chain was expected to be moderated by individual differences. Figure 2 depicts the full model tested by the current study. Specific hypotheses from the model are detailed below.

Figure 2. Full model tested in the current study.

The primary component of the proposed model is a path wherein the content of messages communicated during a selection assessment influence organizational attraction through corporate image perceptions. Support for this basic impression formation model can be found in recruitment literature where signaling theory (Rynes Bretz, & Gerhart,
1991; Spence, 1974) is drawn upon to suggest that cues about the job and organization are symbolic of broader organizational attributes. Favorable attributes inferred from these cues then invoke desire to work for or be affiliated with the organization (Allen et al., 2007; Braddy et al., 2008; Cober et al., 2004; Lyons & Marler, 2011). This mediational path is exemplified in studies of how website content and features influence perceptions of the organization and attraction to the organization. For example, Lyons and Marler (2011) collected observations of actual organizational websites from senior-level undergraduates and found that organizational image perceptions mediated the relationship between website aesthetic properties and organizational attraction. Additionally, Carpenter, Doverspike, and Miguel (2012) provided corroborating evidence of the relationship between website content and organizational attraction mediated by perceptions of the organization.

Hypothesis 1: Assessment content will have a positive effect on organizational attraction through corporate image.

The proposed model also involves the same mediated path with applicant reactions as the outcome variable. That is, the content of the assessment is expected to have an indirect influence on reactions to the selection assessment through corporate image perceptions. While the mediated model of organizational attraction described above essentially mirrors the model established in recruitment research and applies it to a selection context, less direct empirical evidence is available to support the same mediational processes with applicant reactions as the outcome variable. Thus, testing the proposed model is an initial step in understanding the relationship between corporate image and applicant reactions. Specifically, the proposed model tested Herriot’s (2004)
assumptions that perceptions of the organization are antecedent factors affecting applicant reactions to selection procedures.

**Hypothesis 2:** Assessment content will have a positive effect on applicant reactions to the assessment through corporate image.

The current study involved an experimental manipulation of the cues/signals presented as part of the assessment. It was beyond the scope of the current study to manipulate cues relating to all 4 dimensions of corporate image. Thus, cues and signals representing the corporate image dimensions of CSR image and financial image were manipulated in the current study. Although exploratory analysis involved investigating the relationships between all four corporate image dimensions and various other variables in the model, the primary analyses focused on the two corporate image dimensions (CSR and financial) presumed to be related most closely with the assessment content conditions.

The relationships among cues presented during assessments, perceptions of a hiring organization, and expression of attraction to that organization are expected to be more complex than a simple mediated relationship. Therefore, this main mediational chain was examined in light of several sets of moderating variables that were expected to exert influence over the proposed relationships.

Previous experience, in the forms of familiarity with the organization, and general experience in the workforce were expected to moderate the proposed mediational chain such that the relationship between cues and corporate image depended on an applicant’s previous experiences. The psychological process presumed to underlie the proposed relationship between presentation of cues related to particular organizational attributes
and the formation of corporate images relating to those organizational attributes is expected to function in a similar manner outside of the present context. That is, potential applicants may have encountered similar cues about the organization at an earlier time and it is assumed that these previous experiences will have an effect on the corporate image currently held.

Because of the many sources from which job seekers may gather information and make inferences about organizational attributes, it is expected that some applicants will have previous experience with the company or their product and service offerings. Indeed, research has demonstrated that familiarity exerts a considerable influence over message effectiveness and audience perceptions of organizations (Turban & Greening, 1997; Walker et al., 2011). Thus, the degree of familiarity with the hiring organization was expected to influence the potency of message content on applicants’ perceptions about the organization. Individuals’ images of the organization were expected to be more strongly influenced by assessment content cues and signals if they had limited existing mental models and perceptions about the organization.

Hypothesis 3: Familiarity will moderate the relationship between assessment content cues and corporate image such that there will be a stronger relationship for individuals who are less familiar with the organization.

The amount of work experience for an individual is expected to influence the degree to which the assessment content affects that individual’s images of the hiring organization. Similar to the theory behind the influence of familiarity on this relationship, applicants with limited work experience are expected to rely on a different set of expectations and mental models when evaluating job prospects. Researchers have found
age and experience differences in the degree to which individuals rely on consumer
driven information to evaluate organizations, suggesting that more experienced workers
are receptive to, and focus, on different kinds of information about an organization than
less experienced workers (Thornbury & Brooks, 2010). Thus, the corporate image
perceptions of those with less work experience are likely to be more directly based on the
content and cues about the organization encountered during the assessment than for
individuals with more work experience. Familiarity and work experience were measured
prior to completion of the assessment and examined as moderators of the relationship
between cues and images.

*Hypothesis 4:* Work experience will moderate the relationship between
assessment content cues and corporate image such that a stronger relationship will
be observed for those who have less work experience.

The results and discussion presented by Highhouse et al (2007) suggested that
individuals may be processing information presented about the organization to the extent
that it coincides with their social identity needs. Thus, some assessment content cues will
be more salient than others, depending on an individual’s social identity consciousness.
One type of social identity consciousness, concern for value expression, has to do with an
individual’s awareness and preference for appearing respectful and honorable to others.
Common organizational practices that are typically considered respectable and honorable
are endeavors such as investment in environmental and social programs. Individuals with
a strong concern for value expression will find information about these types of practices
salient because the information is relevant to their social identity. Content relating to
these types of organizational practices will be more strongly related to corporate image relevant to social responsibility for these individuals.

Another type of social identity consciousness, concern for social adjustment, relates to an individual’s awareness and preference for appearing impressive and of high status to others. Individuals with a high concern for social adjustment are more likely to pay attention to organizational practices that suggest power, high profits, and superiority such as exceptional financial performance and industry leading intellectual capital. Individuals with a strong concern for value expression will find information about these aspects of organizational performance salient because the information is relevant to their social identity. Content relating to these aspects of organization were expected to be more strongly related to corporate image relevant to financial performance for these individuals.

_Hypothesis 5a:_ Concern for value expression will moderate the relationship between social/environmental content and CSR image such that a stronger relationship will be observed for individuals with a high concern for value-expression.

_Hypothesis 5b:_ Concern for social adjustment will moderate the relationship between financial content and financial image such that a stronger relationship will be observed for individuals with a high concern for social adjustment.

The current study also included a test of the proposition presented by Highhouse and colleagues (2007) that social identity consciousness would moderate the relationship between symbolic inferences and organizational attraction. For individuals with a high concern for social adjustment, affiliation with a group or entity that embodies aspects that
are important to their social identity is desirable. Thus, if an individual who has a high
concern for value expression perceives an organization to have a positive corporate social
responsibility image, the individual will be more likely to express attraction to that
organization. A similar pattern was expected for individuals who have a high concern for
social adjustment when they perceive an organization to have a very positive financial
image. The desire to be associated with an entity that contributes to one’s social identity
will result in a higher likelihood of expressing attraction to that organization. It was
expected that the relationship between impressions or perceptions of particular
organizational attributes will influence applicant attraction under conditions where
attraction to the organization serves the function of social identity consciousness needs.

*Hypothesis 6a:* Concern for value expression will moderate the relationship
between CSR image and organizational attraction such that a stronger relationship
will be observed for individuals with high value expression concern.

*Hypothesis 6b:* Concern for social adjustment will moderate the relationship
between financial image and organizational attraction such that a stronger
relationship will be observed for individuals with high social adjustment concern.

The assessment experience itself can influence how individuals feel about an
organization (Macan et al., 1994; Smither et al., 1993; Hausknecht et al., 2004). An
applicant’s perception of how they performed on an assessment may be a particularly
powerful influence on their perceptions and reactions following the assessment. Those
who perceive their performance on the selection assessment to be higher may experience
positive feelings and then report higher satisfaction with the selection process as well as
report higher attraction to the job and organization. The negative experience of feeling as
if one performed poorly may spillover to an individual’s reported attraction and reactions to the assessment and organization in such a way that they report feeling less attracted and overall less satisfied with the assessment experience.

For the current study, perceived assessment performance was examined as a moderating influence on the relationship between corporate image and the two outcomes of organizational attraction and reactions to the selection assessment.

Hypothesis 7: Perceived assessment performance will interact with corporate image in the prediction of organizational attraction such that a stronger relationship between corporate image and attraction will be observed when perceived performance is high.

Hypothesis 8: Perceived assessment performance will interact with corporate image in the prediction of reactions to the selection process such that a stronger relationship between corporate image and reactions will be observed when perceived performance is high.

In sum, I have hypothesized a model in which assessment content influences organizational attraction and applicant reactions through corporate image perceptions. Individual differences in previous experience and social identity consciousness are expected to moderate the relationships between assessment content and corporate image perceptions. For the latter part of the mediation chain, social identity consciousness is expected to moderate the relationship between corporate image perceptions and organizational attraction. Additionally, a participant’s perception of how they performed on the assessment is expected to moderate the relationship between corporate image perceptions and both organizational attraction and applicant reactions. The following
chapter describes the sample, measures, and procedure used to test the hypotheses presented above.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

Sample

Participants were recruited from undergraduate psychology and business classes at a large Mid-Western university. Participants accessed the study via an online link provided via email or through the psychology department research pool website. The study was not formatted to function properly on mobile or tablet devices, thus participants were required to complete the online surveys and Virtual Job Tryout assessment using an internet-connected desktop or laptop computer. Participants received extra class credit for participating and had the option to enter a drawing to win one of several retail gift cards worth $25.

During the fall semester of 2012, participants were recruited from undergraduate psychology classes. Two-hundred-fifty-two participants began the first part of the study during the fall semester. In the spring semester of 2013, participants were recruited from undergraduate psychology classes and business classes. An additional 323 participants started the first part of the study during the spring semester. Of the 575 participants that began the first part of the survey, 405 completed all three parts of the study, resulting in a 70.4% completion rate.

Approximately 83% of the sample was Caucasian. Other ethnicities reported by participants in the sample were African American (7%), Asian/Pacific Islander (3%), and
Hispanic (3%). Four percent of participants reported ‘Other’ or ‘Two or more races’ for their ethnic identity. Nearly 65% of the sample was female with an average age of 21 years. A majority of the sample (70%) reported a GPA at or above 3.0 and majored in either the Social Sciences (29%) or Business (28%) with the next most frequently chosen major being Health/Medicine (14%). Juniors and seniors comprised 46% of the sample and 49% of participants indicated that they expected to enter the job market within 12 months.

Participants’ readiness for job market entry coupled with their prior experience with job applications (74% have used the internet to apply for a job), employment assessments (61% have taken an assessment as part of a job application), and work experience (68% currently employed and 95% have had at least one job), indicated that the content of this study was relevant to the population represented by this sample.

Measures

Table 1 provides the full list of measures in the order that they were completed by participants. See Appendix A for the full list of items used for each measure.
Table 1. List of Measures in Order of Completion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Completed Immediately Prior to the Virtual Job Tryout (Part 1) | Demographics  
Work Experience  
Employment Opportunity Inventory  
Social Identity Consciousness  
Familiarity | Primary Analyses  
Primary Analyses  
Exploratory Analyses  
Primary Analyses  
Primary Analyses |
| Virtual Job Tryout Assessment (Part 2) | Virtual Job Tryout Measures | Manipulation Conditions & Exploratory Analyses |
| Completed Immediately Following the Virtual Job Tryout (Part 3) | Perceived Performance  
Applicant Reactions  
Corporate Image Perceptions  
Organizational Attraction  
Perceived Fit  
Perceptions of Compensation & Job Security  
Manipulation Check | Primary Analyses  
Primary Analyses  
Primary Analyses  
Primary Analyses  
Primary Analyses  
Exploratory Analyses  
Exploratory Analyses  
Manipulation Check |

Focal Study Measures Completed Immediately Prior to Virtual Job Tryout

The following measures were collected in the online survey prior to the Virtual Job Tryout assessment.

Demographics. Demographic and background information including participant age, race, gender, college major, and grade point average were collected via self-report at the beginning of the survey.

Work Experience. As part of the background portion of the survey, participants responded to questions about their amount of previous work experience, current job status, job search experience, and familiarity with employment assessments.

Social identity consciousness. Social adjustment concern and value-expression concern were measured with 5 items each, as developed and described by Highhouse et al. (2007). An example social adjustment concern item is: “Working for an impressive company would make me seem impressive to others.” An example of a value-expressive
concern item is: “It is important to work for a company that is scandal-free.” Participants responded to each of the 10 items using a five-point Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree response format. These scales have been shown to be valid predictors of organizational attraction in previous research. Highhouse et al., (2007) reported that concern for social adjustment predicted attraction to highly impressive firms ($r = .24, p = .01$) and that concern for value expression was a significant predictor of attraction to highly respectable firms ($r = .19, p = .05$). Highhouse et al. (2007) reported initial Chronbach’s alpha reliability estimates of .67 for value expression concern and .65 for social adjustment concern. Actual obtained reliability estimates for the current study were .75 for value expression concern and .78 for social adjustment concern.

Familiarity. Brooks, Highhouse, Russell, and Moohr (2003) utilized a single item measure of familiarity. They asked participants to indicate how familiar they were with 12 companies using a scale from 1 (not at all familiar) to 5 (very familiar). A similar method was employed for the current study, except that familiarity with the company in general and familiarity with specific aspects of the company were both assessed. In total, five types of familiarity were assessed. One item measured a candidate’s general familiarity with the hiring organization, and 4 other items measured familiarity with a particular aspect of the hiring organization’s products or practices related to the 4 dimensions of corporate image. Items included, “How familiar are you with this company as an employer?”, “How familiar are you with the products and services offered by this company?”, and “How familiar are you with the community outreach programs sponsored by this company?” These items were not combined into scale scores for the analysis.
Focal Study Measures Completed Immediately Following the Virtual Job Tryout

Immediately following completion of the Virtual Job Tryout assessment, participants were directed to another online survey page to complete the measures described below.

