The Importance of Gender Congruence in Corporate Social Responsibility: Field Experimental Evidence of Applicant Interest

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Labor market scholars have made recent calls for moving beyond demand-side explanations for observed labor market outcomes and for uncovering supply-side processes and the interaction between these. One organizational characteristic that has been posited to influence job seeker preferences is corporate social responsibility (CSR). Mixed empirical results of the effects of CSR on firm performance more broadly, as well as increased inquiry into the contingencies of when CSR may benefit firms through stakeholders such as employees, point to the importance of examining how CSR interacts with other organizational characteristics. In this study, we examine how the gender composition of company leadership making CSR claims contributes to shaping the applicant pool. Specifically, since social responsibility is perceived to be female-typed, we examine whether congruence between an organization’s claims and the gender composition of leadership affect whether prospective employees apply for jobs. Addressing this research question poses a key empirical challenge: it is necessary to observe not only those who do apply to a job, but also the risk pool of those would could have applied. We address this challenge using a unique field experimental design and find that congruence between firm leadership gender composition and social responsibility is a key predictor of whether prospective applicants apply for an otherwise identical job vacancy.

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1. Introduction

In the face of “a war for talent,” organizations are increasingly focused on their recruitment and hiring strategies.\(^1\) Though some elements of organizational hiring processes have evolved in recent years, most notably with a shift to online job search, the general structure of hiring and recruitment has remained static for decades. On the demand side, firms strive to identify the best employees from a pool of applicants using their screening and selection criteria. Much of the research in this tradition has pointed to the ways that organizations leverage characteristics about potential employees, including educational and employment history (Bills et al. 2017), ascriptive characteristics such as gender (Ding et al. 2013, Petersen and Saporta 2004), and cultural cues (Erickson 1996, Rivera 2012, Turco 2010) in deciding whether to interview or hire job applicants. A necessary precursor to these demand-side processes is that job seekers apply for jobs, essentially entering the pool of applicants from which an employer can deploy their screening and selection criteria. Yet, we know surprisingly little about these supply-side labor market processes, or the factors affecting the likelihood that job seekers pursue job opportunities at a given firm.

One organizational characteristic from which job seekers can obtain information about prospective employers is corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Bode & Singh, 2018; Burbano, 2016). CSR, or the socially oriented claims and commitments that organizations voluntarily make, has been steadily on the rise in recent years. Various different social initiatives fall under the general umbrella of CSR, including corporate philanthropy, diversity and equity, environmental sustainability, and even issues like data security (Waddock and Graves 1997). Though CSR has been generally posited to send positive signals to a company’s key stakeholders (Godfrey et al. 2009) empirical analyses of whether CSR positively influences firm performance more broadly have been mixed (Margolis and Walsh 2001, Orlitzky et al. 2003). Focusing on employees, while compelling evidence has been put forth that CSR positively influences intermediate employee perceptions such as personal meaning (Glavas and Kelley 2014), motivation (Dunn et al. 2008, Grant 2012), identification with the firm (Brammer et al. 2007, Glavas and Godwin 2013, Turban and

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Greening 1997), and expectations of career benefits (Bode and Singh 2018), whether such perceptions translate into employee outcomes of greater import to the firm has been less clear (Bode et al. 2015). Recent work has pointed out important contingencies or boundary conditions of the effects of CSR on employee outcomes of greatest importance to the firm such as employee retention (Carnahan et al. 2016), and employee acquisition of skills (Burbano et al. 2018).

Importantly, organizational claims about social responsibility are always made in the context of a firm with specific other characteristics, such that prospective job applicants simultaneously observe multiple firm characteristics. Because organizational claims are made by a firm’s leadership team and CSR has been argued to be associated with female stereotypes of warmth (Shea and Hawn 2018) and communality (Lee and Huang 2018), the effects of socially responsible claims may vary based on the gender composition of an organization’s management team. As organizations are increasingly committed to both making claims of social responsibility and growing the number of women in management, unpacking how these characteristics affect a firm’s ability to attract human capital is of central importance and addresses a recent call for labor market research to examine the intersection of demand- and supply-side labor market processes (Brands and Fernandez-Mateo 2016).

There are significant empirical challenges to examining how CSR and management gender composition affect an organization’s ability to attract human capital. First, it is critical to capture not only those who apply to a job, but also the risk pool of those who could have applied. Existing work has made headway on the already-challenging inclusion of those who applied to a job, rather than just observing those who were hired, for understanding demand-side processes related to hiring outcomes (e.g., Fernandez and Mors 2008). Advancing our understanding of supply-side outcomes requires an examination of an even earlier, oft unobservable, stage of the hiring process. Second, it is challenging to establish a causal relationship between firm characteristics and employee behavior more broadly as it requires a comparison of employees in very similar organizational contexts with variance only in the firm characteristics of interest. Scholars have recently begun to address this challenge using field experiments (Burbano 2016, Tonin and Vlassopoulos 2014).
Similarly, we conducted a field experiment on one of the highest traffic job search platforms. Online job search engines are increasingly being used by job seekers to identify prospective jobs: 79% of Americans looking for a new job utilize online resources in their search for employment. This makes the use of an employment search engine to source U.S. job seekers an ideal setting for addressing our research question. We identified job seekers via this job search engine with relevant experience for a job vacancy, which was constant across our conditions. These job seekers were then randomly assigned to hiring companies that varied in terms of gender composition of their leadership team and claims of social responsibility. We then observed the effect of social responsibility claims made by organizations with more male- versus female-dominated leadership teams on contacted job seekers’ interest in the job.

We find heterogeneous effects of CSR based on the gender composition of the organization’s leadership team. For companies with female leadership, CSR claims lead to a higher rate of application as compared to otherwise identical organizations without CSR, with no difference by job-seeker gender. However, for firms with male leadership, we find that adding socially responsible claims decreases interest, and that this is driven by male job seekers. Interestingly, we observed the highest levels of interest from job seekers on average for male-led firms not making claims of social responsibility and for female-led firms making socially responsible claims. Our findings thus suggest that the inclusion of socially responsible claims offsets the overall lower interest from job seekers for companies with female leadership.

These findings have important implications for research on both corporate social responsibility and gender in the labor market. The effects of CSR claims are a function of the gender composition of the company such that both interact in shaping the pool of applicants. Our study thus highlights the importance of simultaneously considering demand- and supply-side processes in the labor market.

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2 The study was pre-registered on Open Science Framework. IRB approval was obtained for this field experiment. The experiment took place in February, 2018.


4 With respect to the gender composition of the hiring company founders and employees, we varied whether the founders and team were all female, all male, or mixed gender. We varied social responsibility claims by including a statement of the company’s commitment to the community and the environment, including a statement of the company’s commitment to diversity and inclusion, or not including a socially responsible claim. We thus employed a 3x3 randomization design.

5 We observe whether they click an “interested” button, automatically included in every message sent to job seekers via the employment site, which serves as our dependent variable.
2. Literature and Theory
2.1. The Effects of Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility is generally posited to send positive signals to a company’s key stakeholders (Godfrey et al. 2009). Despite these proposed positive effects of CSR, empirical meta analyses of the effect of CSR on firm performance indicate mixed results (Margolis and Walsh 2001, Orlitzky et al. 2003). Focusing on one critical stakeholder – the employee – scholars have demonstrated that CSR can positively influence employee perceptions such as personal meaning (Glavas and Kelley 2014), motivation (Dunn et al. 2008, Grant 2012), identification with and feelings of commitment to the firm (Brammer et al. 2007, Glavas and Godwin 2013, Turban and Greening 1997), and expectations of career benefits (Bode and Singh 2018). However, whether CSR affects employee outcomes of greatest significance to the firm, such as retention and employee performance, has been less clear, partly due to empirical challenges of establishing causal effects of CSR (Bode et al. 2015).

Though limited, revealed preference field experiments suggest current employees value socially responsible firms (Tonin and Vlassopoulous 2014), but recent studies have pointed out important contingencies of the effects of CSR. For example, the positive effects of CSR on employee acquisition of skills on the job are limited to firms with higher senior-to-junior employee ratios (Burbano et al. 2018). Similarly, correlational field studies reveal that CSR only improves employee retention among employees who seek meaningfulness at work (Carnahan et al. 2016).

Examining prospective employee outcomes, surveys of student populations reveal that students express greater interest in working for socially responsible firms (Greening and Turban 2000, Turban and Greening 1997). Similar to the notable boundary conditions of CSR among current employees, revealed preference field experiments focused on prospective employees suggest that preferences for socially responsible firms is limited to high performers (Burbano 2016). To advance our understanding of the effects of CSR it is thus necessary to further uncover the conditions under which CSR yields positive.
2.2. The Effects of Corporate Social Responsibility, by Gender Composition of Management

Given that an organization’s CSR claims are made within an organizational context, understanding the effects of CSR requires consideration of other organizational characteristics. More specifically, these claims are likely attributed to the firm’s leadership team, which has a given gender composition. It is particularly likely that CSR has heterogeneous effects based on who is making these claims because claims of social responsibility are thought to be female-typed (Shea and Hawn 2018).

More generally, gender typing occurs when a given task or role becomes associated with stereotypically male or female traits (Perry et al. 1994). Whereas feminine stereotypes focus on communal characteristics including warmth, helpfulness, and cooperativeness, masculine stereotypes center on agentic characteristics such as assertiveness, competence, and decisiveness (Abele 2003, Fiske and Stevens 1993). Gendered outcomes commonly emerge when there is a mismatch between the gender-type of a role or context and the gender stereotype associated with a given individual based on their sex (Eagly and Karau 2002).

This mismatch, or gender role incongruity, is particularly problematic for women in male-typed roles or engaging in male-typed behaviors where differences in outcomes are most pronounced and persist even when clear performance information on which to assess individuals is readily available (Botelho and Abraham 2017). In male-typed roles and contexts, stereotypically male as opposed to female traits are considered important for success (Perry et al. 1994). Thus, gender-typing leads evaluators to perceive men as better-suited for these tasks or contexts (Gorman 2005, Heilman 1983, Perry et al. 1994) and to evaluate them more favorably (Davison and Burke 2000, Eagly and Karau 2002, Turco 2010). This is the case for leadership positions: these positions are male-typed (Cejka and Eagly 1999) and female leaders are thus viewed less favorably because of the perceived mismatch between the communal characteristics associated with the female stereotype and the agentic traits ascribed to the archetypal leader (Eagly and Karau 2002, Heilman 2001).