Perceived Performance. A single item, “I performed well on the Virtual Job Tryout” with a 5 point response scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree was used to measure perceived performance. This single item measure has been used in previous research (e.g. Ryan, Boyce, Ghumman, Jundt, & Schmidt, 2009) as an indicator of applicants' perceived performance on cognitive ability tests.

Assessment Reactions. Reaction items were answered via a 5 point response scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Three items adapted from Smither et al. (1993) were used to assess perceived predictive validity. A sample perceived predictive validity item is “I am confident that the examination can predict how well an applicant will perform on the job.” Smither et al. reported a Chronbach’s alpha coefficient of .83 for the perceived predictive validity scale and found that perceived predictive validity was significantly correlated with other justice perceptions ($r = .21-.22$, $p < .01$) as well as organizational attractiveness ($r = .15$, $p < .01$). Chronbach’s alpha coefficient for perceived predictive validity in the current study was .83. Face validity was assessed with 2 items from Bauer et al. (2001). A sample face validity item is “The content of the test was clearly related to the job.” Perceived opportunity to perform was measured with four items from Bauer et al. (2001). A sample item is “This test gives applicants the opportunity to show what they can really do.” Bauer et al. reported that all the subscales of the selection procedural justice scale, from which the face validity and perceived
opportunity to perform subscales came, had adequate reliability (.73 to .92). In the current study, Chronbach’s alpha coefficient for perceived face validity was .85 and .93 for perceived opportunity to perform. Finally, procedural fairness was assessed via 2 items adapted from Gilliland (1994). A sample item is “The exam process is fair.” Gilliland reported Chronbach’s alpha of .85 for the procedural fairness scale and demonstrated that it predicted outcomes such as recommendation intentions ($r = .30, \ p < .05$). In the current study, Chronbach’s alpha of .82 was observed for procedural fairness perceptions.

*Corporate Images.* Four subscale scores were used as indicators of the dimensions of corporate image. Each of the 4 dimensions of corporate image, employer image, market image, financial image, and social image, described by Highhouse et al., (2009), were be measured with 3 items each. Diab and Highhouse (2012) expanded the single item measures of employer, market, and financial image used by Highhouse, Broadfoot et al. (2009) and developed the three items to measure social image. Sample items include, “This company treats its employees well” (employer image), “This company is known for its great quality” (market image), “This company generates high profits” (financial image), and “This company cares about society” (social image). Participants responded to each of the 12 items using a five-point *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree* response format. Diab and Highhouse (2012) found these subscales to be valid predictors of both impressions of two prominent corporations and general evaluations of the organizations. For example, Diab and Highhouse (2012) found that employer image, market image and social image were most strongly associated with respectability impressions ($r = .45, \ p < .01$, $r = .62, \ p < .01$ and $r = .67, \ p < .01$,
respectively) and that financial image were most strongly associated with finding an organization impressive ($r = .48$, $p < .01$). Diab and Highhouse (2012) reported Chronbach’s alpha coefficients of .82 for financial image, .92 for CSR image .90 for employer image, and .84 for market image. Reliability coefficients obtained in the current study were comparable at .88 for financial image, .87 for CSR image, .86 for employer image, and .83 for market image.

**Attraction.** The measure designed by Highhouse, Lievens, & Sinar (2003) was used to measure participant attraction to the organization. Participants responded to 15 items using a 5-point Likert scale from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree* to indicate general attraction, intentions to pursue employment, and company prestige. Highhouse et al. (2003) reported Chronbach’s alpha coefficients of .88, .82, and .83 for the subscales general attraction, intentions to pursue employment, and company prestige, respectively. Similar coefficients were obtained for the current study: .85 for general attraction and intention to pursue, and .82 for perceived prestige. All 15 items were averaged to create an overall attraction score for the analyses. Previous research using the full 15 item scale has reported reliability coefficients ranging from .88 to .93 (Carpenter et al., 2012). For the current study, Chronbach’s alpha coefficient was .93 for the 15 item scale.

**Exploratory Measures**

**Employment Opportunity.** Griffith et al. (2005) developed the Employment Opportunity Index (EOI) to measure job market perceptions. Four dimensions of the EOI were adapted for inclusion in the current study; ease of movement, desirability of movement, networking, and crystallization of alternatives. An example item from the ease of movement scale is “There simply aren’t very many jobs for people like me in
today’s job market.” An example item from the desirability of movement scale is “Most of the jobs I could get would be an improvement over my present circumstances.” An example item from the networking scale is, “I have contacts in other companies who might help me line up a new job.” An example item from the crystallization of alternatives scale is “Right now, I have a job offer ‘on the table’ from another employer if I choose to take it.” Griffeth et al. (2005) reported Chronbach’s alpha coefficients ranging from .70 to .85 across the 4 dimensions. For the current study, Chronbach’s alpha coefficients of .66 for ease of movement, .82 for desirability of movement, .81 for networking, and .64 for crystallization of alternatives were observed.

Fit. Three commonly used items were used to measure subjective organizational fit perceptions (e.g. Cable & Judge, 1996; Greguras & Diefendorff, 2009). “My values match those of current employees in this organization,” “I feel my values match or fit with this organization and the current employees in this organization,” and “The values and personality of this organization reflect my own values and personality.” Previous research reported Chronbach’s alpha coefficient for .87 for these items (Cable & Judge, 1996). Chronbach’s alpha coefficient of .93 was observed in the current study.

Perceptions of Compensation & Job Security. Six items used by Turban (2001) were used to measure participant’s perceptions of organizational attributes related to compensation and job security. The six organizational attributes are benefits, compensation, job security, financial soundness, treatment of employees, and opportunities for advancement. Participants indicated how much better or poorer the company is compared to other companies using a five-point scale from 1- much poorer to 5- much better. Turban (2001) observed a Chronbach’s alpha coefficient of .83 for these
six items. In the current study, Chronbach’s alpha coefficient of .91 was obtained for these six items.

**Overall Performance.** The assessment yielded an overall performance score on a scale of 1-10 based on the scoring algorithm used for the assessment of actual candidates applying for the material handler position at the retail-manufacturing organization. The overall performance score was used in exploratory analyses.

**Manipulation Check**

At the end of the survey, participants were asked to indicate specific facts that they learned about the company during the assessment. The list of facts reflected specific content from each of the three assessment conditions as well as two “fake” facts.

**Procedure**

All data for the current study was collected online. Participants completed a Virtual Job Tryout assessment for an entry level position at a large specialty retailer and manufacturer. Immediately prior to and following the assessment, participants completed online surveys measuring the major variables of interest described in the model for the current study. The entire study took approximately 50 minutes to complete. The Virtual Job Tryout assessment portion of the study was expected to take approximately 45 minutes, although the average completion time of the Virtual Job Tryout was shorter with an average of 32 minutes.

First, participants were directed to an online survey to provide demographic and work experience information, complete individual difference measures, and indicate their familiarity with the organization. Participants were instructed to act as if they were applying for a job with the company and were then directed to the Virtual Job Tryout.
assessment. Participants created a unique identifying code during the first part of the survey that they used to enter the assessment portion. This code was used to link their responses from each part of the study.

The Virtual Job Tryout assessment for the current study was an actual assessment used by the organization as part of the selection process for distribution/material handlers throughout their organization. Participants saw the actual company name and branded content. However, the job name was removed from the assessment to provide a more general experience and in an effort to avoid participants focusing on the nature of the job rather than the organization.

Assessment Content Manipulation

The assessment was preceded by a slide show of images and text describing the organization and the nature of the responsibilities, benefits, and challenges associated with the position. There were a total of 9 slides with text and images. Three of these slides were different for each condition. The text and image content of these three slides constituted the experimental manipulation for the current study. Appendix B contains the introductory content for each condition. There were three conditions to which participants were randomly assigned. After screening and cleaning the data (described in detail in Chapter IV), the final sample sizes used for the analyses were 108 for the financial performance condition, 115 in the social/environmental condition, and 114 in the neutral condition.

The three unique slides for the first condition presented text and images concerning the financial performance of the company. The three unique slides for the second condition presented text and images concerning the social and environmental
initiatives of the company. Finally, the three unique slides for the neutral condition presented text and images with basic facts about the company such as the year it was founded and headquarter location.

*The Virtual Job Tryout Assessment*

The assessment consisted of 4 distinct “experience” sections which measured knowledge, skills, abilities, and characteristics associated with successful performance in the distribution/material handler role. Each section was preceded by audio and/or visual instructions including a description of the purpose behind the particular experience.

The first experience contained situational judgment items that measured how candidates respond to realistic work and coworker situations. For each situational judgment item, participants were presented with text at the top of the screen that described a situation commonly encountered on the job. Below the situation text, participants saw 4 answer choices presented in a 2x2 block. Participants used their mouse to drag two buttons (“Most” and “Least”) into placeholders next to each response option to indicate which response they would be most likely to do and which they would be least likely to do. Participants advanced to the next question by clicking on the “Next” button in the bottom right corner of the screen.

The second experience was a virtual simulation which measured skills in data entry, verification accuracy, and speed, as well as spatial and mathematical reasoning ability. Tasks included: 1) finding the shipping label ID number on an image of a shipping label and typing the number into a text field, 2) determining and indicating how many quantities of a product to ship when provided the total number of units needed and the units per case, 3) comparing a list of product ID numbers and indicating whether they
match or do not match, and 4) determining the total number of units on a two-dimensional rendering of a palette of different sized containers when provided the number of units contained in each type of container.

The next experience consisted of several multiple choice questions regarding a candidate’s relevant past work experience, stability of work history, reliability, and past performance.

The fourth assessment experience measured several personality traits and tendencies. Participants were presented with several items on each page. Each item consisted of two statements and participants had to click radio buttons to indicate which statement was “most like me”.

Upon exiting the Virtual Job Tryout assessment, participants completed part 3 of the study, another short online survey measuring reactions, attraction, and corporate image.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter begins with a description of data screening procedures. Next, preliminary analyses, including descriptive statistics and correlations among focal study variables, are described. Finally, the processes and results used to test the hypotheses are detailed.

Data Screening and Cleaning

Of the 575 participants that began the first part of the survey, 405 completed all three parts of the study. Demographic data from the 405 completed cases were compared to 146 incomplete cases who had responded to the demographic questions in order to rule out any systematic differences between the sample of participants who completed the study and those who chose not to complete the study. The two groups were equivalent on GPA, age, school status, anticipated timeline for entering the job market, and familiarity with the company as an employer. A t-test revealed that the samples differed significantly in gender composition with a lower proportion of females in the sample that completed the survey (where 1 = Male and 2 = Female, Mean_{completed} = 1.65, Mean_{incomplete} = 1.70, \( F = 6.43, p < .05 \)). As described later in this chapter, gender did not correlate significantly with any of the hypothesized dependent variables, but its influence was accounted for where appropriate.
Screening the data revealed several cases that warranted removal from the data set prior to analysis. Specifically, 27 participants took an inordinate amount of time to complete the survey. In each case, there was a long lag between completing one part of the survey and beginning a subsequent part. A lack of variance across all major variables was observed in 9 cases. Twelve cases were dropped because participants were under 18 years old. Three cases were dropped because they participated in the study twice. Additionally, 11 participants indicated that they experienced technical difficulties during the assessment portion of the study. Technical difficulties may have resulted in a different assessment experience, introducing a confound to the manipulation.

Finally, 11 cases identified as multivariate outliers were eliminated from the analysis. These cases were detected by screening scale scores of major study variables using standardized residuals, Cooks D, Mahalanobis distance and leverage criteria. Cases were removed from further analysis if they exceeded the recommended cutoff values on these criteria (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) and were shown by scatterplots to have undue influence. Unless otherwise noted, data from 337 participants were used in the analyses described in this chapter.

*Manipulation Check*

The purpose of the manipulation check was to determine whether there were significant differences among participants who saw the assessment content related to social and environmental programs, participants who saw the assessment content related to financial performance, and participants who saw the neutral assessment content with respect to their recognition of facts about the company. This analysis involved sets of two types of variables. The predictor variable was type of assessment content, which could
assume one of three values: the social and environmental content condition (coded as 0),
the financial performance content condition (coded as 1), and the neutral content
condition (coded as 2). At the conclusion of the survey, participants were asked to
indicate what they learned about the company during the assessment from a list of 8
statements. Two statements each pertained to the three content conditions and two were
falsified details that were not described in any of the content conditions. The criterion
variable, which was measured on an interval scale, represented participants’ endorsement
of the sets of statements about the company.

A series of one-way ANOVA, between subjects designs revealed a significant
effect for type of assessment content for all three sets of statements pertaining to the
information actually presented in the assessment content conditions (for endorsement of
social and environmental statements, $F(2, 334) = 15.43, p < .01$, for endorsement of
financial performance statements, $F(2, 334) = 8.69, p < .01$, and for endorsement of
neutral statements, $F(2, 334) = 78.61, p < .01$). Tukey’s HSD test showed that
participants in the social and environmental content condition endorsed significantly
more social and environmental content statements than participants in the financial
performance and neutral content conditions ($p < .01$), participants in the financial
performance condition endorsed significantly more financial performance content
statements than participants in the social and environmental ($p < .05$) and neutral
conditions ($p < .01$), and participants in the neutral content condition endorsed
significantly more neutral content statements than participants in the social and
environmental and financial performance conditions ($p < .01$).
There were no significant effects of type of assessment content on endorsement of the fake statements, $F_{(2, 334)} = 1.29, \text{ns}$. This analysis provides evidence that the experimental manipulation was strong enough for participants to retain the presented content past the conclusion of the assessment.

**Confirmatory Factor Analyses**

With the exception of Corporate Image, all the measures used in the present study were from established scales that have been used in published literature. Prior to performing analyses to test the hypotheses, confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were conducted for all items from each focal study scale to ensure that there were no major deviations from the expected factor structure when the scales were used with this sample. CFAs were conducted using Mplus 4.12 (Muthen & Muthen, 1999-2006) with maximum likelihood estimation. All items loaded onto factors and scales as anticipated, with acceptable fit statistics and adequate reliability levels. See Appendix C for factor loadings, fit statistics, and Chronbach’s alpha coefficients.

Composite scale scores were created for the dependent variables, overall attraction and applicant reactions, from the subscales measuring these constructs. For overall attraction, a composite scale score was calculated from the means of subscale scores of attraction, intentions to pursue, and perceived prestige. Similarly for overall applicant reactions, a composite scale score was created from the means of subscale scores for perceived predictive validity, perceived face validity, opportunity to perform, and perceived fairness. As shown in Table 2, reliabilities for the composites are adequate.
Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, reliabilities (on the diagonal), and bivariate correlations among demographic variables and the focal study scales and composite scores.

Table 2. Focal Study Variable Correlations

<table>
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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Gender</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Age</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>--</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. GPA</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>--</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Familiarity</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Number of Jobs</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. SIC: Value Expression</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
<td>(.75)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. SIC: Social Adjustment</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>(.78)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>8. CSR Image</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>(.87)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>9. Financial Image</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.73**</td>
<td>(.88)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Perceived Performance</td>
<td>-.18**</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>--</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Perceived Predictive Validity</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
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<td>12. Perceived Face Validity</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.23**</td>
</tr>
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<td>13. Opportunity to Perform</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.16**</td>
</tr>
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<td>14. Fair Process</td>
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<td>.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.37**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Overall Reactions</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Attraction</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Intention to Pursue</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Perceive Prestige</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.18**</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.69**</td>
<td>.63**</td>
<td>.13*</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Overall Attraction</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>.06</td>
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</table>

Mean GPA of 4.97 thus refers to response options rather than actual GPA value.

*Note. *p < .05. **p < .01. GPA was measured on a 7 point scale where 1 = ‘1.0 - 1.5’, 2 = ‘1.6 - 2.0’, 3 = ‘2.1 - 2.5’, 4 = ‘2.6-3.0’, 5 = ‘3.0 - 3.5’, 6 = ‘3.5 – 4.0’, and 7 = ‘4.0+’.
Table 2 (Continued). Focal Study Variable Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1. Gender</td>
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<td>5. Number of Jobs</td>
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<td>6. SIC: Value Expression</td>
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<td>7. SIC: Social Adjustment</td>
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<td>8. CSR Image</td>
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<td>9. Financial Image</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Perceived Performance</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Perceived Predictive Validity</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Perceived Face Validity</td>
<td>.58**</td>
<td></td>
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<td>13. Opportunity to Perform</td>
<td>.67**</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td></td>
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<td>14. Fair Process</td>
<td>.66**</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td>.65**</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Overall Reactions</td>
<td>.87**</td>
<td>.65**</td>
<td>.91**</td>
<td>.82**</td>
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<td>16. Attraction</td>
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<td>.28**</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Intention to Pursue</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.89**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Perceive Prestige</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>.65**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Overall Attraction</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.94**</td>
<td>.95**</td>
<td>.80**</td>
<td>.90**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean: 3.58 3.89 3.07 3.66 3.44 3.20 3.34 3.58 3.37
SD: 0.56 0.72 0.96 0.86 0.73 0.76 0.70 0.56 0.60

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01.

Hypothesis Testing

Results concerning hypothesized relationships were initially analyzed using one-way ANOVA, bivariate correlations and multiple regression. A series of one-way ANOVAs were conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference among participants who viewed the social/environmental content, participants who viewed the financial performance content, and participants who viewed the neutral content with respect to their reported corporate image of the company. The predictor variable for these analyses was type of assessment content in which the social and environmental content condition was coded as ‘0’, the financial performance content condition was coded as ‘1,
and the neutral content condition was coded as 2. The criterion variables were the 4 dimensions of corporate image, financial image, CSR image, market image, and employer image. These analyses revealed significant effects for the type of assessment content on the two corporate image dimensions that related to the content manipulation (financial image and CSR image). However, there was no significant effect for the type of assessment content for the corporate image dimensions that did not relate to the content manipulation (employer image and market image). Table 3 summarizes the main effects for all 4 corporate image dimensions.

Table 3. One-Way ANOVAs of Corporate Image by Manipulation Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Neutral Condition Mean ($n = 114$)</th>
<th>Social/Environmental Condition Mean ($n = 115$)</th>
<th>Financial Performance Condition Mean ($n = 108$)</th>
<th>$F$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSR Image</td>
<td>3.54&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.75&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.57&lt;sub&gt;ab&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>4.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Image</td>
<td>3.43&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.63&lt;sub&gt;ab&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.55&lt;sub&gt;b&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.35*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer Image</td>
<td>3.61&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.72&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.67&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>0.91 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market Image</td>
<td>3.65&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.71&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>3.78&lt;sub&gt;a&lt;/sub&gt;</td>
<td>1.49 ns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *$p < .05$. Mean values in the same row with the same subscript letter are not significantly different from each other.

Specific to CSR image, Tukey’s HSD test showed that participants who viewed the social/environmental content had higher CSR image scores ($M = 3.75$) than those who viewed the neutral content ($M = 3.54$) ($p < .05$). The mean difference between CSR image scores of participants who viewed the social/environmental content and those who viewed the financial performance content (Mean Difference = -0.17, $p = .08$) approached but did not reach the customarily accepted significance level of $p < .05$.

A similar pattern emerged for financial image. Participants who viewed the financial performance content had higher financial image scores ($M = 3.55$) than those who viewed the neutral content ($M = 3.43$). There were no significant differences in
financial image score between those who viewed the financial performance content and those who viewed the social/environmental content (M = 3.63).

It is not surprising that mere exposure to social/environmental and financial performance content did not differentiate between the average CSR image and average financial image. The two image dimensions are correlated and a portion of their variance is likely attributable to an overall positive impression of the organization, which could have been impacted by the somewhat richer detail provided in both the social/environmental content and financial performance content. Additionally, both CSR image and financial image may have been influenced by prior experiences which were not accounted for by this analysis employed to test the hypotheses described in Chapter II do not compare the effects of exposure to social/environmental content with the effects of exposure to financial performance content. Instead, the effects of exposure to each type of content were examined independently.

On the whole, the results of the ANOVA demonstrated initial support for the relationship between assessment content that references particular organizational attributes and subsequent corporate image perceptions regarding those organizational attributes.

Hypotheses 1 through 5 concerned the influence of type of assessment content on CSR image and finance image. To test these hypotheses, two dummy variables were created to represent the type of assessment content that participants viewed. The dummy variables were coded as follows: For the first dummy variable, representing those in the social/environmental content condition, ‘1’ = saw social/environmental content, and ‘0’ = did not see social/environmental content. For the second dummy variable representing
those in the financial performance content condition, ‘1’ = saw financial performance content, and ‘0’ = did not see financial performance content. Participants in the neutral content condition had values of ‘0’ for both dummy variables.

*Hypotheses 1 and 2: Mediation by Corporate Image*

Hypotheses 1 and 2 predicted that assessment content cues would have significant effects on organizational attraction and applicant reactions through corporate image perceptions. Recent writings on modern approaches to mediation guided the analyses for testing these hypotheses (Hayes, 2009; 2013; Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Shrout & Bolger, 2002; Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010). The approach used to test the mediation hypotheses involved estimation of the following: The effect of the independent variable (assessment content) on the outcome variable (attraction or applicant reactions), referred to as the ‘total effect’ or $c$ path, the effect of the independent variable on the mediator variables (corporate image perceptions), referred to as the $a$ path, the relationship between the mediator and outcome variable ($b$ path), and the indirect effect of the independent variable on the outcome variables through the mediator variables, defined as the product of the $a$ and $b$ paths ($ab$). The indirect effect is considered equal to the difference between the total effect ($c$) and the direct effect ($c'$) of the independent variable on the outcome after considering effect through the mediator. See Figure 3 for a diagram of these relationships.
Figure 3. Panel A: Illustration of direct effect of X on Y. Panel B: Illustration of a mediation design where X affects Y indirectly through M.

All estimates for the mediation models were generated using the macros developed by Preacher and Hayes with the STATISTICAL PACKAGE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES (SPSS) software, version 20 for Windows (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Ordinary least squares regression analysis was conducted with a nonparametric bootstrapping procedure to produce a confidence interval around the indirect effect ($ab$). The bootstrapping process involved repeatedly sampling with replacement (for 5000 iterations) from the original sample to produce a sampling distribution of $ab$. Confidence intervals were generated from the empirically derived sampling distribution. Mediation is assumed when zero falls outside the confidence interval from the bootstrapped sample.

This process for investigating indirect effects is considered superior to the causal steps approach described by Baron and Kenny (1986), and addresses a key weakness of the products of coefficients approach, or Sobel test (Sobel, 1982; 1986). The Sobel test,
which requires estimation of the standard error of $ab$, assumes that the sampling
distribution of $ab$ is normal. Since this assumption is often violated with small sample
sizes (Hayes, 2008; Preacher & Hayes, 2004; 2009; Stone & Sobel, 1990), a
nonparametric bootstrapping procedure that makes no normality assumptions is
considered the most powerful and reasonable alternative for obtaining confidence limits
for indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2009; Zhao et al., 2010).

To test the hypothesis that viewing social/environmental assessment content has a
significant indirect effect on organizational attraction through CSR image, estimates of
the total and direct effects of the dummy variable representing the social/environmental
content condition on organizational attraction, as well as estimates of the specific indirect
effects of social/environmental content on organizational attraction through each
mediator variable (CSR image and finance image) were produced in SPSS. In the interest
of parsimony and based on recommendations of Preacher and Hayes (2008), both
corporate image dimensions relevant to the hypothesis were included in the model. This
allowed for the comparison of the indirect effects of social/environmental content on
organizational attraction through both corporate image variables and provided for a more
complete understanding of the hypothesized model than would have been possible if the
model only included the mediation variable related to each specific organizational
attribute. Additionally, the dummy variable representing financial performance content
was included in the model as a covariate.

As expected, social/environmental content condition predicted CSR image ($b = .21, p < .01$) but did not predict financial image ($b = .12, ns$). This is consistent with the
ANOVA results described above. Both image dimensions accounted for significant
variance in organizational attraction ($b_{\text{CSR Image}} = .42, p < .01; b_{\text{Finance Image}} = .18, p < .01$).

There was not a significant total ($c$) effect of social/environmental content on organizational attraction ($b = .03, ns$) (see Figure 4). The coefficient representing $c'$ indicated that social/environmental content did not have a unique effect on organizational attraction beyond the indirect effect through corporate image perceptions.

It should be noted that the coefficient for the direct effect of social/environmental content on attraction has the opposite sign of the estimate of the indirect effect which may indicate a suppression effect or inconsistent mediation (MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000). In this case, the positive effect of social/environmental content on organizational attraction through CSR image appeared to suppress or reduce the magnitude of the total effect of social/environmental content on organizational attraction. Once the indirect effect was controlled for in the mediation model, the negative relationship between social/environmental content and organizational attraction emerged. Since the assessment content variable represents inclusion in an experimental condition, there were no a priori expectations that inclusion in any particular experimental condition would influence attraction to the organization. Data collected for the current study was not sufficient to explain the observed inconsistent mediation. It is possible that a variable which was not measured may explain the negative direct effect. Future research is needed to clarify this relationship.
Despite the lack of significant total and direct effects of social/environmental assessment content and evidence of inconsistent mediation, the bootstrapped results for the indirect effects did indicate that social/environmental assessment content exerted influence on organizational attraction through corporate image perceptions. The point estimate for the indirect effect of social/environmental content on organizational attraction through CSR image was 0.09, with the 95% bias-corrected (BC) confidence interval (CI) ranging from 0.025 to 0.176. The fact that zero fell outside this CI indicated a significant, non-zero indirect effect, supporting Hypothesis 1 for CSR image. BC bootstrap CI of -0.001 to 0.070 indicated a non-significant indirect effect through financial image. Consistent with expectations, a 95% CI for the contrast (0.012 to .154) indicated that the two indirect paths were significantly different in magnitude. Viewing social/environmental content had an effect on organizational attraction, mediated by CSR Image, but the relationship between social/environmental assessment content and
organizational attraction was not mediated by financial image perceptions. Path estimates for the mediation models used to test Hypothesis 1 are presented in Table 4 and bootstrapped estimates and 95% BC CIs of the indirect effects are presented in Table 5.

Table 4. Summary of Path Estimates for Mediation Models used to Test Hypothesis 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV</th>
<th>Mediators</th>
<th>DV</th>
<th>DV Model Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CSR Image</td>
<td>Finance Image</td>
<td>Overall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/Env Content</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Financial Perf Content)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR Image</td>
<td>-0.16*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Image</td>
<td>0.42***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL (c path)</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIRECT (c’ path)</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Perf Content</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.20*</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Social/Env Content)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR Image</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Image</td>
<td>0.42***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL (c path)</td>
<td>0.18**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIRECT (c’ path)</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Covariates in parentheses. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

A similar model was used to test the hypothesis that financial performance content would have an indirect effect on organizational attraction through financial image. The dummy variable representing the financial performance content condition was the independent variable and the dummy variable representing the social/environmental condition was entered in the model as a covariate. The pattern coefficients for the independent variable to mediator ($a$ path) and mediator to dependent variable ($b$ path) paths were as expected. Financial performance content predicted financial image ($b = .20, p < .05$) but not CSR image ($b = .04, ns$) and both image dimensions exerted significant influence on organizational attraction (see Figure 5). As
observed for the mediation model containing social/environmental assessment content, there was not a significant total effect \((c)\) of financial performance content on organizational attraction \((b = -0.11, ns)\).