Despite this general perception that men are stronger leaders, it remains unclear whether having women in management deters or attracts prospective applicants. This general tendency for female leaders to be penalized may be attenuated in organizations with female leaders that make claims of social
responsibility. In organizations focusing only on business initiatives that contribute to the bottom line, which are arguably more male-typed, gender incongruence is likely exacerbated for female leaders. To the extent that social claims are associated with female stereotypes of warmth and communality (Shea and Hawn 2018), making CSR claims may lead to more positive perceptions of female leaders. Consistent with the notion that social responsibility claims improve the evaluation of women, a recent study in the entrepreneurial context revealed that female-founded ventures with a social impact framing have greater access to funding than otherwise female-founded ventures without a social focus. CSR claims associated with diversity and equity may be perceived as particularly congruent for female leaders given that the presence of women in management is commonly linked to some degree of greater gender equity (e.g., Abraham 2017, Cohen and Huffman 2007).

It is less clear whether gender-incongruence penalties emerge for men, with evidence that men sometimes even benefit in female-typed contexts (Kmec 2008, Williams 1992). Most of this research on gender incongruence for men have focused on male tokens in female-dominated contexts or occupations, for example showing that men ascend more quickly in the female-dominated occupation of nursing. One possible explanation for this stems from the overarching status-ordering of gender whereby men are generally recognized as being of higher status (Berger et al. 1977, Correll and Ridgeway 2003). While in female-typed contexts the specific skills relevant to the task align with female stereotypes, men are still perceived as having greater general competence. In the context of CSR, however, there is some evidence of penalties to men who participate in corporate social initiatives (Bode et al. 2015). Thus, organizational claims of social responsibility may be perceived as congruent for firms with a greater proportion of women in management, but incongruent for firms with a greater proportion of men in management.

2.3. Heterogenous Effects of CSR-Management Gender Congruence on Prospective Applicant Interest by Gender of Applicant

Male and female job seekers may respond differently to each of these organizational characteristics. In terms of the gender composition of management, homophily and in-group preferences may disproportionally lead men (women) to favor organizations with male (female) leaders. Choice homophily
is the tendency for socially similar people to connect at a higher rate than would occur by chance (Ibarra 1992, 1995, 1997, Lincoln and Miller 1979, see McPherson et al. 2001 for a review). Men and women have also been found to see same-gender others as their career referents—the people whose careers they see as most like their own—which has implications for their respective career aspirations (Gibson and Lawrence 2010, Sumner and Brown 1996). Consistent with this, there is some empirical evidence showing that gendered signals, such as gendered language in job postings and gendered images of role incumbents, contribute to gender sorting, leading men and women to prefer jobs that are consistent with their own gender (Gaucher et al. 2011, Skuratowicz and Hunter 2004).

Because both the presence of women in management and claims of corporate social responsibility have been associated with more equitable or fair workplaces (e.g., Cohen and Huffman 2007, Rupp et al. 2006, Stainback and Kwon 2012), female job seekers may be particularly attracted to these organizations. Extant research has shown that expectations of facing discrimination and competition often deter women (and racial minorities) from applying to jobs (Barbulescu and Bidwell 2013, Cech et al. 2011, Pager and Pedulla 2015). Furthermore, the prevailing view on heterogenous responses to CSR suggests that women should be more sensitive to and respond most favorably to a firm’s social responsibility than men (Kesner 1988, Williams 2003), though more recent empirical studies have found no differences in responses to CSR by gender (Bode and Singh 2018).

3. Field Experiment Design

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

To examine the effects of CSR in the context of an organization’s management gender composition on prospective applicant interest, we implement a field experiment on one of the highest traffic online employment search engines ("JobSeeker.com"). This search engine aggregates job listings from websites; allows employers to post jobs directly; enables employers to find active job seekers, using various search

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6 The study was pre-registered on Open Science Framework. IRB approval was obtained for this field experiment. The experiment took place in February 2018. We include data from one month from the time of the study launch.

7 The name of the employment search engine is available from the authors upon request. Revealing the identity of the site poses potential risks to the platform itself as job seekers may discover that academic research is being conducted. Therefore, we are not including the name of the site in the paper.
criteria; and facilitates contact with these job seekers directly through the site. Online employment search engines are increasingly being used by job seekers to identify prospective full-time, as well as part-time, jobs. According to a Pew Research Center study, 79% of Americans looking for a new job utilize online resources in their search for employment, which is higher than the proportion making use of personal or professional contacts (66 and 63% respectively). This makes the employment search engine a generalizable and relevant setting from which to source U.S. job seekers.

We created a market research analyst job description, and identified job seekers, or potential applicants, suited for this position on JobSeeker.com. To identify these potential applicants, we used the following search criteria: individuals who had updated their resume on the website within the past week, are based in the United States, indicated that they were looking for full-time jobs, have a bachelor’s degree, and whose resumes included the following terms under job titles or skills: “market research,” “business analyst,” “business analysis,” “data entry,” “market analyst,” “market analysis,” “data analyst,” “data analysis,” or “research analyst.” We then sent a message about our job opening to individuals who met these criteria via the portal for contacting job seekers on JobSeeker.com. In this message, the details of the job were the same for all individuals, while the described characteristics of the hiring company, including founder and recruiter names and details about the company’s mission, varied by condition (conditions and their corresponding manipulations described in detail in the following section). The message also included a link to the company’s website and invited contacted job seekers to visit the website to learn more about the company and to submit an online application.