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 5. Mediation of Financial Performance Content and Organizational Attraction by Financial Image. \(* p < .05\). ** \(p < .01\). \(^+\) bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence interval does not contain zero.**

The 95% CI (.006 to .093) around the point estimate (.04) for the indirect effect of financial performance content on organizational attraction through financial image indicates that financial image mediates the relationship between financial performance content and organizational attraction. A significant non-zero path was not indicated by the 95% CI (-.048 to .087) for the indirect path through CSR image. However, the 95% CI for the contrast comparing the two indirect effects contained zero (-.071 to .059), indicating that the two indirect paths cannot be distinguished in terms of magnitude. Preacher and Hayes (2008) discussed this pattern of results (e.g. when one indirect effect is significantly different from zero and the other is not, but the two effects are not significantly different in magnitude) in terms of a paradox that occurs frequently when
one of the indirect effects in the contrast is not sufficiently far from zero, and that results from conducting multiple tests that differ in power. In the context of testing Hypothesis 1, results supported the expectation that assessment content would exert a significant indirect effect on organizational attraction through corporate image perceptions.

After accounting for the indirect path from financial performance content to attraction through financial image, there was a significant unique effect of financial performance content on organizational attraction \((b = -.16, p < .05)\). This coefficient has the opposite sign of the estimate of the indirect effect described above. Additionally, this direct effect \((c')\) is higher in magnitude than the total effect \((c)\), which may indicate a suppression effect or inconsistent mediation (MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000). In this case, the positive effect of financial performance content on organizational attraction through corporate image perceptions appeared to suppress or reduce the magnitude of the total effect of financial performance content on organizational attraction. Once the indirect effect was controlled for in the mediation model, the significant negative relationship between financial performance content and organizational attraction emerged. As for the results from the model for social/environmental content, there were no a priori expectations that inclusion in any particular experimental condition would influence attraction to the organization. Data collected for the current study was not sufficient to explain the observed inconsistent mediation. It is possible that a variable which was not measured may explain the negative direct effect. Future research is needed to clarify this relationship.
In order to test Hypothesis 2, which predicted that assessment content would have a significant indirect effect on applicant reactions through corporate image perceptions, the same set of estimates as were generated for Hypothesis 1 were estimated with applicant attractions as the dependent variable. The pattern of relationships for the $a$ and $b$ paths were as expected and summarized in Table 6 and Figure 6. Social/environmental assessment, predicted CSR image but not financial image and both image variables predicted organizational attraction. There was neither a significant total nor direct effect of social/environmental assessment content on applicant reactions. Despite the lack of significant effects for the $c$ or $c'$ paths, bootstrap results for the indirect effect of social/environmental assessment content on applicant reactions indicated that assessment content exerted an indirect effect on applicant reactions.
Beginning with the indirect effect of social/environmental content on applicant reactions, the 95% CI (.003 to .109) around the point estimate (.04) for the indirect effect through CSR image indicated a significant, non-zero indirect effect. This provided partial support for Hypothesis 2. As expected, the 95% CI (-.002 to .098) for the indirect effect through financial image demonstrated a non-significant effect (see Table 7). However, the 95% CI (-.075 to .074) for the contrast comparing the two indirect effects contained zero, indicating that the two indirect effects of social/environmental content on applicant reactions through CSR image and financial image do not significantly differ in magnitude.

A similar pattern was observed for the model testing the indirect effect of financial performance content on applicant reactions through the two corporate image dimensions (see Figure 7). The pattern of relationships for the \(a\) and \(b\) paths were as expected and summarized in Table 6. The 95% CI (.010 to .132) around the point estimate (.05) for the indirect effect of financial performance content on applicant
reactions through financial image indicated a significant, non-zero effect. This result provided further support for Hypothesis 2. Similar to the pattern observed when examining specific indirect effects for the indirect paths involving social/environmental content, the 95% CI (-.020 to .056) for the indirect path of financial content on applicant reactions through CSR image, indicated the lack of a significant indirect effect. Additionally, the 95% CI (-.119 to .002) for the contrast comparing the specific indirect effects indicated that the indirect paths from financial performance content through financial image and through CSR image did not differ in magnitude (see Table 7).

Figure 7. Mediation of Financial Performance Content and Applicant Reactions by Financial Image. *p < .05. **p < .01. † bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence interval does not contain zero.
Table 6. Summary of Path Estimates for Mediation Models used to test Hypothesis 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediators</th>
<th>DV</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>Overall Applicant Reactions</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>R²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSR Image</td>
<td>Finance Image</td>
<td>Social/Env Content (Financial Perf Content)</td>
<td>0.21** 0.12</td>
<td>-0.10 0.19* 0.26**</td>
<td>11.71*** 0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR Image</td>
<td>Financial Image</td>
<td>Financial Perf Content (Social/Env Content)</td>
<td>0.04 0.20*</td>
<td>0.02 0.19* 0.26**</td>
<td>11.71*** 0.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Covariates in parentheses. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 7. Indirect Effect of Assessment Content on Applicant Reactions through CSR Image and Financial Image

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediator Point Estimate</th>
<th>BC 95% CI Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indirect Effects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR Image</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>0.003 0.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Image</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>-0.002 0.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>0.065 0.151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contrast</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR Image vs. Financial Image</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>-0.075 0.074</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV = Social/Environmental Content

| Indirect Effects        |                |       |
| CSR Image               | 0.007          | -0.020 0.056 |
| Financial Image         | 0.052          | 0.010 0.132 |
| TOTAL                   | 0.059          | -0.011 0.145 |
| Contrast                |                |       |
| CSR Image vs. Financial Image | -0.045 | -0.119 0.002 |

IV = Financial Performance Content

Note. ‘TOTAL’ refers to the indirect effect of the IV on the DV through all Mediators in the model.
Evidence of a potential suppression effect or inconsistent mediation was found with both models tested for Hypothesis 2. After accounting for the indirect path from assessment content to applicant reactions through corporate image perceptions, the coefficient for the direct effect of assessment content on applicant reactions had the opposite sign of the estimate of the indirect effects. There were no a priori expectations that inclusion in any particular experimental condition would influence reactions to the assessment experience. Data collected for the current study was not sufficient to explain the observed inconsistent mediation. It is possible that a variable which was not measured may explain the negative direct effect. Future research is needed to clarify these relationships.

As summarized in Tables 4 through 7, results supported Hypotheses 1 and 2, despite evidence of potential suppression effects. Assessment content had significant indirect effects on organizational attraction and applicant reactions through corporate image perceptions. The remaining hypotheses concerned moderation of relationships between assessment content and corporate image and between corporate image and the dependent variables, organizational attraction and applicant reactions. Results were analyzed using multiple regression in SPSS.

Hypotheses 3 and 4: Previous Experience Moderators

Hypotheses 3 and 4 postulated that the extent of individuals’ past experiences, regarding the hiring organization or as members of the workforce in general, would attenuate observed relationships between assessment content and corporate image perceptions. The familiarity variable represented participants’ responses to the inquiry
about how familiar they were with the company. Work experience was represented by number of jobs participants reported ever holding.

Although there were no expectations about the magnitude or direction of the relationships between these moderator variables and the dependent variables, the bivariate correlations were inspected prior to conducting the regression analysis. Bivariate correlations revealed that familiarity with the company was significantly related to CSR image \( (r = .12, p < .05) \). Familiarity also related to financial image in the same direction but was non-significant at \( r = .11 \). Work experience was not significantly related to either CSR image or financial image \( (r = -.03, ns) \). Bivariate correlations did reveal that gender was significantly related to familiarity \( (r = .16, p < .01) \) and age was significantly related to familiarity \( (r = .12, p < .05) \) and work experience \( (r = .52, p < .01) \). Age and gender were entered into the regression equations along with the moderator variables, where appropriate, to control for demographic effects on the dependent variables.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the relationship between assessment content and corporate image would be weaker for individuals who reported high familiarity with the organization. A regression equation was computed to test this hypothesis for the relationship between assessment content and each CSR image and financial image. To test the former, CSR image was regressed on the linear combination of the two dummy variables representing social/environmental content and financial performance content conditions, gender, age, familiarity, and the products of each dummy variable and familiarity which represented the interaction effects of assessment content type with familiarity. This equation accounted for approximately 5% of the variance in CSR image
\( F(7, 319) = 2.15, p < .05 \). The dummy variable representing social/environmental content had a significant influence on CSR image above the other variables \( (\beta = .16, p < .05) \) but the interaction terms did not account for significant variance in CSR image above the other variables.

To test Hypothesis 3 for the other image dimension, financial image was regressed on the linear combination of the two dummy variables representing social/environmental content and financial performance content conditions, gender, age, familiarity, and the products of each dummy variable and familiarity. This equation accounted for approximately 5% of the variance in financial image \( (F(7, 319) = 2.34, p < .05) \). As was the pattern with CSR image, the dummy variable representing financial performance content had a significant influence on finance image above the other variables \( (\beta = .16, p < .05) \) but the interaction terms did not account for significant variance in finance image above the other variables.

Taken together, the results summarized in Table 8 do not provide support for Hypothesis 3. The strength of the relationship between assessment content and corporate image perceptions does not vary with respect to familiarity with the hiring organization.
### Table 8. Interaction effects of Familiarity and Assessment content on Corporate Image

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>β</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>(F\Delta)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR Image</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social/Env Condition</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial Perf Condition</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Familiarity</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Familiarity*Social/Env Cond</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Familiarity*Financial Perf Cond</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Image</td>
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<td>-.00</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social/Env Condition</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial Perf Condition</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Familiarity</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Familiarity*Social/Env Cond</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Familiarity*Financial Perf Cond</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. \*p < .05. \**p < .01.*

Hypothesis 4 predicted that the relationship between assessment content and corporate image would be weaker for individuals reporting more experience in the workforce. Similar to the process used to test Hypothesis 3, a regression equation was computed to test Hypothesis 4 for the relationship between assessment content and each CSR image and financial image. First, CSR image was regressed on the linear combination of the two dummy variables representing social/environmental content and financial performance content conditions, age, work experience, and the products of each dummy variable and work experience. This model only accounted for approximately 2% of the variance in CSR image, a non-significant proportion \(F_{(6, 320)} = 1.32, ns\). The
interaction variables did not account for significant amounts of variance in CSR image above the other variables in the model. Model results are summarized in Table 9.

Next, finance image was regressed on the linear combination of the two dummy variables representing social/environmental content and financial performance content conditions, age, work experience, and the products of each dummy variable and work experience. As summarized in table 8, results were consistent with results from the model predicting CSR image in that the equation accounted for a non-significant proportion of variance in financial image ($F_{(6, 320)} = 1.71, ns$).

Table 9. Interaction effects of Work Experience and Assessment Content on Corporate Image

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step2</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IV</td>
<td></td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR Image</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social/Env Condition</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial Perf Condition</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work Experience</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work Exp*Social/Env Cond</td>
<td></td>
<td>.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work Exp*Financial Perf Cond</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Image</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social/Env Condition</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial Perf Condition</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work Experience</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work Exp*Social/Env Cond</td>
<td></td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work Exp*Financial Perf Cond</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.56*</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *p* < .05.*
Based on the results summarized in Table 9, Hypothesis 4 was not supported. The strength of the relationship between assessment content and corporate image perceptions does not vary with respect to general work experience.

*Hypothesis 5 and 6: Social Identity Consciousness Moderators*

Hypotheses 5 predicted that two dimensions of social identity consciousness, value-expression concern and social adjustment concern, would moderate the observed relationships between social/environmental content and CSR image and between financial performance content and financial image, respectively. Prior to conducting the regression analyses, bivariate correlations were inspected. The two dimensions of social identity consciousness were moderately correlated at $r = .44$, $p < .01$. Value-expression concern was significantly correlated with CSR image ($r = .15$, $p < .01$) and, to a lesser degree, with finance image ($r = .12$, $p < .05$). Social adjustment concern was not significantly correlated with either image dimension. Age was significantly correlated with both dimensions of social identity consciousness (with value-expression concern $r = -.13$, $p < .05$; with social adjustment concern $r = -.29$, $p < .01$), thus, the influence of age was accounted for in subsequent regression equations.

Beginning with CSR image as the dependent variable, CSR image was regressed on the linear combination of the two dummy variables representing social/environmental content and financial performance content conditions, age, value-expression concern, and the products of each dummy variable and value-expression concern, which represented the interaction effects of assessment content type with value-expression concern. This model accounted for approximately 5% of the variance in CSR image ($F_{(5, 320)} = 3.20$, $p < .01$). Social/environmental content ($\beta = .16$, $p < .05$) and value-expression concern ($\beta =$
.19, \( p < .01 \) each accounted for significant variance in CSR image above and beyond the other variables in the model. However, the interaction term did not account for significant variance in CSR image, indicating that the relationship between social/environmental content and CSR image does not vary with respect to individual’s concern for value-expression.

A similar model was built to test the hypothesis in regard to financial performance content, financial image, and social adjustment concern. Financial image was regressed on the linear combination of the two dummy variables representing social/environmental content and financial performance content conditions, age, social adjustment concern, and the products of each dummy variable and social adjustment concern which represented the interaction effects of assessment content type with social adjustment concern. The model accounted for approximately 4% of the variance in CSR image (\( F_{(5,321)} = 2.74, p < .05 \)) but only financial performance content had significant influence on financial image beyond the other variables in the model. Lack of a significant interaction term indicated that the relationship between financial performance content and financial image does not vary with respect to an individual’s concern for social adjustment. As demonstrated in Table 10, Hypothesis 5 was not supported.
Table 10. Interaction effects of Social Identity Consciousness and Assessment Content on Corporate Image

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>β</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>ΔFΔ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR Image</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social/Env Condition</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial Perf Condition</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Value Expression Concern</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VE*Social/Env Cond</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Image</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social/Env Condition</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial Perf Condition</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.16*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Adjustment Concern</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SA*Financial Perf Cond</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *p < .05. **p < .01.