Messages sent to job seekers via JobSeeker.com generate an email to the recipient that includes a voting button through which contacted job seekers can indicate whether they are interested in the job opportunity. If a job seeker indicates that they are interested, JobSeeker.com sends an automated message to the hiring company indicating that the seeker is interested. Importantly indicating interest is not

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9 Certainly, online employment search engines are not the only manner through which prospective applicants source jobs, with referrals and other sources being important (e.g., Fernandez, Castilla and Moore, 2000). They are, however, an important source for job seekers in today’s job market, making our setting a relevant one.
10 We created an email address, info@{name of company} for each company.
costless: once a job seeker indicates that they are interested, JobSeeker.com shares the job seeker’s contact information, typically email, phone number, and address. On our website for each company, we also observed whether a contacted individual submitted a resume and filled out an online application for the job opening. On JobSeeker.com, the voting buttons are the predominant way that job seekers reciprocate interest to prospective employers. It is less common to request that individuals submit separate applications when they are contacted, since an employer who messages a job seeker through the website already has access to that job seeker’s resume. In the opening line of the messages that we sent to job seekers via JobSeeker.com we explicitly indicated that we had found their resume on the employment search engine (see Figure 2). Furthermore, there is a charge (approximately $1.00-$3.00) for contacting each job seeker, therefore, an employer willing to pay this fee has presumably reviewed the resume and is interested in the job seeker. We thus use indication of job seeker interest via the “interested” voting button on JobSeeker.com as our main outcome variable of interest.

3.2. Conditions and Manipulations

Individuals messaged were randomly assigned to one of nine conditions (see Figure 1 for the 3x3 design). We varied the gender composition of the hiring organization’s leadership team, or founders (the founders and employees were all female, all male, or mixed gender and balanced in number) and CSR claims (included claims of the company's commitment to the community and the environment, included claims of the company’s commitment to diversity and inclusion, or did not include CSR claims).

***Insert Figure 1 about here***

These manipulations were implemented in two ways. First, we varied the messages sent to the job seekers via JobSeeker.com. In addition to the job description (which was constant across conditions), the

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

12 Separate from the purposes of the study, we hired 9 individuals, 1 for each condition/hiring company, amongst those who indicated interest in the company, to conduct a short-term market research job. We did this to ensure that our study was not a waste of time for the subjects.
messages sent to job seekers included information about the company’s founders and the socially responsible claims. Specifically, job seekers received messages with the names of the company’s founders, the organization’s commitment to business outcomes, the name of the recruiter, a link to the company’s url, directing the job seeker to a company website as described below, and the organization’s CSR claims for our socially responsible conditions. Each of these elements were consistent with the condition to which the job seeker was randomly assigned. Second, we created nine company names with corresponding websites for each of our nine conditions. The names of these companies were identical, with the exception of two letters at the start of the company name. Each website was identical in design and layout (including a Home page, an About Us page, a Join Us page, and a Contact Us page), portrayed two founders, and listed the exact same job description. The manipulations implemented on each company website varied the images and text corresponding to our conditions. Figure 2 shows the exact messages sent to job seekers via JobSeeker.com, including the manipulations corresponding to each condition.

***Insert Figure 2 about here***

As can be seen in the screenshots of each condition’s website (see Appendix), the text on the websites highlight the founder’s gender, describe the company’s claims as either socially responsible (committed to the community and environment or to diversity and inclusion) or not, and highlight the founder’s experience and commitment, which is consistent with the company’s social responsibility claims (or lack thereof). The images furthermore reinforce our conditions by revealing the gender composition of the founding team and other employees and by relating to the company’s claims about social responsibility (or lack thereof).

We manipulated the images of the founders and all people shown on the company websites in accordance with the gender conditions: all female for the female condition, all male for the male condition, equal number of men and women for the mixed gender condition. The images of the founders were pre-tested on Amazon Mechanical Turk so that the men and women across conditions did not differ on

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13 Names of the nine companies and exact website urls are available from the authors upon request.
14 The messages sent to job seekers include the founder names, recruiter name, and details about the mission that are consistent with the corresponding condition and website.
important characteristics that could confound our results. Specifically, we selected photographs that were statistically equivalent in perceived attractiveness, age, competence, and warmth.\footnote{14 female and 14 male stock photos were identified by the authors, and 30 MTurkers saw each photo and ranked them on a Likert scale of 1 to 5 along each of the dimensions with the exception of age, which was measured in the following buckets: <25, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55+. To measure competence and warmth, the questions were adapted from Fiske, Cuddy, and Xu (2002).} In addition to the founder pictures, we selected names for our founders and recruiters based on the most popular names for girls and boys in their approximate year of birth, based on the age measure from our pre-test (male founders: Michael and Christopher; female founders: Jessica and Amanda).

To manipulate claims of social responsibility, we varied the text on the websites, in addition to a logo. For example, the headline text of the Home Pages reads, “At {Company Name}, we provide outstanding service to our clients and invest our capital to \{no CSR condition: grow and expand our company / community CSR condition: inspire and implement solutions that improve the broader community and the environment / diversity CSR condition: promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace and beyond\}.” All pages include the same text on the lower left-hand side of the home page referencing a commitment to clients, developing integrative solutions and preparing for future success. Social responsibility was manipulated by condition in the text on the lower right-hand side of the home page. For the no CSR condition, this message focused on successful implementation of business strategies for clients. In the socially responsible conditions, in addition to this message focused on successful implementation of business strategies, we also added language about the company’s commitment to either the community and environment or diversity and inclusion. Further detail on these manipulations is available in the Appendix.

4. Sample and Randomization Balance

Our sample is comprised of 6,321 job seekers who represent the population of active job seekers meeting our search criteria on JobSeeker.com.\footnote{We truncated our sample at the earliest date and time at which the first company account on JobSeeker.com stopped contacting job seekers. Due to the high volume of messages we were sending over a short period of time (the messages were automated), the employment website suspended our ability to contact job seekers. As this} Table 1 presents summary statistics for the job seekers in
the sample, by condition. Nearly half of our sample of job seekers were female, and these job seekers represent a national sample, with approximately 26 percent being from the Northeast, 35 percent being from the South, 23 percent being from the West, and 16 percent being from the Midwest. By design, only those with bachelors’ degrees were contacted, so everyone in the sample has at least a bachelor’s degree. Job seekers had approximately ten years of work experience on average. Our randomization was successful as there were few significant differences between the mean characteristics listed in Table 1 across conditions. For robustness, we report versions of our regression analyses that control for the observables not well-randomized across conditions (female, from Midwest, from Northeast, from South).

***Insert Table 1 about here***

5. Measures

**Dependent Variable.** Our dependent variable, Interested, is a binary variable representing whether the contacted individual indicated they are interested in the job using voting buttons embedded in the messages that we sent via JobSeeker.com. This variable is equal to 1 if the individual indicated interest in the job, and 0 otherwise. As aforementioned, indicating interest is a strong indicator that the job seeker wants to pursue the given opportunity. First, this is the predominant way that job seekers reciprocate interest to prospective employers. Second, by indicating interest, the job seeker agrees to having their contact information shared with the hiring company, thus this is a form of applying for the job.

**Independent Variables.** To compare the treatment effects of individual cells of our 3x3 matrix and compare them to each other, we constructed binary variables for each condition. We use a two-part variable naming convention to designate the condition we are referencing. For example, Female Founder (No CSR) is equal to 1 for observations in the Female Founder, No CSR Condition and equal to 0 otherwise. We have a total of nine binary variables to represent each of our conditions and define each of these as described in the above example. Because we are making comparisons between different pairs of conditions, the baseline varies across models. The relevant baseline is specified in each respective model. We refer to founder gender or management team gender in what follows for simplicity, and because founder and

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suspension happened at different times for each of the company accounts, we exclude all observations of individuals that were contacted after the time at which the first cancellation of messaging ability took place.
manager gender is likely to be most salient to prospective applicants, though our gender conditions reflect an all-male, all-female or mixed gender composition of the entire hiring company, not just founder.

Other variables and controls. To examine how treatment effect differs by gender of the prospective applicant, we assigned gender to each job seeker using the IBM InfoSphere Global Name Management Tool (see also Botelho and Abraham 2017). We first scored each job seeker’s name based on the likelihood of it being a woman’s name. This tool takes as its input an individual’s first name and compares that name with its database of 750 million names from around the world. Each name is then scored, on a scale from 0 to 99, for the likelihood that the individual with the given name is female, with higher scores being more likely to be female. We then created a dichotomous variable Female equal to 1 if this score was greater than 60 and equal to 0 if this score was less than 40 to avoid the possibility of erroneously coding names that were more gender ambiguous. We control for observables that were not perfectly-randomized across conditions, namely location. Midwest is equal to 1 is the job seeker is based in the Midwest and equal to 0 otherwise. Indicators for South, West and Northeast are constructed in the same fashion.

6. Results

6.1 Effect of CSR Claims Based on Founder Gender Composition on Job Seeker Interest

Figure 3 pools male and female job seekers to show the average likelihood that job seekers indicate interest in the job, by CSR claims and the gender composition of the company’s leadership team. A comparison of interest in the job vacancy for companies not making social claims reveals that female-led companies receive significantly less job seeker interest than do male-led companies, on average. For companies not making CSR claims, thirty-one percent of contacted prospective job applicants indicated interest when the leadership team was all-male, compared to twenty-five percent for a mixed-gender leadership team (t(1397)= -2.48, p<0.05) and twenty-seven percent for an all-female leadership team (t(1417)=1.65, p<0.10).

In terms of the addition of CSR claims, these results reveal that when management is mixed-gender there is no significant effect of community- or diversity-related socially responsible claims as compared to
no CSR claims. When the gender composition of management is either all male or all female, however, making CSR claims has distinct, yet heterogeneous, effects on job seekers’ likelihood of applying. For all-male management teams, adding community- or diversity-focused social responsibility claims lowers the likelihood that job seekers indicate interest relative to all-male teams that do not claim to be socially responsible (22 percent vs. 31 percent, \(t(1420)=3.93, p<0.001\) and 22 percent vs. 31 percent, \(t(1422)=3.97, p<0.001\), respectively), consistent with a gender-incongruence penalty for men in this context. There is neither a statistical nor substantive difference in job seeker interest based on the type of CSR claims, on average, for male-led companies, suggesting that for companies with male leadership simply making any CSR claims leads to a decrease in job seeker interest.