Hypothesis 6 predicted that the two dimensions of social identity consciousness, value-expression concern and social adjustment concern, would moderate the observed relationships between the two dimensions of corporate image, CSR image and financial image, and organizational attraction, respectively. Consistent with results from tests of Hypothesis 1, bivariate correlations between CSR image and attraction ($r = .57, p < .01$) and between finance image and attraction ($r = .49, p < .01$) were observed. Neither dimension of social identity consciousness was significantly correlated with organizational attraction. As described above, age was entered into subsequent regression equations due to its significant correlation with the dimensions of social identity consciousness.

To test Hypothesis 6 relative to the relationship between CSR image and organizational attraction, organizational attraction was regressed on CSR image, age,
value-expression concern, and the product of CSR image with concern. Both variables
used to create the product term were mean-centered. This model accounted for
approximately 31% of the variance in organizational attraction ($F_{(4, 321)} = 36.65, p <
.001). As expected, there was a significant effect of CSR image on attraction ($\beta = .54, p <
.001$) above and beyond the other variables. The product term coefficient was in the
expected direction but did not account for significant variance in organizational image
beyond the other variables in the model ($\beta = .08, ns$).

A similar regression equation was used to test Hypothesis 6 relative to the
relationship between financial image and organizational attraction. Organizational
attraction was regressed on financial image, age, social adjustment concern, and the
product of mean-centered financial image with mean-centered social adjustment concern.
The model accounted for 23% of the variance in organizational attraction ($F_{(4, 322)} =
23.97, p < .001$). However, financial image was the only variable that explained a
significant amount of variance in organizational attraction above and beyond the others in
the model ($\beta = .47, p < .001$). As summarized in Table 11, neither dimension of social
identity consciousness interacted with corporate image perceptions to predict
organizational attraction. The relationship between corporate image perceptions and
organizational attraction did not vary with respect to individual’s levels of social identity
consciousness; Hypothesis 6 was not supported.
Table 11. Interaction effects of Social Identity Consciousness and Corporate Image on Organizational Attraction

(DV = Organizational Attraction) | Step 1 | Step 2 | $F$ | $R^2$
--- | --- | --- | --- | ---
Age | -.03 | -.02 |  |  
CSR Image | .55*** | .54*** | 47.69*** | .31 
Value-Expression Concern | -.02 | -.00 |  |  
VE*CSR Image |  |  | .08 |  
Age | -.01 | -.02 | 2.75 | .01 
Financial Image | .48*** | .47*** |  |  
Social adjustment Concern | -.01 | -.01 | 31.94*** | .23 
SA*Financial Image |  |  | .03 |  

Note. ***$p < .001$.

Hypothesis 7 and 8: Perceived Performance Moderation

Hypotheses 7 and 8 predicted that the relationship between corporate image perceptions and dependent variables, organizational attraction and applicant reactions, would be stronger when participants perceived that they had performed poorly on the assessment. These hypotheses were tested using a similar process as described for hypotheses 3 through 6. Bivariate correlations revealed that perceived performance significantly predicted applicant reactions ($r = .30, p < .01$) but was not significantly correlated with organizational attraction ($r = .08, ns$). For each dependent variable, regression equations were estimated with each corporate image dimension, CSR image and financial image, serving as the independent variable.

To test Hypothesis 7, the prediction that perceived performance would moderate the relationship between corporate image and organizational attraction, the first regression equation was created with organizational attraction regressed on CSR image, perceived performance, and the product of the mean-centered variables, CSR image and
perceived performance. This model accounted for approximately 31% of the variance in organizational attraction ($F_{(3, 333)} = 50.63, p < .001$). However, the interaction between CSR image and perceived performance did not have a significant effect ($\beta = .02, ns$) on organizational attraction beyond the direct effects of the product components. In the second model, organizational attraction was regressed on financial image, perceived performance, and the product of these two mean-centered variables. The model accounted for approximately 24% of the variance in organizational attraction ($F_{(3, 333)} = 34.24, p < .001$) but the product term did not significantly predict organizational attraction beyond the direct effects ($\beta = .01, ns$).

As summarized in Table 12, results did not support the moderation effect of perceived performance on the relationship between corporate image and organizational attraction. Hypothesis 7 was not supported by the results.
Table 12. Interaction effects of Perceived Performance and Corporate Image on Organizational Attraction and Applicant Reactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>( \beta )</td>
<td>( \hat{\beta} )</td>
<td>( F )</td>
<td>( R^2 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Attraction</td>
<td>CSR Image</td>
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<td>.56***</td>
<td>76.01***</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived Performance</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perf*CSR Image</td>
<td></td>
<td>.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial Image</td>
<td>.48***</td>
<td>.48***</td>
<td>51.48***</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived Performance</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perf*Financial Image</td>
<td></td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant Reactions</td>
<td>CSR Image</td>
<td>.31***</td>
<td>.31***</td>
<td>37.75***</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived Performance</td>
<td>.29***</td>
<td>.30***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perf*CSR Image</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial Image</td>
<td>.33***</td>
<td>.32***</td>
<td>40.85***</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived Performance</td>
<td>.31***</td>
<td>.33***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perf*Financial Image</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.10*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *\( p < .05 \). ***\( p < .001 \).

Hypothesis 8, which predicted that perceived performance would moderate the relationship between corporate image and applicant reactions, required two regression models. First, the applicant reactions variable was regressed on CSR image, perceived performance, and the product of the mean-centered variables. This model accounted for approximately 18% of the variance in applicant reactions (\( F_{(3, 333)} = 25.76, p < .001 \)). While both direct effects predicted applicant reactions beyond the other variables in the model, the interaction did not account for significant variance in applicant reactions beyond the direct effects. Therefore, there is no evidence to support the hypothesized
interaction effect. In the second model, the applicant reactions variable was regressed on financial image, perceived performance, and the product of the mean-centered variables. This model accounted for approximately 21% of the variance in applicant reactions ($F_{(3, 333)} = 28.77, p < .001$) (see Table 12). Each direct effect and the product term accounted for significant variance in applicant reactions above and beyond the other variables. The interaction effect ($\beta = -.10$) reached the significance level of $p = .05$. However, the direction of the moderation was in the opposite direction than expected. The pattern of results suggested no relationship among financial image and applicant reactions at high levels of perceived performance, and a slightly negative relationship among financial image and applicant reactions at low values of perceived performance. Future research is needed to clarify this relationship. Regardless of whether the results represented a real moderation effect, Hypothesis 8 was not supported by the data.

**Structural Analyses**

Based on the results of hypotheses tests, path analysis using the structural equation modeling software, MPlus v. 6.12 (Muthen & Muthen, 1998-2012) was employed to assess the model as a whole. Although a composite score was used to represent applicant reactions in the regression analyses, a latent construct was created to represent applicant reactions in the structural analysis. A CFA was conducted to explore and confirm that the 4 subscales had acceptable factor loadings to serve as indicators of the latent construct. Figure 8 shows the factor loadings for each indicator of applicant reactions and Table 13 presents the model fit statistics.
Examining the relationships in a structural model provides additional information about the hypothesized mediational process and the relative influence of each type of corporate image perception on the dependent variables. As suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999), the following cutoff values were used to evaluate model fit: .09 or below for the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). Values approaching .95 for the comparative fit index (CFI), and .06 or below for the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA).
Table 13. Model Fit Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>$df$</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>SRMR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applicant Reactions CFA</td>
<td>10.82</td>
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<td>.11</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<td>Structural Model I</td>
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<td>.19</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structural Model II</td>
<td>35.03</td>
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<td>.04</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Model I</td>
<td>46.10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Model II</td>
<td>34.16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A structural model was estimated with paths from each type of assessment cue to both CSR image and financial image and with paths from each corporate image variable to applicant reactions and organizational attraction. Figure 9 presents the initial structural model with standardized path estimates. As shown in Table 13, this model (Structural Model 1) was not a good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 301$, $df = 22$, $p < .01$, $RMSEA = .19$, $CFI = 0.74$, $SRMR = .13$). The modification index for allowing CSR image and financial image to correlate was substantial (185.3). This index, coupled with the significant bivariate correlation among these variables prompted the addition of this path estimate in the subsequent model.

Figure 9. Structural Model I. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$. Values are standardized coefficients.
A modified structural model was estimated wherein the non-significant paths from social/environmental content to financial image and financial performance content to CSR image were eliminated and the two corporate image variables were free to correlate. Figure 10 presents the subsequent structural model with standardized path estimates. As shown in Table 13, this modified model (Structural Model II) had adequate fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 35, df = 23, p < .01$, $RMSEA = .04$, $CFI = 0.99$, $SRMR = .04$).

Inspection of the path coefficients in Figure 14 indicated that CSR image is more strongly related to organizational attraction than applicant reactions, and the reverse is true for financial image.

Examination of the indirect effects showed significant indirect paths from social/environmental content to organizational attraction through CSR Image (.05, $p < .05$) but a significant indirect effect was not observed for the path from financial performance content to organizational attraction through financial image (.02, $ns$). These results are consistent with the pattern found in previously described analyses where the relationship between financial image and attraction was generally smaller in magnitude.
than the relationship between CSR image and attraction. Standardized path estimates for
the indirect effects are presented in Table 14.

Table 14. Mediation by Corporate Image Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>( \beta )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structural Model II</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/Env Content ( \rightarrow ) CSR Image ( \rightarrow ) Organizational Attraction</td>
<td>.04*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/Env Content ( \rightarrow ) CSR Image ( \rightarrow ) Applicant Reactions</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Perf Content ( \rightarrow ) Financial Image ( \rightarrow ) Organizational Attraction</td>
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<td>Applicant Reactions ( \rightarrow ) Financial Image ( \rightarrow ) Organizational Attraction</td>
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*Note. \( *p < .05 \)

Corporate image did not mediate the relationship between either type of
assessment content and applicant reactions, although each estimate of the indirect effects
was trending in the expected direction. The path from financial performance content to
applicant reactions through financial image (0.02, \( p = .06 \)) was approximately equal in
magnitude to the indirect path from social/environmental content to applicant reactions
through CSR image (0.02, \( p = .08 \)). The path analyses did not indicate a stronger
relationship between financial image and reactions compared with CSR image and
reactions as was observed in the regression analyses conducted to test hypotheses 2 and
8. Alternative Structural Models

As described in Chapter 2, empirical research on the relationship between
perceptions of the organization and applicant reactions was scarce. Although results
supported the direction of the relationship between corporate image and applicant reactions as hypothesized for the present study, results concerning applicant reactions as a dependent variable were generally weaker compared to organizational attraction as a dependent variable. Given these results, it was prudent to explore the possibility that applicant reactions were part of the set of factors that influenced corporate image perceptions, which then in turn affect organizational attraction. Applicant reactions and organizational attraction are each considered outcomes of the selection process and previous research has found that they were correlated (Bauer et al., 1998; Macan et al., 1994). To examine the potential influence of applicant reactions on corporate image perceptions and organizational attraction, an alternative structural model was estimated wherein applicant reactions was an exogenous variable with paths to each CSR and financial image. Figure 11 presents the alternative structural model with standardized path coefficients. As shown in Table 13, this alternative model (Alternative Model I) had adequate fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 46$, $df = 24$, $p < .01$, $RMSEA = .05$, $CFI = 0.98$, $SRMR = .05$).

Inspection of the path coefficients presented in Figure 11 showed that applicant reactions had stronger effects on corporate image compared to the influence of the assessment content variables on the image dimensions. The pattern of significance for indirect effects of assessment content to organizational attraction through the two corporate image dimensions remained the same, with a significant effect (.05, $p < .05$) through CSR image but not through financial image (.02, $ns$). Despite having a similar influence on the two corporate image variables, the indirect paths from applicant reactions to organizational attraction were only significant through CSR image (.14, $p$
Table 14 presents the standardized estimates of the indirect effects for the alternative models.

Figure 11. Alternative Structural Model I. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001. Values are standardized coefficients.

Figure 12 presents a second version of the alternative structural model in which a path was added to the alternative model to assess whether applicant reactions had a direct effect on organizational attraction. As shown in Table 13, this alternative model (Alternative Model II) had adequate fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 34, df = 23, p < .10, RMSEA = .04, CFI = .99, SRMR = .04$). The addition of the direct path from applicant reactions to organizational attraction weakened the indirect effects (see Table 14) and the path from financial image to organizational attraction fell short of the critical significance value of p < .05.
Since the two alternative models are nested, a test of significance for the change in $\chi^2$ was conducted. The $\chi^2$diff of 11.94 ($\text{df}_{\text{diff}} = 1$), was significant ($p < .01$). This indicated that the alternative model with the direct path from applicant reactions to organizational attraction did fit significantly better than the previous model which only estimated indirect effects for the influence of applicant reactions on organizational attraction. Although the first alternative model was more parsimonious, the second alternative model was accepted as the best fit to the data. Theoretical and practical implications of the structural and alternative models are described in Chapter V.

Additional Exploratory Analyses

In addition to the alternative structural model described above, bivariate correlations and hierarchical regression were used to examine relationships which were not explicitly hypothesized. The exploratory analyses described below were conducted with two goals in mind: to understand the associations of non-manipulated image dimensions (employer image and market image) with the primary study variables, and to describe other participant characteristics and perceptions that contributed to the formation
and consequences of impressions about the organization. Table 15 presents bivariate correlations among exploratory variables including all 4 corporate image dimensions, and additional variables measuring participant work experience, perceptions of the job market, and perceptions regarding the hiring organization.
### Table 15. Correlations among Variables used in Exploratory Analyses

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*Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001*
Table 15 (Continued). Correlations among Variables used in Exploratory Analyses

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Mean: 3.66  3.71  3.62  3.54  2.60  0.69  0.55  2.45  4.01  4.46
SD: 0.62  0.59  0.61  0.59  0.85  0.46  0.50  1.00  1.18  1.27

*Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001*
Table 15 (Continued). Correlations among Variables used in Exploratory Analyses

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Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001
Table 15 (Continued). Correlations among Variables used in Exploratory Analyses

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Mean: 4.41  2.98  3.97  0.52  1.97  1.23  2.28  1.29  1.21  4.16  3.38
SD: 1.40  1.47  0.96  0.50  1.27  0.66  1.41  0.74  0.59  0.56  0.73

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001
Table 15 (Continued). Correlations among Variables used in Exploratory Analyses

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Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001
Exploratory analyses began with an investigation of the relationships among the image dimensions that had not been manipulated in the primary study and the other variables included in the hypothesized model. Employer image and market image were each significantly correlated with overall familiarity with the company ($r = .12, p < .05$ and $r = .24, p < .01$, respectively). Regarding specific aspects of the company, familiarity with the product and service offerings was the only aspect with which over 30% of participants were at least somewhat familiar. Those who were familiar with the company’s products and service offerings were more likely to have positive employer and market images of the company. This is consistent with results from previous research.
that suggested younger applicants place more emphasis on consumer-based information about a company when forming impressions of the company (Thornbury & Brooks, 2010). Over 90% of participants indicated being somewhat unfamiliar or not at all familiar with the company as an employer, with the company’s financial performance, and with the company’s sponsorship of social and environmental programs. Lack of variance on these indicators of familiarity rendered the correlation coefficients associated with them difficult to interpret.

Employer image and market image both had positive correlations with attraction to the organization \( (r = .60, p < .01 \) and \( r = .51, p < .01, \) respectively). Hierarchical regression analysis demonstrated that accounting for the influence of employer image and market image in the prediction of organizational attraction explained an additional 6% of variance in the model \( (\Delta F_{(2, 332)} = 14.62, p < .001) \) compared to when only CSR and financial image were considered. Employer image predicted organizational attraction above and beyond the influence of the other image dimensions \( (\beta = .43, p < .001) \). See Table 16 for a summary of the regression models.

Table 16. Hierarchical Regression Analyses of Corporate Image Dimensions on Organizational Attraction

<table>
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<th>IV</th>
<th>( \beta )</th>
<th>( \Delta F )</th>
<th>( \Delta R^2 )</th>
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<td>CSR Image</td>
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<td>78.99***</td>
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<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
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<td>Market Image</td>
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<td>Employer Image</td>
<td>.43***</td>
<td>14.62***</td>
<td>.06</td>
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*Note.* \( *p < .05. \ ***p < .001. \)
Employer and market image were also associated with applicant’s reactions to the assessment, although not to a considerably different degree than were CSR image or financial image. Assuming the directionality implied by the alternative structural models, the indirect effects of applicant reactions on organizational attraction through the corporate image dimensions were estimated. Tests of the indirect effects suggested that, while applicant reactions predicts all 4 types of corporate image perceptions, the indirect path to organizational attraction was only significant through employer image (.1147, 95% CI = .06 to .19) (see Table 17). This suggests that positive reactions to an employment assessment have a general positive effect on perceptions regarding the hiring organization, but that applicant reactions are particularly influential on how the organization is viewed as an employer, which has a uniquely potent effect on an applicant’s inclination to pursue employment at the organization.

Table 17. Indirect Effect of Applicant Reactions on Organizational Attraction through Corporate Image

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.195</td>
<td>0.055</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market Image</td>
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<td>0.064</td>
<td>-0.036</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>0.162</td>
<td>0.227</td>
<td>0.103</td>
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</table>

It is prudent to note that applicant reactions are not considered to be solely influenced by aspects of the selection procedure. As explicated in models of applicant reactions (Hausknecht et al., 2004), individual difference and experience variables can also impact applicant reactions. In the case of the current study, participants who have had more experience with employment tests in general, and who have taken a
computerized employment test were more likely to perceive that the assessment allowed them the opportunity to perform \( r = .12, p < .05 \) and \( r = .13, p < .05 \), respectively) and that the process was fair \( r = .13, p < .05 \) and \( r = .17, p < .01 \), respectively.)

Next, associations between the image dimensions and participant characteristics and perceptions of the assessment experience and organization were explored. Specifically, perceptions of employment alternatives, perceptions of compensation and job security, actual score on the assessment, and perceived fit with the organization were examined in relation to corporate image and other focal study variables.

Only one dimension of perceived alternative employment opportunity, desirability of movement, was significantly associated with perceptions of the company or selection process. Specifically, those who reported that a job change would be desirable were more likely to perceive that the hiring organization offered better benefits \( r = .19, p < .01 \), compensation \( r = .17, p < .01 \), job security \( r = .15, p < .01 \), were in a more financially sound position \( r = .11, p < .05 \) and treated their employees better \( r = .13, p < .05 \) compared to other companies. Additionally, those who reported high desirability of movement were more likely to perceive that they fit with the organization and were more likely to be attracted to the company \( r = .15, p < .01 \). This is in line with the notion that applicant attraction is determined by factors both within and outside the confines of selection procedures.

Considering the measurement context, it was not surprising that an individual’s image of the organization relative to how its employees are treated exerted a strong influence on organizational attraction. Consistent with these results, the analyses demonstrated that employer image was associated with perceptions that the company
offers an attractive benefits package ($r = .34, p < .01$), competitive compensation ($r = .38, p < .01$), and opportunities for advancement ($r = .34, p < .01$). Although, these relationships are not unique to employment image as each of these components were also significantly correlated with the other corporate image dimensions.

Overall, participant score on the assessment was not as useful a measure as was anticipated at the onset of this study. In practice, the overall assessment score is normed on a 1 through 10 scale with approximately 10% of participants scoring at each level. As shown in Figure 13, below, participants in the current study tended to score quite low on the assessment. Given the entry level nature of the assessment, it is unlikely that the assessment was too difficult for participants. Instead, lack of motivation to perform well and take the assessment seriously was the likely reason for the low scores. Nevertheless, assessment score was moderately correlated with participant perception of their own performance ($r = .38, p < .01$), perceived fit ($r = .17, p < .05$) and attraction to the organization ($r = .13, p < .05$).
Finally, corporate image and other variables were examined as to their association with perceived fit with the organization. Past research has considered perceived fit an antecedent to organizational attraction (Cable & Judge, 1997; Carpenter et al., 2012; Dineen et al., 2002). Based on previous research, it was expected that perceived fit would precede organizational attraction in the impression formation model such that one’s fit with the company is influenced by corporate image perceptions. Indeed, all 4 image dimensions were significantly correlated with perceived fit ($r = .41-.52$, $p < .01$), and fit was significantly correlated with overall organizational attraction ($r = .65$, $p < .01$).

Tests of the indirect effect of each corporate image dimension on overall organizational attraction through perceived fit revealed significant indirect effects in each instance (see Table 18).
Table 18. Indirect Effects of Corporate Image on Organizational Attraction through Perceived Fit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV</th>
<th>Point Estimate</th>
<th>BC 95% CI</th>
<th>Model R^2</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Upper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR Image</td>
<td>0.257</td>
<td>0.196</td>
<td>0.332</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Image</td>
<td>0.227</td>
<td>0.162</td>
<td>0.303</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer Image</td>
<td>0.231</td>
<td>0.176</td>
<td>0.301</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market Image</td>
<td>0.263</td>
<td>0.196</td>
<td>0.342</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ***p < .001.

Given that perceived fit appeared to be a more proximal indicator of overall attraction, the moderation described in Hypothesis 6 was re-examined with perceived fit serving as the dependent variable. These analyses are summarized in Table 19. In the model in which perceived fit was regressed on CSR image, value-expression concern, and the centered product of the two variables, a significant interaction was not observed. In the parallel model with financial image, social adjustment concern, and their product as predictors, the interaction term was significant (β = .14, p < .01) above and beyond the influence of financial image (β = .39, p < .001). Figure 14 presents a plot of the interaction. As demonstrated, there is a slightly more positive relationship between financial image and perceived fit when the applicant has a high concern for social adjustment.
Table 19. Interaction effects of Social Identity Consciousness and Corporate Image on Perceived Fit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV</th>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(\beta)</td>
<td>(\beta)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR Image</td>
<td>.52***</td>
<td>.51***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value-Expression Concern</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VE*CSR Image</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Image</td>
<td>.41***</td>
<td>.39***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social adjustment Concern</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA*Financial Image</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. **\(p < .01\). ***\(p < .001\).

Figure 14. Simple Slope Plot of the Interaction between Financial Image and Social adjustment Concern in the Prediction of Perceived Fit.

Overall, results supported hypotheses pertaining to the main effects of the impression formation model wherein attributes of the assessment experience influence corporate image perceptions which, in turn affected organizational attraction (see Table 20). However, the lack of significant interaction effects led to the rejection of several
hypotheses regarding the influence of previous experience and individual differences on the impression formation process. Instead of applicant reactions functioning as a dependent variable as initially proposed, findings suggested that an alternative model wherein aspects of the assessment experience including assessment content and applicant reactions to the selection procedure influenced organizational attraction through corporate image perceptions. Supplementary and exploratory analyses provided further evidence in support of the relationship between corporate image perceptions and organizational attraction, and suggested a more complex model involving perceptions of fit as a proximal antecedent to attraction. Theoretical and practical implications of the results described in this chapter are detailed in Chapter V.

Table 20. Summary of Hypothesis Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Analyses</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 1</td>
<td>Multiple Regression, 95% Bias Corrected Bootstrap Confidence Interval of Indirect Effects</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 2</td>
<td>Multiple Regression, 95% Bias Corrected Bootstrap Confidence Interval of Indirect Effects</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 3</td>
<td>Multiple Regression</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 4</td>
<td>Multiple Regression</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 5</td>
<td>Multiple Regression</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 6</td>
<td>Multiple Regression</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 7</td>
<td>Multiple Regression</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 8</td>
<td>Multiple Regression</td>
<td>Not Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

As organizations maintain and increase efforts toward managing impressions across stakeholder groups, it will be increasingly important to understand the process through which individuals form impressions of organizations, including the sources of information that impact perceptions of various organizational attributes. A considerable amount of research from the last two decades has been devoted to understanding the antecedents and consequences of job seeker and applicant perceptions of organizations as they pertain to organizational attraction and job pursuit (Chapman et al., 2005; Uggerslev, Fassina, Kraichy, 2012). Although recruitment process characteristics, including reactions to selection procedures and perceptions of selection assessment characteristics, comprised a major category of organizational attraction predictors in a recent meta-analysis (Uggerslev et al., 2012), most of the studies involved measurements of procedural or interactional justice perceptions or characteristics and content conveyed via recruitment websites. Few studies have acknowledged the possibility that the informational content contained in the assessment itself may contribute to image perceptions and organizational attraction (c.f. Sinar et al., 2003; Tsai & Yang, 2010).
To expand upon the recruitment and attraction literature, the current study focused specifically on the context of assessment for selection and tested an impression formation model wherein organizational attraction was influenced by content of the selection assessment and individuals’ images regarding specific organizational characteristics. Whereas previous research manipulated and measured the influence of organizational website content on attraction (e.g. Cober et al 2004), the current study was an investigation into whether the conclusions from that research stream are relevant for online selection assessments. The current study considered impression formation during selection to be a continuation of the impression forming that may have commenced outside of the context of the current assessment experience. Thus, individual’s familiarity with the hiring organization was assessed prior to the manipulated content exposure. This measure represented an effort toward tying the recruitment and selection experiences together and considering broad sources of influence on individual’s perceptions about organizations. With the inclusion of the Highhouse et al. (2009) measure of corporate image perceptions, the current study contributed to the somewhat disjointed organizational image and corporate reputation literatures by expanding our understanding of perceptual influences on organizational attraction. Measuring corporate image perceptions also allowed for further exploration of the role played by specific images during the selection process, including perceptions of corporate social responsibility, a topic of recent interest in popular and scholarly press (Aquinis & Glavas, 2012). Individual differences in social identity consciousness and work history were also explored as to their influence on the impression formation process.
**Effects of Assessment Content on Attraction.** Overall, the primary mediational chains described in the apriori model were supported. Data collected from 337 participants indicated that exposure to content specific to particular organizational attributes during an assessment influenced organizational attraction through image perceptions. More specifically, as a result of viewing content related to the social and environmental practices of the hiring organization, individuals had a more positive image of the company as a socially responsible corporate citizen. When someone had a positive corporate image they were more likely to report attraction to the organization, including intent to pursue employment. When exposed to content related to the financial performance of the hiring organization, individuals had a more positive image of the company’s financial performance. Those with a more positive financial image of the company were more likely to report being attracted to the organization.

The observed indirect effects in which the informational content about the social/environmental efforts of the organization and about the company’s financial performance affected organizational attraction through each respective corporate image perceptions were consistent with findings from research on web-based recruitment (Braddy et al., 2009; Cober et al., 2004). A certainty derived from recruitment research is that job seekers make inferences about organizations based on information from diverse sources (Barber, 1998; Rynes, 1991). The results from the current study provided empirical evidence to support the logical notion that perceptions about organizational attributes can be influenced by experiences that occur after the recruitment stage and during the selection process. Additionally, the present study demonstrated that organizational attraction can be influenced by aspects of the selection assessment itself.
Role of Applicant Reactions. Due to a lack of empirical evidence linking applicant reactions to corporate image perceptions, apriori hypotheses regarding applicant reactions cautiously assumed that individuals’ reactions to the assessment experience, including procedural justice perceptions, perceived face and predictive validity of the assessment, and perceived opportunity to perform, would be dependent variables in the impression formation process. That is, corporate image perceptions were hypothesized as antecedents to applicant reactions. Although results largely supported this assertion, exploratory analyses suggested that applicant reactions could also be considered a predictor of corporate image perceptions and applicant attraction.