For companies with all-female leadership teams, including a community- or diversity-focused CSR claims yields an increase in the likelihood that job seekers indicate interest in the company’s job vacancies as compared to female-led companies without CSR (31 percent vs. 27 percent, \(t(1394)=-1.75, p<0.10\) and 34 percent vs. 27 percent, \(t(1417)=-3.06, p<0.01\) respectively). Though there is no statistically significant difference in job-seeker interest for female-led companies based on the type of socially responsible claims, the magnitude and statistical significance of the treatment effect of CSR is stronger for diversity- than for community-oriented claims (34 percent vs. 31 percent). Our results thus suggest that for female leaders making CSR, particularly diversity-oriented, claims increases applicant interest relative to not making any CSR claims.

***Insert Figure 3 here***

Table 2 reports results of OLS regressions predicting job seeker interest by CSR claims and gender composition of leadership and reveals that all results described above are robust to the inclusion of control variables.\(^{17}\) We report OLS regression results for ease of interpretation, though our findings are robust to the use of logit or probit, rather than OLS specifications of the regression analyses.

***Insert Table 2 here***

\(^{17}\) We added controls that were not well-randomized (\(p>0.10\) in Table 1) across conditions.
Taken together, our results reveal that the addition of either community- or diversity- social responsibility claims for all-male teams results in the lowest level of job seeker interest that we observe across all of our conditions. By contrast, for female-led companies, adding either community- or diversity- social responsibility claims leads to the highest level of job-seeker interest—a level statistically equivalent to the interest level for male-led companies without CSR.

6.2. Gender Differences in Job Seeker Response to CSR Claims and Founder Gender Composition

Figure 4 introduces job seeker gender to examine whether the patterns described above vary by job-seeker gender. A comparison of male versus female job-seeker interest within each of our nine conditions generally reveals that there are no gender differences in interest among job seekers. The one exception, however is for male-led companies not making CSR claims, where male job seekers are significantly more likely to demonstrate interest than are female job seekers (36 percent vs. 24 percent, t(646)=3.18, p<0.01).

Next, we examine whether, given the gender composition of the leadership team, male and female job seekers respond differently to a company making socially responsible claims, as compared to an otherwise identical company with no CSR. The left-most set of bars in Figure 4 illustrates that for male-led companies adding CSR—irrespective of the type—male, but not female, job seekers demonstrate less interest. Specifically, for male-led companies making community- or diversity- focused claims, 20% of male job seekers demonstrate interest as compared to 36% for male-led companies not making any CSR claims (t(750) = 4.76, p<0.01 for comparison of community vs. no CSR; t(730)=3.93, p<0.01 for comparison of diversity vs. no CSR). These results reveal that making any type of CSR claim decreases job-seeker interest in companies with male-dominated leadership teams.

The right-most set of bars depicts that for female-led companies, on the other hand, the addition of diversity-oriented CSR leads to a marginal (p<0.10) increase in interest from both male and female job seekers. Though the average effect of adding diversity-focused claims was more significant when pooling male and female job seekers (p<0.01) as depicted above in Figure 3, when divided by job-seeker gender the effect is directionally consistent but loses some statistical significance. There is no difference in interest
by job seeker gender for companies with mixed-gender leadership that add CSR claims, as presented in the middle set of bars; both male and female job seekers reveal the same interest level for companies with mixed-gender leadership, irrespective of whether or not they include social responsibility claims.

Comparing the first and last sets of bars in Figure 4 (CSR conditions with Male Founders vs. CSR conditions with female founders) uncovers variation in interest by job-seeker gender for jobs in companies making CSR claims based on whether leadership is male- or female-dominated. In terms of companies making diversity-focused claims, both male and female applicants are significantly more likely to demonstrate interest in job vacancies in companies with female-, as opposed to male-, leadership. Though both male and female job seekers demonstrate more interest in vacancies in companies making community-focused CSR claims when the leadership team is female, this pattern is only statistically significant for male job seekers. OLS regressions that introduce applicant gender and interactions between applicant gender and each condition presented in Table 3 support these findings.18

***Insert Figure 4 and Table 3 here***

Our results indicate that male job seekers drive the lower level of interest for job vacancies in male-dominated companies making socially responsible claims, relative to vacancies in male-led companies with no CSR. By contrast, we do not observe any gender differences in interest from job seekers for vacancies in companies led by mixed-gender or female teams making social claims as compared to otherwise identical companies not making CSR claims. Interestingly, both male and female job seekers generally demonstrate more interest in jobs opportunities in companies making CSR claims when led by women as opposed to men.

8. Discussion and Conclusions

18 Men and women respond in a statistically equivalent manner to a female or mixed gender management team composition (compared to male management team), given either community- or diversity-focused socially responsible claims (p>0.10 for all relevant coefficients of the interaction terms). There is a difference in interest rate across male and female applicants resulting from CSR claims treatments (both community and diversity), when the company founders are male, however (B=0.14, p<0.01 with and without controls for community, B=0.10, p<0.05 without controls and p<0.10 with controls for diversity).
Similar to the ways that employers leverage available cues about applicants in making their recruitment and selection decisions (e.g., Bills et al. 2017), job seekers are also motivated to gather information about job openings and prospective employers (Gaucher et al. 2011, Schneider 1987, Skuratowicz and Hunter 2004). This study broadens our understanding of how claims of corporate social responsibility interact with the gender composition of a firm’s management team in affecting the likelihood that job seekers apply to a given job vacancy. We find strong support that CSR claims lead to a higher likelihood that job seekers apply for jobs in firms with female leadership, but a lower likelihood of application to firms with male leadership. Interestingly, this decrease in application rate for male-dominated companies making socially responsible claims is driven by male job seekers. Conversely, for female-dominated companies, the addition of socially responsible, particularly diversity-focused, claims yields an increase in average application rate, and there is no difference by job-seeker gender.