This explanation is consistent with the premise of the current study if applicant reactions are considered indications of the selection experience. That is, aspects of the selection assessment, including informational content presented within the assessment and applicant’s reactions to the selection procedure, influenced organizational attraction through corporate image perceptions (See Figure 15). This model is consistent with the propositions presented by Hausknecht et al. (2009) in which applicant perceptions of procedural characteristics and procedural justice are supposed to predict attitudes and behaviors toward the organization, including organizational attraction.

Figure 15. Revised Conceptual Model of Impression Formation during Selection.
It is worth noting that applicant reactions exerted a stronger influence on CSR and financial image perceptions than exposure to the assessment content pertaining to each type of corporate image. There was also a significant indirect effect of applicant reactions on organizational attraction through CSR image. While these results do not invalidate the relationship observed between assessment content and corporate image perceptions, they do raise questions about the potency of the influence of assessment content on corporate image perceptions compared to other antecedents. Although encountering certain information about a company during a selection assessment may influence an individual’s corporate image of the hiring organization, results from the current study suggested that the more global assessment experience may be of greater consequence for informing applicant’s corporate images. Future research is needed to determine the relative influence of characteristics of the selection assessment compared with existing corporate image perceptions in order to fully understand how, and to what degree, corporate image perceptions are impacted by application and selection experiences.

**Potential Conditional Effects.** In the current study, familiarity with the organization was significantly correlated with CSR image and organizational attraction. Although a moderating influence was not observed, this finding is consistent with findings from several studies in the recruitment and attraction literatures which have shown relationships between familiarity and perceptions about organizations (Collins, 2007; Turban & Greening, 1997; Walker et al., 2011). It was expected that the indirect paths described above would vary according to individual differences in familiarity with the hiring organization, previous work experience, and individual differences in social identity consciousness. None of the hypothesized relationships or indirect effects were
conditional on any of these individual difference variables. However, small sample sizes for each content condition and lack of variance on the individual difference variables warrants caution in interpreting these results. An investigation into the effects of familiarity on the paths predicting corporate image with another sample, or another organization may yield results that are more consistent with existing theory and literature.

A recent study conducted by Gully, Phillips, Castellano, Kyongji, and Kim (2013) found that the relationship between informational content about organizations’ social and environmental efforts presented via recruitment messaging and perceived fit was moderated by individual differences in desire to have an impact through work. This individual difference variable is qualitatively similar to social identity consciousness in that it is related to an individual’s identity and purpose concerning their association with organizational entities. Although individual differences did not moderate the relationship among assessment content and corporate image perceptions in the current study, other research suggests that there are further opportunities to investigate these types of relationships.

**Corporate Image Dimensions.** A secondary goal of the current study was to describe the roles of the 4 corporate image dimensions, market image, employer image, CSR image, and financial image. The current study was a first step in understanding the role of image perceptions in a selection context and ultimately, results across analyses indicated that the 4 corporate image dimensions were important pieces of the impression formation and attraction process.

The former two dimensions, market and employer image were not the focus of primary analyses but results showed that they were important components in the
impression formation process. Interestingly, average familiarity with the company’s products and services was higher than familiarity with any other specific company attribute, including general familiarity with the company. Familiarity with products and services was accordingly significantly correlated with market image. These results are consistent with propositions described by Thornbury and Brooks (2010) which posited that younger members of the job market may rely heavily on consumer-based sources of information about an organization. Market image was a significant predictor of perceived fit and attraction to the company, and had a significant indirect effect on organizational attraction through perceived fit.

Findings suggested that employer image was the strongest predictor of organizational attraction, a logical result considering that the selection assessment experience was saturated with information about actual employment for the company. In the alternative model, where assessment content and applicant reactions influence organizational attraction through corporate image perceptions, the indirect path through employer image had the only non-zero effect.

**Practical Implications**

Organizational psychology research is lagging behind selection and assessment practitioners and thought leaders in recruitment and selection practice in regard to describing the role that corporate image perceptions can play during and after the application process. While organizations are becoming increasingly brand conscious, emphasizing culture fit, and being cognizant of their image as social actors, academic literature has yet to explain best practices regarding these efforts in selection contexts.
The current study suggests some actionable avenues and allows extraction of practical advice for organizations and assessment developers.

First, results suggest an extension of the advice elucidated by Cober, Brown, Blimental, Doverspike, and Levy (2000) that organizations should use recruitment sources to highlight unique aspects of the company, which help job seekers differentiate employers and that messaging should be targeted to desired audiences, to the selection context. This study demonstrated that content in selection assessments have an impact on corporate images, perceived fit, and organizational attraction. Thus, the same practices that guide content considerations for recruitment sources should inform the development of selection assessment content.

Many brand conscious organizations are implementing selection assessments that have branded components meant to convey realistic previews of both the job and company culture (Vilardo, 2010; Winkler, 2006; Zappe, 2009). The results of the current study suggest that this is a worthwhile investment, especially for organizations whose target applicant pool may have limited opportunity to form impressions of organizations through other sources.

The selection assessment experience influences more than employer image, fit perceptions, and organizational attraction. Characteristics of an applicant’s selection experience can influence corporate images related to many organizational attributes, including perceptions of the company’s products and services, financial performance, and corporate social responsibility initiatives. These corporate images may in turn have consequences for applicant behavior after and outside of the employment context, such as consumer and investor behavior. Organizations should make efforts to monitor
perceptions of applicants who are hired and those who are not hired in order to ensure that the images that the organization portrays through recruitment and selection practices are reflective of the organization’s actual and intended brand message.

Limitations

As described above, the current study contributes to recruitment and selection literature and findings have practical implications for assessment development and selection procedure design. Despite the strengths of the current study, such as the use of an actual selection assessment employed by a real company, and sampling from a relevant population, the current study was limited in several respects. The sample lacked demographic diversity, which limits the generalizability of the results. Participants were mostly Caucasian, female, and young. Replication of these findings with a more diverse sample including more men, ethnic minorities, and older adults is necessary. Testing these hypotheses with a sample of more experienced job seekers is particularly important for understanding the potential roles of familiarity and work experience in relation to corporate image perceptions.

Sample size also limited the types of analyses that could be conducted with the data. A larger data set with increased variation on key measures would allow for modeling more latent constructs in the structural analyses and provide more power for detecting moderating effects (Bobko, 1995) and interpreting path coefficients in structural models. Insights from recent meta-analytic summaries of organizational attraction literature may also shed light on some of the weaker relationships observed in the data from the current study. Specifically, researchers found that organizational characteristics have a stronger influence on organizational attraction later in the
recruitment/selection process such as when applicants are maintaining applicant status opposed to the initial application stage of the process (Uggerslev, Fassina, Kraichy, 2013). Since the simulated candidate experience for the current study did not likely mimic the investment of a candidate in the “later” stages of the selection process, it is likely that corporate image perceptions would exert an even stronger influence on attitudes and behaviors for actual candidates who are further along in the selection process than were observed herein.

The student sample is a third limitation of the current study, along with the assumption that participants were motivated to follow instructions and act as if they were applying for a real job. The substantial rate of incompletion coupled with low overall scores on the selection assessment suggested that this sample of participants may not have been properly motivated to put forth an honest effort. Evidence supporting the hypothesized model may be more robust if participants were provided a stronger incentive for participating and exerting an authentic effort. An obvious worthwhile extension would be to obtain a field sample so the applicant experience need not be simulated. In fact, meta-analytic research has demonstrated that the relationships among applicant reactions to selection procedures and attitudinal and behavioral outcomes tend to be stronger with field samples. Thus, replicating this study with a sample of actual applicants may provide more robust empirical data for estimating and examining relationships among variables.

Another design element that limited the conclusions that could be drawn from the current study was the cross-sectional nature of the data collection. Although the analyses supported the hypothesized indirect paths, corporate image, attraction, and applicant
reactions were all measured at the same time point. Allowing more time to elapse between measures, and measuring perceptions across multiple time points would be valuable for further explaining the impression formation process.

Future Research

Extending beyond the replication and expansion opportunities described above, results from the current study set the stage for several interesting future research directions. Since the current study was one of the first to incorporate the individual level measurement of 4 different corporate images, future research is necessary to describe the longevity and stability of perceptions and the relationship among corporate image perceptions relative to various antecedents and outcomes. A longitudinal study in which corporate image perceptions are measured at time points preceding, during, and following a selection assessment will provide further information about the degree to which corporate image perceptions change as a result of encountering a branded selection assessment.

Upon establishing the stability of the corporate image construct, another inquiry may involve measuring the extent to which several different types of assessment content and/or informational cues about organizational attributes influence corporate image perceptions. In concluding their review of the literature on corporate social responsibility, Aguinis and Glavas (2012) pointed out that we know little about how the content and messaging of recruitment sources can foster CSR engagement. While the present study contributed empirical evidence regarding the predictors and outcomes associated with corporate image of CSR practices, further research is necessary to understand how CSR
image perceptions and their influence on organizational attraction may translate to
employee behavioral engagement in CSR practices.

Aguinis and Glavas (2012) also pointed out that there is a knowledge gap in the
literature regarding the micro-foundations or individual level associations of CSR.
Among the unanswered questions is whether there are differences in CSR related values
and attitudes based on age. The authors posed the question of whether younger
generations are interested in CSR because of firm reputation. The pattern of results
observed from the current study may provide information pertinent to this inquiry. Across
analyses, CSR image tended to relate to organizational attraction at a stronger magnitude
than financial image. Future research is necessary to determine if the strong and
consistent relationship between CSR image and organizational attraction was due to the
relatively young sample. An additional interesting approach to understanding how
corporate image perceptions contribute to perceived fit and organizational attraction may
involve studies designed to compare the relative effects of different corporate image
perceptions on fit and attraction. Such studies are needed in order to make more
definitive conclusions regarding whether CSR image has a stronger influence on
organizational attraction compared to financial image and whether such associations are
dependent upon age or other individual difference variables. Extending this line of
inquiry further, researchers could take a profile approach to determine whether a
particular combination of corporate image perceptions is particularly predictive of
perceived fit and attraction for various organizations.

Highhouse and colleagues described corporate image as a component in the
process of general organizational impression formation and reputation judgments (Diab
& Highhouse, 2012; Highhouse et al., 2009). Future research may include measures of general impressions of organizations, expanding the model described by the current study to replicate and expand upon the findings from Diab and Highhouse.

In addition to examining the variables from the current study in the context of an expanded impression formation model, future research may explore the role of fit in the attraction model. Results from exploratory analyses conducted with the data from the current study were consistent with other research findings that perceived person-organization fit perceptions were a mechanism through which applicant attraction occurred (Cable & Judge, 1997; Carpenter et al., 2012; Dineen et al., 2002). Replication of the indirect effects of corporate image perceptions on attraction through perceived fit and investigations into moderating influences would be valuable for understanding the nature of impression formation and attraction early in the recruitment and selection process. Indeed, findings from a recent investigation by Gully et al. (2013) supported a moderated mediation model in which information about organization’s social and environmental responsibility values, presented in a recruitment context, influenced perceived fit and attraction to varying degrees depending on individual differences in desire to make an impact through work. Given the similarities between the findings from Gully et al. and those from the current study, research aimed at integrating the models from these two studies should yield interesting and informative results. Such a model may explore how informational content regarding various organizational attributes or values, presented in a recruitment and/or selection context differentially impact organizational image, perceived fit, and organizational attraction depending on the
individual difference variables included in the Gully et al. study and social identity consciousness measures.

A related extension may include refined measurement of the social identity consciousness construct, as the current measure has not yet been used in many published studies. Alternatively, additional constructs related to social identity consciousness and identity theory in general, such as the individual difference variables included in the study by Gully et al. (2013), may explain additional variance in the impression formation model.

Assuming that the results from the current study regarding the ability to influence corporate image perceptions by presenting information about organizational attributes during an branded selection assessment hold up to further empirical tests, the future research that will likely be of most use for practitioners and organizations employing branded selection assessments will involve demonstrating the consequential, behavioral effects of corporate image perceptions. Organizations and assessment developers will be interested in quantifying the impact that engendering positive corporate images has on outcomes such as job offer acceptance, consumer behavior, and social (including virtual) information sharing. Testing the hypotheses from the current study was an initial step toward this goal. Replicating the results in a field sample is a next step which can open the door for numerous studies that incorporate the impression formation model supported by the current study with additional behavioral follow-up measures.

Conclusion

The current study contributed to organizational research expanding upon organizational attraction and impression formation research to examine the process of
impression formation in a selection context. By employing an assessment that is used in practice by a real organization, and through an experimental manipulation of the assessment content, this study demonstrated that the assessment serves as a source of information that applicants use to make inferences about particular organizational attributes. Results indicated that assessment content pertaining to the company’s social and environmental practices influenced CSR image and assessment content pertaining to the company’s financial performance influenced financial image. Typical selection assessments are not characterized by organizational efforts to influence stakeholder perceptions about these types of attributes. Such efforts are usually reserved for recruitment media, public relations campaigns, and investor communications. However, findings from the current study emphasize the importance of applicants’ perceptions of these organizational attributes in the selection context because positive CSR and financial image perceptions were associated with organizational attraction, including intent to pursue employment. Although the present study did not include content manipulations aimed at affecting market and employer image, applicants’ images of the company’s product and services as well as their image of the company as an employer also emerged as important indicators of organizational attraction.