This paper makes several contributions to research on corporate social responsibility, labor market processes, and gender role incongruity. First, by drawing on role incongruity theory we demonstrate that both congruence and in-congruence between a firm’s management gender composition and claims of social responsibility have important implications for job seeker interest. For female-led organizations, our findings suggest that the addition of social claims, either community and environment-oriented or diversity and inclusion-oriented, can be a successful strategy for attracting a greater number of job applicants. This finding is consistent with some existing work suggesting that female founders may be advantaged when adding a social element to their venture, particularly in the context of access to funding (e.g., Lee and Huang 2018). Our study extends this line of inquiry by revealing the potential costs of adding CSR for firms with male leadership. We find that prospective applicants, particularly male applicants, are less likely to pursue job opportunities in firms with male-dominated leadership making claims of social responsibility. Furthermore, our study reveals that the heterogenous effects of CSR based on gender extend to the supply-side labor market processes by shaping the pool of applicants available to a hiring firm. Our study thus provides one potential explanation for the mixed results on the effects of CSR and contributes to our understanding of the boundary conditions under which CSR can have positive effects, by highlighting the importance of considering who is making the social claims.
One fruitful direction for future work is to examine heterogenous effects of CSR by management gender on other key outcomes. For example, future research could uncover whether congruence or incongruence between claims and leadership gender composition affect job applicant salary requirements, or post-hire employee actions, such as productivity, shirking, and turnover. Beyond understanding how management gender and CSR interact in affecting employee behaviors, it is also plausible that gender and CSR interact such that participating in social initiatives impacts male and female employees differently. One recent paper suggests that this is in fact the case: managers penalize employees engaging in social initiatives in making promotion decisions (Bode et al. 2018 wp). Examining whether other stakeholders such as consumers, investors, and the media also penalize male-CSR congruence, or more broadly respond in different ways to CSR depending on management gender, are also potential directions for future research.

Second, this study advances our understanding of supply-side labor market processes more generally by examining how demand-side characteristics, namely the gender composition of an organization’s leadership team and claims of social responsibility, shape the applicant pool. Most research aimed at understanding labor market processes has focused largely on either the demand-side, or the actions taken and decisions made by employers (Cohen and Broschak 2013, Fernandez and Mors 2008), or the supply-side, or the choices made by job seekers (Barbulescu and Bidwell 2013), viewing these as two distinct processes. However, these labor market processes do not operate independently. Though not centered on labor market outcomes, there is some evidence that quotas, as imposed by affirmative action initiatives, may lead women to opt-in to tournaments because they perceive greater likelihood of success and lower-levels of competition (Niederle et al. 2013). Additionally, prior negative experiences with a specific firm have been shown to reduce the likelihood that a job seeker subsequently applies to job opportunities with that firm (Brands and Fernandez-Mateo 2016). This study contributes to this line of inquiry by showing that job seekers are affected by overarching organizational characteristics in their decisions about whether to pursue a given job opportunity.

Third, our unique field experimental design allowed us causal identification of the effects of CSR given management gender, thus enabling us to address the challenge of the endogeneity of firms’ CSR choices that has contributed to confusion about the effects of CSR (Margolis and Walsh, 2001) and only
recently been addressed in empirical research (Burbano 2016, Flammer 2015, 2018, Flammer and Luo 2017). It furthermore serves as an example of a novel methodology that can be applied to the study of supply-side organizational characteristics that influence applicant interest more broadly as our design allowed us to capture the appropriate risk set, namely all job seekers that could have applied to our job opportunity.

In addition to overcoming the empirical challenges associated with addressing our research question, our research design uniquely allows for generalizability of our results. By identifying our population of job seekers on one of the highest traffic online job search engines, we are confident that we captured a nationally representative population of potential applicants for our market research analyst position. Furthermore, the increased reliance on online job search engines by modern day job seekers further strengthens the generalizability of our results. It is plausible that our hiring companies are most representative of smaller, entrepreneurial organizations for which publicly available information is limited to what the organization shares on its websites. For larger established corporations, about which prospective applicants may have preconceived notions and access to other sources of information about the company, the magnitude of our effects may be dampened. Future work could further unpack how our findings vary based on employer characteristics including status and size. Nonetheless, given that small firms make up a substantial proportion of the economy, comprising 48 percent of US employment, understanding the effect of firm characteristics among this population of firms is inherently important.19

Practically speaking, this paper has important implications for firm decisions related to making socially responsible claims and the potential effects on their ability to attract human capital. That we find adding social claims for female-led firms significantly increases the pool of applicants suggests that CSR may serve as a tool for female leaders in attracting human capital. For male leaders, however, making socially responsible claims has the opposite effect. Since many firms continue to be led by men, it is critical that organizational decision makers consider the gender composition of their leadership before launching CSR initiatives. This may be particularly true for firms in male-dominated industries, where both leadership

19 US Census Bureau, Business Dynamics Statistics, 2014
and employees are disproportionately male, given that our effects were most pronounced among male job seekers. More generally, our results indicate that firms should not assume that CSR claims will positively affect key outcomes and instead take other firm characteristics into account.
REFERENCES


**Figure 1: 3x3 Randomization Design**

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

Manipulations are bolded below, though they were not bolded in the messages sent to job seekers.

Hi {Name of Job Seeker},

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

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

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

Best regards,
[male condition: Kevin Smith / female condition: Ashley Smith / mixed gender condition: Taylor Smith], {name of company}

JOB DETAILS

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

The job will consist of doing research, data entry, and analysis for one of our core clients. See our website for more details.
Figure 3: Interest Level by CSR Claims and Composition of Leadership Team

Figure 4: Interest Level by CSR Claims and Composition of Leadership Team, by Applicant Gender
Table 1: Randomization Balance, by Condition

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Note: Table reports means. P-value of null that difference of means between the treatment group and the control group (Male Founders, No CSR) equals 0 is reported in brackets.
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Note: OLS regression results where all models include robust standard errors, reported in parentheses. Baseline is No CSR Claims, same founder gender as indicated in parentheses.  
+ p < .1, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001
Table 3: Differential Effect of CSR Claims, Given Founder Gender, by Applicant Gender

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Note: OLS regression results where all models include robust standard errors, reported in parentheses. Baseline is No CSR Claims, same founder gender as indicated in parentheses.

+  p < .1,  *  p < .05,  **  p < .01,  ***  p < .001
Company Website Screenshots, per Condition
The parts of the website that vary by condition are shown in Appendix Figures 1a-9d below.

Appendix Figure 1a. Male Founders – Community CSR: Home Page

Appendix Figure 1b. Male Founders – Community CSR: About Us Page
Join Us

Our founders Michael and Christopher strongly believe that giving back to the broader community and to the environment is a business imperative. Please explore our current employment opportunities below.

Contact Us

Please feel free to contact our team at info@companyname.com if you have additional questions.
Appendix Figure 2a. Male Founders – Diversity CSR: Home Page

Appendix Figure 2b. Male Founders – Diversity CSR: About Us Page
Appendix Figure 2c. Male Founders – Diversity CSR: Join Us Page

Join Us
Our founders Michael and Christopher strongly believe that having diverse and inclusive teams is a business imperative. Please explore our current employment opportunities below.

Appendix Figure 2d. Male Founders – Diversity CSR: Contact Us Page

Contact Us

Please feel free to contact our team at info@companyname.com if you have additional questions.
Appendix Figure 3a. Male Founders – No CSR: Home Page

Appendix Figure 3b. Male Founders – No CSR: About Us Page
Appendix Figure 3c. Male Founders – No CSR: Join Us Page

Appendix Figure 3d. Male Founders – No CSR: Contact Us Page

Please feel free to contact our team at info@companyname.com if you have additional questions.
Appendix Figure 4a. Female Founders – Community CSR: Home Page

Appendix Figure 4b. Female Founders – Community CSR: About Us Page
Appendix Figure 4c. Female Founders – Community CSR: Join Us Page

Appendix Figure 4d. Female Founders – Community CSR: Contact Us Page

Please feel free to contact our team at info@companyname.com if you have additional questions.
Appendix Figure 5a. Female Founders – Diversity CSR: Home Page

Appendix Figure 5b. Female Founders – Diversity CSR: About Us Page
Appendix Figure 5c. Female Founders – Diversity CSR: Join Us Page

Appendix Figure 5d. Female Founders – Diversity CSR: Contact Us Page

Please feel free to contact our team at info@companyname.com if you have additional questions.
Appendix Figure 6a. Female Founders – No CSR: Home Page

Appendix Figure 6b. Female Founders – No CSR: About Us Page
Appendix Figure 6c. Female Founders – No CSR: Join Us Page

Join Us

Our founders Jessica and Amanda strongly believe that helping our clients succeed is a business imperative. Please explore our current employment opportunities below.

Appendix Figure 6d. Female Founders - No CSR: Contact Us Page

Contact Us

Please feel free to contact our team at info@companyname.com if you have additional questions.
Appendix Figure 7a. Mixed Gender Founders - Community CSR: Home Page

Appendix Figure 7b. Mixed Gender Founders - Community CSR: About Us Page
Appendix Figure 7c. Mixed Gender Founders - Community CSR: Join Us Page

Appendix Figure 7d. Mixed Gender Founders - Community CSR: Contact Us Page

Please feel free to contact our team at info@companyname.com if you have additional questions.
Appendix Figure 8a. Mixed Gender Founders - Diversity CSR: Home Page

Appendix Figure 8b. Mixed Gender Founders - Diversity CSR: About Us Page
Appendix Figure 8c. Mixed Gender Founders - Diversity CSR: Join Us Page

Appendix Figure 8d. Mixed Gender Founders - Diversity CSR: Contact Us Page

Please feel free to contact our team at info@companyname.com if you have additional questions.
Figure 9a. Mixed Gender Founders – No CSR: Home Page

Figure 9b. Mixed Gender Founders – No CSR: About Us Page
Figure 9c. Mixed Gender Founders – No CSR: Join Us Page

Join Us

Our founders strongly believe that helping our clients succeed is a business imperative. Please explore our current employment opportunities below.

info@companyname.com

Figure 9d. Mixed Gender Founders – No CSR: Contact Us Page

Contact Us

Please feel free to contact our team at info@companyname.com if you have additional questions.