Ultimately, the data collected for the present study supported a model of impression formation and attraction in which characteristics of the selection assessment, including assessment content and reactions to the assessment and procedure, influence organizational attraction, mediated by corporate image perceptions. Although support was not found for the moderation of this mediation model by any individual differences in familiarity with the company, previous work experience, or social identity.
consciousness, the model allows for several future research extensions involving individual difference constructs.

Results from the present study suggest that employers should continue efforts toward providing a fair and pleasant application experience as well as consider the type of information presented to candidates during selection assessments. The assessment experience can be an opportunity for individuals to develop and refine images of the company that may impact their attitudes and behavior toward the company, including continuation in the application process, and involvement with the company outside of the employment context. These results may be especially pertinent to large, brand-conscious organizations whose applicants may also be stakeholders in other respects, such as customers or investors.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

MEASURES

Focal Study Measures Completed Immediately Prior to Virtual Job Tryout

Demographics

Gender
Male
Female
Prefer not to answer

How would you describe your ethnic background?
Caucasian
African American
Asian/Pacific Islander
Hispanic
Native American
Two or more races
Other

Age (open ended)

What was your approximate GPA last semester?
1.0-1.5
1.6-2.0
2.1-2.5
2.6-3.0
3.0-3.5
3.5-4.0
4.0+

In which of the following areas of study are you most likely to receive your degree?
The Humanities (English, History, Philosophy)
The Arts (Theatre, Dance, Music, Visual)
The Sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics)
Applied Sciences (Engineering, Polymer Science)
Social Sciences (Psychology, Political Science, Sociology)
Business (Marketing, Management)
Health/Medicine (Nursing, Pre-med)
Other

What is your current status?
Freshman
Sophomore
Junior
Senior
Other

Work Experience

I expect to get a job: (If you’re currently employed, indicate when you expect to get your next job)
In the next 4 months
In the next 4-8 months
In the next 8-12 months
In the next 12-18 months
In the next 18+ months

Are you currently employed?
No, just a student
Yes, part-time (less than 30 hours per week)
Yes, full –time (more than 30 hours per week)

How many jobs have you held?
0
1-2
3-4
5-6
7+

How many companies have you worked for?
N/A never had a job
1-2
3-4
5-6
7+

Have you ever used the internet to apply for a job?
Yes
No
What job search methods have you used?
N/A- I have never searched for a job
Contacted people I know to ask for leads on jobs
Directly contacted employers to ask about jobs
Looked at job postings in newspapers
Searched for a job on the internet

Have you ever taken a test or assessment as part of a job application?
Yes- an assessment administered on a computer via the internet.
Yes- an assessment administered on a computer at a designated testing location.
Yes- an assessment administered via paper that I completed at home.
Yes- an assessment administered via paper at a designated testing location.
Yes- a work sample assessment at a designated testing location.
No- never taken an assessment as part of a job application
N/A- never applied for a job

Social Identity Consciousness

Social adjustment concern
It is important that the company be popular and prestigious
Working for an impressive company would make me seem impressive to others
I want to work for a company that is perceived to be impressive
I would consider how impressive my family thinks working for the company would be
I wonder if strangers would be impressed by where I work

Value-expressive concern
I want to be proud of the company I work for
I would not work for a company with a bad image
I would hope that the company has an honorable reputation in the community
It is important to work for a company that is scandal-free
I believe where you work is an important part of who you are

Response scale: 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)

Familiarity

How familiar are you with this company?
How familiar are you with this company as an employer?
How familiar are you with the products and services offered by this company?
How familiar are you with the social and environmental programs sponsored by this company?
How familiar are you with this company’s financial performance?

Response scale: 1 (not at all familiar) to 5 (very familiar)
**Focal Study Measures Completed Immediately Following the Virtual Job Tryout**

**Perceived Performance**

I performed well on the questions I just completed.

Response scale: 1(Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)

**Applicant Reactions**

**Perceived Performance**

I performed well on the questions I just completed.

**Perceived predictive validity**

Applicants who perform well on this type of test are more likely to perform well in material handler jobs than applicants who perform poorly on the tests.

I am confident that the examination can predict how well an applicant will perform on the job.

The employer can tell a lot about the applicant’s ability to do the job from the results of the examination.

**Face Validity**

It would be clear to anyone that this test is related to the job.

The content of the test was clearly related to the job.

**Opportunity to Perform**

I could really show my abilities through the Virtual Job Tryout.

This test allowed me to show what my job skills are.

This test gives applicants the opportunity to show what they can really do.

I was able to show what I can do on this test.

**Procedural Fairness**

I felt good about the way the examination was conducted and administered.

The exam process is fair.

Response scale: 1(Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)

**Corporate Image**

**Employer Image**

• This company is an excellent employer.
• This company treats its employees well.
• This would be a great company to work for.
Market Image
• This company has a terrific brand image.
• This company provides excellent products and/or services.
• This company is known for its great quality.

Financial Image
• The financial performance of this company is excellent.
• This company generates high profits.
• This company is a great investment opportunity.

Social Image
• This company is socially responsible.
• This company cares about society.
• This company is a great corporate “citizen.”

Response scale: 1(Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)

Organizational Attraction

General Attractiveness
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.

Intentions to Pursue
I would accept a job offer from this company.
I would make this company one of my first choices as an employer.
If this company invited me for a job interview, I would go.
I would exert a great deal of effort to work for this company.
I would recommend this company to a friend looking for a job.

Prestige
Employees are probably proud to say they work at this company.
This is a reputable company to work for.
I would find this company a prestigious place to work.
There are probably many who would like to work at this company.

Response scale: 1(Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)
Exploratory Measures

Employment Opportunity Index

Ease of Movement
There simply aren't very many jobs for people like me in today's job market.
Given my qualifications and experience, getting a new job would not be very hard at all.
I can think of a number of organizations that would probably offer me a job if I was looking.

Desirability of Movement
Most of the jobs I could get would be an improvement over my present circumstances.
If I looked for a job, I would probably wind up with a better job than the one I have now.
By and large, the jobs I could get if I left my current job are superior to the job I have now.

Networking
I have a far-reaching "network" of contacts which could help me find out about job opportunities.
I have contacts in other companies who might help me line up a new job.
My work and/or social activities tend to bring me in contact with a number of people who might help me line up a new job.

Crystallization of Alternatives
Right now, I have a job offer "on the table" from another employer, if I choose to take it.
I have found a better alternative to my present job.

Response scale: 1(Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)

Perceived Fit

I feel my values match or fit with this organization and the current employees in this organization.
My values match those of current employees in this organization.
The values and personality of this organization reflect my own values and personality.

Response scale: 1(Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)

Perceived Compensation & Job Security

Compared with other companies where you might search for a job in your chosen career, indicate whether this company is a much better or poorer employment option for the following:
Benefits
Compensation
Job Security
Financial Soundness
Treatment of Employees
Opportunities for Advancement

Response scale: 1 (Much Poorer) to 5 (Much Better)

Manipulation Check (identifiable company information is redacted here but was presented to candidates in full)

Indicate anything specific you learned about [COMPANY] during the Virtual Job Tryout (check all that apply):
[COMPANY]…
   strives toward environmental sustainability.
   was founded in [YEAR].
   had a net profit over $200 million in 2001.
   is headquartered in [CITY, STATE].
   developed advanced industry technology.
   engages in programs to support local communities.
   has job opportunities in 6 states.
   produces over 200 varieties of [PRODUCT TYPES].
   none of the above.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Text Content</th>
<th>Image Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSR</td>
<td>[Company] is… Brewing a Better World by Supporting Local Communities</td>
<td>Several individuals in a neighborhood helping to move bags and boxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR</td>
<td>[Company] is… Brewing a Better World by Protecting the Environment</td>
<td>Line graph comparing amount of waste composted, recycled, and put in landfills across 6 fiscal quarters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR</td>
<td>[Company] is… Brewing a Better World by Committing to Sustainable products</td>
<td>Image of native farmer from coffee source community at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>[Company] is… Growing Fast with Rising Market Shares</td>
<td>Bar chart of net sales for 2007-2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>[Company] is… Growing Fast with Industry Leading Technology</td>
<td>Image of complex robotic machine inside manufacturing plant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>[Company] is… Growing Fast with Expanding Production &amp; Grocery Presence</td>
<td>Image of product display at grocery store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>[Company] Was founded in [YEAR]</td>
<td>Arial photo of company headquarters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>[Company] is… Currently based in [CITY, STATE]</td>
<td>Photo of company building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>[Company] is… A producer of [PRODUCT TYPES]</td>
<td>Image of two employees working</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### PRIMARY STUDY SCALE RELIABILITY AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale &amp; Items</th>
<th>Standardized Factor Loading</th>
<th>CFA $\chi^2$ (df)</th>
<th>$\alpha$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concern for Value Expression</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>17.04 (5) $p &lt; .01$</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to be proud of the company I work for</td>
<td>.516</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would not work for a company with a bad image</td>
<td>.528</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important to work for a company that is scandal-free</td>
<td>.489</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would hope that the company has a good reputation</td>
<td>.505</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe where you work is an important part of who you are</td>
<td>.457</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concern for Social Adjustment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>13.62 (5) $p &lt; .05$</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important that the company be popular and prestigious</td>
<td>.502</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working for an impressive company would make me seem impressive to others</td>
<td>.665</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to work for a company that is perceived to be impressive</td>
<td>.654</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would consider how impressive my family thinks working for the company would be</td>
<td>.727</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wonder if strangers would be impressed</td>
<td>.657</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Applicant Reactions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>135.29 (38) $p &lt; .001$</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I could really show my abilities through the Virtual Job Tryout.</td>
<td>.904</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This test allowed me to show what my job skills are.</td>
<td>.903</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This test gives applicants the opportunity to show what they can really do.</td>
<td>.989</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to show what I can do on this test.</td>
<td>.916</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt good about the way the examination was conducted and administered.</td>
<td>.792</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The exam process is fair.</td>
<td>.747</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicants who perform well on this type of test are more likely to perform well in material handler jobs than applicants who perform poorly on the tests.</td>
<td>.604</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale &amp; Items</td>
<td>Standardized Factor Loading</td>
<td>CFA $\chi^2$ (df)</td>
<td>$\alpha$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident that the examination can predict how well an applicant will perform on the job. The employer can tell a lot about the applicant’s ability to do the job from the results of the examination.</td>
<td>.792</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 4</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would be clear to anyone that this test is related to the job. The content of the test was clearly related to the job.</td>
<td>.748</td>
<td>.662</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Attraction –General</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>25.82 (5) $p &lt; .001$</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attraction</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For me, this company would be a good place to work.</td>
<td>.718</td>
<td>.798</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td>.346</td>
<td>.817</td>
<td>.854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Attraction –Intent to Pursue</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>53.18 (5) $p &lt; .001$</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prestige</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees are probably proud to say they work at this company. This is a reputable company to work for. I would find this company a prestigious place to work. There are probably many who would like to work at this company. Employees are probably proud to say they work at this company.</td>
<td>.423</td>
<td>.563</td>
<td>.525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Corporate Image</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>129.57 (48) $p &lt; .001$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Company” is a great corporate ‘citizen’. “Company” is socially responsible “Company” cares about society</td>
<td>.589</td>
<td>.601</td>
<td>.534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale &amp; Items</td>
<td>Standardized Factor Loading</td>
<td>CFA $\chi^2$ (df)</td>
<td>$\alpha$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Company” has a terrific brand image</td>
<td>.476</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Company” provides excellent products and/or services</td>
<td>.572</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Company” is known for its great quality</td>
<td>.546</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The financial performance of “Company” is excellent</td>
<td>.586</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Company” generates high profits</td>
<td>.602</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Company” is a great investment opportunity</td>
<td>.540</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 4</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Company” is an excellent employer</td>
<td>.575</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Company” treats its employees well</td>
<td>.556</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This would be a great company to work for</td>
<td>.534</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: A confirmatory factor analysis could not be run for the Overall Attraction scale as the model was over-identified. Thus, the component subscales were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis. Chronbach’s Alpha for the Overall Attraction scale used in the analyses was .90. The confirmatory factor analysis for the corporate image dimensions was for verification of the factor structure. The corporate image dimension subscales were used independently in the analyses.
APPENDIX D

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
NOTICE OF APPROVAL

October 18, 2012

Jacqueline Carpenter
1863 Beacon Hill Circle, Apt. 21
Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio 44221

From: Sharon McWhorter, IRB Administrator

Re: IRB Number 20121009 "Virtual Job Tryout Study"

Thank you for submitting your Exemption Request for the referenced study. Your request was approved on October 18, 2012. The protocol represents minimal risk to subjects and matches the following Federal category for exemption:

☐ Exemption 1 – Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices.

☒ Exemption 2 – Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior.

☐ Exemption 3 – Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior not exempt under category 2, but subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office.

☐ Exemption 4 – Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens.

☐ Exemption 5 – Research and demonstration projects conducted by or subject to the approval of department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine public programs or benefits.

☐ Exemption 6 – Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies.

Annual continuation applications are not required for exempt projects. If you make changes to the study’s design or procedures that increase the risk to subjects or include activities that do not fall within the approved exemption category, please contact me to discuss whether or not a new application must be submitted. Any such changes or modifications must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Please retain this letter for your files. This office will hold your exemption application for a period of three years from the approval date. If you wish to continue this protocol beyond this period, you will need to submit another Exemption Request. If the research is being conducted for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, the student must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation.

Cc: Dennis Doverspike – Advisor
Cc: Valerie Callanan – IRB Chair

Approved consent form/s enclosed

The University of Akron is an Equal Education and Employment Institution